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RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

# Citizens' Attitudes Towards Online Communication Channels in Contacting Local Governments and the Emergence of Integrated Multi-Channel Platforms: The Case of Orange Table

## Vatandaşların Belediye ile Olan İlişkilerinde Çevrimiçi (Online) İletişim Yöntemlerine İlişkin Tutumları ve Entegre Çok Kanallı Platformların Ortaya Çıkışı: Turunç Masa Örneği

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**Abstract**

This article explores attitudes of citizens towards online communication channels and newly emerging integrated multi-channel platforms which combine online and offline communication channels, when contacting local governments. It analyzes citizens' attitudes in terms of their awareness, intention to use and satisfaction, together with the effects of gender, age, education, and socio-economic development level. Main hypothesis of the research was that in highly digitalized world the most preferred way of communication between citizens and municipality would be online contact. The article presents descriptive quantitative analysis based on data obtained by paper-based questionnaire conducted with residents of Muratpasa district in Antalya, where participants were asked about their preferred ways for communicating with district municipality. This district was chosen for the integrated platform - namely the Orange Table – which was adopted by the municipality, and which combined online and offline communication channels for interacting with citizens. The research revealed that citizens still prefer traditional offline communication channels when contacting municipality. Calling by phone was the most preferred way which was followed by going personally. Social media was one of the least preferred communication channels. Integrated model was widely known and frequently used although not consciously all the time.

**Keywords:** Citizen attitude, Online communication, Local government, Governance, Integrated multi-channel platform

**Öz**

Bu çalışma, vatandaşların yerel yönetimlerle olan ilişkilerinde çevrimiçi (online) iletişim kanallarını ve yerel düzeyde çevrimiçi ve çevrimdışı (offline) iletişim kanallarını birleştiren entegre çok kanallı platformları kullanmaya ilişkin tutumlarını incelemektedir. Vatandaşların söz konusu tutumları, bu konudaki farkındalıkları, kullanma eğilimleri ve memnuniyetlerine bakılarak analiz edilmiş ve bu yapılırken cinsiyet, yaş, eğitim ve sosyo-ekonomik gelişmişlik düzeylerinin etkisi dikkate alınmıştır. Araştırmanın temel hipotezi, hızla dijitalleşen dünyada vatandaşların belediye ile olan ilişkilerinde en çok tercih edilen iletişim yolunun online iletişim olacağı şeklinde idi. Çalışma, Antalya'nın Muratpaşa ilçesinde yaşayanlarla gerçekleştirilen ve katılımcılara ilçe belediyesiyle iletişim kurmak için tercih ettikleri yolların sorulduğu, yüz yüze

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anketlerden elde edilen verilere dayalı, betimsel nicel bir araştırmaya dayanmaktadır. Bu ilçe belediyesi, çevrimiçi ve çevrimdışı iletişim kanallarını ortak bir platformda birleştiren entegre bir model olan Turunç Masa uygulamasını kullanmakta olduğu için çalışma alanı olarak seçilmiştir. Araştırmanın sonuçları, vatandaşların belediye ile olan ilişkilerinde geleneksel yöntemleri tercih ettiklerini göstermektedir. Telefon ile iletişim kurmak en çok tercih edilen yöntem iken bunu yüz yüze iletişim takip etmektedir. Sosyal medya en az tercih edilen iletişim kanalları arasındadır. Entegre model, yaygın olarak bilinmekte ve her zaman bilinçli olmasa da sıklıkla kullanılmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Vatandaş tutumu, Çevrimiçi (online) iletişim, Yerel yönetim, Yönetişim, Entegre çok kanallı platform

## Introduction

Online communication channels have been adopted by local governments to carry out some of their services and to communicate with their residents. With the advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and social media tools, online communication channels have been expected to have a greater share in the citizen-municipality communication compared to offline communication channels. However, it has been observed that offline communication channels are still highly preferred by the citizens for their communication with the municipality. In this context, it is seen that municipalities have attempted to set up multi-channel platforms which aim at integrating online and offline channels for citizen-municipality communication.

This research aims at understanding whether citizens prefer online or offline communication channels in their relations with the municipality. It analyzes the issue by concentrating on the case of Muratpasa Municipality, which is a district (sub-metropolitan) level municipality in Antalya-Turkey. Making research at sub-metropolitan level is important because citizens are expected to contact this level more frequently than the metropolitan level. The research also questions to what extent citizens are aware of integrated multi-channel platforms in their communication with the municipality by concentrating on the case of Orange Table Model which has been in use in Muratpasa since 2014, where traditional face-to-face communication channels are combined with online communication channels. It tries to understand to what extent the citizens are informed about the integrated model-namely the Orange Table- and to what extent they have recourse to it intentionally.

The main hypothesis of the research was that in the highly digitalized world the most preferred way of communication between the citizens and the municipality would be online contact. However, it has been found out that despite the proliferation of various online communication facilities, particularly that of social media tools in the recent years, citizens still prefer traditional offline/face-to-face communication channels to online communication channels in their relations with the municipality. To understand their preferences for communicating with the Municipality, paper-based questionnaire was conducted with 416 citizens over the age of 18 living in Muratpasa district.

