

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF RADIO, TELEVISION, AND CINEMA**

MASTER THESIS

**THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON DEMOCRACY
AND POLITICAL POLARIZATION IN TURKEY FROM
THE PERSPECTIVE OF TURKISH STUDENTS**

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**THESIS SUPERVISOR
ASST. PROF. YASMIN ALDAMEN**

ISTANBUL, 2022

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by

AHMAD MOHAMMAD ZIAD SH WAZZAN

**A thesis submitted to the school of graduate studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Radio Television and Cinema**

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ISTANBUL, 2022

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of art in Radio, TV and Cinema Program.

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ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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Signature:



ÖZ

TÜRK ÖĞRENCİLERİN GÖZÜNDEN TÜRKİYE'DE SOSYAL MEDYANIN DEMOKRASİ VE SİYASAL KUTUPLAŞMAYA ETKİLERİ

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Türkiye'de internet ve sosyal medya kullanımı sürekli artmakta, aynı zamanda geleneksel haber kaynakları da zayıflamaktadır. Bu durum, cumhuriyetin bilgi ortamında bir değişikliğe işaret etmektedir. Türkiye'de siyaset sahnesinde her zaman toplumsal ve siyasal kutuplaşma resmedilmiştir. Güç kaydığında bile, bölünme devam etmiştir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de sosyal medya ile siyasi kutuplaşma arasındaki bağlantıyı bulmaya yöneliktir.

Bu çalışmanın amaçlarına ulaşmak için nitel ve nicel metodoloji kullanılarak, (370) Türk üniversite öğrencisine bir anket dağıtılarak veri toplama gerçekleştirilmiş, anket 25 (çoktan seçmeli, Likert ölçeği ve bir açık soru) sorudan oluşmakta olup, Google formları kullanılarak 26 Nisan-16 Mayıs tarihleri arasında Türkiye'de 18 – 50+ yaş aralığında lisans, yüksek lisans ve doktora düzeyindeki üniversite öğrencileri katılmıştır. Ayrıca farklı eğitim düzeylerinden 6 öğrenciden oluşan bir odak grup çalışması. Sorular yarı yapılandırılmış olup, görüşme Zoom üzerinden gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Çalışma, sosyal medyanın siyasi kutuplaşma üzerinde zayıf ile orta düzeyde bir etkiye sahip olduğunu bulmuştur. Çalışmanın sonuçları, Türk gençliğinin siyasi haber almak için sosyal medya platformlarına güvenmediğini ve çoğunun sosyal medyada siyasi liderleri takip etmediğini, iletişim platformlarının gençleri kendilerini ifade etmeye

teşvik etmediğini ve son olarak, sosyal medya algoritmalarının, kullanıcıya önerdikleri içerik aracılığıyla filtre balonları oluşturmaya orta derecede katkıda bulunduğu dikkat çekilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Filtre Balonları, Sosyal Medya, Siyasi kutuplaşma, Türk öğrenciler, Yankı Odası.



ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL POLARIZATION IN TURKEY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TURKISH STUDENTS

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The usage of the internet and social media in Turkey is constantly growing, simultaneously, traditional news outlets are getting weaker. This situation indicates an alteration in the republic's information landscape. Social and political polarization was always portrayed in the political scene in Turkey. Even when the power shifted, the division remained sustained. This study aims at finding if there is a link between social media and political polarization in Turkey.

To reach the goals of this study and collect needed data, qualitative and quantitative approaches were applied. A questionnaire was designed and distributed to (370) Turkish university students. The questionnaire using google forms consisted of 25 (multiple-choice, Likert scale, and an open question), conducted during the period (April 26 - May 16). The sample consisted of university students across undergraduate, graduate, and Ph.D. levels in Turkey aged between 18 – 50+.

An online focus group discussion was well applied to have a more in-depth understanding of the research problem. It was conducted with six students also from different university education levels.

The results of the study showed that the perspectives of the Turkish Students were that social media had a weak to moderate effect on political polarization in Turkey.

Furthermore, the results of the study indicated that the studied sample of Turkish students does not rely on social media platforms to obtain political news, and most of them do not follow political leaders on social media.

In addition, communication platforms did not encourage Turkish students to express themselves, as well as an indication that social media algorithms have contributed to a medium degree in creating filter bubbles through the content they suggest to users.

Keywords: Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles, Political polarization, Social Media, Turkish Students.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ÖZ	iv
ABSTRACT	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ix
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS	xiii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS ...	3
2.1. Social Media Platforms	3
2.2. Social Media and Polarization	5
2.3. Spiral of Silence and Political Views	8
2.4. Echo Chambers and Polarization	10
CHAPTER III POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND ITS SITUATION IN TURKEY	13
3.1.The Republic of Turkey	13
3.2. Political Polarization	14
3.3. Turkey's Polarization Patterns	15
3.4. Turkey's Current State of Polarization	17
3.5. Influence of Turkish Traditional and Social Media on Political Polarization.....	20
CHAPTER IV METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY	24
4.1. Research Problem	24
4.2. Hypothesis of the Study	27
4.3. Research Questions	27
4.4. Importance of the Study	28
4.5.Objectives of the Study	29
4.6.Concepts of the Study	29
4.7. Limitations of the Study.....	31
4.8. Data Collection Sources	31
4.9. The Study Methodological Framework and Data Collection Techniques ...	31
4.9.1. Methodological Approaches	31
4.9.2. Data Collection Tools	32

4.9.2.1. Quantitative Method.....	32
4.9.2.2. Questionnaire	32
4.9.2.2.1. Validity Procedures	33
4.9.2.2.2 Reliability Test	34
4.9.2.3. Qualitative Method.....	35
4.9.2.3.1. Focus Group Discussion	35
4.9.3. Ethical Considerations in Conducting Questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion.....	36
CHAPTER V RESULTS AND ANALYSIS.....	37
5.1. Quantitative Results	37
5.1.1. Demographic Data	37
5.1.2. User's Behaviors and Usage of the Social Media Platforms	40
5.1.3. Face-To-Face Communication or Communication Through Social Media in Terms of Expressing Political Views.....	43
5.1.4. Social Media Have a Polarizing or a Depolarizing Effect	44
5.1.5. Algorithms Affect and Create Filter Bubbles Through the Content They Suggest to the User	46
5.2. Qualitative Results	46
CHAPTER VI DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS.....	49
CHAPTER VII CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	52
7.1. Conclusion.....	52
7.2. Recommendations.....	53
REFERENCES	54
APPENDIXES.....	58
APPENDIX A.....	58
APPENDIX B.....	65
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	68

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1. Reliability Test	34
Table 4.2. Focus Group Discussion Participants Demographic Data.....	36
Table 4.3. Focus Group Discussion Axes	36
Table 5.1. Questionnaire’s Demographic Data	37
Table 5.2. Location	38
Table 5.3. Used Social Media Platforms.....	40
Table 5.4. Number of Times of Checking Social Media Accounts Per Day	40
Table 5.5. One-Way Analysis of Variance According to the Number of Times of Checking Social Media Accounts Per Day	41
Table 5.6. Time Spent on Social Media	41
Table 5.7. One-Way Analysis of Variance According to the Number of Check-In Hours Variable.....	42
Table 5.8. The Effect of the Top Four Used Social Media Platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, And YouTube) in Creating Echo Chambers Differently.....	42
Table 5.9. Engagement and Expression on Social Media	43
Table 5.10. Do You Follow the Accounts of Leaders of the Party You Feel Closest To?	44
Table 5.11. Do You Follow the Accounts of Leaders of the Party You Feel Furthest From?	44
Table 5.12. One-Way Analysis of Variance According to How Much the Students Feel Different from Their Farthest Party	44
Table 5.13. Do Social Media Have a Polarizing or a Depolarizing Effect? I.E., Does It Help Users to be More Open to the Ideas of the Supporters of Their Opposed Party?	45
Table 5.14. Ideologically, How Different Do You See Yourself from the Supporters of the Party You Feel Farthest from on a Scale of 1-10?.....	45
Table 5.15. Do Social Media Algorithms Contribute to Creating Filter Bubbles Through the Content They Suggest to the User	46

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1. Spiral of Silence Model.....	9
Figure 2.2. Filter Bubbles.....	11
Figure 3.1. Political Map of Turkey	14
Figure 3.2. Would You Discuss the State of Emergency?.....	19
Figure 3.3. Are the Below Listed People Agree with Your Ideas on the State of Emergency.....	20
Figure 3.4. Social Media Channels and Political Discussion.....	23



LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AK PARTY	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi
BİLGESAM	Bilge Adamlar Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi
CNN	Cable News Network
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi
SNS	Social Network Sites
TED Talk	Technology, Entertainment and Design Talk
TRT	Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There has been a lot of research regarding social media and its implications in the last decade, and the way social media influences political views has become a focus of political communication in particular. One line of studies is concentrated on the factors that affect polarization levels, as social media creates heterogeneous networks and allows people to be more open to divergent ideas. Although social media presented hope that individuals would rely on diversified sources for news, there is a growing concern it intensifies political polarization due to people's inclination to create relationships with those who are similar to them.

In its first chapter, the thesis deals with social media platforms and their implications along with the explanation of important concepts. Echo chambers and filter bubbles are frequently used expressions when researchers try to convey their concerns on how the usage of social media would restrict the type of information users consume online. These expressions are also combined with the aforementioned tendency that individuals try to create an atmosphere for themselves where they do not have to face any kind of content that is not compatible with their opinions.

The second chapter talks about Turkey's state and its process of political polarization, which sparked in the republican era and continued until this day. The overlap between political parties and political identities is one of the most significant reasons behind segregation, and people progressively describe politics and society in terms of "Us" against "Them". There is a major distrust in traditional media outlets, which is driving change in how people acquire information, especially the younger generation. Studies showed that the vast majority of Turkish social media users do not post their political views on different platforms, which indicates that social media did not offer a solution for polarization.

The theoretical framework was clarified in the third chapter, in which the problem of the study, hypothesis, questions, importance, concepts, limitations, methodology, and data collection tools were explained. In addition, the third chapter shows that both quantitative and qualitative were used to reach the aims of this study. It includes an explanation of the questionnaire, the axes it adopted, and the focus group discussion.

The quantitative and qualitative data derived from the questionnaire and focus group discussion along with their analysis were discussed in the fourth and fifth chapters, while in chapter number five the results were discussed and connected based on each question and aim of the study. In addition, the results were linked with the literature review and the related theories used to interpret them.

The sixth chapter which is the last chapter handles the conclusions and answers all the research questions. In addition, to the recommendations for further studies, politicians and everyday social media users.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

2.1. Social Media Platforms

Social media can be defined in different approaches. Social media are platforms that give users the ability to generate and share content on the web, at the same time it allows users to interact with each other. When defined in that way, platforms are categorized based on their purpose. Kaplan and Haenlein identified six classes for social media platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010):

- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, MySpace).-
- Blogs and microblog sites (e.g. Twitter, Tumblr).
- Content communities (e.g. YouTube, Daily Motion, Pinterest, Instagram, Flickr, and Vine).
- Collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia).
- Virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft).
- Virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life, Farmville).

Social media platforms allow individuals to express themselves freely and communicate with different people holding all kinds of views. Therefore, they were believed to widen people's horizons and improve democracies. However, many fragments in society, including the media, academics, and even politicians, believe it is having the opposite effect.

In the last 15 years, social media research has exploded. Scholars have been curious about the beneficial and bad implications that social media can have on people's everyday lives as well as on society as a whole. The implications of social media on

political and civic involvement have been a focus of political communication in particular (Gil de Zúñiga, Huber, & Strauss, 2018).

In a variety of ways, social media has the potential to promote democracy. One option is to assist individuals in being more exposed to news, either intentionally or unintentionally, which has been linked to increased political engagement. Furthermore, it has been suggested that social media might let individuals express themselves politically, which is an important avenue for people to become involved in politics (Gil de Zúñiga, Huber, & Strauss, 2018).

