

INTERNET USAGE IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: “A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES’ WEBSITES IN TURKEY AND THE USA”[♦]

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ABSTRACT

In today's contemporary world, new communication technologies lead to significant alterations and transformations, have been indispensable components for human life. In these technologies, due to primary emergence of Internet expansion all over the world, from economy towards culture, from entertainment towards science, in many fields, the diversification of its specific implementations is being recognized. Such an rapid increase of Internet usage is accompanied with its usage of political usage.

That new media environment is providing more resources for financial support and media coverage of the messages. For the achievement of more participating democratic conditions, the Internet offering huge potential of usage, has been commenced to be in implementation as a mass media by political parties. Political purpose of the Internet usage, has led to new transformations in the political communication. The importance of Internet in a political communication has brought into agenda the analysis of political party websites.

In that study, making up a comparative analysis of four political party representing two different country has been aimed. In such a study, it is thought that with regard to illuminating the point of two countries with the possession of different development levels have been reached in Internet usage in political communication.

Key Words: *Internet, political communication, website analysis.*

ÖZET

Günümüz dünyasında önemli değişim ve dönüşümlere yol açan yeni iletişim teknolojileri, insan yaşamının ayrılmaz bir parçası haline gelmiştir. Bu teknolojiler içinde ön plana çıkan internetin tüm dünyada hızlı bir şekilde yaygınlaşmasıyla

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birlikte pek çok alanda spesifik amaçlı kullanımının da hızla arttığı görülmektedir. İnternet kullanımının her geçen gün böylesine hızlı bir artış göstermesi, internet'in siyasal amaçlı kullanımını da beraberinde getirmiştir.

Bu yeni medya ortamı, mesajların daha büyük hedef kitlelere ulaştırılmasında ve finanssal destek sağlanmasında daha fazla kullanım ve yararlanma imkanı sunmaktadır. Daha katılımcı bir demokrasi için büyük bir kapasite imkanı sunan internet, siyasal partiler tarafından bir kitle iletişim aracı olarak kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. İnternet'in siyasal amaçlı kullanımı, siyasal iletişim alanında önemli dönüşümlere yol açmıştır

İnternetin siyasal iletişimdeki sahip olduğu bu önem, siyasal partilerin web sayfalarının analizini gündeme getirmiştir. Siyasal partilerin web sitelerini inceleme konusunda birçok metodolojik çalışma mevcuttur. Web sitesi analizlerinde çalışmayı uygulayan bilim dalına göre birçok farklılıklar gözlemlenmesine rağmen tüm çalışmalarda ortak olarak sitelerin amacı ve dizaynı meselesi ön plana çıkmaktadır.

Bu çalışmada iki farklı ülkede dört siyasal partinin karşılaştırmalı web sitesi analizinin gerçekleştirilmesi amaçlanmıştır. Böylesi bir çalışmanın gelişmişlik düzeyi farklı iki ülkede siyasal iletişimde internet kullanımının gelmiş olduğu noktayı göstermesi bakımından ışık tutacağı düşünülmektedir. Bu amaçla Türkiye'den Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) ve Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi(CHP)'nin ve Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nden Republican Party (RNC) ve Democratic Party(DNC)'nin web siteleri çalışmamızda inceleme konusu olarak seçilmiştir.

***Anahtar Kelimeler:** İnternet, politik iletişim, web sitesi analizi*

INTRODUCTION

The rattling developments in information and communication technologies have shrunk the world to fit into a computer screen. Owing to the magical tool called Internet, distances disappeared, and the world became a "global village". Compared to traditional mass communication tools, the Internet, which provides a wider access to bigger masses, has been a popular appeal for politics as well.

Offering possibilities of access to a more participant democracy, the Internet pioneered enormous transformations in political communication. Internet enables contact with broader range of masses, and a shorter and more interactive process not systemized by a particular centre. Due to these advantageous features, Internet has developed into an indispensable tool for political parties.

As the use of Internet in political communication has become prevalent, the academic interest in this field is observed to have increased. The common point of the researches carried out in this field is the "effects of the Internet on political life". Although all these studies achieved success in terms of drawing a general framework, they failed to answer the questions whether political parties benefit from this great opportunity in a rational way.