In its effort to understand the attitudes of the residents towards online communication channels (e.g. social media accounts of the Municipality) and towards the integrated multi-channel platform (namely the Orange Table) in the district, the research draws upon the model put forward by Yang (2017) – i.e. both attitudes are analyzed in terms of

awareness, intention to use and satisfaction of the residents, together with the effects of gender, age, education and socio-economic development level.

It should be noted that, in this research, offline communication is differentiated from online communication by grouping 'calling, going personally, petition' as offline communication channels all referring to face-to-face communication and 'e-mail, web page, social media, android application' as online communication channels.

Use of online communication channels in local governments is a relatively new topic and so far, it has been mostly analyzed in its relation to transparency, accountability, participation, crisis management and improvement of public services (Bonson, Torres, & Royo, 2012; Desouza & Bhagwatwar, 2014; Guillamon, Ríos, Gesuele, & Metallo, 2016; Kim & Lee, 2012; Stamati, Papadopoulos, & Anagnostopoulos, 2015; Williamson & Parolin, 2012). However, role of online channels in the communication between the citizen and the municipality and the extent to which they are preferred in this relationship have not been studied that much particularly at the sub-metropolitan level. Moreover, multi-channel platforms aiming at integrating online and offline communication channels have not attracted much academic attention. Therefore, this research could be considered as a contribution to the field in this regard. One more contribution is that drawing upon the model by Yang (2017), the research analyzes the attitudes of citizens towards online communication channels and towards integrated multi-channel platforms by considering the issue in terms of awareness, intention to use and satisfaction of the residents, together with the effects of gender, age, education and socio-economic development level.

## Literature Review: From E-government to E-governance and Emergence of Integrated Multi-Channel Platforms

The pace of technological developments has been highly affecting the mode of governing. As a result, during the last decades we have been introduced to various concepts such as e-government, m-government, e-governance, and the like.

1990s witnessed the emergence and advance of New Public Management (NPM) Reforms in the public sector in many developed countries, which was later followed by the developing ones (Pina, Torres, & Royo, 2017; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). During the same years, the search for a new mode of governing paved the way for the concept of 'governance' with its emphasis on 'co-doing', which implies the collaboration of all related public, private and civil actors in 'decision-making and implementing the decisions made' (Kooiman, 1993; United Nations, 2009). Characteristics of 'good governance' were listed as participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus-oriented, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and accountability -which were also expected to 'minimize corruption, take views of minorities into account, make the voices of the most vulnerable heard in decision-making and be responsive to the present and future needs of the society' (Hendriks, 2013; United Nations, 2009).

Advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and their use in government affairs have brought about the concept and practice of electronic government (e-government) which is usually associated with web 1.0 technology (Uzun, Yıldız, & Önder, 2022). E-government was simply defined as 'the use of ICTs, and particularly the

Internet and as a tool to achieve better government' by the OECD (OECD, 2003a), and as 'having the potential to reduce costs, improve services, bring transparency, accountability and control corruption' (Singh & Sahu, 2008) and as 'an effective communication channel for citizens to participate in democratic institutions and political processes' (Bonson, Royo, & Ratkai, 2015; Moon, 2002). Having been attributed with such characteristics, according to Yildiz (2007), 'e-government has emerged as a popular catch phrase in public administration' and according to Hardey & Loader (2009) it 'has often been a central part of broader attempts to reorganize state services and administration'.

E-government is being used in public administration since 1990s in the form of 'official websites, mayor's mailboxes, hotlines, and online forums' (Yang, 2017), where 'the Internet is the most important tool for its delivery' (Singh & Sahu, 2008). As the use of digital devices such as smartphones and tablets has become widespread, the concept and practice of mobile government (m-government) has become popular, implying that citizens can contact administrative units 'from different entry points' (Yang, 2017). Although it provides easier utilization of public services, m-government is considered as 'a complement to traditional e-government practices' (Yang, 2017).

Development of web 2.0 technology which is defined as 'of the user, by the user and for the user' has paved the way for the emergence of social media and has brought about the concept of Government 2.0 (Chu & Xu, 2009). Thus, Government 2.0 is considered as 'a fundamental shift in the implementation of government' where 'technology and social tools are enablers' (AGIMO, 2009) and 'engagement is the keyword' (Bonson, et al., 2012). Social media relies on 'user-generated content' produced through co-production (also called peer-production and crowdsourcing) (Stamati, et al., 2015) which has been facilitated by new media tools (Firmstone & Coleman, 2015). Meijer (2011), argues that by providing networking, storage capacity and long-distance communication, social media technologies have brought about new interaction patterns in government-citizen relations. As the use of social media tools has become widespread, government units have started to adopt social media tools in their communication with citizens besides traditional e-government applications, with the purposes of transparency, accountability, participation, and innovation in public services -thus for achieving good governance (Epstein, Bode, & Connolly, 2021; Guillamon, et al., 2016; Li, Feng, Timmermans, & Zhang, 2020; Oliveira & Welch, 2013; Yang, 2017).

