



## NEW MEDIA USE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: THE CASE OF ISTANBUL

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### Abstract

#### Article Info

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This study focuses on the role of new media platforms in political participation and democratization. The research was conducted among individuals over 18 living in Istanbul, and the sample was determined using a stratified sampling method. The study adopted the quantitative method, and data were obtained using the survey data collection technique with the participation of 429 people. These data were subjected to thematic and descriptive analysis, and the relationship between the participants' media use practices and their participation in political processes was analyzed in the context of demographic data. According to the findings obtained in this study, the platforms, usage practices, and content preferred by the participants are especially effective in the political participation process. One of the most important findings is that new media platforms increase access to political information but are limited in encouraging active political participation. On the other hand, while individuals with a high level of political interest are seen to use new media platforms more consciously in terms of political participation, the fact that the general audience tends to be more passive viewers is another important finding. Thus, whether new media platforms are only an information tool or an active participation platform for individuals comes to the fore.

**Keywords:** Political Communication, New Media Platforms, Political Participation, Media Consumption, Agenda, Democracy.

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## **1. Introduction**

Traditional mass media and new media platforms are among the most important parts of political systems in contemporary democracies. The most important feature of these tools is that mass media and new media platforms have the power to address and influence large masses (Aziz, 1982). Since these tools assume decisive roles on behalf of society in contemporary democracies, they are the fourth power of the political system in democracies (Güz, 2008). As a matter of fact, mass media and new media platforms have come to the forefront regarding the effects they create during election periods. In other words, these tools protect the existing system and effectively form public opinion to improve the democratic process, especially during election periods (Nisbet, 2008). On the other hand, it is one of the greatest expectations that mass media and new media platforms should be more careful about the public's access to political information, especially during election periods (Savigny, 2002). The reason for such an expectation is that these tools have the power to shape both social and political processes (Özkan, 2006). Because these tools can control power relations and make room for different views and opinions, especially during election periods, it can be said that they are effective in the free formation of public opinion (Atabek, 2002). Thus, the social and political roles of the media can be understood more clearly.

Since the 20th century, developments in information and mass communication technologies, especially new media (social media) that emerged with the widespread use of computer and internet technologies, have provided individuals with the opportunity to perceive and criticize and to quickly share and discuss social, cultural, economic and administrative developments around them (Yurdakul, 2016). Considering the development of technology and the increasing impact of digitalization, social media platforms have radically transformed political processes. With new media platforms becoming one of the most important spaces of daily life, it is understood that the relationship between politicians and voters has also transformed (Türk, 2013). The transformative power of new media, especially in political processes and election periods, stems from the fact that, unlike the one-way communication structure of traditional mass media, new media offers an interactive and two-way political space. Thus, it is thought that political participation and the democratic process will develop more independently. On the other hand, considering the impact and speed of these tools in terms of feedback, it becomes easier for political actors to manage electoral processes. In this context, political actors and parties can make efforts to turn the electoral processes in their favor by making an assessment of the socio-cultural structure, economic behavior and media

consumption practices of voters (Barlas, 2017). In other words, while it is seen that there is a relationship between social media users' backgrounds, social characteristics, patterns of use of new media platforms and contexts of content and their political participation (Bakker & De Vreese, 2011), the analysis and use of this relationship by political actors can have different results in terms of individuals' participation in political processes. One of the best examples is the 2008 Obama election campaign, in which digital campaigning was conducted alongside traditional campaigns and mobilized the masses quickly. However, this situation has also been used as a manipulation tool and has taken place in history as the Cambridge Analytica scandal. In this respect, new media platforms, like traditional mass media, can have different effects on democratic participation with their ownership structure (Curran, 2017) and capital relations in electoral processes.