This study aims to scrutinize the effects of the differences in development levels in countries on the Internet use in political communication through the research carried out on the website use of four political parties that shape political life in Turkey and the United States. With that purpose, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) and Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP) from Turkey and Republican Party (RNC) and Democratic Party (DNC) from United States of America, have been selected as the subject in our websites researches.

In this way, the study intends to demonstrate the level of Internet usage in political communication in two different countries with different levels of development.

Politicization of Communication: Political Communication

Communication, which commenced together with the beginning of human history, stands out as an indispensable component of life. The ways of communication and interaction between people constitute a significant part of social life. Besides face-to-face communication, today people are known to be a part of communication network also as audience, reader and spectator. Therefore, communication is characterized as the *sine qua non* of life and socio-cultural order.

Due to its interdisciplinary nature, the field of communication has become the focus of attention of diverse disciplines. The concept of communication, which is used in various meanings and fields, has been attributed 4560 ways of application in a research done through written sources (Zillioğlu,1993:4). At the basis of using such a variety of meanings for the concept of communication lies the fact that communication is rendered to different scientific fields, and these diverse fields approach the concept from different perspectives in accordance with their interests.

Indicating that every field related to communities and human behaviour has to be interested in communication, Schramm defines communication as “an act of sharing beyond the effect created on an individual by another individual” (Schramm 1964 qtd. in Usluata, 1997:5). On the other hand, Berlo denotes the main goal in communication as “influencing the environment in which we live as an active subject”, and states that we communicate so as to create influence and change (1960:12). Considering these different definitions, communication may be identified as the process of transferring feelings, thoughts, knowledge, and culture in the most general sense, to communities.

How communication is realized in a certain society is largely determined by the socio-cultural characteristics of that society. In addition, behaviour patterns of groups, environment, education, the degree of learning, and profession shape the way of communication. In the light of current developments in the world, communication is divided into many categories, and accordingly, it is possible to talk about the communication that a person establishes with himself/herself – in other words, inner communication – , communication between persons, organizational communication, technological communication, intercultural communication, and mass communication. Holding a significant place among these categories, mass communication refers in the general sense to the process of transferring information to big masses via mass communication tools.

Mass communication tools, which show a rapid progress in parallel to technological developments, address to a very wide range of masses, and at the same time, have the power of manipulation and mobilization over people. Due to these features, mass communication tools have become the essential instruments of politics, and consequently, political communication as the combination of politics and communication sciences has grown to be the focus of attention in academic and intellectual circles.

The starting point of political communication, which is a sub-field of politics and communication, goes back to Aristotle. However, the emergence of the term “communication” in its current meaning coincides the initiation of researches executed on the effects of mass communication tools widely used in the twentieth century on political life. The identification of political communication with the propaganda activities carried out to manipulate masses especially during World War II caused the term to be attributed a negative meaning.

Reconstruction of democracies is possible by transforming the political masses devoted to the fascist history into a community with aims and critical perspective. The scientific definition of public opinion for determining the way of thinking and attitudes of a community is denoted as political communication by establishing a relationship between politics and communication (Köker, 1998:22). It is accepted that the indispensable reliance of governments on public approval in democracies will enable political communication to exist in the future as it does today.

Political communication was defined in the beginning as the government’s way of communication with the electoral body. Later it gained the meaning of discourse exchange between the politicians in the government and opposition parties especially during election campaigns.

The scope of this field expended in time and included the research on the role of mass communication tools in forming public opinion, and the effects of public research on political life. Today, political communication refers to the analysis of communication's role in political life in the way to comprise mass communication tools, public opinion polls and especially the political advertisement during election campaigns (Wolton, 1991: 51-52). As can be understood from this extensive definition, political communication draws attention to the interaction of several factors in politics.

Dominique Wolton defines communication as "the field which allows the exchange of contradictory discourses of three actors – politicians, journalists, and the public – who can legitimately argue about politics in front of the public" (Wolton, 1991:52). Accordingly, political communication refers to a process of exchanging diverse political discourses. The discourses in the course of this exchange process do not necessarily have to be concordant. Dispute as an indispensable factor in politics is experienced in terms of a communication style.