Taking into account that people are reluctant to communicate with their political opponents in their daily lives, many imagine their political opponents as the media display them, so the media is framing how individuals apprehend the political circumstances. (Emily Kubin, 2021). Social media employs algorithms to line up contents that show in the users' newsfeeds depending on their previous interests rather than chronological order, that way they can increase interaction. (Golino, 2021).

Another area of research has focused on the architecture of social networks as an element influencing polarization rates (Mutz, 2002; Sunstein, 2000). People who are in diverse societies (where individuals from various environments interchange ideas) are more probably to be subjected to different points of view and, as a result, to become familiar with politically contrasting ideas (Lee, Choi, Kim, & Kim, 2014).

Despite inceptive hope that social media would allow individuals to absorb more diverse sources of information about current events, there is growing concern that such forums could aggravate political polarization due to social network homophiles, or people's well-documented tendency to create social network relationships with those who are identical to them (A. Bail & al., 2018).

People rely on their acquaintances to collect information about politics, build their political affiliations, and take decisions on whom to vote for. (Barberá, 2015). The ideological fragmentation of media is one cause of this ideological polarization; giving audiences an "echo chamber" for their own opinions, which could take part in the polarization of public opinion (Hong, 2013; Kim & Hong, 2015; Sunstein, 2009).

2.2. Social Media and Polarization

Partisan cues in news coverage of politics have been proven to increase the salience of partisan attitudes, hence contributing to polarization. According to Levendusky (2013), political media makes audiences' partisan identities more salient by portraying politics as a conflict between profoundly opposing parties, resulting in both cognitive and affective polarization (A. Tucker & et al, 2018).

Garrett et al. (2016) found that being exposed to ideologically biased websites is positively related to retaining incorrect ideas on politically crucial matters, even when respondents are aware of the right facts contradicting such beliefs (Tucker, A., et al., 2018).

Partisan identification (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; DiMaggio, Evans, & Bryson, 1996) and media utilization models (Nie et al., 2010; Stroud, 2007, 2010) have been stressed as predictors of polarization in many polarization research (Lee, Choi, Kim, & Kim, 2014).

Being exposed to different communication networks makes it possible to have depolarizing effects as per some deliberation theorists. They assert that a clash in political ideas usually inspires debate and objective analysis and evaluation (Delli Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004), motivate people to explore ideas opposite to theirs, have opinions based on diversified worldviews, and eventually generates citizen consensus by adjusting their ideas to those preferred by others (Lee, Choi, Kim, & Kim, 2014).

Subjection to competing viewpoints does increase political tolerance and awareness of the genuine arguments that underpin opposing viewpoints, according to empirical study (Mutz & Mondak, 2006; Price, Cappella, & Nir, 2002). Furthermore, people's attitudes about political candidates were depolarized by heterogeneous social networks, which increased negative feelings toward in-party candidates while decreasing good emotions toward out-party candidates (Lee, Choi, Kim, & Kim, 2014).

However, encountering different points of view may enhance pre-existing political biases and develop more extreme positions in the opposite direction of one's starting opinions. Weapon regulation (Taber & Lodge, 2006), gay marriage and sexual minority justice (Wojcieszak & Price, 2010), stem cell studies (Binder, Dalrymple, Brossard, & Scheufele, 2009), sexual orientation (Munro & Ditto, 1997), and behaviors towards political candidates (Munro & Ditto, 1997) are just a few examples of the topics researchers strive to study. (Lee, Choi, Kim, & Kim, 2014).

Confirmation bias is one of the information-processing strategies in which people give information that confirms their position with uneven attention and weight (Nickerson, 1998; Taber & Lodge, 2006). This type of motivated information processing is supposed to explain why encountering opposing viewpoints exacerbates strong preferences (Lee, Choi, Kim, & Kim, 2014).

Audience members, for the most part, choose which media messages to pay attention to and thereby construct their information environments. Many scholars are concerned about aspects that may lead to biased message intake, particularly in the Internet age, where information selection has become more accessible due to internet availability (e.g., Bennett & Iyengar, 2008).

Concerns about how political attitudes are formed and their impact on democracy has arisen in response to the recent surge of populism and political polarization. As a result, numerous study articles have been published looking into the function of social media in the formation of political opinions.

The inception of social media was attributed to political polarization according to many researchers. They claim that social media creates “echo chambers” in which a consumer and his friends are not able to view material that does not comply with their point of view (see, for example, Mutz, 2006; Hindman, 2008; Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2009, 2018), and that social media practices encourage this situation (see, for example, El-Bermawy 2016; Sambrook, 2016; Allcott and Gentzkow).

More recent research claims that social media does not necessarily raise polarization (Boxell et al., 2017), but rather can minimize it (Barber'a, 2015; Dubois and Blank,

2018; Algan et al., 2019) by introducing users to a variety of viewpoints and therefore leading to less narrow political views (Barber'a, 2015; Dubois and Blank, 2018; Algan et al., 2019). This is because social media (such as Twitter or Facebook) spans a far bigger network than just direct connections, exposing individuals to other political perspectives through their weak ties and hence making them less likely to have extreme political views. Both points of view appear to be rational and have empirical backing. Campbell, Leister, and Zenou (2019) (Campbell, Leister, and Zenou, 2019).

In terms of its capability of increasing polarized ideas on the internet, social media has received a lot of interest in comparison with other media outlets due to its ability to create networks between people who share the same perspectives. (Sounman Hong, 2016).

Moreover, other researchers claim that the open structure of web2.0 permits users to consume a diverse range of ideological perspectives, which was not available before the internet. (Garrett, Carnahan, & Lynch, 2011; Mutz & Mondak, 2006 (Sounman Hong, 2016).

According to a study conducted by Damon Centola and published in the Scientific American Magazine on groups of Republicans and Democrats, echo chambers had reverse effects than the one expected. Members in each group leaned towards the opinions of the other group. This unexpected result happened because the group that the study was conducted on was egalitarian; there were not any influencers among them. Therefore, ideas were spread among the group based on their quality rather than the person holding them. Social media platforms are centralized, meaning that a small amount of people or just one “influencer” at the center is connected to the majority of normal users the “periphery” (Centola, 2020).

Ideas are filtered through, or sometimes even blocked, by a powerful social influencer on centralized networks, like many social media sites. In a centralized echo chamber, even a modest amount of partisan bias displayed by the influencer can be magnified across the entire group. But as mentioned before in egalitarian networks, ideas spread based on their quality, and not the person touting them. Because online networks are generally formed around a few prominent influencers, the problem of partisan

prejudice is intensified on social media. One of the key reasons why disinformation and fake news have grown so widespread is because of this aspect of social media. Biased influencers have a disproportionate impact on their audience in centralized networks, allowing tiny ideas and presumptions to grow into widespread misconceptions and incorrect beliefs (Centola, 2020).

Users may polarize over time if they are exposed to mostly attitudinal material as a result of their social and algorithmic recommendations. Online selective exposure, according to Lelkes and colleagues (2017), is a likely cause of their result that broadband internet access is linked to increasing political emotional polarization. However, among selective exposure researchers, there is still controversy and conflicting findings concerning the effect of social media on the media material people choose to consume (A. Beam, J. Hutchens, & D. Hmielowski, 2018).

Growing political involvement caused by social media has indirectly taken part in political polarization, even though there were no straight effects of social media utilization. (Changjun Lee, 2017).

Active social media users were more inclined to contribute to political processes, which results in them adopting more radical political beliefs over time than those who do not. Discussing political differences can widen the cleavage in the viewpoints of those participating in political debate and aggravate polarization according to some studies (Changjun Lee, 2017).

2.3. Spiral of Silence and Political Views

The spiral of silence theory was formalized in 1974 when Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann published *The Spiral of Silence, a Theory of Public Opinion* in the *Journal of Communication*. As per the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974; 1993), individuals who adopt an opinion that is supported by the majority in a given environment feel entitled to express their opinions freely, whereas others that have an opinion of the minority refrain from doing so. People feel pushed to observe their environment due to their fear of social isolation. News media can also play a role in enforcing the majority's opinion. Therefore, the inclination of one group to express

their opinion and the other not to generate a spiraling process where some opinions are heard and others are muted irrespective of their representation in a community. (Matthes, 2015).

The "Spiral of Silence" is another connected notion that should be highlighted. Neumann proposed the spiral of silence theory, which states that people refrain from revealing their political views if they believe they are in the minority. (Erdoğan & Uyan, 2017)

As we see in figure 2.1., people who are afraid of isolation are afraid of being cut off from their social connections. This is critical in terms of opinion expression. Individuals will rather agree with the overall consensus stated in their social network than offer an opposing concept or perspective (E. Sale, 2015).

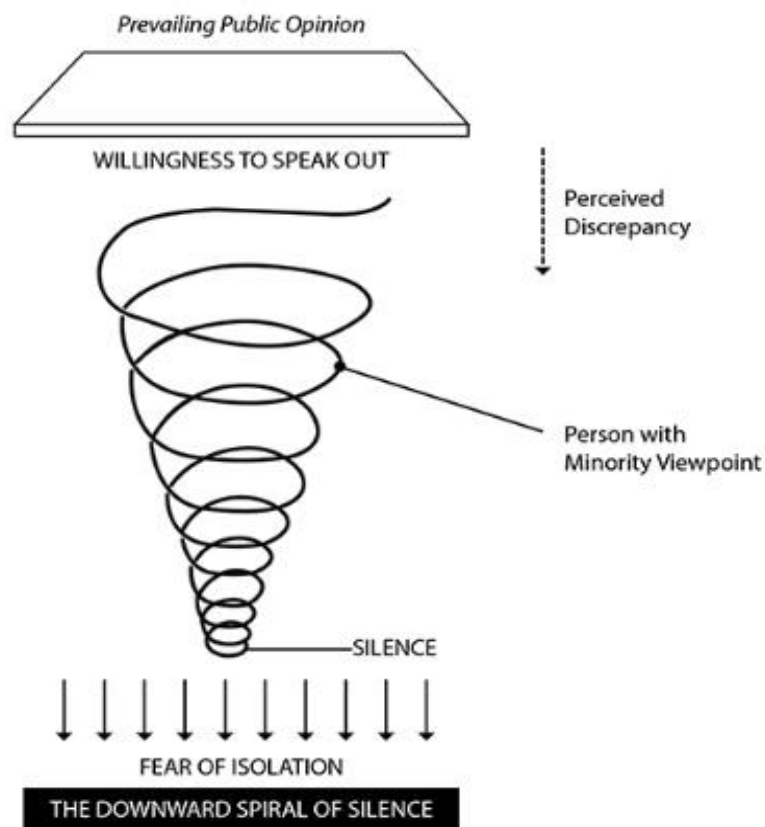


Figure 2.1. Spiral of Silence Model

Source: (Aryal, 2014; Noelle-Neumann, 1993)

The "spiral" in Noelle-hypothesis Neumann's is this escape from the fear of isolation. The spiral is a visual representation of the theory. The spiral's narrowest end indicates the small proportion of people who do not express their opinions. These individuals hold an opinion that is far outside the boundaries of current public opinion. Individuals that have outlier opinions will not fit into the current political climate (E. Sale, 2015).

A recent Pew Research Center (2016) study of the seemingly positive impact of social media uses on political activity into doubt. Many people are exhausted by the amount of political content they have to face on social media even though they appreciate its capacity for political information sharing and interaction. They feel uncomfortable when they argue about politics on social media with other users who do not hold the same views as theirs. According to the Pew Research Center (2014), when faced with a dispute and do not believe their friends or followers sympathize with them, Facebook and Twitter users are less likely to speak up (Hampton, Rainie, Lu, & Dwyer, 2014).

2.4. Echo Chambers and Polarization

According to group polarization theory indicates the proclivity of a group is to make decisions that are riskier than the average individual decisions made by members before the group meeting. Subsequent social psychology studies revealed that a similar tendency applies more broadly to changes in attitude and opinion following a debate. (Proietti, 2017).

An echo chamber can operate as a mechanism to reinforce an existing view inside a group and, consequently, push the entire group toward more extreme perspectives. Echo chambers have been identified as a growing result of human characteristics such as selective exposure, contagion, and group polarization, according to certain research. However, the effects of echo chambers, as well as their very existence, have lately been called into doubt. This problem is exacerbated by the lack of comparative research on social media, particularly in the area of news consumption (Cinelli, Morales, Galeazzi, Quattrociocchi, & Starnini, 2021).