This study focuses on the relationship between the practices of using new media platforms and political processes. In particular, focusing on whether the relationship between the technological tools preferred by social media users, their platform preferences, and the purposes of using these platforms is significant in terms of participation in political processes and the relationship between this participation and their political preferences was evaluated through factors such as the time spent in digital space, the importance attributed to digital spaces in daily life, age, and gender. In the study, where the quantitative method was chosen, the population consists of adult individuals over 18 residing in Istanbul. Stratified sampling was applied, and the data obtained through the survey were subjected to thematic and descriptive analysis

## **2.Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. New Media and Political Participation**

Today, it is understood that new media platforms play an important role in how individuals participate in political processes and perceive the agenda. These platforms, which are more dynamic and interactive than traditional media tools, are seen to transform processes such as obtaining, interpreting, and disseminating political information. "New media, as a new medium of mass communication, has made it possible for society and politics to interact with each other while acting as a bridge just like traditional media" (Öztay, 2022). Especially in the early literature, these platforms were considered a renewed form of participation, content production, and interaction (Casemajor et al., 2015). Political actors can share videos about themselves, their projects, or to raise public awareness through their own social media accounts. These videos, which are widely followed, can be commented on, and shared by followers

(Ulusal & Özdemir, 2024, p. 38). However, along with this optimistic approach, the uncertainty of digital platforms and their features in democratic processes have also been criticized in many respects (Gillespie, 2010). Thus, it is seen that the use of new media platforms not only increases democratic participation but also poses different risks.

The increasing use of digital media and their growing importance in political processes is differentiated by the fact that users prefer these media to obtain news and information for their needs, unlike conventional media (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). On the other hand, using digital media enables connected action and activates communities, facilitating political participation not only during election periods but also in non-election periods (Copeland & Feezell, 2017). In this context, the interaction opportunities digital platforms provide transform how social media users engage in political processes. These platforms enable users to participate in the political system during election periods and throughout their use.

The prominent role of new media platforms in obtaining news and information is important in political participation. Considering situations such as the discussion of public events, which is one of the results of the structural features of these platforms, situations such as agenda formation, obtaining information about the agenda, interpreting and sharing the agenda pave the way for participation in political processes for many segments of the society (Demirhan, 2023, p. 184). Supporting these discussion environments on social media platforms with reinforcing elements such as written, visual, and video changes the dimension of the information obtained from this field. For this reason, the actors of political processes can be involved in the usage practices of users by producing information through social media in different ways (Dursunoğlu, 2017). Since this is realized not in a temporal period but as a process, the participation of social media users in political processes intensifies and moves to a different dimension.

The multi-layered structure of new media platforms allows users to have differentiated experiences as a communication tool in political participation processes (Bayraktutan et al., 2014). There is a relationship between the features of new media platforms and the usage practices of users in these experiences. This relationship relates to users shaping the platform features according to their needs and preferences. For example, while Twitter (X) creates a different experience in terms of following the political agenda, instant information flow, and participation in discussions, Facebook plays an active role in forming groups, events, and collective actions formed by people who are more similar to each other. Instagram and TikTok

offer a different experience. These platforms, which are more visual-oriented, offer new possibilities for the participation of specific age groups in political processes and the dissemination of political messages. This multi-layered structure differentiates users' participation in political processes according to the platforms they prefer, their usage practices, the purposes they aim for, and their desire for interaction.

In addition to the dominant uses of new media platforms, such as communication with close relatives and leisure time evaluation in daily life, it can be said that the purpose of using new media platforms, such as getting news and information, following the agenda, and taking part in social processes is too important to be ignored. "Although television is the main tool for getting news, the second reason for connecting to social networks is expressed as following the agenda" (Şener et al., 2015, p. 94). In this context, it is seen that people who use new media platforms, especially during election periods, follow breaking news, like the content and posts produced by a candidate and a party, and share content, news, and information to their accounts (Balcı & Saritaş, 2016). Thus, while it is possible to say that these platforms are used more intensively for political participation during election periods, it can be argued that this participation will also vary according to age, gender, education level, and capital accumulation.

