DIGITAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND TIKTOK: SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF USER COMMENTS IN THE 2024 US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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Abstract

Political communication can be defined as strategic communication with the aim of influencing the perceptions and attitudes of the target audience. Voters need information about the candidates they intend to support and election campaigns allow voters to share their opinions, suggestions and thoughts with politicians. During these periods, political parties tend to use mass media and digital media to provide voters with the information they may need. Today, TikTok as an important platform in the digital political communication process, it plays a critical role for politicians to interact with the target audience and shape public perception. This role also attracted attention during the United States of America (USA) presidential elections held on November 5, 2024. In this context, in this study, which focuses on the digital political communication process in the 2024 US Presidential Elections, the emotional distribution of public perception towards the Republican Party candidate Donald Trump and Democratic Party candidate Kamala Harris, who competed in the election, was analyzed through the sentiment analysis method based on the comments made on the TikTok posts of the candidates. According to the research findings, comments on Donald Trump's posts are characterized by a positive emotional tone. However, deeper and more lasting interactions, such as feelings of support and loyalty and social/contextual comments, were observed to be limited. Although the comments on Kamala Harris are largely positive, the low level of loyalty and commitment of her supporters is noteworthy. As a noteworthy finding, it was observed that Trump supporters were more likely to comment with loyalty and commitment than Kamala Harris supporters. In conclusion, the social media interactions of both candidates provide a view of the emotional states of their supporters and how they interact in the social context.

Keywords: Digital political communication, sentiment analysis, Tiktok, Donald Trump, Kamala Harris

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DİJİTAL SİYASAL İLETİŞİM VE TİKTOK: 2024 ABD BAŞKANLIK SEÇİMLERİNDE KULLANICI YORUMLARININ DUYGU ANALİZİ

Öz

Siyasal iletişim; hedef kitlenin algı ve tutumlarına etki etme amacıyla gerçekleştirilen stratejik bir iletişim faaliyeti olarak tanımlanabilir. Seçmenler, desteklemeyi düşündükleri adaylar hakkında bilgiye ihtiyaç duymaktadır ve seçim kampanyaları seçmenlerin görüş, öneri ve düşüncelerini siyasetçilerle paylaşabilmelerine olanak tanımaktadır. Siyasal partiler bu dönemlerde kitle iletişim araçları ve dijital medya olanaklarıyla doğrudan seçmene ihtiyaç duyabileceği bilgileri aktarma imkanına sahip olabilmektedir. Günümüzde TikTok, seçmenlerle iletişim yoluyla siyasi mesajları yaymak ve kitlelere ulaşmak için tercih edilen sosyal medya platformları arasında yer alması ile dikkat çekmektedir. Ayrıca dijital siyasal iletişim sürecinde önemli bir platform olarak politikacıların hedef kitle ile etkileşim kurmasında, kamuoyu algısının şekillendirilmesinde kritik rol oynamaktadır. Bu rol 5 Kasım 2024 tarihinde gerçekleştirilen Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD) başkanlık seçimlerinde dikkat çekmiştir. Bu bağlamda 2024 ABD başkanlık seçimlerinde dijital siyasal iletişim sürecini konu edinen bu çalışmada, seçimde yarışan Cumhuriyetçi Parti adayı Donald Trump ve Demokratik Parti Adayı Kamala Harris'e yönelik kamuoyu algısının duygusal dağılımları, adayların TikTok paylaşımlarına yapılan yorumlar üzerinden duygu analizi yöntemi ile incelenmiştir. Araştırma bulgularına göre; Donald Trump'ın paylaşımlarına gelen yorumlar, olumlu bir duygusal tonla öne çıkarken; destek, bağlılık duyguları ve sosyal/bağlamsal yorumlar gibi daha derin ve kalıcı etkileşimlerin sınırlı olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Kamala Harris'e ilişkin yorumlar ise büyük ölçüde olumlu olmasına rağmen destekleyen kitlenin sadakat ve bağlılık oranlarının düşüklüğü dikkat çekmektedir. Dikkat çekici bir bulgu olarak Trump destekçilerinin sadakat ve bağlılık içeren yorumlarının Kamala Harris destekçilerine göre daha fazla olduğu görülmüştür. Sonuç olarak her iki adayın sosyal medya etkileşimleri ve destekçilerinin duygusal durumlarına dair bir görünüm sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Dijital siyasal iletişim, Tiktok, duygu analizi, Donald Trump, Kamala Harris*