Users can communicate in a variety of ways on different platforms, ranging from retweets and mentions on Twitter to likes and comments in groups on Facebook,

resulting in quite varied social dynamics (Cinelli, Morales, Galeazzi, Quattrociocchi, & Starnini, 2021).

The concepts of echo chambers and filter bubbles represent the widespread public apprehension that the use of social media will reduce the number of information users view or absorb online, blocking a common pattern of knowledge transfer. The concern is that social media algorithms, when paired with a desire to engage with like-minded individuals, will build an environment in which users will be exposed to pleasant, opinion-reinforcing material at the expense of more diverse, opinion-challenging information (Kitchens, L. Johnson, & Gray, 2020).

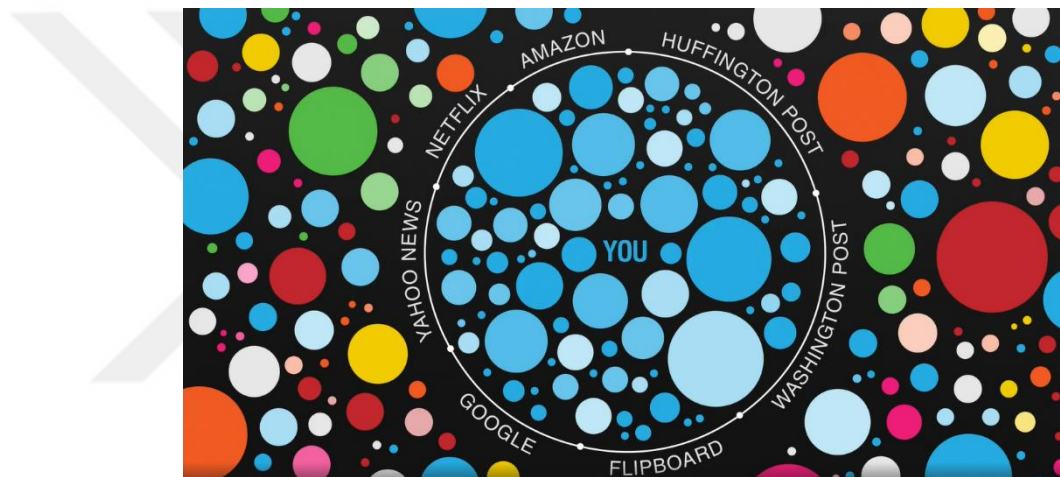


Figure 2.2. Filter Bubbles

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/media-network/media-network-blog/2014/may/13/internet-confirmation-bias>

Researchers' capacity to examine the presence or development of echo chambers and filter bubbles is hampered by a lack of consensus over their conception and quantification, despite decades of interest in the topic (Kitchens, L. Johnson, & Gray, 2020).

Indeed, there are elements of popular social media sites that may encourage information-limiting settings. People in online social networks, for example, communicate more frequently with like-minded persons, just as they do in physical interactions. Bakshy et al. (2015) revealed that more than 80% of Facebook

connections had the same party affiliation in a survey of 10.1 million U.S. Facebook users with self-reported ideological affiliation (Kitchens, L. Johnson, & Gray, 2020). Individuals prefer to consume opinion-reinforcing news sources over opinion-challenging news sources, even within this already confined option set, according to selective exposure theory (Frey 1986). Garrett (2009) found evidence for this trend in a field experiment with 727 online news consumers, who reported interest in reading online news items that they judged to be supportive of their current perspective and reluctance in reading stories that challenged their existing opinion.

Finally, scholars have long been concerned that algorithmic filtering might restrict the variety of information sources that people are exposed to, engage with, or consume (Kitchens, L. Johnson, & Gray, 2020).

Social media networks have been found in several pieces of research to be information-expanding. Users can utilize social media to find new information sources, thus broadening the range of ideas, opinions, and information to which they are exposed (Kitchens, L. Johnson, & Gray, 2020).

CHAPTER III

POLITICAL POLARIZATION AND ITS SITUATION IN TURKEY

3.1. The Republic of Turkey

Turkey is located in the eastern Mediterranean region, partially in Europe and partly in Asia. The country covers 302,169 square miles, about 3% of which (with around 8% of the population) is in Europe. The Anatolian Plateau serves as the country's heartland (F.Nyrop, 1973).

In 1923, Kemal Ataturk formed the Republic of Turkey, promising a new era of popular sovereignty, secular society, and Western-style modernization, setting pillars of a philosophy known as Kemalism—and moved the capital to Ankara (Gasirowski & L. Yom, 2017).

Turkey's population increased by 1 million 65 thousand 911 individuals over the previous year, reaching 84 million 680 thousand 273 as of December 31, 2021. The male population stood at 42 million 428 thousand 101 people, while the female population stood at 42 million 252 thousand 172 people. Males made up 50.1 percent of the overall population, while females made up 49.9 percent. (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2021)

Six nations and six bodies of water surround Turkey. In Europe, the country shares borders with Greece and Bulgaria; in Asia, it shares borders with Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, as well as Iran, Iraq, and Syria as shown in figure (3.1.) The Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 established the Greek frontier. The treaty provided for a population exchange to end persistent boundary and territorial claims involving the areas near this border, under which the sizable Greek-speaking community of western Turkey was returned to Greece and the Turkish-speaking population of Greek Thrace was

repatriated to Turkey. There have been no active boundary conflicts since then (F.Nyrop, 1973).



Figure 3.1. Political Map of Turkey

Source: <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneWorld/turkey.htm>

3.2. Political Polarization

The term "polarization" relates to the capacity of individuals in a society to be divided into groups based on certain demographic traits. To put it another way, polarization necessitates the presence of at least two groups (Sacit Hadi AKDEDE, 2020).

Bearing in mind the significance of polarization in modern political discourse, the literature offers startlingly little aid in defining it. feasibly the easiest place to start is by defining what polarization is not. Polarization is not disruptive incivility in political debate: while the two may (or may not) be empirically connected, polarization relates to the magnitude of disagreement, not how disagreement is communicated. Polarization cannot be reduced to an equilibrium of responses between agreement and

disagreement with survey questions (except in the limiting case of two-point scales) Polarization is inherent in the extremes and distances between reactions, not in their substantive content. (DiMaggio, Evans, & Bryson, 1996)

When inequality within groups diminishes or increases between groups, polarization rises. In this situation, the members of each cluster are of comparable quality, yet it could be claimed that the society is polarized if distinct clusters contain persons with dissimilar traits (Sacit Hadi AKDEDE, 2020).

Contemporary polarizations sometimes begin when a previously divided or disadvantaged segment of society becomes politically unified and determined to attain social, economic, cultural-ideological, or institutional goals. This happens when political entrepreneurs effectively highlight and trigger underlying social cleavages, bringing to the forefront, creating, or reinventing a dominant cleft around which other cleavages align. As a result, polarization is characterized as the process through which a society's typical variety of disparities progressively coincide along a single axis, cross-cutting contrasts become reinforcing, and individuals understand and explain politics and society in terms of "Us" vs "Them" (Jennifer McCoy, 2018).

The separation between elite and mass polarization is a feature of the current period. Elite polarization, polarization within the government party, and polarization within the party as an organization. The distribution of political attitudes among all citizens is one approach to looking at public opinion polarization, also known as mass polarization (Delia Baldassarri, 2008).

Higher degrees of polarization can be good for society, as it predicts higher levels of political engagement and voter attitudes. Political polarization, on the other hand, can be harmful to democracy, increasing power concentration and legislative deadlock (Jones, 2001), as well as decreasing citizen satisfaction (Emily Kubin, 2021).

3.3. Turkey's Polarization Patterns

Within the historical process, political polarization happens on a societal level. If the main goal is to prevent polarization and contribute to the formation of a more

peaceful and flexible social structure, it is critical to consider and comprehend the social basis of this polarization. (Altun, 2014)

A valuable political tool to comprehensively understand political and social transformation has always been the center-periphery approach. Although this approach has occasionally failed to explain social and political development and transition, it has nonetheless been an essential tool for studying Turkish politics. Although the center-periphery relationship has remained important in the analysis of the political structure from the classical period Ottoman to the Turkish Republic, it has experienced periodic changes. (Tuncel & GÜNDOĞMUŞ, 2012)

Polarization in Turkey is analyzed according to the center-periphery model put forward by Edward Shils in 1961. Shils's (1961:117) model is based on the idea that every society has a center and a periphery. According to this model, the 'center' is conceptualized as a social and political structure and is positioned as the determinant of the values, symbols, and beliefs on which the rulers of the society are based. In other words, the center is not defined as a structure formed by places and institutions, but as the center of spiritual characteristics formed by values and beliefs. Historically, political and social polarization in Turkey developed over five eras or stages, the Ottoman Empire Era, the Republican Era, the Multi-Party period, the 1961 constitution, and the 2000s period. In each period, the relationship between the center and the periphery took a different shape, also, with different political and economic events taking place in each period, each event introduced new value systems and brought changes to the socio-political atmosphere. (Kurt, 2015).

Center-Periphery Theory, on the other hand, refers to the existence of a conflict that takes place around the positions that the center and the periphery are trying to gain or protect. When the Ottoman period, the first years of the republic period, and after being evaluated, it is seen that even though the center and the periphery changed in name or shape, these groups retain their place in terms of at least one of the status, location, and culture they have adopted. In other words, even if a peripheral element transitions to the center in terms of management or economy, it has always been culturally left out of the center or left; Similarly, the center has always been in an effort to stay in the

center in a sense, even when it was in the periphery with the claim of cultural superiority. (BİLGİÇ, KOYDEMİR, & AKYÜREK, 2014)

The perception that the opposition parties, which are the main elements of the structural opposition in democratic systems, do not have the potential to be an alternative to power in the eyes of society, paved the way for rapid tension and polarization in the political field in Turkey. (TUNCEL, 2014)

3.4. Turkey's Current State of Polarization

The overlap between political parties and political identities is one of the most important causes for the high level of division among political party followers. Political identities, or one's "place on earth," are shaped through shared victimhood and glorification, as well as shared tastes and traits, and are also defined in connection to who the "other" is. When political party identification and political identities collide, political polarization is more likely.

Political party preferences are no longer transient and changing, and these preferences, which are shaped by political identities, may help to separate oneself from other party followers (Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey, 2018).

In the quantitative research conducted by BİLGESAM, a 109-question survey was applied to 5039 people (AKGUL, 2017). According to the results, ethnic segregation became a prominent phenomenon. The view of non-Kurds towards Kurds in Turkey reveals the extent of polarization. The fact that one out of three-five people does not want to marry a Kurd presents an example of polarization in the private sphere. While the fact that one out of every three people does not want to see a Kurd as a prime minister or president in the country has been evaluated as a manifestation of polarization in the public sphere (AKGÜL, 2017).

Another polarization area revealed by BİLGESAM is the sectarian one. According to the findings that emerged as a result of Sunni-Alevi polarization, one out of every three people in Turkey saw marriage with Alevis as problematic, while one out of every five people stated that they did not want to see an Alevi prime minister and president

(BİLGESAM, 2014: 34). One value polarization area revealed by BİLGESAM is Religion, but the most important polarization is the data emerging in the political field (Akgul, 2017).

One of the most important indications of political segregation is the social distance one party's supporters feel towards their opposite one. This concept, formulated by Bogardus (1925), is used to measure polarization depending on individuals' tendency to connect with others. As per the results of the survey, 79 percent of the sample stated that they refuse to have their daughter get married to someone who follows a party that is opposite to them. In addition, 74% said that they do not want to carry out business with a follower of that party, also 70% expressed that they refuse to live beside them. 68% of parents wouldn't like their kids to play with supporters of that political party. According to the findings, there is a large social divide between political party followers in Turkey (Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey, 2018).