Political discourse, as opposed to other discourses, carries a meaning for all fellow-citizens. The power of political discourse stems from its scope and various degrees of legitimacy (Van Dijk, 1999:364). In this sense, legitimacy is determined with elections for the politicians, with the process of transferring the news for the journalists, and with science for public vote. The interaction of these three legitimate actors constitutes political communication. Especially during election campaigns, many public opinion polls take place, and the results of these researches are broadcasted via mass communication tools, exclusively on the websites of the political parties. The remarkable differences between the results of the public opinion polls cause the objectivity of these researches to be questioned.

Gurevitch and Blunler, who define political communication as the transfer of messages from the un-equals (the extremely informed and uninformed ones, the extremely powerful and unpowerful ones, the sensitive and the indifferent ones) to others, note that political communication embodies a division between the actuators and spectators, and therefore limits the participatory energy that the system may possibly produce (1997:201).

Political communication is both the expression and building block of political culture reflected on government institutions and the government itself (the political system) in all societies (Nimmo and Swanson, 1990:23). The political culture of every country shapes its own process of political communication. The field of communication in Turkey has gained a wider

scope with the foundation of private televisions and radio stations at the end of 1980s after a period of the domination of the government over the tools of communication, and thus Turkey has advanced less in the field of communication in comparison to the West. Despite the fact that the first researches in the field of political communication in Turkey date back to 1960s, they have not gone beyond propaganda-cantered studies. The studies in this field have multiplied and advanced together with the increase in the number of private radios and televisions, public opinion research companies, and the transformations in the field of political communication that gradually turned into a sector on its own. However, despite all this progress so far, it is not possible to talk about a sufficient number of extended academic studies scrutinizing political communication from a wider perspective taking into account the diverse aspects of the issue.

Political communication is still identified with “a series of communication activities carried out during the times of election” in Turkey. In this respect, both the ones in the government and in the opposition parties should prolong this activity so as to maintain the trust and support of the public via mass communication tools that gradually achieve more efficiency and scope with the help of new communication technologies.

Internet Usage in Political Communication

ARPANET, which had been developed by the United States Department of Defence for the purpose of connecting research units, took the name INTERNET in 1990 and became the biggest civil network connecting millions of people today. As the use of the internet has increasingly spread all over the world, internet use for specific purposes has enhanced in many fields such as economics, health, culture, art, entertainment and science. The gradual increase in the use of Internet has brought in its train the use for political purposes as well.

The use of Internet for political purposes has rapidly gained momentum in the United States, where the Internet is extensively used. The fact that political parties depended on the Internet especially during the presidential election campaigns in 1996 in the United States stimulated the academic studies in this field. Similarly, a notable increase in the use of Internet besides traditional mass communication tools is observed in the field of political communication in the European countries, especially in Germany, France and Holland.

Traditional mass communication tools rather reinforce one-way and hierarchical political communication. It is noted that Internet, unlike

traditional mass communication tools, affects the nature of communication in five different ways: 1-Volume: a vast amount of knowledge may be transferred via the Internet. 2- Speed: The compressed data significantly reduces the amount of time necessary for conveying a particular message. 3-Format: the audio and video content of messages provides a dynamic and effective transfer. 4- Direction: Internet permits mutual, simultaneous and interactive communication. Furthermore, the possibilities of horizontal and vertical communication between groups and individuals enhance through hypertext links on the websites. 5- Individual Control: Having control over sending and receiving messages facilitates the search for required information without the need for specific data centres, and allows determining the information to be published or broadcast (Gibson and Ward, 2000: 304). Subsequently, web-based communication is a more interactive and rapid process, which is not systematized by a particular centre.

Internet, which itself is also a mass communication tool, causes structural and formal transformations in the current mass communication tools. This new sophisticated media environment, through which political parties can control the agenda without any intermediaries and present themselves more thoroughly, dispels the lack of communication between political parties and their electoral bodies and provides a considerable increase in the number of membership to political parties. Moreover, it also commences new opportunities for conveying messages to greater target masses and providing expansive and rapid financial support. Thus, many extremist political parties, which cannot benefit from the support of especially traditional mass communication tools, tend to use the Internet, as it is a low-cost tool in reaching the masses and does not contain any external pressure factors. In addition to all these aspects, political parties' desire to leave a professional and modern impression on the masses plays a significant role in their tendency to use web-based communication.