Introduction

Political communication can be defined as strategic communication aimed at influencing the perceptions and attitudes of target audiences and directing their political preferences. These communication strategies carried out by political parties aim to influence the decision-making processes of voters in order to disseminate political thought and ensure the support of voters. When election campaigns are evaluated in the context of political communication strategies; they allow voters to share their opinions, suggestions and thoughts with politicians. It can be argued that voters need information about the candidates they intend to support. In these periods, political parties tend to convey the information they may need directly to voters through mass media and digital media opportunities. On the other hand, political communication is not only a form of one-way communication in which leaders convey their own messages, but also a practice that constantly evolves depending on the dynamics of society and technology. This is because each era has developed its own communication strategies and tools in order to enable political actors seeking sovereignty to achieve their goals more effectively. In a democracy, voters are the main target audience of the political communication process as the absolute power that will ensure the election of the candidate, and when analyzed in this context; feedback from the target audience directly affects the campaign strategies of political actors. Considering that the success of political parties and candidates in elections depends on their ability to persuade voters according to their discourses and actions and to cause changes in their attitudes and behaviors, political communication strategies created by analyzing the expectations of the society correctly will achieve success in the long run.

Voters need information about candidates' political profiles and the policies they intend to implement before taking a stance on them. It can be argued that this information need is higher among swing voters. This information need can be met through techniques such as social media, targeted advertisements and sponsored content thanks to mass media and new media opportunities. This process increases participation in democracies and contributes to voters making informed choices. In the past, leaders usually communicated with the public through written statements and books, but with the development of mass media in the 20th century, it has become possible to reach the entire society. However, with the traditional mass media, communication strategies that envisage one-way communication

and focus on impact have been possible in political communication. With the introduction of the Web 2.0 era on the Internet, which emerged with the development of digital media technologies, two-way communication has become possible where the receiver can also be the source, instead of one-way communication where only the source produces content. Social media, which emerged with the Web 2.0 infrastructure, is seen as the most important source of information preferred by society today (We are social, Meltwater, 2024). While the use of digital media has increased worldwide, interest in print media such as newspapers and magazines, which focus on one-way communication, has significantly decreased (Reuters Institute, 2023).

Thanks to social media and other digital communication opportunities, leaders have the opportunity to reach wider audiences, as well as customize their messages according to location, prepare special content for groups in the society, and deliver special messages directly to each individual in the target audience. In this context, social media has an important role in political communication (Güçdemir & Göksu, 2015, p. 45; Çağlar & Köklü, 2017, p. 149; Balcı et al., 2020, p. 1; Tuncer et al., 2025, p. 324). Today, leaders interact directly with the society on platforms such as X, Facebook, Instagram and Tiktok, and convey information about their various policies and goals. In this way, leaders can build a sincere image by establishing closeness with the target audience and at the same time, they can receive feedback from the society about themselves and their policies (Irak, 2022, p. 204; Çağlar & Taşçıoğlu, 2023, p. 150). Tiktok, one of the social media platforms, offers a strong interaction channel for social media-oriented voter groups with its short and visual content-oriented structure. In addition, the platform is an attractive tool for political candidates and parties due to its connection with its young user base. By sharing their opinions on social media, users can communicate directly with political candidates or decision-makers. This interaction promotes political transparency and allows citizens to have a direct dialog with politicians. In this study, comments on Kamala Harris and Donald Trump were subjected to sentiment analysis. Comments were categorized and analyzed according to specific themes. While the "Kamala" dossier was characterized by supportive and encouraging themes, the "Trump" dossier showed a broader and more neutral distribution of sentiment. The purpose of the analysis is to explore public perception of the two political figures in more depth.