The usage practices of new media platforms, with their characteristics that may vary according to age, education, and socio-economic status, facilitating the participation of users in political processes and facilitating the participation of groups or individuals in political processes, acting with common goals, providing new ways of thinking and action, as well as being effective in actions such as combining the creative characteristics of individuals with political intentions (Fenton & Barassi, 2011: 181), are important in terms of political participation and democratization. However, although new media platforms have positive effects on the process of political participation and democratization due to the structural features of the platforms, it is necessary to say that their effects are limited in the process of political participation and socialization (Metin, 2016). Therefore, individuals can act with different motivations in political participation processes. Despite this, it is also argued that using new media platforms, following the agenda, and obtaining news and information are important in political participation processes (Chen & Chan, 2017).

To summarize the literature, there are two distinct approaches and debates on new media platforms and political participation. First, while optimistic studies approach new media platforms from the point that these platforms positively affect political participation and

democratization, pessimistic discussions approach the situation in the opposite direction. In this respect, the studies support both scenarios. Therefore, the new media platforms individuals prefer and the content they prefer on these platforms is one of the keys to their political participation processes (Prior, 2005, p. 587).

### **3.Methodology**

#### **3.1.Research Design**

This research uses the relational survey model and survey method, which was one of the quantitative data collection methods used for the study. In addition, the demographic information form and new media usage questionnaire developed by the researchers were used to collect data.

#### **3.2.Participants**

The study population consists of adults over 18 who reside in Istanbul. The stratified sampling method was used to select the study sample from the population. In this context, 429 individuals participated in the survey. Of the individuals participating in this study, 51.7% were female (N=222) and 48.3% were male (N=207). 21.9% of the participants were between the ages of 18-24 (N=94), 21.2% were between the ages of 25-34 (N=91), 26.6% were between the ages of 35-44 (N=114), 20.5% were between the ages of 45-54 (N=88), 8.6% were between the ages of 55-64 (N=37) and 1.2% were over 65 (N=5). The distribution of the demographic information of the participants in the study is as follows.

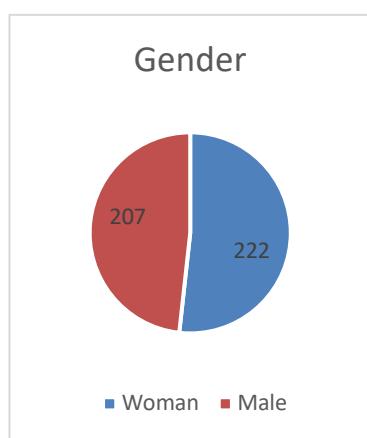


Figure 1.

*Distribution by Gender*

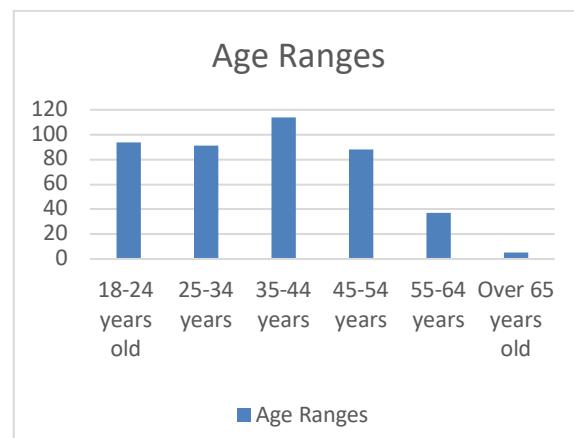


Figure 2.

*Distribution by Age*

When the participants' interest in politics is analyzed, 27.5% of the participants stated that they were not interested in politics at all (N=118), 35.2% were less interested in politics (N=151),

32.4% were interested in politics (N=139), and 4.9% were very interested in politics (N=21). In addition, 8.2% of the participants stated that they were members of a political party (N=35), while 91.8% stated that they were not (N=394).

### **3.3.Data Collection Tools**

The study used the demographic information form and new media usage questionnaire, which the researchers created by utilizing the literature (Gürbüz, 2022). The demographic information form created to obtain the participants' demographic information consists of eight items. In addition, the New Media Usage Questionnaire, which was created to obtain the participants' new media usage information, includes seven questions.