As social media is becoming an important element of e-government activities, it can be argued that now it is a new phase called e-governance. Dunleavy & Margetts (2015) name the period starting from early 2000s as Digital Era Governance by referring to the impact of digitalization and social media use in government affairs which emphasizes 'services re-organized around digitally-enabled citizens' and 'co-production of public services and policy'. Bergquist, Ljungberg, Remneland, & Rolandsson (2017) argue that with the advent of social media, a move is occurring from NPM-based e-government practices to digital governance. They state that e-government practices are complemented with and challenged by e-governance practices, as digital opportunities for an interactive, reflexive, and transparent dialogue between government and citizens are becoming possible. They also argue that with the advent of social media, e-government and e-governance are becoming integrated where e-governance deals with the decision-making process and

e-government deals with their implementation (Bergquist, et al., 2017), which might be taken as an implication for the need and emergence of new patterns of communication and legitimacy between the government and the citizens and the need for integrated models (Bergquist et al., 2017). Bonson, et al. (2015), define this process as 'transition from e-government (citizen as customer) to we-government (citizen as partner) implying a new kind of social contract'.

Although social media tools have been adopted by different levels of governments, it is the local government level and particularly the municipal level at which they are more frequently adopted and discussed. This is usually attributed to the traditional attitude which considers municipalities as the most convenient level for communication and participation (Borge, Colombo, & Welp, 2009; Cho, Mossberger, Swindell, & Selby, 2021; Guillamon, et al., 2016). Social media tools used by local governments generally include social networking applications like FacebookTM, LinkedIn, GoogleDocs; microblogging services like TwitterTM; media sharing sites like YouTubeTM, FlickrTM; Instant Messaging like GoogleTalk, MSN; Skype, etc. (Meijer, 2011; Oliveira & Welch, 2013).

As online communication -which is basically defined as 'Internet-mediated communication'- is becoming widespread and as social media tools are being adopted by the municipalities, urban communication -which is defined as 'the ways in which people in cities connect (or do not connect) with others and with their urban environment via symbolic, technological and/or material means- has also started to change (Aiello & Tosoni, 2016). In this study, the change that has been brought about to the citizen-municipality relationship by the adoption of social media tools in the provision/utilization of municipal services will be examined. However, it will focus on 'written online communication' and will exclude other online communication types, such as WhatsApp calls, Facetime calls and social media visual calls, as these are not that much used by the municipalities, although might be kept in their future plans.

Literature on the benefits of using social media tools in government-citizen relations in general and in municipality-citizen relations in particular is becoming quite dense. Among these benefits, corporate dialogue, collaboration, providing free and rapid flow/exchange of information, e-participation, inclusion, transparency, accountability, anti-corruption, efficiency, innovation, legitimacy, feedback on service quality/design, data mining, freedom of expression, improving policy-making and public services, reducing barriers of space and time with quicker actions and long-distance communication, crowdsourcing and peer production -thus having positive impact on economic growth and quality of life, improving government-citizen relationship and democracy are widely expressed (Bergquist, et al., 2017; Bonson, et al., 2012; Bonson, et al., 2015; Bonson, Royo, & Ratkai, 2017; Fusi & Feeney, 2016; Guillamon, et al., 2016; Magro, 2012; Meijer, 2011; Oliveira & Welch, 2013; Pina, et al., 2017; Stamati, et al., 2015). Jeffres & Lin (2006) put forward the four macro functions in the use of social media in municipal affairs as 'surveillance of the environment, coordination of activities, socialization and entertainment'. It has been argued that adoption of social media tools by the municipalities has been 'adding an inclusionary dimension to the smart city paradigm' (Patti & d'Antonio, 2016). These are the long-desired characteristics for administrations at all levels and they do certainly

dominate the discussions turning around the adoption of new media technologies to municipal services both in the academia and in the government circles.

However, although adoption of social media tools in the citizen-municipality relations are expected to provide improvement in terms of the above-mentioned traits, there are already various studies analyzing the deficiencies and challenges incorporated in this process. In this context, issues about privacy, security, quality, digital divide -particularly in developing/non-developed countries, lack of information and technology literacy, equity in representation, organizational/technological/financial challenges, an administrative culture not open to digital world have been mentioned as the challenges that should be paid attention in adopting social media tools in municipality-citizen relationship (Bergquist, et al., 2017; Bonson, et al., 2015; Edmiston, 2003; Karkin, 2014; Magro, 2012; Pina, et al., 2017; Singh & Sahu, 2008; Stamati, et al., 2015; Yang, 2017). Digital divide, defined as 'the gap between individuals/households and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access ICTs and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities', is considered as a major barrier to e-participation (Hatuka & Zur, 2020; OECD, 2001; Vromen, 2007). In addition to this, it has been argued that 'one-sided reliance on the Internet for the implementation of e-governance' would both 'jeopardize the improvement of service quality' and 'shift the burdens to the citizens', particularly to those not having proper access to the Internet (Singh & Sahu, 2008).