1. Digital Political Communication and TikTok

Political communication is an interactive and dynamic process that aims to persuade the target audience and direct their vote preference. Its use to impose various ideological goals or policies is also considered under the umbrella of political communication (Bostancı, 2014, p. 86). In this sense, political communication, which refers to a two-way communication process, is a set of efforts made by utilizing advertising, propaganda and public relations techniques according to the requirements of the conjuncture in order to come to power by ensuring public trust and support (Özkan, 2007, p. 23). The media can be considered as one of the important elements for political communication. The media has the power to bring the issues on its agenda to the public agenda. In doing so, many factors such as the style it uses, the time or space it allocates, and the length of the content are effective. In addition to this feature of the traditional media, with the new media and its infrastructure, the society has started to shape the social agenda with its own posts, and moreover, it has become in a position to shape the agenda of the media, also known as citizen journalism.

New communication technologies have led to the emergence of a new lifestyle that connects individuals and is called the "network society" (Dijk 2016, p. 8). When the network society is evaluated as a concept that enables people on the other side of the world to communicate with others regardless of national borders and that brings information communication to a global dimension, digital media, unlike traditional media, offers an interactive environment that is open to user participation. Emphasizing the increasing influence of social media on politics, Nguyen et al. (2022, p. 187) found that the free expression environment offered by social media enables political participation and freedom of expression, especially for ethnic and cultural groups. Similarly, Tsatsou (2022, p. 1475) states that social media increases the visibility of marginalized groups and helps them to make their voices heard more effectively on social issues. According to studies examining the role of digital media on political communication (McNair, 2017, p. 45; Postill, 2020, p. 166; Wolfsfeld, 2022, p. 92), unlike traditional media tools, digital media enables users to actively participate in political processes and creates a more inclusive environment. Studies

emphasizing that the algorithms of social media platforms can have an impact on political campaigns by shaping the content that users are exposed to (Drahošová and Balco, 2017, p. 1007; Lane, et al., 2024, p. 28) have revealed that algorithms can increase the success of campaigns by ensuring that the content reaches the targeted audiences effectively. However, according to studies (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001, p. 5; Marquart et al., 2020, p. 200; Lipschultz, 2022, p. 53) that draw attention to the disadvantages and ethical problems that arise alongside the advantages provided by social media in the political communication process; misinformation in the social media era increases social polarization, disinformation spreads rapidly and damages public trust.

It is known that each social media platform emphasizes different types of sharing. For example, while it can be argued that textual content attracts more attention on X, Instagram is a platform for purely visual sharing. Tiktok, on the other hand, is known for short video posts. In this context, TikTok is a platform where users dance, lip sync, showcase their various talents, and structure the content they publish in line with their digital self-presentations (Bhandari et al., 2020, p. 3; Gül Ünlü et al., 2020, p. 126; Montag et al., 2021, p. ; Gerbaudo & Moreno, 2024). On the other hand, user videos expressing political views have recently shown a significant increase on TikTok (Chaihanchanchai & Anantachart, 2024, p. 5). Bucknell and Kottasz (2020, p. 465) showed that TikTok is used more actively, especially by Generation Z. Schellewald (2023, p. 1568) suggested that young people use TikTok to position themselves among peer groups and understand what they are doing. Zeng and Abidin (2023, p. 93), who examine the interactions of younger generations with older generations, state that TikTok plays a creative role in expressing the social and political criticisms of young people in a humorous language. Therefore, TikTok is also important for young people to create an identity, express themselves and receive feedback. In addition to age statistics, the TikTok platform; similar to other social media platforms; shows that more female users use it than male users (Neyaz, et al., 2020, p. 38). On the other hand, results from personality psychology (Montag et al., 2015, p. 5; Chen and Hu, 2020, p. 1005) have found that producing, participating, and consuming behaviors on TikTok have a strong influence on users' motivation to use. Beyond becoming a global phenomenon, TikTok is also seen as a platform that leads to data protection issues/privacy, hate spreading and cyberbullying (Neyaz et al., 2020, p. 38). Cheng and Li (2024, p. 201) reveal that the most important factors affecting users' interaction (such as liking, commenting, sharing) on TikTok are the emotional tone of the content and the way it is addressed to the audience. According to the findings, videos with positive narratives significantly increase the interaction of users and receive more likes, comments and shares, while content with negative emotions attracts high interaction in terms of the number of comments, although it has a lower share rate.