### **3.4.Data Analysis**

Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the demographic information obtained from the participants in the sample and the new media usage questionnaire.

### **3.5.Ethical Considerations**

In order to implement the specified data collection tool, approval was obtained from the XX Ethics Committee (Protocol No: XXX). The research data were collected face-to face and participants of the study was informed about the purpose of the study during the data collection process.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1.New Media Use Survey**

Participants were asked a total of seven different questions about new media use. When the participants were asked how many hours they spend on average per day on social media tools (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc.), 50.1% stated that they spend 0-2 hours per day (N=215), 30.1% 3-4 hours per day (N=129), 15.2% 5-6 hours per day (N=65) and 4.7% 7 hours or more per day (N=20). On the other hand, 72.7% of the individuals reported spending 0-2 hours a day (N=312), 17.2% spent 3-4 hours a day (N=74), 4.2% spent 5-6 hours a day (N=18), and 5.8% spent more than 7 hours a day (N=25) on internet media (internet news, etc.). When the same question was asked for traditional media (radio, television, newspaper), 84.4% of the participants reported spending 0-2 hours a day (N=362), 13.8% spent 3-4 hours a day (N=59), 1.6% spent 5-6 hours a day (N=7) and 0.2% spent 7 hours or more a day (N=1) using traditional media (Table 1).

*Table 1.**Time Spent on Media Tools (daily average)*

New Media Usage	Frequency	%
Time spent on social media tools (days)		
0-2 hours	215	50,1
3-4 hours	129	30,1
5-6 hours	65	15,2
7 hours and over	20	4,7
Time spent on internet media tools (days)		
0-2 hours	312	72,7
3-4 hours	74	17,2
5-6 hours	18	4,2
7 hours and over	25	5,8
Time spent in traditional media (days)		
0-2 hours	362	84,4
3-4 hours	59	13,8
5-6 hours	7	1,6
7 hours and over	1	0,2

The participants were asked which new media environments they used more and were allowed to choose multiple options. In this context, 96.5% of the participants stated that they use social media more (N=414), 38% use websites more (N=163), 4% use Wikis more (N=17), and 5.1% use blogs more (N=22). More specifically, when the participants were asked which tools they use more for new media and allowed to choose more than one tool, 98.4% stated that they use mobile/mobile phones (N=422), 16.8% tablets (N=72), 12.1% desktop computers (N=52), 6.3% laptops (N=27), 4.7% Smart TVs (N=20). Apart from these, no participant said they used a different new media tool (Table 2.)

*Table 2.**New Media Environment and Tools Used for New Media*

	Frequency	%
Use of new media environments (multiple options)		
Social media	414	96,5
Websites	163	38
Wikis	17	14

Blogs	22	5,1
Tools used for new media (multiple options)		
Mobile/mobile phone	422	98,4
Tablet	72	16,8
Desktop computer	52	12,1
Laptop computer	27	6,3
SmartTV	20	4,7

When research participants were asked how important social media is in their daily lives, 5.4% reported that it is not important at all (N=23), 18.9% reported that it is not important (N=81), 28.9% reported that it is somewhat important (N=124), 36.6% reported that it is important (N=157), and 10.3% reported that it is very important (N=44).

Participants were asked to rank the social media platforms they frequently use, choosing three different media platforms as their top three choices. The options given are as follows: WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Telegram, and Discord. The social media platforms that the individuals who participated in the research use the most and ranked first are WhatsApp (N=189) at 44.1%, Instagram (N=107) at 24.9%, YouTube (N=64) at 14.9%, Twitter (N=35) at 8.2%, Facebook (N=24) with 5.6% and TikTok (N=10) with 2.3%. In addition, the second most used social media platforms are YouTube (N=144) at 33.6%, Instagram (N=140) at 32.6%, WhatsApp (N=60) at 14%, Facebook (N=37) at 8.6%, Twitter (N=34) with 7.9%, TikTok (N=12) with 2.8%, LinkedIn (N=1) with 0.2% and Telegram (N=1). The third most used social media platforms are YouTube (N=130) with 30.3%, Instagram (N=97) with 22.6%, WhatsApp (N=69) with 16.1%, Facebook (N=52) with 12.1%, Twitter (N=39) with 9.1%, TikTok (N=32) with 7.5%, Pinterest (N=5) with 1.2%, Telegram (N=3) with 0.7% and LinkedIn (N=2) with 0.5%.