In the face of these challenges regarding the adoption of social media tools in municipality-citizen relations and particularly those arising from the one-sided reliance on these tools in municipal communication, 'the multi-platform approach' or as it is also called 'the integrated model approach' has been put forward. The logic is to set up a municipality-citizen relationship in which online and offline communication channels are integrated and used together where for instance the internet-based communication devices are used together with landline phones, mobile phones or call centers in the provision of municipal services (Meijer, 2011; OECD, 2003b; Pina, et al., 2017; Singh & Sahu, 2008).

It has been argued that the above-mentioned deficiencies and challenges emerged by the adoption of social media tools in municipal communication would be overcome or remedied with the integrated model. The integrated model is expected to bridge the digital divide, facilitate provision of municipal services to all as there would be various communication channels complementing each other, provide 'seamless operations' that the citizen would not be asked to learn the organizational chart to know which department to apply but just to contact the single accessible point, minimize the problem of technology literacy, provide rapid communication (Singh & Sahu, 2008).

Meijer warns that the role of digital communities should not be exaggerated because as 'individuals are social and emotional beings' these communities 'have a limited role compared to other channels of public service provision such as telephone calls and face-to-face meetings' (Meijer, 2011) which again points to the need for multi-platform/ integrated approaches. Pina, et al. (2017) argue that 'e-participation is only an enabler of citizen engagement' and 'it doesn't overcome all the barriers to these processes', pointing to the need to integrate e-participation with traditional offline tools for citizen participation'. Moreover, depending upon the conflicting results coming from previous

research regarding the correlation between online and offline participation and regarding their socio-demographic profile, Pina, et al. (2017) and Yetano & Royo (2015) argue that it would be better to combine the two participation methods to become more inclusive. Moreover, it is argued that besides the new technology, what is needed is a new approach (Magro, 2012) and that in the digital era this requires 're-integration, simplification and needs-based holism' (Dunleavy & Margetts, 2010). Thus, all these discussions can be taken as the framework for the endeavors of both scholars and practitioners in adopting multi-platform/integrated approaches, which would also be applicable to the case that will be analyzed in this study.

Finally, when it comes to understanding the attitudes of citizens towards the use of social media tools in municipal services, the theories of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) can be referred to. After TAM, which was devised by Davis in 1985 to understand the attitudes of people to new technology (Yang, 2017), UTAUT was devised by Venkatesh et al., and it tries to understand the effects of gender, age, experience, and voluntariness to use on the intention of the people to use a newly adopted technology (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003). Based on but also furthering these approaches, Yang analyzed the issues of awareness, intention to use and satisfaction of citizens in their use of e-services by considering the effects of demographic factors such as gender, age, and educational background (Yang, 2017). It has been declared that although empirical evidence from different countries has brought about different/opposite results, these models are used in many empirical studies due to their proven applicability (Yang, 2017). Inspired by the model devised by Yang (2017), this study analyzes the attitudes of citizens towards using online communication tools of Muratpasa Municipality and the integrated platform (the Orange Table) by looking at the issues of awareness, intention to use and satisfaction of the residents together with the effects of gender, age, education, and socio-economic development levels.

## An Example for Integrated Model - The Case of Orange Table

Antalya is the fifth most populated city in Turkey which is located at the southern coast of the country. Muratpasa is the second most populated municipality in Antalya and according to 2017 data, its population is 488,666 (51% female, 49% male) where 81% of the population (374,945) is over the age of 18 (Statistical Institute of Turkey, 2018).

The Municipality has an official website which provides access to announcements, projects, and events of the Municipality, to information about the Municipality and Muratpasa area, to Municipal services manual, opinion polls about Municipal services, the Orange Table and various other information (Muratpasa Municipality Website, 2018).

There is also an e-municipality platform through which citizens are provided with the following municipal services: Paying debts with the ID number, document tracking and confirmation, tender offer, Orange Table applications, questioning current debts, applying for various courses, applying for jobs, learning land prices, construction costs, depreciation rates and environmental cleaning tax amounts. E-municipality platform which was created in 2012 has reached 27,515 registered users by the year 2018 (Muratpasa Municipality Website, 2018). The ratio of registered users to 2018 population is 5.6%,

which is quite low in the face of rising number of digital platform users. This implies that digital platforms are not that much preferred by the citizens in their communication with the municipality.

The Municipality has been using social media tools for the last ten years; it has Facebook and Twitter accounts since January 2012, Instagram since May 2014. According to August 2018 data, its Facebook account has 43,259 followers, Twitter account 37,473 followers and Instagram account 4520 followers. In general, it is observed that both the citizens and the Municipality use these social media accounts for providing and getting information about local issues/municipal services such as marketplace arrangements, local handcraft expositions/stands, sports and cultural activities, available beaches, water outage.

Besides these, Muratpasa Municipality has an integrated model called Orange Table since November 2014, through which citizens communicate with the Municipality and access municipal services via various platforms including both online and offline channels.

Operational process of the Orange Table can be seen in Figure 1 which has been translated and adapted from its organizational chart obtained from the Orange Table center.