TikTok is also notable for being among the preferred social media platforms for spreading political messages and reaching the masses through communication with voters. Studies focusing on digital political communication and dialogic communication on TikTok (Schellewald, 2021, p. 1437; Hernandez, 2022, p. 10; Hindarto, 2022, p. 149) state that TikTok stands out as an important medium in political campaign strategies and communication, has become an effective tool for politicians who want to reach young audiences and engage them; and that the platform's comment, like and share features encourage voters to engage in political processes. Studies investigating the TikTok algorithm (Burchell, 2023, p. 9; Taylor et al., 2024, p. 6) state that TikTok algorithms and the "discover" tab enable users to easily encounter political content, increasing the potential for politicians to go viral. Investigating politicians' use of TikTok, Cervi and Marín-Lladó (2021, p. 11) found that many parties post more self-promotional content rather than utilizing the interaction opportunities offered by the platform. This situation is explained as "politainment" (the presentation of politics in entertainment format) rather than political communication. As a matter of fact, studies emphasizing the entertainment-oriented nature of the TikTok platform (Salazar, 2023, p. 7; Zamora, 2023, p. 229) remind that this feature causes politics to be intertwined with the trend known as "politainment", and politicians introduce themselves with entertaining content to connect with their voters, resort to visual storytelling, and strive to present their political messages with humorous or daily content. Examining politicians' use of TikTok during election periods, Cervi et al. (2023, p. 203) found that politicians did not take full advantage of the platform's possibilities and

exhibited a top-down communication style that did not include deliberative posts, and mostly used the platform to showcase their personal lives.

2. TikTok in the 2024 US Presidential Election

TikTok is a platform that shapes the campaign strategies of candidates in the political communication process with its potential to spread quickly with short videos. In previous studies examining the American Elections on TikTok in this sense, Medina et al. (2020, p. 257) found that republican users produced more political content on TikTok and their videos received more responses; on the other hand, democratic users participated significantly more in cross-party debates. Studies examining TikTok use in the election from a Generation Z perspective (Seppälä, 2022, p. 16; Grigoryan, 2024, p. 217) have found that TikTok is used for more open political expression, helps spread awareness for movements such as Black Lives Matter, and has a positive impact on political participation. However, despite these positive effects, there are also studies (Benaissa, 2021; Brooks & Wellman, 2024) that draw attention to the spread of misinformation through TikTok during election periods.

Analyzing political discourse during the 2024 US Presidential Election, Shah et al. (2024, p. 5) showed that the words "MAGA," "TrumpVance2024," "DonaldTrump," "AmericaFirst," "Kamala Harris," "GodWins," "TrumpWon," and "Truth" were frequently used. The 2024 US Presidential Election marks a pivotal moment in American political history as it reflects deepening divisions, evolving campaign strategies, and the growing role of digital media in shaping public discourse (Wayne, 2023, p. 227). The 60th United States presidential election, the 2024 US Presidential Election, took place on November 5, 2024. While Donald Trump and Kamala Harris are known as the leading candidates in the election, other candidates are Jill Stein, Robert Kennedy and Chase Oliver. When the election results were finalized, Donald Trump was elected President of the United States with 49.9% of the valid votes and 312 delegate votes. Kamala Harris came second with 48.4% of the vote and 226 delegate votes. The other candidates did not receive any delegate votes.

3. Method

Sentiment analysis method was applied within the scope of the research. Sentiment analysis is a method used to determine the emotional tones in texts (Saberi & Saad, 2017, p. 1660). Although it mainly focuses on three main categories, namely positive, negative and neutral emotions, it is possible to diversify it in more detail (Liu, 2022, p. 34). This process involves a preprocessing stage that first analyzes the grammatical structure of the text and the emotional tones of the words. Then, these texts are categorized into emotion categories, and this classification process is usually performed using labeled datasets. Thus, various algorithms and machine learning techniques are used to reveal positive, negative and neutral emotions in the texts. Referring to previous research that analyzed sentiment in TikTok, Isnan et al. (2023, p. 168) found that viral video advertisements in general have a neutral emotional tone. Heyder and Hillebrandt (2023, p. 121), on the other hand, found that users enjoy using TikTok mostly use positive words on the platform.