In addition, participants were asked what they follow the most on social media and to rank the top three things they frequently follow. The options given are as follows: current news/events, politics, economy, culture and arts, daily life issues, fashion-magazine-entertainment, shopping, and religious issues. 56.6% of the participants stated that they follow current news/events in the first place (N=243), 20% stated that they follow daily life issues (N=86), 6.3% stated that they follow economy (N=27), 5% stated that they follow politics (N=86), 6.3% stated that they follow culture and arts (N=5), 8% follow fashion-magazine-entertainment (N=25), 5.1% follow politics (N=22), 4.7% follow economy (N=20), 0.7% follow shopping (N=3) and 0.7% follow religious issues (N=3). The things that the participants frequently follow in the second place are as

follows; 24.2% of the participants individuals stated that they follow daily life topics (N=104), 16.1% fashion-magazine-entertainment (N=69), 14.7% current news/events (N=63), 14.7% followed economy (N=63), 14.7% followed culture and arts (N=63), 11.9% followed politics (N=51), 2.3% followed shopping (N=10) and 1.4% (N=6) followed religious issues. The third most followed topics are daily life topics (N=90) with 21%, fashion-magazine-entertainment (N=85) with 19.8%, current news/events (N=67) with 15.6%, current news/events (N=67) with 14%, 9% followed culture and arts (N=64), 13.1% followed economy (N=56), 8.6% followed shopping (N=37), 5.6% followed politics (N=24), and 1.4% followed religious issues (N=6) (Table 3).

Table 3.

*New Media Environment and Social Media*

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
How important is social media in daily life?		
It doesn't matter at all	23	5,4
Not important	81	18,9
Partially important	124	28,9
Important	157	36,6
Very important	44	10,3
Most frequently used social media platforms (1st preference)		
WhatsApp	189	44,1
Instagram	107	24,9
Youtube	64	14,9
Twitter	35	8,2
Facebook	24	5,6
TikTok	10	2,3
Frequently followed content on social media (1st preference)		
Current news/events	243	56,6
Daily life topics	86	20
Economy	27	6,3
Fashion-magazine-entertainment	25	5,8
Culture and Arts	22	5,1
Politics	20	4,7
Shopping	3	0,7
Religious topics	3	0,7

When participants were asked for which purposes they use new media tools and allowed to choose more than one option, 83.9% (N=360) said to pass the time, 78.3% (N=336) said to follow the agenda, 63.3% (N=273) said to chat, 55,9% (N=240) stated that they use new media tools to access news, 29.1% (N=125) to make non-political posts, 27.7% (N=119) to follow their relatives, and 8.2% (N=35) to make political posts.

Table 4.

*Purposes of Using Media Tools*

	Frequency	%
For what purposes do you use the new media? (More than one option)		
Spending time	360	83,9
Following the agenda	336	78,3
Chatting	273	63,3
Accessing news	240	55,9
Sharing non-political posts	125	29,1
Following relatives	119	27,7
Political sharing	35	8,2

After determining the participants' purposes for using new media, the purposes were divided into those for political participation and those for non-political participation and cross-analyzed according to gender, age, political interest, and political party membership variables.

Table 5.

*Purposes of New Media Use According to Gender of Participants*

				Following the agenda	Making political posts	Accessing news	Posting non-political posts	Spending time	Chatting	Keeping track of my relatives
<b>Use for Political Participation</b>				<b>Non-Political Participatory Use</b>						
Gender	%	%	%							
Woman	77,5	6,3	51,8		27,5	86	66,7	32,4		
Male	79,2	10,1	60,4		30,9	81,6	60,4	22,7		

When participants were asked for which purposes they use new media tools and allowed to choose more than one option, 86% of female participants said they use new media tools to pass the time. In contrast, 81.6% of male individuals reported using new media tools to pass the time. When their use for political participation is analyzed, most women and men state that they use new media to follow the agenda.