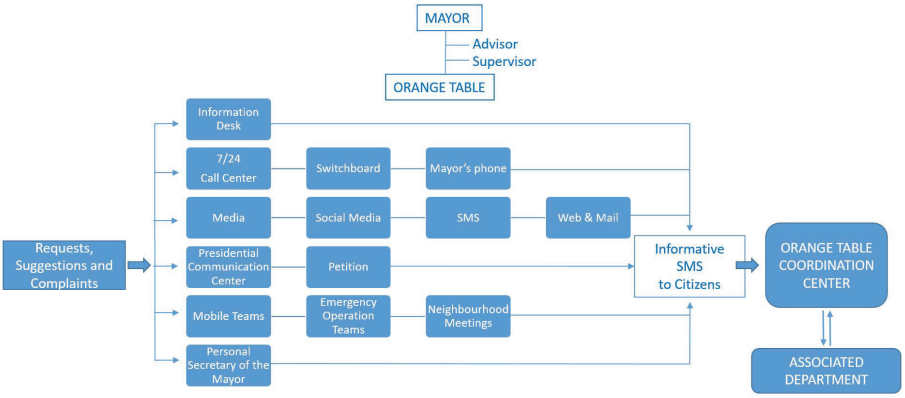


***Figure 1.*** Organizational chart flow of orange table

The main starting point of Orange Table was set to find solutions for the problems faced in coordinating and accommodating the information/data coming through various social media accounts while also integrating the ones coming through rather conventional communicating channels such as written applications or phone calls. This model also aimed at decreasing bureaucratic processes by making Orange Table the only contact

point serving as a 'hub' in citizen's relationship with the particular department of the Municipality and providing equality and accessibility for all. The citizen applying to the Municipality through any channels provided by the Orange Table is informed about the reception of his/her application in two minutes by an SMS. Then the application is directed to and examined by the related department. Later, the citizen is informed about the required process and time within 48 hours via telephone if it is available, otherwise via the original application channel. When the process is completed, the citizen is again informed about the result by a phone call. Through this model, citizens have the chance to submit complaints, search for solutions for their problems/concerns and share their suggestions about municipal services via Orange Table which was expected to provide participation, efficiency, accountability, and transparency by attempting to adopt a problem-tracking and solution-oriented attitude.

## Materials and Methods

This is descriptive quantitative research. As the quantitative research method, survey method was used. Questionnaire was prepared to understand to what extent the citizens preferred to use internet-based contact and the Orange Table in their relationship with the Muratpasa Municipality. To this end, questionnaires were directed to the residents of Muratpasa aged 18 and over, who were selected from the voting lists by the layering technique, as 18 is the age to become the legal respondent for municipal services besides being the eligible age for voting. The study area was grouped into four different socio-economic development zones (A: highly developed, B: developed, C: developing, D: underdeveloped) based upon the data obtained from the Statistical Institute of Turkey in order to reflect the maybe existing differences in this regard. Face-to-face paper-based questionnaires were conducted between July-August 2018 in the randomly selected sample which was proportioned according to the population of each zone. With a 95% confidence level and at least ±5% precision, minimum sample size was calculated as 384. With an expected 95% response rate then the required minimum sample size was found as 404. However, we conducted our questionnaire with 416 participants. Research ethics committee approval was taken for the survey.

Gender distribution of the sample was the same with Muratpasa Municipality's gender percentages, as 51% female and 49% male. Ages of the participants were changing from 18 to 82, and the accumulation was at the 25-54 interval. Their professions were predominantly private sector employers and employees. Educational status of the participants was mainly bachelor's degree and high school.

The questionnaire was designed in three parts with a total of 39 questions: in the first part general demographic information were questioned, in the second part participants' attitudes towards using website and social media accounts of the Municipality in their relations with the Municipality were asked and in the last part their awareness and use of Orange Table were inquired.

Descriptive statistics were given as frequencies and percentages. In the analysis of categorical variable, when the percentage of the cells which have an expected value

less than five is greater than 20% Fisher's Exact Test, when it was smaller the Pearson Chi-Square Test was used. The results were analyzed by using the SPSS 20 Program. Statistical significance value was accepted as $p<0.05$.

In addition to survey, a short on-site observation was held in the Orange Table headquarters and documents/reports obtained from the Orange Table were analyzed, from which we get the data about the ways citizens prefer to contact the Municipality and derived the chart in Figure 1. Finally, as a complementary strategy we had online observations on the websites of the Orange Table and Muratpasa Municipality (which will be referred to together as the website of the Municipality throughout the study) and its social media accounts.

## Results and Discussion

In this section attitudes of citizens towards online communication models and integrated multi-channel platforms are discussed by considering each issue in terms of awareness, intention to use and satisfaction of the residents, together with the effects of gender, age, education, and socio-economic development level.

### Online Communication Channels in Citizen-Municipality Relations

In the case area, 90% of the participants were having Internet access. No relation was found between having Internet access and socio-economic development level. From this it can be inferred that digital divide is not an applicable challenge in our case where 355 (85%) of the participants had at least one social media account and 61 (15 %) had no social media account at all. 85 of them (24%) follow at least one social media account of the Municipality. 270 (76%) respondents have at least one social media account and do not follow any of the social media accounts of the Municipality. 23 of those having at least one social media account (7%) prefer using Facebook when they want to interact with the Municipality. This was followed by Twitter as 14 (4%), Instagram 10 (3%) and YouTube 3 (1%).