Actually, there are several reasons for the political parties' preference to use this new communication technology. Political parties fulfil many functions through the use of Internet: 1- Information provision, 2- Campaigning, 3- Resource generation, 4- Networking and organization strengthening, 5- Promoting participation (Gibson and Ward, 2000: 304-305).

Information Provision: This function refers to the process, through which parties transfer the information about their identities and politics to bigger masses in a social and educational manner rather than as an activity for collecting votes. Besides, the fact that Internet is a low-cost method addressing to masses ensures significant advantages on these grounds.

Campaigning: The word campaign here points to the activities carried out by parties so as to get new voters on their side. Modern campaigns can easily be organized and supported by means of websites. Parties compete with one another in order to persuade especially young electors, who are to vote for the first time. The fact that this young population has gradually turned towards web-based communication in one way or another augments the interest of political parties in attracting young electors.

Resource Generation: This description refers to the activities realized by political parties to increase their financial support and attract new voters. Financial grants and support constitute the most consequential point of attention of the websites of party members in the United States. However, this aspect carries less significance in countries like Turkey, where parties receive official support from the government.

Networking and Organization Strengthening: This function refers to the activities carried out by political parties in order to build up and strengthen internal and external connections. What is meant by internal connections is the connections established between the parties and the electors in the constituency, between the parties and the elected politicians from the constituency, between the parties and the managers in decision, and finally between the parties and various pressure groups like trade unions and women organizations. External connections refer to the ones between the parties and other institutions, such as several interest groups, government representatives or media institutions.

Promoting Participation: This expression points to the methods applied by the parties with the intention of promoting the participation of citizens to political events. Furthermore, citizens can simultaneously get involved into online debates by means of real time chatting and discussions.

Thus, Internet obviously provides the opportunity of greater capacity for a more participatory democracy. This in turn brings up the approach of "internet democracy".

There are two approaches concerning the effects of Internet on political life (Norris, 2003: 23-27). According to the first approach, Internet is the provider of virtual democracy. As asserted in this view, which emerged at the beginning of 1990's, Internet reinforces social capital, mobilizes the public, provides transparency with the government units, reduces the distance between the governor and the governed, and therefore facilitates direct democracy. According to the defenders of this view, the use of Internet will promote political participation by means of attracting the youth, who have become indifferent towards political life.

The second approach, which emerged towards the end of 1990's with the claim that Internet does not create the expected effect during the period between elections, holds a suspicious view about the outcomes of the Internet. The defenders of this approach maintain that the functional contribution of Internet to political life is not more than the contribution of traditional mass communication tools. It is further claimed that the websites of political parties do not fulfil the expected functions, such as motivating the supporters, maintaining security, and crystallizing floating votes. In line with this view, Internet is effective only on people engaged in politics. Also, in parallel with the development level of countries, rational profit derived from internet usage differs between people who have the opportunity to use this tool extensively and the ones who do not, and thus social inequality increases.

The Analysis of the Websites of Political Parties

Website analysis, which does not have a long history, has become a significant area of study attracting attention from many disciplines besides politics. The approaches used in these analyses are categorized in two groups as qualitative and quantitative. The main concern of these studies focuses on the aim and design of websites, although they differ in accordance with the scientific field performing the analysis. It is observed that many organizations, such as governments, state units, political parties, official institutions, international organizations and non-governmental organizations benefit from the use of Internet for political purposes. In this study, Internet usage in political communication is analyzed on the scale of political parties. Although the analyses carried out so far on the websites of political parties have been successful in terms of drawing a general framework, they remain to be insufficient in developing counter-indexes for measuring diverse characteristics.

In this study, the basic problematic about "the effects of the differences in development levels on the internet usage in political communication" has been evaluated through the analysis carried out on the website use of Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Republican People's Party (CHP) from Turkey, Republican National Committee (RNC) and Democratic National Committee (DNC) from the United States. The reason why these parties were included in the analysis stems from the fact that the ruling party AKP and the main opposition party CHP shape political life in Turkey, and the ruling party RNC and its most powerful rival DNC similarly shape political life in the United States. The websites of these four

political parties were examined between 15 January and 30 January 2004. The methodological part of the study has been based on Gibson, Ward, Margolis, Resnick and Ward's article entitled "Election Campaigning on the World Wide Web in the USA and UK: A Comparative Analysis" (2003).