Political parties in Turkey do not serve the same purposes as in other countries, this is because they were an outcome of the westernization process. notions like democracy, political parties, and parliament are not the outcome of internal dynamics in Turkey but are imposed from above. This lack of internal infrastructure resulted in prejudiced and unpleasant institutions and has emphasized the development of sociopolitical polarization. (ALTINTAŞ, 2003)

Moral superiority is another dimension of polarization; when party followers compare themselves to others, they believe that they are higher in rank, status, or quality. This feeling of supremacy is a mechanism that permits people to more easily ignore supporters of 'others' meaning, 'most distant party followers. higher in rank, status, or quality (Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey, 2018).

The fact that, in comparison to other democratic countries, the positions and functions of non-governmental organizations, which are other actors in the democratic political system and undertake the function of connecting the public with the political system, are extremely inadequate, increasing the roles and functions of political parties. (ALTINTAŞ, 2003)

To determine how relevant the "Spiral of Silence" is in the context of Turkey, participants were asked if they would join in a debate on the "state of emergency." While 64 percent of participants indicated they would have such a conversation with their families over dinner, just 57 percent said they would have such a conversation with their friends. Only one-third of respondents are keen to address this matter at their workplaces or schools, compared to 45 percent who would debate it at a community gathering. Only 25% of those who said they would debate this issue on Facebook or Twitter did so. Figure (3.2.) shows that people are hesitant to address a serious issue even among family and friends, let alone in public. Similarly, Twitter and Facebook, which are portrayed as alternative public venues, are not true alternatives (Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey, 2018).

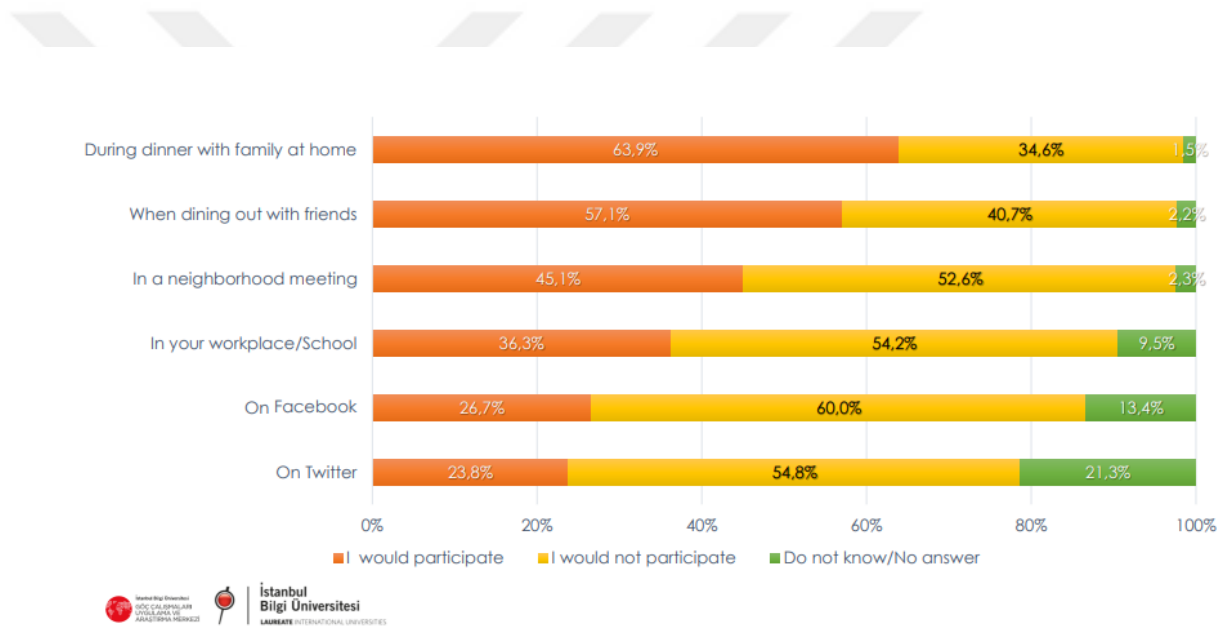


Figure 3.2. Would You Discuss the State of Emergency?

Source: <https://goc.bilgi.edu.tr/media/uploads/2018/02/06/dimensions-of-polarization>

Additionally, when participants were questioned if they share similar views on the present "state of emergency" with those in their immediate circle (spouse, brother/sister, close friend, or family), we discovered that the vast majority of them do. The number of people who agree with their coworkers or classmates is 63 percent, whereas 59 percent of people agree with their neighbors on this topic. On Facebook (57 percent) and Twitter, most individuals are friends with others who think like them (53 percent).

The polarization in Turkish society extends beyond political parties to the entire public, with voters constantly interpreting crucial political topics based on their party affiliations. Significantly, individuals who support different political parties typically hold opposing views on basic truths of recent events in politics and the legitimacy of government. (Aydın Düzgüt, 2019)

Figure (3.3.) suggests that Turkish society is hemophilic, meaning that individuals tend to associate with people who are similar to them (Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey, 2018).

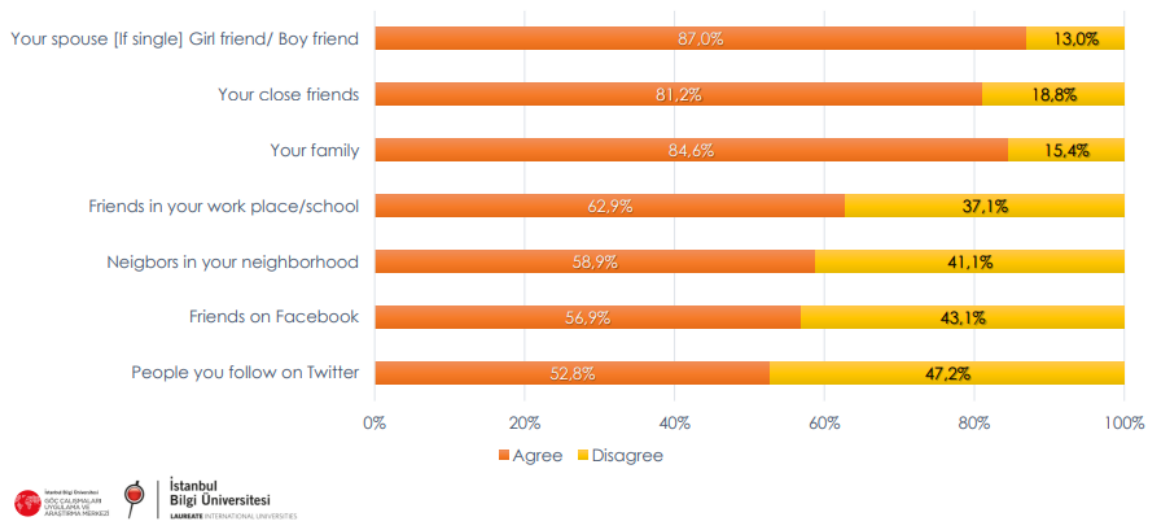


Figure 3.3. Are the Below Listed People Agree with Your Ideas on the State of Emergency

Source: <https://goc.bilgi.edu.tr/media/uploads/2018/02/06/dimensions-of-polarization>

3.5. Influence of Turkish Traditional and Social Media on Political Polarization

In democratic systems, it is expected that the media will inform the public and contribute to the formation of a freethinking market in the public by presenting a wide range of social facts and views, especially by performing the function of controlling political mechanisms in a pluralistic system. However, this claim of liberal (pluralist) media theories is not considered valid today. Because the idea that news texts reflect social reality like a mirror appears as an ideal that goes no further than a metaphor, the

social reality of the media is constructed within the framework of certain ideologies in a way that ensures social consent and reconciliation. For this reason, media organizations are not as impartial information providers, but organizations that reject or support certain policy options, evaluate and interpret constantly occurring events, and take an active role in the political process by structuring and selecting information (Kurt, 2015).

Although some of the studies examining the relationship between polarization and media have found evidence of a relationship between the media and polarization, no such evidence has been found in some studies. However, studies indicate that there is a relationship between the exposure of those who support any political view or party to media broadcasts close to their views and polarization, and there is a relationship between the consumption of media that defends their views. That is, when individuals are exposed to media coverage that supports their political views, polarization is generated because these media broadcasts provide information that promotes their views (Kurt, 2015).

When it comes to news networks on television, which are the most popular source of political information, followers of the CHP and the IYI Party watch CNN Türk, FOX TV, and Halk TV more than other channels, and more than other party supporters do. A Haber, ATV, TRT, and Kanal 24 are popular among AK Party supporters, whereas Habertürk and Star are popular among MHP followers. Based on this graph, we can conclude that there is a significant divide amongst party followers in terms of their preferences for watching TV news stations (Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey, 2018).

The relationship between the media and polarization differs in terms of different media types, and the features and technologies of those tools. Namely, The Internet provides individuals with the opportunity to encounter information that either denies or complements their political tendencies. It is not known whether individuals on the Internet, where there is a free choice, are seeking views in online content that struggle with the opinion they defend or that they agree with.

While the Internet can also be used to explore different viewpoints, Stromer and Galley's (2003) research found that people who use the Internet like to hear differing opinions on political debate issues. On the other hand, the use of radio, television, and newspaper are traditional mass media that may limit people's ability to choose different political content. In many societies, people read only one newspaper and follow the newspapers that support their views and agree with them, regardless of whether they are satisfied with the society and life in which they live (Kurt, 2015).

Media polarization is both a cause and an effect of political polarization. Individuals follow media outlets that represent their political ideas in this process. As a result, people have the opportunity to interpret news from their perspective. Polarization in the media can reach a stage where followers of opposing parties are surrounded by people who have very different perspectives on the world and find it impossible to grasp what others are thinking (Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey, 2018).

Although social media has been hailed as a means of boosting political engagement, it's also possible that, in an era of hyperpartisanship, social media experiences will make individuals less interested in politics. Similar to the last point, it's possible that division itself may deter people from engaging in politics (Tucker, A., et al., 2018).

According to the findings, social media is not a solution for polarization. Twitter is used by one-third of all Internet users. Only 15% of them routinely post-political thoughts on Twitter, while almost half of all users never do so. Moreover, 60% of Twitter users claim to follow individuals who share their viewpoints.

The situation is no different for Facebook users, who account for 87 percent of all Internet users. Only 7% of Facebook users express their political views, while 56% never do so. Two-thirds of Facebook users say their Facebook friends share their political viewpoints.

Figure (3.4.) shows that echo chambers and homophily, as we previously discussed, are severe issues for these two social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter (Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey, 2018).

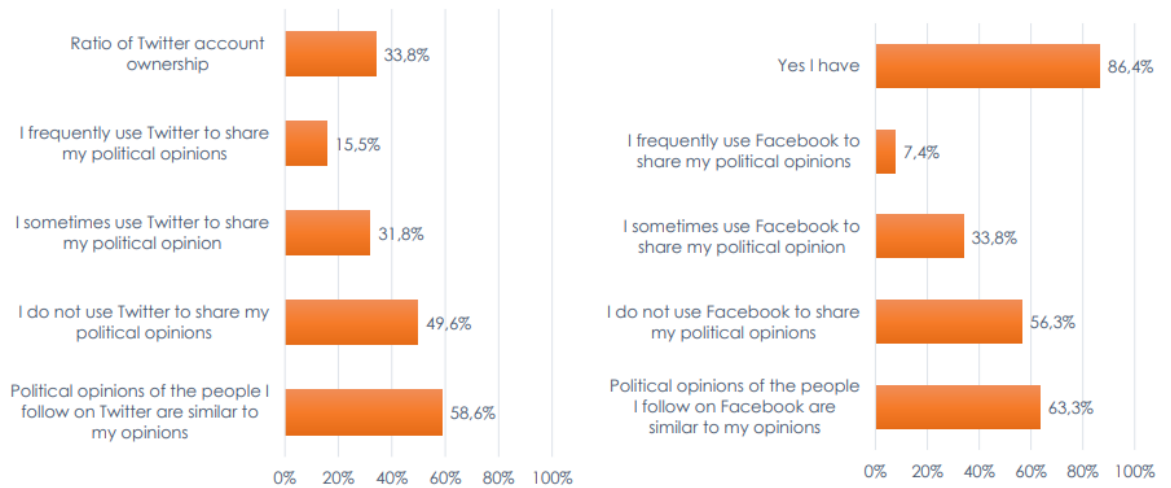


Figure 3.4. Social Media Channels and Political Discussion

Source: <https://goc.bilgi.edu.tr/media/uploads/2018/02/06/dimensions-of-polarization>

As younger Turks have become increasingly reliant on social media for news and information, party gaps have increased, as have generational ones. Between 2015 and 2018, the proportion of Turks aged 18 to 34 who said social media platforms were their primary source of news increased by 11 percentage points, compared to just 4 percentage points among Turks aged 55 and above. While the percentage of Turks aged 18 to 34 who rely only on social media for news is still relatively low at 15%, it has increased dramatically in the last three years, more than doubling. In addition, whereas 83 percent of Turks aged 55 and above acquire their news primarily from television, the percentage among Turks aged 18 to 34 is substantially lower, at 64 percent (A. Beam, J. Hutchens, & D. Hmielowski, 2018).