In this study, internet-based communication between the citizens and the Municipality were analyzed by concentrating on their use of the Municipality website and its social media accounts. Regarding the website use, the research revealed that 68% of the participants have never visited the website of the Municipality. Reasons for referring to the website were declared as getting information (15%) and using municipal services (7%).

The website mainly gives information about municipal services however only a limited number of operations can be actually realized through the website of the Municipality. For almost all the provided services, the website directs the citizens to the Orange Table, which clearly shows the intention of the Municipality to integrate all contacts with the Municipality into the Orange Table hub.

When it comes to the citizens' use of social media accounts of the Municipality, 331 of the participants (80%) declared that they do not follow any of these accounts; where the Municipality's Facebook account was followed by 58 participants (49%), Twitter by 33 (28%) and Instagram by 27 (23%) participants. Participants stated that they refer to the social media accounts of the Municipality mostly for getting information and

for following the events organized by Municipality. 72% of the participants declared that they had never thought of using the social media accounts of the Municipality for contacting the Municipality. 62% of those who had used these accounts stated that they were satisfied with their experience.

Social media accounts of the Municipality provide communication which targets mainly sharing information with the citizens. As is the case with the website, regarding the demands/issues raised through the social media accounts of the Municipality, the Municipality makes a serious effort to direct these demands/applications to the Orange Table hub. This integration is made by requesting the communication details of the citizens via direct message (DM) to create an application on behalf of them and to inform them about the course/result of their application.

As within the scope of our study we aimed at understanding how effectively the citizens were using the internet-based communication channels of the Municipality, we asked the following questions with which we tried to find out their awareness, intention to use and satisfaction in relation to gender, age, education, and socio-economic structure when applicable.

***Awareness.*** When asked about the first solution they think of when faced with a problem concerning the municipality, the top three answers were calling (57%), applying to the Orange Table (22%) and going personally (15%), whereas online channels (website, social media and e-mail) constituted only 2%.

When it comes to what they do for contacting the municipality, the top answer was again calling (62%), the second one was going personally (27%), and social media was one of the least preferred ways (1%). This shows that internet-based contact doesn't constitute an option at all for the citizens vis-a-vis calling and going personally which indicates the importance of offline/face-to-face communication in their preferences.

All the participants were aware of the presence of the website of the Municipality, whereas when asked about which social media account of the Muratpasa Municipality they had heard, 28% of the participants said they were informed about Facebook, 19% about Instagram, 17% about Twitter and 2% about YouTube. Majority of the participants (62%) were not informed about any of the social media accounts of the Municipality at all.

It has been detected that there is no relation between gender and being informed about the social media accounts of the Municipality.

When distributed according to ages, middle-aged residents are more informed about the social media accounts of the Municipality. This could be because this age group must be in more contact with the Municipality due various reasons.

Those who were informed about the social media accounts of the Municipality were 6% basic education (primary + elementary school) graduates, 34% high school graduates, 60% Bachelor's and higher. This shows that people with higher education level are more aware of the social media accounts of the Municipality.

The percentages of being informed about the social media accounts of the Municipality according to the socio-economic development levels of the neighborhoods were as follows; zone A: 46%, zone B: 24%, zone C: 19%, and zone D: 11%. Therefore, it can

be inferred that as socio-economic development level increases, awareness of the citizens about using social media accounts in their contact with the municipality rises.

***Intention to Use.*** As it has been mentioned, 68% of the participants had never visited the website of the Municipality. 72% of the participants had never thought to use social media accounts of the Municipality.

No relation was detected between gender and the intention to use the website and the social media accounts of the municipality.

Middle-aged participants were more inclined to use the website of the Municipality - with the following percentages: 18-24 ages 12%, 25-44 ages 62%, 45-64 ages 22%; 65 and over 4%. Residents who at least once considered using the social media accounts of the Municipality had the following percentages according to their ages: 18-24 ages 15%, 25-44 ages 64%, 45-64 ages 17%; 65 and over 4%. Intention to use shows similar characteristics with awareness in relation to age distribution.

As is the case with awareness, as education level increases, intention to use the website and the social media accounts of the Municipality rises. However, no meaningful relation was observed between socio-economic development level and intention to use (Figure 2).