Each website included in the analysis was given points according to the flow of information on the website, resource generation, communication networking, functionality feature including participation and campaign indexes, and presentation capacity including visuality, accessibility, actuality and visibility. In addition, upward, downward and vertical flow of interactive information communication was examined.

Research Results

Depending on the function and presentation characteristics of each analyzed party website, the quality of the contents and the efficiency in presenting these contents were brought to light. In this respect, parties' aim in using Internet for political communication and the extent to which they could fulfil this goal was revealed.

Table 1: Parties in Turkey: Functions of Websites

When the functions of the websites of AKP and CHP from Turkey were observed, downward information provision was found to have greater influence. The research revealed that information provision of AKP was higher than that of CHP. Although documentary information such as party history, structure, ideologies, politics and legislation was present on the websites of both parties; event calendar, frequently asked questions, and privacy policy within the function of information provision were not come across on both websites. Both sites reserve significant space for press statements and the press news about the parties. While the homepage of CHP includes a link to a periodically published bulletin consisting of news about the party, the homepage of AKP includes a link to AKİM that carries out the party's public relations activities and provides news about the party.

In terms of the function of resource generation, none of the websites has a category for collecting grants or selling party related-products to provide income except for the membership fee on the AKP website. The law pertaining to the foundation and goals of political parties in Turkey is the determining factor in this result.

Regarding networking, both parties follow approximate paths. It is observed that internal communication indexes of both parties maintain a

higher level compared to their external communication. It was also noted that the analyzed websites have links to local units, members of parliament, and women and youth branches within the scope of internal communication, whereas there are links to mediums, judicial institutions and hospitals within the context of external communication. Yet, none of the websites include links to international political parties that defend parallel ideologies.

Participation function examined in terms of feedback, openness, opinion poll and interaction indexes reveals the same values for both parties. Both sites provide the users with the opportunity of sending e-mails to party leaders and members of parliament. AKP website includes a button of "visitor's book" where website visitors can write down their opinions and suggestions (we have not received an answer to the message we sent via this link about the number of e-mails sent to this site and the reply rates), while CHP website offers its visitors a discussion platform where they can simultaneously debate on certain topics. Nevertheless, it is not possible to say that the level of upward and interactive information communication flow on either of the sites is sufficient. On the other hand, a research conducted in Turkey in December 2000 puts forward that 37.2% of Turkish Internet users use the Internet primarily for chatting (Anderson, 2001:110).

At the time of this study, active campaigning was observed to have started on the website of the ruling party AKP, as local elections that would be held on 28 March 2004 was approaching. The party website introduced detailed information about the election and candidate profiles, and provided links for the activities organized by the party for the election process; whereas no remarkable preparation for the election was observed on the website of the main opposition party CHP. Yet, negative propaganda activities against AKP were carried out on CHP website, although there was no such practice on AKP website.

Table 2: Parties in Turkey: Website Style and Delivery

Sources: AKP Website (<http://www.akparti.org.tr>) and CHP Website (<http://www.chp.org.tr>), 15-30 January 2004.

In the analysis made about the presentation of websites, it was observed that AKP website included more appealing elements compared to CHP website. While CHP website consisted of only frames and images, AKP website was enriched with visual elements like graphics, frames, images, and live streaming. Furthermore, AKP website spared a section on

“AK Songs” and “AK Poems” in order to attract the attention of users.

In terms of accessibility both parties displayed a low performance. Neither of the websites is accessible from WAP/PDA. In addition, both websites lack a special software option for people with sight defects. While the documents are available in text format on CHP website, AKP website offers the option of an English version of the site. The homepages of AKP and CHP websites have 35.8 KB and 811 Byte data capacity respectively. Generally, the sites exceeding 25 KB are known to load more slowly due to the high number of graphics.

In terms of navigability, both sites lack facilities to provide the users with easy navigation, although they both include site map and search engine. The analyzed websites did not consist of the latest update time, whereas the analysis made on documents revealed that both sites were updated every 1-2 days. AKP and CHP were found to have 324 and 431 links respectively in Google, which is the most favourite search engine among Internet users.