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

4.1. Research Problem

Turkey's use of the Internet and social media is on the rise. As the number of online information sources grows, the country's digital media environment is constantly forming and altering. Concurrently, traditional news outlets are on the wane, indicating a significant shift in the country's information landscape. In Turkey, social and political polarization has been a defining feature of the country's domestic political rivalry. Turkey's internal power balance has shifted many times in social, political, and economic terms during the previous two decades, yet division has remained constant. Furthermore, in a situation where partisanship appears to be the norm, exposure to opposing viewpoints can typically intensify rather than mitigate polarization (Kirdemir, 2020).

Within the given framework, both traditional and digital news actors play their parts. Previous research has suggested that in Turkey's news media ecosystem, "press-party parallelism" and "press sociopolitical camp parallelism" exist. Because the majority of Turkish social media users who observe political headlines choose media and persons who share their existing partisan beliefs, most of the Turkish audience members live in echo chambers, responding primarily to sources and individuals within their party groups. Confirmation bias is widespread among news consumers, which is worsened by partisanship and low-quality news production throughout the Turkish digital media industry (Kirdemir, 2020).

Media polarization is both a cause and an effect of political polarization. Individuals follow media outlets that represent their political ideas in this process. As a result, people have the opportunity to interpret the news through the lens of their worldview. Polarization in the media may reach a stage where followers of various political parties

are surrounded by people who have quite diverse perspectives on the world and find it impossible to grasp what others are thinking (Erdoğan & Uyan, 2017).

Of course, there are complicated interactions between social media and traditional media. On the one hand, it's obvious that social media has evolved into a tool for traditional media reporting; just consider how frequently a tweet from @realDonaldTrump follows a news item about the president. At the same time, stories created by traditional news media sites make up a large portion of the political content shared on social media (A. Tucker & et al, 2018).

This polarization is not curable with social media. A Twitter account is used by one-third of all Internet users. Only 15% of them routinely post-political thoughts on Twitter, while almost half of all users never do so. Furthermore, 60% of Twitter users claim to follow individuals who share their viewpoints. The situation is no different for Facebook users, who account for 87 percent of all Internet users. Only 7% of Facebook users express their political views, while 56% never do so. Two-thirds of Facebook users say their Facebook friends share their political viewpoints (Erdoğan & Uyan, 2017).

Different scientific fields have investigated the emergence and endurance of polarization on social media. Online and offline echo chambers, as well as "selective exposure to information," are blamed for the problem. People in divided cultures prefer to get information from sources they consider to be politically aligned with them or sources that give information they already believe to be trustworthy. The entire isolation of knowledge from the outside is the consequence of such a communal process. Because of the focus on echo chambers, it was assumed that exposure to other or opposing viewpoints would reduce polarization and foster more moderate views and compromise (Kirdemir, 2020).

Sputnik Türkiye, a Kremlin-backed site, has shown particularly skilled at propagating falsehoods online to serve Russian goals. Ironically, Turks who use social media to learn the truth and avoid traditional news outlets' pro-government slants are more likely to be misinformed as a result. Individuals have few choices for finding independent and reliable political information, and the growth of frequently

combustible misinformation on social media may exacerbate division (O'Donohue, Hoffman, & Makovsky, 2020).

Not coincidentally, partisanship and polarization are interwoven with misinformation, fake news, and other types of lies across the Turkish digital news ecosystem. The overall reality is depicted either as a conflict between a prevailing and rising country and internal and external players who want to destroy it or as a total disaster in which an inept government conspires against its inhabitants. As a result, polarization, poisonous remarks, personal assaults, and organized campaigns target opposing individuals and political parties throughout online social networks (Kirdemir, 2020).

It is more and more likely that one of the main objectives of internet propaganda, which is frequently spread by automated social media accounts known as "bots," is to ensure that some traditional media news pieces are viewed more frequently than others (Sanovich et al. 2018).

However, several researches have contradicted this viewpoint, claiming that exposure to sources from the opposite party may increase rather than decrease political and social division. Receiving a consistent message from the other side may have the unintended consequence of increasing division among politically active liberal and conservative groups in the United States. Although the topic has yet to be answered, it is reasonable to conclude that the free flow of information and competing viewpoints across political groups does not inevitably assist to reduce polarization (Kirdemir, 2020).

In essence, this study aims to know if using social media is linked to having a polarized political opinion. This will be achieved by examining to which extent social media is creating echo chambers among students.

The rising amount of usage of social media among students' age groups dictated the decision of choosing students in this study. In addition, this age group is eligible to vote, which means that their opinions will have a significant effect on any upcoming election or referendum, etc.

Since social media allow users to express their opinions unlike traditional media where the person is only a receiver, some users might abstain from doing so because they are afraid of facing a backlash. Therefore, leading them to fall back into a one-dimensional hemophilic environment again, creating a spiral of silence.

Posts that are shown on the users' feed are personalized based on each user's preferences and isolate them from content that they have shown less interest in. This means that social media algorithms can hide posts from people or news websites/accounts that the user does not agree with, or hold different viewpoints. This leads to people believing that they have full information about something while they are only getting one side of it, hence, making it harder for people to agree about facts and limiting them to a single viewpoint.

Partisan disinformation can easily be spread on social media, especially if it is coming from a partisan leader or influencer. Thus, dependency on social media to learn about events and get information about other parties' ideas can increase the intensity of incompatibility between different party supporters.

4.2. Hypothesis of the Study

- H0: Social media does not have an effect on political polarization among Turkish students
- H1: Social media have an effect on political polarization among Turkish students

4.3. Research Questions

Depending on the above hypothesis, the main question of the study is:

- Is there a link between social media platforms and political polarization in Turkey?

While the sub-questions are:

1. Is the usage of social media linked to the level of political polarization among Turkish students?

2. Do the top four used platforms in Turkey (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube) contribute to creating echo chambers differently?
3. Can social media be a solution to the spiral of silence for students? In other words, do they feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts on them?
4. Do social media have a polarizing or a depolarizing effect? i.e., does it help users to be more open to the ideas of the supporters of their opposed party?
5. Do social media algorithms contribute to creating filter bubbles through the content they suggest to the user?
6. How much do Turkish students depend on social media to get their political news?

4.4. Importance of the Study

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, around 56 percent of the population had access to the Internet in 2015 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2016). The fact that a significant portion of the population lacks Internet access makes estimating the consequence of Internet use on various outcomes, such as political awareness, easier.

Even though internet content consumption is not as high as traditional media, especially TV, social media is exceptionally in demand among Turkish internet users. 87 percent of adult internet consumers (those who have a smartphone) declared using social media, making Turkey one of the top five growing countries in social media usage. Social media earned its place as a handy tool for following local politics.

This study will shed fresh light on how Turkish students deal with social media platforms, and how are they affected by them in terms of political polarization.

Critics commonly blame social media platforms for intensifying political polarization by creating "echo chambers" that shield people from information that contradicts their preexisting ideas. Rather than studying the consequences of social media, this line of research aims to diagnose the existing status of the political landscape in social media.

Most of the previous research regarding this topic is concentrated on the U.S population, whereas this study uses a sample of Turkish students, which contributes an international contributed value and perspective. This study has significant implications for the developing discipline of computational social science as well as continuing initiatives to minimize political division on the internet.

4.5. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to find if there is a link between social media platforms and political polarization from the viewpoint of Turkish students.

The study also aims at:

- 1- Find out if the utilization of social media (time spent and the number of checks per day) affects the level of polarization of students.
- 2- Comparing different platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) in terms of creating echo chambers.
- 3- Examining if social media offers a solution to the spiral of silence for students, meaning, do they feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts on the aforementioned platforms.
- 4- Learning if social media has either a polarizing or a depolarizing effect by checking if it helped them be more open to the ideas of their opposing party.
- 5- Verifying if the algorithms used by social media platforms also play a role in creating filter bubbles through the content they suggest to the user.

4.6. Concepts of the Study

Political Polarization: Polarization can be seen in two different ways, a condition, and a process. As a condition, it is a concept used to express the extent of divergence of opinions on a particular issue. While as a process, it expresses the extent to which this situation has developed. (DiMaggio, Evans, & Bryson, 1996).

Echo Chambers: According to the oxford dictionary, an echo chamber is “*an environment in which somebody encounters only opinions and beliefs similar to their own, and does not have to consider alternatives*” (McKean & E., 2005). An echo chamber can serve as a method to boost an existing attitude within a group and, as a result, lead everyone in the group toward more radical opinions, suggests the group polarization theory. It has been demonstrated that echo chambers may be found in a variety of online media, including blogs, forums, and social media platforms. According to some studies, echo chambers are a new consequence of human traits including group polarization, contagion, and selective exposure (Cinelli, Morales, Galeazzi, Quattrociocchi, & Starnini, 2021).

Filter Bubbles: The concept of the filter bubble was introduced by the journalist and activist Eli Pariser (2011) in his book *The Filter Bubble* and gained fame in his TED Talk in 2011. As claimed by Pariser, internet and social media platforms employ algorithms on an unprecedented scale to individualize each user’s experience depending on their previous searches, preferences, likes, etc. (Pariser, 2011).

Spiral of Silence: The theory suggests that individuals who feel that they carry the ideas and opinions of the majority, become influential and louder over time, whereas people with the ideas of the minority become continuously become inaudible and unheard. The spiral of silence theory is supported by the SNS (social network sites) environment, where encountering favorable political information predicts speaking out but encountering negative postings suppresses opinion expression (Gearhart & Zhang, 2015).

Disinformation: Disinformation is defined as "deliberately misleading information proclaimed publicly or leaked by a government or notably by an intelligence organization" in the standard dictionary. However, "deliberately deceptive information" might also be produced by other entities (Fallis, 2009).

4.7. Limitations of the Study

- 1- Spatial Limits:** It includes all Turkish university students who study in the Republic of Turkey ages between 18-50+ and at the educational levels of undergraduate, graduate, and Ph.D.
- 2- Time Limits:** Both quantitative and qualitative tools of the study were conducted between April 26 and June 1, 2022.

4.8. Data Collection Sources

- **Preliminary Source:** The study variables needed for the hypothesis test and descriptive analysis were compiled using data collection strategies. First, a questionnaire was distributed to Turkish students, the aim of which was to collect quantitative data about different axes of the study. In addition, a focus group discussion was also made with the contribution of Turkish students to collect qualitative data to elaborate further on the questionnaire results.

– **Secondary Sources:** Data on the study's subject (theoretical framework) was gathered by referring to scientific studies, domestic and international prior research, magazines, scientific journals, statistics, and official websites relevant to the study's subject.

4.9. The Study Methodological Framework and Data Collection Techniques

4.9.1. Methodological Approaches

The study employs a mixed approach; both quantitative and qualitative methods to better understand the research topic and to support the findings and conclusions of both approaches. The study involved the distribution and analysis of a questionnaire. The focus group discussion tool also was used to support the conclusions and allow for further analysis of the research quantitative findings.