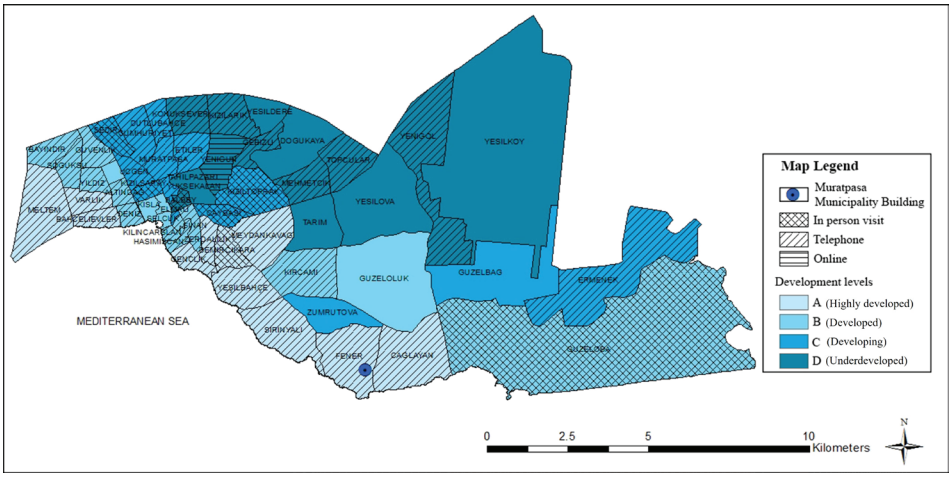


***Figure 2.*** Relation between socio-economic development level and choice for communication channels

When it comes to using social media accounts of the Municipality actively, participants who had thought to use but never used them was found as 70%. 80% of the participants were not following any social media accounts of Municipality whereas only 20% were following at least one.

There were no meaningful relations between gender, age and socio-economic development level and following any social media accounts of the Municipality. However, there was a meaningful relation between education and following a social media account. Of those following at least one social media account, 3% were basic education graduates, 38% high school graduates, 59% bachelor's and higher.

37% of the participants following at least one social media account of the Municipality were actively participating on these accounts (like, sharing, posting etc.). In other words, of those participants following at least one social media account of the Municipality, 63% of them do not get into interaction with the Municipality. This implies that there is kind of a one-way, semi-unilateral communication between the two parties where the citizens seem to follow the social media accounts of the municipality without much interaction and active participation.

There was no meaningful relation between gender and socio-economic development level and active use of social media accounts of the Municipality. However, there were meaningful relations between age and education and being an active user of social media accounts. As has been the case with awareness, middle aged and more educated people tend to be more participatory. In addition to this, it has been observed that physical distance between the participants and the Municipality building does not affect the intentions of the participants to use online or offline channels in their communication with the Municipality. It has been detected that majority of the participants intend to make phone calls in communicating with the Municipality no matter what their physical distance to the Municipality building was (Figure 3).

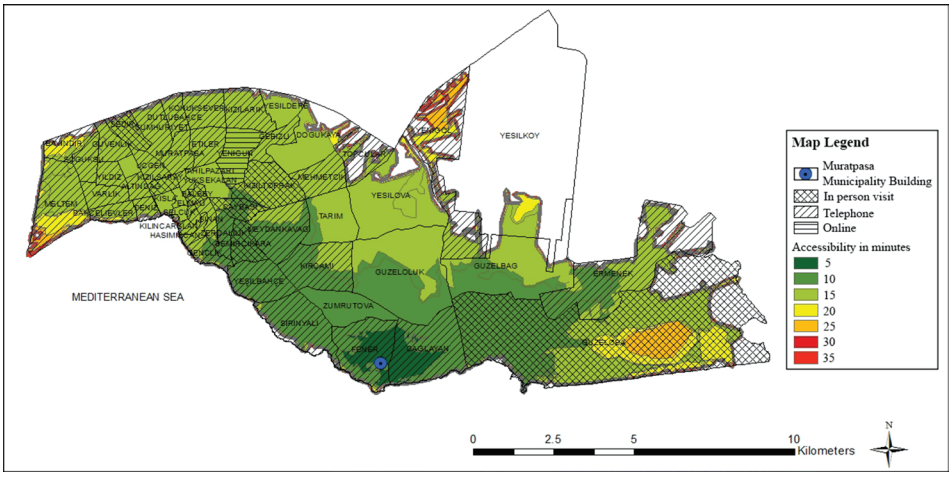


***Figure 3.*** Relation between physical distance and choice for communication channels

***Satisfaction.*** 71% of the participants who have at least once visited the website stated that they were satisfied with the website, 6% unsatisfied and 23% neutral. 62% of the participants who were using the social media accounts of the Municipality were detected to be satisfied with the services/communication provided, 23% were unsatisfied and 15% were neutral.

No meaningful relation was detected between gender, age, education and socio-economic development level and satisfaction with using the website and the social media accounts of the Municipality. From these and the above-mentioned results it can be inferred that in general citizens are reluctant to use the website and the social media accounts, however when they come to use once they are satisfied with them.

**Integrated Multi-Channel Platform - The Orange Table**

***Awareness.*** In terms of awareness, 88% of the participants were informed about the Orange Table. There were no meaningful relations between gender, socio-economic development level and being informed about the Orange Table.

As was the case with the social media accounts of the Municipality, it was the middle-aged group who was the most informed about the Orange Table, which again could be because they are the ones who somewhat must be in contact with the Municipality. A meaningful relation was detected between the level of education and being informed; people with higher education level are more informed.