In this study, the comments on the TikTok social media accounts of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, the candidates competing in the US Presidential Election, on the day before and on the day of the election were analyzed covering the pre-election day and the first 12 hours of the election day. The exclusion of comments made after the 12th hour of the election day is based on the researchers' presupposition that the election results will be largely finalized.

Phyton was utilized in the data collection process. In this sense, Phyton was used to perform a dictionary-based sentiment classification by initially labeling the mood of a review. The R program was used to perform the sentiment analysis. In the data analysis process of the study, 10 randomly selected content codings were made by both coders in order to ensure inter-coder agreement. After ensuring inter-coder agreement, all of the data obtained were

analyzed by the coders between November 10, 2024 and December 10, 2024 through the R program, a language and software environment developed for statistical calculation.

4. Findings and Interpretations

As a result of the sentiment analysis study, when the comments on the candidates' social media posts made the day before and on the day of the election were analyzed, it was found that the Republican Party candidate Donald Trump had 3 posts within the scope of the research and the total number of comments on these posts was 25,482, while the Democratic Party candidate Kamala Harris had 6 posts and 30,448 comments were made on these posts. As a result of the detailed sentiment analysis of these posts, it is understood that the candidates' posts are concentrated in 6 categories. These categories and their explanations are as follows:

Table 1. Sentiment Analysis Categories and Explanations

Category	Explanation
Future and Value Emphasis	It includes expressions of daydreaming or purpose, an emphasis on change, and themes of family and social structure.
Neutral/Indefinite Emotions	Neutral expressions include content that does not convey a clear emotion, such as emotionless information, short and simple statements.
Positive / Affirmative Emotions	Expressions of celebration, happiness, religious wishes and support include positive and encouraging emotions.
Loyalty and Commitment	Patriotism consists of content that expresses feelings of unity, respect, pride and commitment, such as general support or approval.
Social/Contextual Interpretation	It includes social and contextual commentary, with references to the election year, opponents or other leaders.
Calls and Requests	It includes calls for help, voting statements and content encouraging voting.

It was deemed appropriate to use 6 categories in the sentiment analysis category classification of the study. In making this classification, it was aimed to minimize the number of neutral comments. From this point of view, the themes of sentiment analysis are; future and value emphasis, neutral/ambiguous comments, positive/affirmative emotions, loyalty and commitment, social/contextual comments, calls and requests.

Table 2. Table Showing the Sentiment Analysis of Comments on Donald Trump's Posts

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Emphasis on Future and Value	31	0.12%
Neutral/Indefinite Emotions	8498	33.61%
Positive / Affirmative Emotions	12168	48.13%
Loyalty and Commitment	2431	9.62%
Social/Contextual Interpretation	1127	4.46%
Calls and Requests	1027	4.06%

Table 2 shows the emotional tone of the comments on Donald Trump's posts and how users reacted to these posts in their comments. It is seen that positive emotions (n=12168, 48.13%) come first in the comments on Donald Trump's posts. This is followed by neutral emotions (n=8498, 33.61%) and loyalty and commitment (n=2431, 9.62%). Others are social comments (n=1127, 4.46%), calls and requests (n=1027, 4.06%) and future and other emphasis (n=31, 0.12%).

First of all, the high percentage of positive emotions (48.13%) can be interpreted as a sign that Trump's messages have the potential to create motivation or satisfaction in the audience. This shows that Trump's supporters positively evaluate the messages addressed to them. The 33.61% of neutral sentiments can be attributed to the fact that these posts were perceived as more neutral or ambiguous by some users. The lower rate of loyalty and commitment emotions (9.62%) may explain the limited level of emotional attachment or loyalty shown by followers. This rate suggests that some of Trump's posts may only create temporary excitement, but may be less effective in creating a lasting commitment. When the proportions of other emotions are analyzed; social comments (4.46%), calls and requests (4.06%), and future and other emphasis (0.12%) are low, indicating that these posts generally focused the attention of the participants more on positive and neutral emotions.