4.9.2. Data Collection Tools

Quantitative Method: A questionnaire consisting of 25 (multiple-choice, Likert scale, and an open question), was conducted between the dates (April 26 and May 16) using google forms, the participants were university students in Turkey aged between 18 – 50+ undergraduate, graduates, and Ph.D. levels. The number of respondents was 303.

Qualitative Method: Focus group discussion was conducted in the Turkish language with six Turkish students from different education levels on the first of June for 60 minutes. The questions were semi-structured and the discussion was conducted via zoom application.

4.9.2.1. Quantitative Method

4.9.2.2. Questionnaire

In quantitative social science research, questionnaires are commonly utilized. A questionnaire is a list of questions made to people to gather statistics on a particular subject. Questionnaires can be an essential tool for making conclusions about particular individuals, groups, or entire populations when they are well-designed and implemented. They are an effective way to gather a variety of information from a big group of people, often known as respondents (Satya, 2012).

The current study used a questionnaire to obtain data from respondents by sending the URL of the questionnaire to some students and asking them to send it to their colleagues applying the snowball sampling technique. In this technique, the researcher asks the first few respondents, who are normally chosen by convenience sampling, if they know anyone with similar ideas or situations who might be willing to participate in the study.

The first responders were picked from different cities, ethnicities, backgrounds, education levels, and universities both public and private, genders and ages, and from multiple scientific and humanities departments. Also, in this study since we are trying to measure the effect of social media, we tried to reach students who are either active

on social media or use it daily. The first participant who answered was a law student who is interested in political topics and shares his opinions on Instagram.

The snowball method not only saves time but also allows the researcher to communicate more effectively with the samples because they are acquainted with the first sample and the first sample is linked to the researcher (Ghaljaie, Goli, & Naderifar, 2017).

The following parts were covered in the questionnaire:

- 1- The first part contains the respondents' demographic data.
- 2- The second part covered the user's behaviors and usage of social media platforms.
- 3- The third part dealt with how algorithms affect the suggested posts on their newsfeed.
- 4- The fourth part included a comparison between face-to-face communication and communication through social media in terms of expressing political views.
- 5- The fifth part covered whether social media have a polarizing or a depolarizing effect.

4.9.2.2.1. Validity Procedures

Face Validity: Before distributing the questionnaire to the main sample, it was sent to a group of communication academicians¹ for review to ensure that it included all aspects of the research problem and that they were consistent with the study's objectives and questions. It was also improved in terms of language formulation, streamlining, and clarity. All comments were taken and the questionnaire was edited based on these observations until the questionnaire reached the final form.

Distribution Pre-Test: It was carried out through the distribution of the questionnaire to a pilot sample of only 70 participants to make sure the questions were clear and understandable to the students. After collecting the answers, some required

¹ The academicians: Assist. Prof. Yasmin Aldamen, from Ibn Haldun University, and Prof. Mehmet Özçağlayan from Marmara University.

modifications were made to some questions regarding the Turkish language used to make the questions clear.

4.9.2.2.2. Reliability Test

Reliability Procedures: to guarantee the reliability of the research tool, the researcher employed the statistical analysis program (SPSS), which employed Cronbach's Alpha (α), or so-called internal consistency. Where the researcher kept the question in cases where the treatment was strong or positive and eliminated the question in cases where the coefficient was weak or negative. Table (4.1.) shows the value of the reliability coefficient for each axis of the questionnaire.

Table 4.1. Reliability Test

	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
The news accounts or pages I follow are compatible with my political ideas.	0.328	0.463
The political views of the Accounts I follow on Twitter are compatible with mine.	0.169	0.501
I use Twitter to share my political views.	0.195	0.495
My Facebook friends' political opinions match mine.	0.229	0.486
I use Facebook to share my political views.	0.178	0.500
The political views of the accounts I follow on Instagram are compatible with mine.	0.473	0.420
I use Instagram to share my political views.	0.216	0.490
The political views of the accounts I follow on YouTube are compatible with mine.	0.532	0.395
I use YouTube to share my political views.	0.248	0.497

Table 4.1. (cont.)

News that appears on my newsfeed that is suggested by the social media platform is usually compatible with the ideas of the party I feel close to.	0.045	0.529
I engage in political conversations using my social media account with people from the party I feel most distant from.	0.048	0.520
I engage in political conversations using my social media account with people from the party I feel the closest to.	0.344	0.464
Social media has helped me to be more open to the ideas of the party I feel most distant from.	0.118	0.519
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	
0.515	14	

The previous table indicates that the stability coefficient Alpha Cronbach is 0.515, which is suitable for conducting the study.

4.9.2.3. Qualitative Method

4.9.2.3.1. Focus Group Discussion

The main aspects of the focus group discussion were finding out why Turkish students do not show interest in expressing themselves politically on social media and why they do not trust the news they find on social media.

The focus group discussion was conducted in the Turkish language online via zoom application on the first of June 2022 for 60 minutes with six Turkish students from different backgrounds. The characteristics of the participants are shown in Table (4.2.).

The main aim of this focus group discussion is to elaborate further on the results of the questionnaire and to get a better explanation of specific points. The Axes of the Focus Group Discussion are shown in Table (4.3.)

Table 4.2. Focus Group Discussion Participants Demographic Data

Participant	Gender	Education	Age
1	Female	Undergraduate	25
2	Male	Masters	25
3	Female	Masters	25
4	Male	Masters	28
5	Male	Masters	25
6	Male	Undergraduate	22

Table 4.3. Focus Group Discussion Axes

Number	Axis
1	The respondents' demographic data
2	Trust in social media
3	Interest in social media
4	Self-expression on social media

4.9.3. Ethical Considerations in Conducting Questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion

All the data collected in this study, either in the questionnaire or the focus group discussion was collected solely for research purposes and not any other. The questionnaire and focus group discussion was conducted with the assurances of voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and data protection.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The questions were answered by extracting arithmetic averages, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, according to the questions related to it, and the following scale was used in some questions: (1 - 2.33 low, 2.34 - 3.67 medium, 3.68 - 5 high).

5.1. Quantitative Results

5.1.1. Demographic Data

The study community is composed of Turkish university students, from all provinces of Turkey. The questions were answered by extracting arithmetic averages, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, according to the questions related to them. The demographic data was drawn by frequencies and percentages as follows:

Table 5.1. Questionnaire's Demographic Data

Variable	Level	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	169	55.80%
	Female	134	44.20%
	Total	303	100.0%
Education	Undergraduate	271	89.40%
	Masters	26	8.60%
	Ph.D.	6	2.00%
	Total	303	100.0%
Age	18 -28	199	65.70%
	29 - 39	56	18.50%
	40 - 50	37	12.20%
	51	11	3.60%
	Total	303	100.0%

It is noted from Table 5.1. that the study sample is divided according to the gender variable into (169) males and (134) females, while the sample according to educational qualification consisted of (271) who are Undergraduate and (26) who hold are Master's, and (6) are Ph.D. students. The table also showed that the sample according to the age variable consists of (199) of those aged (18-28), and (56) of those aged (29-39), and (37) of those aged between (40-50) and (11) of those aged (51 and over).

Table 5.2. Location

Location	Number	Percentage
Bitlis	82	27.06%
Istanbul	40	13.20%
Bursa	19	6.27%
Izmir	19	6.27%
Eskişehir	13	4.29%
Ankara	12	3.96%
Denizli	11	3.63%
Mersin	10	3.30%
Malatya	9	2.97%
Amasya	6	1.98%
Gaziantep	6	1.98%
Kirklareli	6	1.98%
Adana	5	1.65%
Antalya	5	1.65%
Sinop	5	1.65%
Van	5	1.65%
Diyarbakir	4	1.32%
Kayseri	4	1.32%
Şanlıurfa	4	1.32%
Afyonkarahisar	3	0.99%
Yalova	3	0.99%
Bingöl	2	0.66%
Kirşehir	2	0.66%

Table 5.2. (cont.)

Kocaeli	2	0.66%
Konya	2	0.66%
Kütahya	2	0.66%
Mardin	2	0.66%
Şirnak	2	0.66%
Trabzon	2	0.66%
Adiyaman	1	0.33%
Aksaray	1	0.33%
Aydin	1	0.33%
Balikesir	1	0.33%
Batman	1	0.33%
Çorum	1	0.33%
Elazığ	1	0.33%
Hatay	1	0.33%
Kahramanmaraş	1	0.33%
Kars	1	0.33%
Kilis	1	0.33%
Muğla	1	0.33%
Muş	1	0.33%
Ordu	1	0.33%
Rize	1	0.33%
Samsun	1	0.33%
Grand Total	303	100%

It is noted from Table 5.2. that the majority of the study sample was from Bitlis and Istanbul with percentages from the sample respectively of 27.06% and 13.2%. Followed by Bursa and Izmir with 6.27%. 4.29 % of the participants were from Eskisehir and between 1-12 participants were from the other provinces with their percentages ranging between 0.33% and 3.96%.

5.1.2. User's Behaviors and Usage of the Social Media Platforms

Table 5.3. Used Social Media Platforms

Social Media Platform	Number	Percentage
Instagram	238	It is not applicable from 303 here because the participants were able to use more than one answer
YouTube	173	
Facebook	132	
Other: (Tiktok 4, Telgram 7, Whatsapp 2, Linked in 3, Reddit 2, Ekşi Sözlük 1)	19	

Table 5.3. shows that Instagram is the most used application among Turkish students with 238 participants saying that they use Instagram. In second place is YouTube with 173 users followed by Facebook with 132. Other apps such as Telegram, Tiktok, Whatsapp, LinkedIn, Reddit, and Ekşi Sözlük were also among the apps that Turkish students use.

Table 5.4. Number of Times of Checking Social Media Accounts Per Day

Variable	Number	Percentage
1- 4 times	61	20.1%
5 - 10 times	109	36.0%
More than 10 times	133	43.9%
Total	303	100%

It is noted from **Table 5.4.** that 43.9% check their accounts more than 10 times, followed by those who check their accounts 5-10 times, with a percentage of 36%.

Table 5.5. One-Way Analysis of Variance According to the Number of Times of Checking Social Media Accounts Per Day

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	16.609	3	8.304	11.934	0.000
Within Groups	208.753	300	0.696		
Total	225.361	303			

As we notice in **Table 5.5.**, there are differences in the answers of the sample members due to the variable number of check times.

Table 5.6. Time Spent on Social Media

Variable	Number	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	46	15.2%
1-3 hours	136	44.9%
More than 3- 5 hours	80	26.4%
More than 5 hours	41	13.5%
Total	303	100%

Table 5.6. indicates that 44.9% check their accounts for more than 1-3 hours, followed by those who check their accounts for 3-5 hours with a percentage of 26.4%.

Table 5.7. One-Way Analysis of Variance According to the Number of Check-In Hours Variable

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	45.218	3	15.073	25.017	0.000
Within Groups	180.144	299	0.602		
Total	225.361	302			

Table 5.7. shows that there are differences in the answers of the sample members due to the variable number of hours of checking.

Table 5.8. The Effect of the Top Four Used Social Media Platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, And YouTube) in Creating Echo Chambers Differently

n	Question	mean	sd	Scale
1	The news accounts or pages I follow are compatible with my political ideas	3.03	1.1 2	Moderate
2	The Political Views of The Accounts I Follow on Twitter are Compatible With Mine	2.08	1.5 5	Low
3	I use Twitter to share my political views.	1.35	1.4 7	Low
4	My Facebook Friends' Political Opinions Match Mine	1.10	1.4 5	Low
5	I use Facebook to share my political views	0.77	1.2 7	Low
6	The Political Views of The Accounts I Follow on Instagram are Compatible with Mine	1.84	1.5 5	Low

Table 5.8. (cont.)

7	I use Instagram to share my political views	1.01	1.07	Low
8	The Political Views of The Accounts I Follow on YouTube are Compatible With Mine	1.73	1.53	Low
9	I use YouTube to share my political views	0.82	1.01	Low

It is noted from **Table 5.8.** that the effect of the four social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube) was low.