***Intention to use.*** It was found that 42% of the participants used the Orange Table consciously at least once whereas 58% had never used it intentionally. The top three ways of contact preferred by those who intended to use the Orange Table were, calling (143), going personally (35) and e-mail (19). he contents of these intentional contacts were as follows: complaints (41%), demands/requests (35%), information (12%), appreciation (7%) and suggestions (5%).

There were no meaningful relations between gender, age, socio-economic development level and the intention to use the Orange Table. As the education level increases, the tendency to use the Orange Table also increases. Those using the Orange Table has the following education levels: 14% basic education graduates, 31% high school graduates, 55% bachelor's and higher.

***Satisfaction.*** 64% of the participants who used the Orange Table at least once were detected to be satisfied with it, where 20% of them were unsatisfied and 16% were neutral. No meaningful relation was detected between gender, age, education and socio-economic development level and satisfaction with Orange Table.

So, since Orange Table is an integrated model which incorporates almost all available communication channels, either being aware of it or not any citizen contacting the Municipality through any of these channels are inevitably included in the standard Orange Table process described above. Therefore, reflecting the spirit of the integrated model, citizens need not to know that they are 'already integrated'.

To recapitulate, when the overall available channels to contact the Muratpasa Municipality is analyzed in detail, the following ranking is observed from the most preferred to the least: calling 62%, going personally 27%, e-mail 5%, website 3%, petition 1%, application for android mobiles 1% and social media 1%. Overall, the research revealed that 90% of the participants preferred offline/face-to-face communication channels (calling, going personally, petition) and just 10% preferred online channels (e-mail, web page, social media, android application) in communicating with/getting services from the Municipality (Table 1).

Table 1
*Participants' Preferences About Online and Offline Communication Channels*

| | **Offline / face-to-face methods** | | | **Online methods** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Going personally** | **Calling** | **Petition** | **E-mail** | **Social Media** | **Website** | **Android application** |
| Frequency | 112 | 258 | 5 | 21 | 5 | 10 | 2 |
| Percentage | 27 | 62 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Percentage | 90 | | | 10 | | | |

As the complementary phase of the research, the data obtained from the Orange Table showing the preferred ways of contact between the citizens and the Municipality during the year 2018 was analyzed. This data revealed that 91% of the citizens preferred offline / face-to-face communication channels (calling, going personally, petition, mobile teams) and 9% preferred online communication channels [e-mail, web page, social media, CIMER (Online Presidential Communication Center)].

Therefore, it can be said that depending upon both the results of our research and the supportive data obtained from the Orange Table, despite the overarching developments in ICTs, people still prefer to find an offline / face-to-face contact in communicating with/getting services from the Municipality. As it has been stated, this research aimed at exploring the attitudes of citizens towards online and offline participation channels in their relations with the municipality and it did not ask about the reasons for the preferences of the participants in communicating with the Municipality. However, it could be inferred from both the literature and the research that people might be preferring offline channels due to the following: it is fast and easier to find a correspondent and an answer via phone calls; it is possible to realize/track only certain processes via the website of the Municipality; continuing use of wet-ink signature; old age (65+) could be considered as a factor leading more use of offline communication channels - in the case study, although 71% of the 65+ age-old participants have internet access, all of them prefer offline channels in their communication with the municipality (50% of them prefer calling by phone and 50% prefer in person visits to the Municipality.) In addition to this, people might have concerns about the privacy and security of the digital realm which might discourage them from using online channels in their communication with the municipality.

## Conclusions

With the advent of ICTs, new media technologies and online communication channels are becoming more commonly adopted by local governments for communicating with their residents. However, as our research has indicated, online communication channels are not always that much preferred by the citizens in their contacts with the municipality compared to the rather traditional (offline) ways of communication. Therefore, the need to combine new media tools with traditional communication channels in urban settings has paved the way for the emergence of integrated multi-channel platforms.

Besides combining different communication channels in a hub, integrated platforms have various advantages such as freeing the citizens from the burden of knowing which

department/unit of the municipality is authorized for her/his application; reducing unnecessary workload of the personnel by systematizing all the contacts right at the beginning; and saving time by reducing long bureaucratic processes. However, there is still need to create integrated models responding to the changing requirements of everyday life, being more participatory and providing sustainability for the existing ones.

In the face of increasing use of new media tools and the continuing adherence of the citizens to the traditional/offline communication channels in their relations with the municipality, it seems that integrated models will become more widespread. This research analyzed the attitudes of citizens towards online communication channels in their relations with the municipality and their attitudes towards the newly emerging integrated multi-channel platforms. It explains how the issues of awareness, intention to use and satisfaction of the residents affect these attitudes where gender, age, education, and socio-economic development levels could be influential depending upon the context.

It should be noted that there is no one single integrated model that would be valid for all municipalities. Therefore, when establishing an integrated model, the municipality should create the convenient one according to its own peculiarities. In so doing, it is important to understand the factors affecting the attitudes of the citizens towards online communication channels and towards integrated platforms. This is where this study could be contributory and inspiring. However, there is need for further research particularly to detect the reasons why the citizens do not prefer online communication in their relations with the municipality in the face of rapid digitization, which would help municipalities to devise better-functioning integrated platforms.

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