Table 3. Table Showing the Sentiment Analysis of Comments on Kamala Harris' Posts

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Emphasis on Future and Value	1336	7,07
Neutral/Indefinite Emotions	1764	9,33
Positive / Affirmative Emotions	16653	88,16
Loyalty and Commitment	67	0,35
Social/Contextual Interpretation	3714	19,65
Calls and Requests	6914	36,63

Table 3 shows the emotional tone of the comments on Kamala Harris' posts and how users reacted to these posts in their comments. When the table is analyzed; positive emotions (n=16653, 88.16%) come first. This is followed by calls and requests (n=6914, 36.63%) and social comments (n=3714, 19.65%). The others are neutral emotions (n=1764, 9.33%), future and value emphasis (n=1336, 7.07%) and loyalty and commitment (n=67, 0.35%). First of all, the high percentage of positive sentiments (88.16%) can be interpreted as a strong support and partiality of Harris' posts among his audience, which suggests that his messages are mostly evaluated from a positive perspective by his followers.

The 36.63% incidence of the category of calls and requests indicates that followers actively call for and respond to Harris' messages in a participatory manner. This may reflect the audience's desire to increase their interaction with Harris and respond to his messages in a participatory manner. Moreover, the 19.65% of social comments may indicate that discussions about social issues and public policies are ongoing and that Harris is communicating effectively in this context. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that 9.33% of neutral sentiments indicate that Harris' posts are perceived as more neutral or ambiguous by some followers, but since this rate is quite low, we can say that he leaves a positive impression in general. The 7.07% emphasis on future and value shows how Harris' desire to present a hopeful vision of the future resonates with followers. However, the very low level of loyalty and commitment, at only 0.35%, suggests that viewers feel a less lasting attachment to Harris.

Conclusion

Focusing on the 2024 US presidential elections, this study examined the emotional distribution of public perception of Kamala Harris and Donald Trump. At this point, a positive emotional tone stands out in the comments on Donald Trump's posts (n=12,168, 48.13%). On the other hand, deeper and lasting interactions such as feelings of support and commitment (n=2,431, 9.62%) and social/contextual comments (n=1,127, 4.46%) are relatively limited. This may indicate that the majority of Trump's supporters have a positive attitude towards his posts, while negative views or criticisms are less visible on the platform. This data suggests that Trump's social media strategy is focused on creating positive engagement and trying to appeal to a broad audience, but the absence of negative comments and more critical sentiments suggests that the commenting audience is a fairly homogeneous group in general, and that

dissenting views are less common on these platforms. Overall, the analysis of this data suggests that Trump's online presence has had a strong positive impact on his supporters, but raises questions about how this support may change over time and whether it can have a broader societal impact.

The data on Kamala Harris shows that she has pursued a highly effective strategy on social media and has managed to create a largely positive perception. However, it raises questions about the depth and sustainability of her support. This could pose a potential problem, especially during critical times such as election periods. Kamala Harris' Posts: Comments on Harris' posts are largely characterized by positive sentiments (n=16,653, 88.16%). This suggests that Harris has built strong support among her followers, creating a participatory interaction. The high rate of calls and requests (n=6,914, 36.63%) suggests that followers actively participate in these posts. However, it is noteworthy that loyalty and commitment rates (n=67, 0.35%) are low. As a remarkable finding, it was observed that trump supporters' comments containing loyalty and commitment were higher than Kamala Harris supporters. This may be due to the content of the promises in the candidates' posts or the personal image of the candidates. On the other hand; based on this finding, it can be argued that Trump supporters have more emotional closeness with the candidate than Kamala Harris supporters.