Table 3: Parties in the USA: Function of Websites

The analysis made on the website functions of RNC and DNC from the United States revealed that the websites of both parties were quite rich in information flow, and therefore displayed a good performance in terms of downwards information communication flow. Both parties put press releases on their websites. Besides, RNC website includes political caricatures and press/broadcast options such as GOP TV, GOP Radio, magazine, etc. Both websites provide extended and detailed information about the history, structure, legislation, ideology and politics of the parties. Events calendar and secrecy policy, which do not exist on the websites of the political parties in Turkey, are included in both websites.

When resource generation is considered, distinctive differences are observed between the websites of the political parties in the United States and the ones in Turkey. Both parties in the USA include online donation forms. Besides, within the scope of merchandise index, miscellaneous products carrying the party logo (t-shirts, hats, cups, etc.) are offered for sale on the website in order to draw income for the party. Both parties show similar values in terms of internal and external networking index, and their level of horizontal information communication flow is inadequate. On the website of RNC, which holds a conservative ideology, there are links to organizations with similar ideology (American Conservative, etc.). Both sites include links to organizations formed by citizens from different ethnic

roots (Spanish, African Americans, etc.) and religions (Catholic, Jewish, Muslim), which are effective in political lobbies in the United States. There are also links to organizations formed by disabled citizens. Moreover, on the website of DNC, which has a more reformist ideology compared to RNC, there are links for Gay and Lesbian groups that may be considered as potential electoral bodies. In order to increase the number of its visitors, DNC also offers a special link on its website for the ones who seek jobs or employees. According to the research conducted in the USA in 2000, the usage of Internet, which was a tool of hobby and entertainment in the beginning, gradually turned into a tool for research purposes in time (Anderson, 2001:107).

It is possible to say that American parties embody the same values regarding the participation function. Yet, RNC website, unlike DNC site, includes public opinion surveys and questionnaires. Both websites provide the visitors with links where they can state their opinions and communicate via e-mail. In this respect, the political parties in the United States are observed to display a better performance in terms of downward information communication flow.

When the campaigning functions were examined, it was noted that both party websites had already started an intensive campaigning process for the presidency election that would take place on 2 November 2000. On the websites of both parties, there were negative propaganda activities against each other, and intensive efforts to include visitors in party membership. Unlike the political parties in Turkey, the parties in the United States use their websites more efficiently to carry out their campaigns. This result may be acknowledged as an indicator of the significant role that Internet usage plays in political communication.

Table 4: Parties in the USA: Website Style and Delivery

It is noted that the websites of the political parties in the USA are equipped with rich and plentiful visual material. Both websites include features of graphics, image, sound, movie and animation streaming. In terms of accessibility, both websites may also be viewed in Spanish. Besides, DNC website offers documents also in text format. It is possible to access both websites through WAP/PDA. RNC website has a capacity of 84.7 KB data. Since the save option on DNC website was inactive throughout the analysis, total data capacity could not be measured.

Site map and search engine were available in both websites as a feature of navigability. DNC website had the option of fixed menu bar on lower level pages. However, it is not quite possible to say that the users of either site were offered the opportunity to surf easily on the websites. Like websites of the Turkish political parties, RNC and DNC websites were also updated every 1-2 days. In terms of visibility, the number of links in Google for Republican National Committee and Democratic National Committee was found to be 5290 and 504 respectively.

CONCLUSION

The development levels of countries affect their possibilities to have new communication technologies, and therefore determine their levels of accessing information. Internet provides an immense opportunity of capacity for accessing information, and when the rates of Internet usage all over the world are taken into account, developed countries stand out to be more advantageous in these terms. In this study, which incorporates the comparative analysis of the websites of political parties in Turkey and the USA regarding the use of Internet in political communication, the level of Internet accessibility in both countries was taken into consideration before answering the question “How efficiently do political parties use the Internet?”

