Chapter 55
Relationship between Social Media and Political Parties:
The Case of Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyzes the capacity of social media usage and the social media strategies of political parties that became the members of Turkish Parliament after 2011 election. The social media usage increases in parallel to the improvements in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and it becomes an important tool with its communicative functions to realize activities in social, political, and economic fields. In the globalization process, developments in ICTs and changes in the meaning of democracy have been realized parallel to each other. Politics has become more open to interaction and the participation of different actors. ICTs have created new opportunities to interaction and participation of social actors. These improvements require transformations in the role and functions of political parties. They have to arrange their programs and structures according to participative understanding of democracy and new technologies. Social media usage is seen as a requirement for political parties and party leaders for adaptation to these developments, and it is also seen as a device with its potential for realizing participation, communication, and interaction to adapt to the changes in the understanding of politics.

INTRODUCTION

In the processes of globalization, improvements both in the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) like the development of social media and the perceptions on politics provide opportunity for researchers to study on the impacts of these improvements on traditional structure of political organizations and traditional way of participation. Modern democratic nation-states consist of representative democracy, and political parties, candidates, representation and elections are the main components of this form of democracy. Also, the meaning of political participation is regarded as only voting in regular elections. However, this perception changed with the de-

velopment of different social actors and decrease in the legitimacy of representative democracy because of the power of supra-national institutions over the decisions of national parliaments. In the processes of globalization, the nation states and representative democracy have changed towards a more participative understanding of democracy and a question has gained importance: Could current institutions, actors and processes transform in parallel to the new improvements both in the information and communication technologies and the new understanding of politics? Today, political parties and leaders are still the important actors of politics. However, whether they can adapt this transformation process is an important question. In this context, this study makes research on social media usage capacities of political parties and party leaders which are in Turkish Parliament, and their success on the using these capacities to realize and contribute democratic and participative understanding of politics. Also, it is interesting that the social media usage strategies of political parties focusing on their party programs. This study claims that adaption capacity of political actors to the improvements in the understanding of politics and in the information and communication technologies is important because it will be affected on the process of democracy and the position of these actors in the future.

The frame of this study is that firstly, it explains the democracy and the politics in the process of globalization, the development of information and communication technologies and its effects on political participation. Secondly, it explains relationship between political parties and social media as a part of ICTs. In this study, only Facebook and Twitter is considered among most of 100 social media sites because these are still on the first place in terms of their user number and usage frequency in Turkey. All the number of Facebook users is almost equal to all the number of internet users in Turkey. Data about this information are given in the third section of this study. Thirdly, it focuses on the capacity of ICTs and

current conditions of Internet and social media in Turkey. It gives information about the Internet usage capacities of citizens. Also, it is important for comparative studies because it provides some data about the information and communication technologies capacities and some socio-political conditions in the country. Fourthly, it focuses on the social media usage capacity of political parties and political leaders during 2011 election and drafting a new constitution. Data are attained by the texts of messages in Facebook and Twitter pages of the actors. Moreover, the party strategies and visions about social media are analyzed by means of their party programs. As a conclusion, this study presents the internet usage capacities in Turkey, the capacity of social media usage of political parties and the leaders in the Parliament of Turkey for active political participation which is thought as a potential for realizing more democratic, transparent, interactive, legitimate political processes. It shows their adaptation capacity to the mentioned transformation processes. Also, it gives suggestions to increase the usage of social media for active political participation and about the design of the pages in social media sites.

GLOBALIZATION, POLITICS AND INTERNET

In general sense, globalization means the transformation of relations in the system of nation-state, and the emergence of new system that consist of supra-national institutions and trans-national relations in social, political and economic areas. The concept of power shift signifies the changes in political system (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 1999; Mathews, 2004; McGrew, 2004; Habermas, 2008). This concept explains the loss of autonomy of nation-state and the development of new actors in politics such as supra-national institutions (United Nations, International Money Fund, World Trade Organization), regional institutions (European Union, Association of Southeast

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