As a result, the social media interactions of both candidates provide a view of the emotional state of their supporters and how they interact in the social context. Based on this study, research can be conducted to determine the motivations of users who actively follow candidates' social media accounts during the election period.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Tiktok, kısa ve görsel içerik odaklı yapısı ile sosyal medya odaklı seçmen grupları için güçlü bir etkileşim kanalı sunmaktadır. Ayrıca platform, genç kullanıcı kitlesi ile kurduğu bağ nedeniyle siyasi adaylar ve partiler için cazip bir araç niteliğindedir. Bu anlamda TikTok, kısa videolarla hızla yayılma potansiyeli ile siyasal iletişim sürecinde adayların kampanya stratejilerini şekillendiren bir platformdur. Kullanıcılar, sosyal medya üzerinden fikirlerini paylaşarak siyasi adaylar ve karar vericilerle doğrudan iletişim kurabilmektedir. Bu etkileşim, siyasi şeffaflığı teşvik ederken, vatandaşların politikacılarla doğrudan diyalog kurmasını sağlamaktadır. Amerika seçimlerini TikTok üzerinden inceleyen önceki çalışmalarda; Medina ve diğerleri (2020, s. 257), Cumhuriyetçi kullanıcıların TikTok'ta daha fazla siyasi içerik ürettiğini ve videolarının daha fazla yanıt aldığını tespit etmiştir. Öte yandan Demokratik kullanıcılar, partiler arası tartışmalara önemli ölçüde daha fazla katılmaktadır. Seçimlerde TikTok kullanımını Z Kuşağı perspektifinden inceleyen araştırmalar ise (Seppälä, 2022, s. 16; Grigoryan, 2024, s. 217), TikTok'un aktivist hareketler için farkındalığın yayılmasına yardımcı olduğunu ve siyasal katılım üzerinde olumlu bir etkiye sahip olduğunu bulgulamıştır. Bu olumlu etkilere rağmen seçim dönemlerinde TikTok aracılığıyla yanlış bilgilerin yayıldığına dikkat çeken çalışmalar da (Benaissa, 2021; Brooks ve Wellman, 2024) bulunmaktadır.

Bu çalışmada, Kamala Harris ve Donald Trump üzerine yapılan toplam 55 bin 93 yorum duygu analizine tabi tutulmuştur. Yorumlar, belirli temalara göre kategorize edilerek analiz edilmiştir. Analizin amacı, iki politik figüre dair kamuoyu algısını daha derinlemesine incelemektir. Duygu analizi, metinlerdeki duygusal tonların belirlenmesi amacıyla kullanılan bir yöntemdir (Saberi ve Saad, 2017, s. 1660). Temelde olumlu, olumsuz ve nötr duygular olmak üzere üç ana kategoriye odaklanmakla birlikte daha ayrıntılı biçimde çeşitlendirmek mümkündür (Liu, 2022, s. 34). Bu süreç, öncelikle metnin dilbilgisel yapısını ve sözcüklerin duygusal tonlarını analiz eden bir ön işleme aşamasını içerir. Ardından, bu metinler duygu kategorilerine ayrılır ve bu sınıflandırma işlemi genellikle etiketlenmiş veri setleri kullanılarak gerçekleştirilir. Böylece metinlerdeki olumlu, olumsuz ve nötr duyguları ortaya koymak adına çeşitli algoritmalar ve makine öğrenimi teknikleri kullanılır. TikTok'ta duygu analizi çalışan önceki araştırmalara istinaden Isnan vd., (2023, s. 168), yer alan viral video reklamlarının genel olarak nötr bir duygusal tona sahip olduğunu bulgulamıştır. Heyder ve Hillebrandt (2023, s. 121), ise kullanıcıların TikTok kullanmaktan keyif aldığını ve platformda çoğunlukla pozitif kelimeler kullandığını ortaya koymuştur.

Bu çalışma, ABD Başkanlık seçimlerindeki adaylardan Donald Trump ve Kamala Harris'in TikTok hesaplarında seçim öncesindeki son gün ile seçim gününün ilk 12 saatinde yaptıkları paylaşımlara gelen yorumları incelemektedir. Seçim günü 12. saatten sonra yapılan yorumların araştırma kapsamı dışında bırakılması, seçim sonuçlarının büyük oranda kesinleşeceğine yönelik araştırmacıların önkabulüne dayanmaktadır.