68.6% (205.326.680) of the estimated total population in the United States (299.093.237) by 2006, and only 13.7% (10.220.000) of the population in Turkey (74.709.412) by the same year will have access to Internet. When the rates of Internet usage all over the world are noted, the United States as the birthplace of Internet heads the list with a rate of 20,1, while Turkey is the 20th in the list with a rate of 1% (Internet World Stats, online). In addition, only 2% of the Internet users throughout the world visit the websites of political parties, whereas this rate mounts up to 7% in the United States (Crabtree 2001, Stromer Galley et al, 2001 qtd. in Gibson et al. 2003:67). As can be seen clearly in these data, there is a significant difference between the rates of Internet usage in both countries.

When the Internet usage in political communication in both countries has been analyzed in the light of these data with a specific focus on political parties, it is observed that the USA has a more rooted history in this field. In Internet usage, the political parties in Turkey emphasize introducing themselves, giving information about the party politics and programmes, explaining their goals, and therefore trying to leave a good impression on the public. Although the political parties in the USA also pursue the same

objective, the main motivation for using Internet in political communication in the USA is resource generation. It is not possible to talk about a deficiency in this aspect for the political parties in Turkey due to the legal arrangements.

In the research carried out between 15 January and 30 January 2004, a serious activity about the campaign process could not be observed on the websites of political parties in Turkey, although local elections that would take place on 28 March 2004 were approaching. On the other hand, the political parties in the USA started intensive campaign activities, although the presidency elections on 2 November 2004 would start in a relatively longer period. RNC and DNC, which are the two biggest parties in the USA, carried out negative propaganda activities against each other on their websites. In contrast, only the website of the opposition party CHP included a limited amount of negative propaganda activities against the ruling party AKP.

While the websites of political parties in the USA included links to the websites of marginal groups (gays, lesbians, etc.) and organizations founded by American citizens from different ethnicity and religion, a similar approach was not encountered in Turkish websites. Although the party websites in both countries offered links to women and youth associations, it is not possible to say that an effective effort was put to attract these groups, which are generally known to be rather indifferent in politics.

It was noted that the party websites in the USA had a richer visual content compared to the ones in Turkey. The search on Google, which is one of the most widespread search engines in the world, also revealed that the political parties in the USA had a higher rate of visibility than the parties in Turkey.

All in all, Internet usage in political communication is a multi-dimensional and highly interactive process. Internet is not the key to all problems in political life. As this study puts forth, the development levels of countries has a significant effect on the usage of Internet and the rational benefit derived from this usage.

Subsequently, it has been determined that the websites of political parties in the USA, which is one of the most developed countries in the world, display a better performance in terms of purpose and activity compared to the party websites in Turkey; yet, it has been noted that the opportunities offered by web-based communication – especially in the interactivity level – were not adequately turned to account today, a period witnessing hot debates on digital democracy.

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Table 1: Parties in Turkey: Functions of Websites

	Information Provision	Resource Generation	Networking Internal-External	Participation	Campaign
AKP	13	3	6 - 4	7	4
CHP	10	0	4 - 5	6	2
Mean Score	11.5	1.5	5 - 4.5	6.5	3
Range	0 -16	0 -13	0 -6 0 - 15	0 - n	0 -9

Table 2: Parties in Turkey: Website Style and Delivery

	Glitz/Multimedia	Access	Navigation	Freshness
AKP	4	2	2	6
CHP	2	1	3	6
Mean Score	3	1.5	2.5	6
Range	0 -6	0 -5	0 - n	0 - 6

Sources: AKP Website (<http://www.akparti.org.tr>) and CHP Website (<http://www.chp.org.tr>), 15-30 January 2004.

Table 3: Parties in the USA: Function of Websites

	Information Provision	Resource Generation	Networking Internal-External	Participation	Campaign
RNC	14	9	5 - 6	4	8
DNC	15	6	5 - 6	6	7
Mean Score	14.5	7.5	5 - 6	5	7.5
Range	0 -16	0 -13	0 -6 0 - 15	0 - n	0 -9

Table 4: Parties in the USA: Website Style and Delivery

	Glitz/Multimedia	Access	Navigation	Freshness
RNC	6	3	2	6
DNC	6	2	3	6
Mean Score	6	2.5	2.5	6
Range	0 -6	0 -5	0 - n	0 - 6

Sources: RNC Website (<http://www.rnc.org>) and DNC Website (<http://www.democrats.org>), 15-30 January 2004.