5.1.3. Face-To-Face Communication or Communication Through Social Media in Terms of Expressing Political Views

Table 5.9. Engagement and Expression on Social Media

n	Question	mean	sd	scale
1	I engage in political conversations using my social media account with people from the party I feel most distant from.	2.12	1.24	Low
2	I engage in political conversations using my social media account with people from the party I feel the closest to.	2.23	1.26	Low
3	I express my political views on social media more comfortably than in face-to-face communication.	2.37	1.26	Low

Table 5.9. shows that social platforms were not a solution to the spiral of silence, as their responses to this area were low.

5.1.4. Social Media Have a Polarizing or a Depolarizing Effect

Table 5.10. Do You Follow the Accounts of Leaders of the Party You Feel Closest To

Answer	Frequency	Percent
Yes	129	42.6
No	174	57.4
Total	303	100%

Table 5.10. indicated that 57.4% of Turkish students do not follow the accounts of the leaders of the party to which they feel close.

Table 5.11. Do You Follow the Accounts of Leaders of the Party You Feel Furthest From?

Answer	Frequency	Percent
Yes	132	43.6
No	171	56.4
Total	303	100%

It is noted from **Table 5.11.** that 56.4% of Turkish students do not follow the leaders of the party they feel furthest from, while 43.6% do.

Table 5.12. One-Way Analysis of Variance According to How Much the Students Feel Different from Their Farthest Party

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	19.098	10	2.122	3.014	0.002
Within Groups	206.263	293	0.704		
Total	225.361	303			

Table 5.12. shows that there are differences in the answers of the sample members due to the variable number of how much the students feel different from their farthest party.

Table 5.13. Do Social Media Have a Polarizing or a Depolarizing Effect? I.E., Does It Help Users to be More Open to the Ideas of the Supporters of Their Opposed Party?

n	Question	mean	sd	Scale
1	Social media has helped me to be more open to the ideas of the party I feel most distant from.	2.38	1.27	Moderate
2	Social media made me agree with the ideas of my opposing party on certain incidents (e.g.: internal affairs, economy, refugees, etc.)	2.43	1.26	Moderate
3	I trust the political news on social media and use it to learn about other political parties.	2.98	1.30	Moderate
4	Social media makes my relationship with politics stronger.	2.90	1.28	Moderate
5	I can share my criticisms against political parties that I feel distant from on social media without being sure of their accuracy.	1.98	1.16	low

Table 5.13. pointed out that the effect of social communication on polarization was medium and low, in all sections of the field.

Table 5.14. Ideologically, How Different Do You See Yourself from the Supporters of the Party You Feel Farthest from on a Scale of 1-10?

Level	Frequency	Percent
1	6	2.0
2	3	1.0
3	6	2.0
4	6	2.0
5	22	7.3

Table 5.14. (cont.)

6	18	5.9
7	34	11.2
8	61	20.1
9	29	9.6
10	118	38.9
Total	303	100%

It is noted from **Table 5.14.** that 38.9% had a high degree of disagreement with the party farthest at 10.

5.1.5. Algorithms Affect and Create Filter Bubbles Through the Content They Suggest to the User

Table 5.15. Do Social Media Algorithms Contribute to Creating Filter Bubbles Through the Content They Suggest to the User

n	Question	mean	sd	Scale
1	News that appears on my newsfeed that is suggested by the social media platform is usually compatible with the ideas of the party I feel close to.	2.95	1.18	Moderate

Table 5.15. indicates that social media algorithms contribute to creating filter bubbles through the content they suggest to users to a medium degree.

5.2. Qualitative Results

The focus group discussion was transcribed and coded according to the questions. The quantitative results showed that Turkish students do not trust the news they see on social media. Regarding that issue, the participants in the focus group mainly stated three reasons for that: First, they believe that the news on social media focuses more on speed than credibility as they do not specify a source.

“Because there is a lot of fake news on social media and it spreads very quickly. In addition, the news is made informally without specifying the source, so the news on social media is not very reliable.” (Participant 5, Male, Masters)

They also believe that social media is full of disinformation and that the news there is not objective. Social media is not solely used for keeping up with political developments, there can be other uses as well, when the participants were asked about the subjects they follow, their answers included subjects like music, food, fashion, sports, and entertainment.

“I follow the celebrities I like, fashion, food, sports, etc.”
(Participant 3, Female, Masters)

The questionnaire answers indicated that the vast majority of Turkish students do not prefer to share their thoughts on social media regardless of the platform. The focus group discussion showed the main reason behind that is that they are afraid that their posts and comments are being censored which can affect their future.

“Critics are also afraid of what would happen to them if they were comfortable expressing themselves. Fear that it will affect their work and life in the future.” (Participant 1, Female,
Undergraduate)

Moreover, most of the students said that they would not share their thoughts even from a fake account. An example from the focus group discussion was when students were asked whether they use fake accounts or not: *“No, because I don't use social media to express my thoughts.”* (Participant 4, Male, Undergraduate).

The quantitative results showed that about half of the Turkish students do not follow political leaders on social media, regardless if they're from the party they support or not, so to explore that more we asked the students “If a celebrity and a political leader you liked were on a live broadcast at the same time, which would you watch and why?”. The focus group discussion gave us the same results as half of them said they would watch the celebrity while the other half said that they would watch the political leader.

I would watch the celebrity because political leaders often repeat the same thing, then if I watch the politician on another broadcast, I am sure I will hear the same things. (Participant 5, Male, Masters)

I would prefer to follow the political leader because what they say and do has more impact on our daily life. (Participant 4, Male, Undergraduate)



CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The variants regarding social media usage such as time spent and the number of checks affected the answers of the students. In addition, the majority of the students expressed they feel distant from their opposing party at a maximum level. As mentioned in the second chapter, the social distance political party supporters feel toward "the most distant" political party followers is one of the most important indices of political division (Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey, 2018). As the questionnaire's data shows 38.9% of the participants had a high degree of disagreement with the party they feel the farthest. This gives us an indication that the more students used social media the further they felt from their opposing party, therefore in the political polarization level.

The majority of Turkish students conveyed that they follow news pages on social media that are compatible with their preexisting ideas, as 70.7% of the participants agreed to the statement "the news accounts or pages I follow are compatible with my political ideas" on different levels. That gives us an indication that social media in general create echo chambers, meaning that they create environments where people around them reinforce their opinions and they do not have to face any different or challenging ones.

After the comparison between platforms, results have shown that Twitter is the one that contributes to creating echo chambers the most with 51.7% of its user saying that the political views of the accounts they follow on Twitter are compatible with theirs on different levels. YouTube, on the other hand, is the least, most YouTube users either don't have an account on it or follow channels that hold different views from theirs. With Instagram and Facebook in second and third place. The different nature of each platform justifies the result. However, all of the top four used platforms in Turkey (YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook) had a low effect.

According to the spiral of silence theory presented by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in 1974 people are not usually willing to speak out about their opinion because they are afraid of being isolated. The same thing applies to social media as well; results have shown that students abstain from expressing their opinion on social media. Qualitative results have shown us that students are afraid that their posts and comments are being censored which can affect their future.

As participant 1 stated “*Critics are also afraid of what would happen to them if they were comfortable expressing themselves. Fear that it will affect their work and life in the future.*” (Participant 1, Female, Undergraduate)

Hence, social media did not offer a platform for people to speak out as we can see when participants were asked whether they felt more comfortable expressing their political thoughts on social media than face-to-face 106 participants (35.3%) were negative about it.

When participants were asked about whether social media has helped them be more open to others’ ideas, or agree with the ideas of the opposing party on some internal issues, their answers showed a medium tendency toward social media is helpful in that matter, yet the numbers are not high enough to consider social media as a solution to the polarization issue. This is a good indication that social media can have a positive contribution in making people more open to each other's ideas in certain cases, yet since the effect was only moderate, to solve the polarization situation other social and political aspects should be taken into consideration.

It is noted that social media algorithms contribute to creating filter bubbles through the content they suggest to the user to a medium degree. Therefore, the algorithms of the social media platforms show users content that is compatible with their views, therefore, restraining them to a medium degree from being open to opposing ones.

Turkish youth do not rely on social media platforms to obtain political news and most of them do not follow political leaders on social media, when students were asked about their trust in the news on social media participant 5 said: “*Because there is a lot*

of fake news on social media and it spreads very quickly. In addition, the news is made informally without specifying the source, so the news on social media is not very reliable.” (Participant 5, Male, Masters)

The results show that 57.4% of Turkish students do not follow the accounts of the leaders of the party to which they feel close, while also 56.4% of Turkish students do not follow the leaders of the party they feel furthest. This can be several reasons such as a lack of trust in political news on social media, political leaders not being successful in addressing the youth on social media, and a lack of interest in politics on social media and using it for other causes.

Therefore, to answer the study’s main question, social media does have an effect on political polarization and can play a role in increasing it. Having said that, this effect is low to moderate. This can be due to some reasons, mainly due to the lack of trust in media and politicians, also the alternative uses and contents of social media such as art, entertainment, and sports.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Conclusion

As the results show us, all Turkish demographics use social media at a high level in terms of time spent on them and the number of checks. In addition, the majority feel very distant from their opposing party.

Most of the participants stated that they do not express their political opinions on any of the top four used platforms. When discussed in the focus group, the participants explained that they do not want to face backlash and legal sanctions.

Social media algorithms also play a role in this process, as they work on customizing the suggested posts based on the users' prior searches and interests which limits the viewpoints that a social media user can view.

Social media can play a positive role in depolarizing users. As the participants showed, they can agree on some points with the supporters of their opposing party.

Finally, depending on the answers to the questionnaire, the majority of Turkish students do not trust the news they see on social media, and, they do not follow political leaders. The reasons behind that were that they believe that the news is full of disinformation, many articles are presented without a trustworthy source, they are not objective, and the news on social media relies on speed more than credibility.

In short, social media affect political polarization. Nevertheless, this effect is low to moderate. This can be due to some reasons, mainly due to the lack of trust in media and politicians, also the alternative uses and contents of social media such as art, entertainment, and sports.

7.2. Recommendations

Further studies on a larger scale are still needed on this topic since the current study was limited to Turkish university students with only 303 participants, as our findings have significant ramifications for current discussions in communication, political science, and sociology.

This study also shows that Turkish political leaders, parties, and media institutions need to work more on reaching the youth and gaining their trust and interest.

Finally, the last recommendation for the daily regular users of social media is to be more aware of what kind of effects social media can have on them and how it can shape the way they think. It can be used to look at things from different perspectives not only the ones they see in their daily life.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

The Effects of social media on Political Polarization in Turkey

This questionnaire was prepared to study the impact of the usage of social media by university students on their level of political polarization. This data will be used for research purposes and not for any other reason and will be treated confidentially without requesting or mentioning the personal data of respondents.

Bu anket, üniversite öğrencilerinin sosyal medya kullanımının siyasi kutuplaşma üzerine etkisini araştırmak amacıyla hazırlanmıştır. Bu veriler sadece araştırma amacıyla kullanılacak ve başka bir amaçla kullanılmayacaktır ve yanıtlayanların kişisel verileri talep edilmeden veya belirtilmeden gizli tutulacaktır.

1. Cinsiyet/ Gender *

Mark only one oval.

Female

Male

2. Yaş / Age *

Mark only one oval.

18 -28

29 - 39

40 - 50

+ 51

3. Eğitim Seviyesi / Education *

Mark only one oval.

Lisans / Undergraduate

Yüksek lisans / Masters

Doktora / PhD

4. Yerleşim/ Location *

Mark only one oval.

5. Aşağıdaki Sosyal Medya Platformlarında Hesabınız var mı ? / Do you have an account in any of the following social media platforms? *

Check all that apply.

Facebook

Twitter

Instagram

YouTube

Other:

6. Günde ne sıklıkla sosyal medya hesaplarınızı kontrol ediyorsunuz ? How often do you check your social media account per day? *

Mark only one oval.

1- 4 kere/ 1- 4 times

5 -10 kere/ 5 - 10 times

10 kereden fazla/ more than 10 times

7. Sosyal medyada günde kaç saat geçiriyorsunuz ? / How many hours do you spend on social media per day ? *

Mark only one oval.