Araştırmanın veri toplama sürecinde Phyton'dan yararlanılmıştır. Bu anlamda Phyton, bir incelemenin duygu durumunu başlangıçta etiketlemek suretiyle sözlük tabanlı duygu sınıflama yapmak üzere kullanılmıştır. Duygu analizinin gerçekleştirilmesinde ise R programı kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın veri analizi sürecinde kodlayıcılar arası uyumun sağlanması amacıyla, her iki kodlayıcı tarafından da rastgele seçilmiş 10 içeriğin kodlaması yapılmıştır. Kodlayıcılar arası uyum sağlandıktan sonra elde edilen verinin tamamı kodlayıcılar tarafından, istatistiksel hesaplama için geliştirilmiş bir dil ve yazılım ortamı olan R programı üzerinden 10 Kasım 2024 -10 Aralık 2024 tarihleri arasında analiz edilmiştir.

Araştırma sonuçlarına göre; "Kamala" dosyasında temalar destekleyici ve cesaret verici içeriklerle öne çıkarken, "Trump" dosyasında daha geniş ve nötr duygu dağılımı görülmektedir. Donald Trump'ın paylaşımlarına gelen yorumlarda olumlu bir duygusal ton öne çıkmıştır (n=12.168, %48,13). Öte yandan destek ve bağlılık duyguları (n=2.431, %9,62) ve sosyal/bağlamsal yorumlar (n=1.127, %4,46) daha derin ve kalıcı etkileşimlere görece sınırlıdır. Bu durum, Trump'ın destekçilerinin büyük bir kısmının, onun paylaşımlarına karşı olumlu bir yaklaşım sergilediğini gösterirken, olumsuz görüşlerin ya da eleştirilerin platformda daha az görünür olduğu anlamına gelebilir. Bu veriler, Trump'ın sosyal medya stratejisinin, pozitif bir etkileşim yaratmaya odaklandığını ve geniş bir kitleye hitap etmeye çalıştığını göstermekte ancak negatif yorumların ve daha çok eleştirel duyguların yer almaması, yorum yapan kitlenin genel bağlamda oldukça homojen bir grup oluşturduğunu ve muhalif görüşlerin bu platformlarda daha az yer bulduğunu düşündürmektedir. Sonuç olarak bu verilerin analizi, Trump'ın çevrimiçi varlığının, destekçileri üzerinde

güçlü bir olumlu etki yarattığını ortaya koymaktadır. Fakat bu desteğin zamanla nasıl değişebileceği ve toplumsal olarak daha geniş bir etki yaratıp yaratamayacağı konusunda sorular doğurmaktadır.

Harris'in paylaşımlarına gelen yorumlar, büyük ölçüde olumlu duygular (n=16.653, %88,16) ile karakterize edilmektedir. Bu durum, Harris'in takipçileri üzerinde güçlü destek oluşturarak katılımcı bir etkileşim yarattığını göstermektedir. Çağrı ve isteklere olan yüksek oran (n=6.914, %36,63), takipçilerin bu paylaşımlara aktif katılım gösterdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Ancak sadakat ve bağlılık oranlarının (n=67, %0,35) düşük olduğu dikkat çekmektedir. Dikkat çekici bir bulgu olarak Trump destekçilerinin sadakat ve bağlılık içeren yorumlarının Kamala Harris destekçilerine göre daha fazla olduğu görülmüştür. Bu bulgudan yola çıkılarak, Trump destekçilerin Kamala Harris destekçilerine göre aday ile daha fazla duygusal yakınlık kurduğu ileri sürülebilir. Kamala Harris'e ait veriler göz önüne alındığında; bu durum Kamala'nın sosyal medyada oldukça etkili bir strateji izlediğini ve büyük ölçüde olumlu bir algı yaratmayı başardığını göstermektedir. Ancak desteklerin sürdürülebilirliği konusunda bazı soruların ortaya çıkmasına neden olmaktadır. Bu durum, özellikle seçim dönemi gibi kritik zamanlarda potansiyel bir sorun teşkil edebilir.

Sonuç olarak her iki adayın sosyal medya etkileşimlerine istinaden, destekçilerinin duygusal durumlarına ve adayların toplumsal bağlamda nasıl etkileşimde bulunduklarına dair bir görünüm sunulmaktadır. Bu çalışmadan yola çıkılarak seçim döneminde adayların sosyal medya hesaplarını aktif biçimde takip eden kullanıcıların takip etme motivasyonlarını saptamaya yönelik araştırmalar yürütülebilir.