Appendix

Scoring System: Party Web-Site Survey: ****

Functions

Information Provision

Additive index - 1 point assigned for each item present (0 – 16)

Organisational history

Structure

Values/ideology

Policies

Documents

Newsletters

Media releases

People/Who's Who

Leader focus

Candidate profiles

Electoral Information

Event Calendar

Conference Information

Frequently Asked Questions

Privacy Policy

Article Archive or Library

Resource Generation

Cumulative index (0-13) Three ordinal indices:

(i) Donation index 0 - 4

(ii) Merchandise index 0 - 4

(iii) Membership index, 0 - 4

(iv) Associate membership/volunteer solicitation 1 = present 0 = absent

For each index (1) reference made and postal address listed (2) download form and post (3) online enquiry (specific email or online form) (4) online transaction (0) no references made.

Networking

Internal

Ordinal index: 0-5 plus point for Extranet

- Internal links include those to local parties, MP's/MEPs, international branches

if they are independent of the main party site. 0 = no links; 1 = 1-10; 2 = 11-20; 3 = 21-50; 4 = 51-100; 5 = +100.

- Extranet available from site or members only pages 1 = present
0 = absent

External

Cumulative index: 0 – 15 (3 ordinal indices)

- Partisan links are those to other parties and organisations that are supportive of the party's goals. 0 = no links; 1 = 1-10; 2 = 11-20; 3 = 21-50; 4 = 51-100; 5 = +100.
- Reference links are those to neutral or news/educational sites such as news broadcasters, newspapers, parliamentary/government sites, national libraries etc. 0 = no links; 1 = 1-10; 2 = 11-20; 3 = 21-50; 4 = 51-100; 5 = +100
- Commercial links are those promoting business services such as book sellers, web designers. 0 = no links; 1 = 1-10; 2 = 11-20; 3 = 21-50; 4 = 51-100; 5 = +100

Participation

Cumulative index 0 – n (2 ordinal indices and two count)

Openness (0 - n) Count of email contacts to distinct units or branches within the party listed on site, i.e. web master, hq, candidates/MPs, local organisations, leader, international office, youth organisation press office, etc. Each unit/branch = 1.

Feedback index (0–3) Ordinal (1) email address on the site; (2) email address explicitly focused on soliciting comments; (3) an online form to submit views offered.

Opinion Poll (0 - n) Number of opinion polls offered.

Interaction index (0-4) Ordinal (1) games/gimmicks to play; (2) bulletin board or guestbook to post views; (3) chat room for real-time discussion; (4) opportunity for online debate with leader/senior organisation figures.

Campaigning

Additive index - 1 point assigned for each item present (0 –9)

Election site

Negative campaigning (banner, pop-up ad etc. on home page) Targeting expat voters Targeting marginal constituency/swing voter (explicit effort)

Cookie

Join an email update list

Become online campaigner

Information on proxy/absent vote
Download logo
Download offline leaflets/propaganda

Delivery

Glitz/Multimedia

Cumulative index (0-6) Comprised two additive indices
Homepage design index 1 point for each item present (0-3)
Graphics, frames, moving ../images
Multimedia index 1 point for each item present (0-3)
Sound, video, live streaming

Access

This consists of two dimensions, access in principle and access in practice.

In principle index 1 point for each item present (0-5)

no frames option

text only option (entire site)

text only documents to download and print

WAP/PDA 'wireless' enabled

foreign language translation

blind/visually impaired software

In practice

size of home page in Kb (>25 slows site loading time significantly)

Navigability

Additive index - 1 point for each item present (0 – n)

Navigation tips

No. of search engines

Home page icon on lower level pages

Fixed menu bar on lower level pages

Site map/index

Freshness

Ordinal index (0-6)

Updated daily (6); 1-2 days (5); 3-7 days (4); every two weeks (3); monthly

(2); 1-6 months

(1); + 6 months (0)

Visibility

Number of links in calculated with search engine, e.g. Google

****Source: Gibson, R., Margolis, M., Resnick, D., Ward, S. (2003)

“Election Campaigning on the WWW in the US and UK: A Comparative Analysis”, *Party Politics* 9 (1), Sage Publications, pp. 22-24.