1 saatten az/ less than 1 hour

1-3 saat / 1-3 hours

3-5 saat / 3-5 hours

5 saatten fazla / more than 5 hours

8. İdeolojik olarak kendinizi 1-10 arasında kendinize en uzak hissettiğiniz partinin destekçilerinden ne kadar farklı görüyorsunuz? / Ideologically, how different do you see yourself from the supporters of the party you feel farthest from on a scale of 1- 10?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Farklı değil / Not different

Çok farklı /Very different

9. Kendinizi en uzak hissettiğiniz partinin liderlerinin hesaplarını takip ediyormusunuz? / do you follow the accounts of leaders of the of the party you feel furthest from ?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

10. Kendinizi en yakın hissettiğiniz partinin liderlerinin hesaplarını takip ediyormusunuz? / do you follow the accounts of leaders of the of the party you feel closest to?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

11. Sosyal medyadaki siyasi haberlere güvenirim ve diğer siyasi partiler hakkında bilgi almak için kullanırım. / I trust the political news on social media and use it to learn about other political parties. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Katılmıyorum/ I don't agree Katılıyorum / I agree

12. Sosyal medya siyasetle olan ilişkimi daha kuvvetli bir hale getirir. / Social media makes my relationship with politics stronger. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Katılmıyorum/ I don't agree Katılıyorum / I agree

13. Sosyal medyada kendime uzak hissettiğim siyasi partilere karşı eleştirilerimi doğruluğundan emin olmadan da paylaşabilirim. / I can share my criticisms against political parties that I feel distant from on social media without being sure of their accuracy. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Katılmıyorum/ I don't agree Katılıyorum / I agree

14. Sosyal medyada takip ettiğim haber sayfaları siyasi görüşümle uyumludur. / the news accounts or pages I follow are compatible with my political ideas. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Hiçbiri / none of them Hepsi / all of them

15. Twitter'da Takip Etaki ettiğim hesapların siyasi görüşleri Benimkilerle Uyumlu/ The Political Views of The Accounts I Follow on Twitter are Compatible with Mine *

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

Hesabım yok / I don't have an account Hepsi / all of them

16. Twitter'ı siyasi görüşlerimi paylaşmak için kullanırım / I use Twitter to share my political views. *

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

Hesabım yok / I don't have an account Sıklıkla / Frequently

17. Facebook Arkadaşlarımla Siyasi Görüşlerim Benimkilerle Uyumlu / My Facebook Friends' Political Opinions Match Mine. *

Mark only one oval

0 1 2 3 4 5

Hesabım yok / I don't have an account Hepsi / all of them

18. Facebook'u siyasi görüşlerimi paylaşmak için kullanırım / I use Facebook to share my political views. *

Mark only one oval

0 1 2 3 4 5

Hesabım yok / I don't have an account sıklıkla / Frequently

19. Instagram'da takip ettiğim hesapların siyasi görüşleri Benimkilerle Uyumlu/ The Political Views of The Accounts I Follow on Instagram are Compatible with Mine. *

Mark only one oval

0 1 2 3 4 5

Hesabım yok / I don't have an account Hepsi / all of them

20. Instagram'i siyasi görüşlerimi paylaşmak için kullanırım / I use Instagram to share my political views. *

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

Hesabım yok / I don't have an account Sıklıkla / Frequently

21. YouTube'da takip ettiğim kanalların siyasi görüşleri Benimkilerle Uyumlu/ The Political Views of The Accounts I Follow on YouTube are Compatible with Mine.

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

Hesabım yok / I don't have an account Hepsi / all of them

22. YouTube'u siyasi görüşlerimi paylaşmak için kullanırım / I use YouTube to share my political views. *

Mark only one oval.

0 1 2 3 4 5

Hesabım yok / I don't have an account Sıklıkla / Frequently

23. Sosyal medya platformların önerdiği haber akışında görünen haberler genellikle kendimi yakın hissettiğim tarafın fikirleriyle uyumludur. / news that appears on my newsfeed that is suggested by the social media platform is usually compatible with the ideas of the party I feel close to.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Katılmıyorum/ I don't agree Katılıyorum / I agree

24. Kendimi en uzak hissettiğim partiden kişilerle sosyal medya hesabımı kullanarak siyasi sohbetlere girerim. / I engage in political conversations using my social media account with people from the party I feel most distant from.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Hiç / Never sıklıkla / Frequently

25. Kendimi en yakın hissettiğim partiden kişilerle sosyal medya hesabımı kullanarak siyasi sohbetlere girerim. / I engage in political conversations using my social media account with people from the party I feel the closest to. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Hiç / Never Sıklıkla / Frequently

26. Sosyal medyada siyasi görüşlerimi yüz yüze iletişime göre çok daha rahat ifade ederim / I express my political views on social media more comfortably than face to face communication.

Mark only one oval

1 2 3 4 5

Hiç / Never sıklıkla / Frequently

27. Sosyal medya, kendimi en uzak hissettiğim partinin fikirlerine daha açık olmamı sağladı / Social media has helped me to be more open to the ideas of the party I feel most distant from.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Katılmıyorum/ I don't agree Katılıyorum / I agree

28. Sosyal medya bazı olaylarda karşı tarafın fikirlerine katılmamı sağladı (ör. içişleri, ekonomi, mülteciler vb.) / social media made me agree with the ideas of my opposing party on certain incidents (e.g : internal affairs, economy , refugees etc.)

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Katılmıyorum/ I don't agree Katılıyorum / I agree

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT (TURKISH LANGUAGE)

- **Daha önce yaptığımız bir ankete göre Türk öğrencilerin %57,4'ü sosyal medyadaki siyasi haberlere güvenmiyor. Sizce neden öğrenciler sosyal medyadaki siyasi haberlere güvenmiyor?**

(Participant 5, Male, Masters): Çünkü sosyal medyada çok fazla yalan haber var ve çok hızlı bir şekilde yayılıyor. Ayrıca kaynak belirtilmeden resmiyetten uzak bir şekilde haber yapılıyor bu yüzden sosyal medyadaki haberleri çok güvenilir bulunmuyor.

(Participant 1, Female, Undergraduate): Sosyal medyadaki infodemi oluşumundan kaynaklı olduğunu düşünüyorum.

(Participant 3, Female, Masters): Yansız ve objektif haber yapıldığını düşünmedikleri için.

(Participant 4, Male, Masters): Sosyal medyada popülist ve seçim önceki dönemde oy toplama haberlerin yoğunlaşmış olma, bir çok haberin doğrulanmadan hızlı yayılma ve bir çok sahte hesap olduğunu bildiği içindir.

(Participant 6, Male, Undergraduate): Bilginin kaynağı kesin değil.Provakasyon yapmaya, halkı manipule etmeye çalışan insanlar var.

(Participant 2, Male, Masters): Özellikle twitterda dezenformasyon amaçlı bir sürü haber sayfası ve haber takibi yapan fenomen bulunuyor bu yüzden olabilir.

- **Türkiye'deki siyasi gelişmeleri takip etmek için hangi kaynaklara güveniyorsunuz ve kullandığınız kaynaklar nelerdir?**

(Participant 4, Male, Masters): Genelde gazetede yayınlanan haberler yüzde yüz olmasada daha çok güvenilir geliyor.

Bundle uygulamasından çeşitli gazete haberlerini takip ediyorum.

(Participant 2, Male, Masters): Genel olarak böyle bir amacım olmasa da bunu daha çok etrafımdaki insanlardan duyarak karşılıyorum.

(Participant 1, Female, Undergraduate): Dijital gazetecilik platformlarından takip ediyorum.

(Participant 5, Male, Masters): Sosyal medyadan takip olmak ile birlikte yurtdışındaki medya kanalları.

(Participant 3, Female, Masters): Güvendiğim alanında uzman akademisyenlerin yaptıkları paylaşımları ve yayınları takip ediyorum.

(Participant 6, Male, Undergraduate): İnternette güvenilir olduğunu düşündüğüm haberleri verilerle destekleyen bazı insanlardan ve çeşitli haber sitelerinden.

• **Sosyal medyada takip ettiğiniz konular nelerdir? Bu konuları önem sırasına göre sıralayınız.**

(Participant 3, Female, Masters): Sevdiğim ünlüleri, moda, yemek ,spor gibi şeyleri takip ediyorum.

(Participant 1, Female, Undergraduate): Kendim ile alakalı konuları ve akademik etkinlikleri takip ediyorum.

(Participant 6, Male, Undergraduate): Politika, siyaset, ekonomi, müzik, edebiyat.

(Participant 2, Male, Masters): Ekonomik, Siyasi, spor ve sosyal ve kültürel konular.

(Participant 4, Male, Masters): Ülkenin gündemi, sinema, günlük eğlence.

(Participant 5, Male, Masters): 1 Siyaset, 2 ekonomi, 3 göçmen politikası, 4 spor.

• **Beğendiğiniz bir ünlü ve siyasi bir lider aynı anda canlı yayın açmış olsa hangisini neden izlediniz?**

(Participant 6, Male, Undergraduate): Ünlü kişinin canlı yayını izledim çünkü en azından onu izlerken keyif alırım siyasi liderlerin sözlerine güvenmiyorum.

(Participant 4, Male, Masters): Siyasi lideri izlemeyi tercih ederdim çünkü onların dedikleri ve yapacakları gündelik yaşamımız üzerinde daha etkili.

(Participant 1, Female, Undergraduate): Beğendiğim veya beğenmediğim olsun siyasi liderin canlı yayını izledim. Söylemlerini takip etmek adına.

(Participant 3, Female, Masters): Ekonomik durumlar hakkındaki ve vaatleri dinlemek

(Participant 2, Male, Masters): Siyasi lideri izlerim, çünkü ülke olarak kötü bir durumdayız ve umut asilayacak siyasi liderlere ihtiyacımız var.

(Participant 5, Male, Masters): Ünlüyü izlerdim çünkü siyasi liderler çoğu zaman aynı şeyi tekrar ediyorlar daha sonra başka bir yayında siyasiyi izlesem aynı şeyleri duyacağıma eminim.

• **Sizce Türk gençliğini sosyal medyada siyasi görüşlerini gizlemeye veya yorum yapmamaya iten sebepler nelerdir?**

(Participant 1, Female, Undergraduate): Eleştiriler ayrıca rahat bir şekilde kendini ifade etse başına gelecek durumlardan korkmaları. İleride işini ve hayatını etkilemesinden korkmaları.

(Participant 3, Female, Masters): Bu bir tercih olabilir. İnsanlar sosyal medyayı siyasi görüşlerini belirtme amaçlı kullanmıyor olabilirler.

(Participant 5, Male, Masters): Hukuki yaptırımlar olabilir.

(Participant 2, Male, Masters): Pek gizlediğini sanmamak ile birlikte ((diğer insanlar, onun görüşleri gizlediğini sanması onları daha kabul.

(Participant 4, Male, Masters): Demokrasiden ve adeletten uzak bir yönetim mevcut. Her türlü olumsuz eleştire karşı yapılan yorumların yargıya taşınma riski söz konusu.

(Participant 6, Male, Undergraduate): Tabi ki iktidarın sansür ve korku politikası bir şey söylersem başıma bir iş gelir tutuklanırım korkusu.

• **Sahte bir hesaptan düşüncelerinizi paylaşır mısınız? edenleriyle birlikte lütfen açıklayınız.**

(Participant 2, Male, Masters): Hayır ,buna gerek duymazdım.

(Participant 4, Male, Masters): Hayır çünkü sosyal medyayı düşüncelerimi açıklamak için kullanmıyorum.

(Participant 6, Male, Undergraduate): Hayır paylaşmam. Genel olarak sosyal mecralarda düşüncelerimi paylaşmayı tercih etmiyorum.

(Participant 1, Female, Undergraduate): Olabilir.

(Participant 3, Female, Masters): Eğer hükümet liderine karşı bir eleştiri olacaksa tutuklanma riskini karsa sahte bir hesaptan paylaşım yaparım.

(Participant 5, Male, Masters): Paylaşırım çünkü anonim bi hesaptan fikir paylaşmak tutuklanma riskini daha azaltıyor.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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