Table 6.

*Purposes of New Media Use According to Participants' Age*

Use for Political Participation				Non-Political Participatory Use			
Age	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
18 - 24	89,4	3,2	34	22,3	83	38,3	19,1
25 - 34	82,4	6,6	56	34,1	85,7	73,6	29,7
35 - 44	70,2	7,9	65,8	27,2	83,3	71,1	29,8
45 - 54	76,1	12,5	60,2	29,5	85,2	69,3	21,6
55 - 64	70,3	13,5	70,3	37,8	81,1	64,9	45,9
Over 65 years old	80	20	60	40	80	80	80

When the participants were asked for which purposes they use new media tools and allowed to choose more than one option, it was found that when the purposes for political use were analyzed, it was found that the groups aged 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64 and over 65 used new media tools mainly to follow the agenda and access news; while individuals in the 18-24 age group mostly used new media tools to follow the agenda. When the purposes of use not related to political participation are analyzed, it is found that individuals in the 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, and 55-64 age groups mostly use new media tools to spend time and chat. In contrast, individuals over 65 mostly use new media tools to spend time, chat, and follow their relatives.

Table 7.

*Purposes of New Media Use According to Participants' Political Interest*

	Following the agenda	Making political posts	Accessing news	Posting non-political posts	Spending time	Chatting	Keeping track of my relatives
<b>Use for Political Participation</b>				<b>Non-Political Participatory Use</b>			
Political Interest	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Not interested at all	84,7	0	27,1	29,7	87,3	72	27,1
Less interested	86,8	4,6	50,3	33,1	80,8	59,6	31,8
Related	62,6	11,5	82	20,9	84,9	61,2	20,1
The one who is very interested	85,7	57,1	85,7	52,4	81	61,9	52,4

When the participants were asked about the purposes for which they use new media tools and given the opportunity to choose more than one option, it was found that individuals who were not politically involved at all and those who were less politically involved mostly used new media tools to follow the agenda; individuals who were politically involved used new media tools to access news; and individuals who were very politically involved used new media tools to follow the agenda (85.7%), access news (85.7%), and share political posts (57.1%). Regarding purposes unrelated to political participation, it was found that individuals mostly use new media tools to pass the time, regardless of their level of political interest.

Table 8.  
*Purposes of New Media Use According to Participants' Political Party Membership Status*

	Following the agenda	Making political posts	Accessing news	Posting non-political posts	Spending time	Chatting	Keeping track of my relatives
<b>Use for Political Participation</b>				<b>Non-Political Participatory Use</b>			
Political Party	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Membership	80	20	65,7	25,7	85,7	62,9	25,7
No membership	78,2	7,1	55,1	29,4	83,8	63,7	27,9

When the participants were asked for which purposes they use new media tools and allowed to choose more than one option, it was observed that individuals with and without political party membership mostly use new media to follow the agenda. In addition, when the purposes of using new media tools that are not for political participation are analyzed, it is found that both groups mostly use new media tools to pass the time.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

The role of new media in participation in political processes and democratization has attracted the attention of the academic field since new media platforms have become a part of everyday life. Considering the interactive nature of new media platforms, they open up a space for participation in political processes different from traditional mass media. However, this situation also requires that issues such as manipulation, power relations, the positioning of states in this process, and disinformation should not be ignored. This is evident in the theoretical debate on the subject.

In this context, new media environments should be considered as an ecosystem that shapes the political behavior of users, rather than being merely a technical tool in democratic processes. Moreover, on these platforms of the discussion environments formed on these

platforms can produce different outcomes, such as reinforcing users' political preferences, increasing polarization, or transforming public opinion. Therefore, the findings of the study should be read not only through usage practices but also through the relationship of these practices with political culture.

There are various studies in the literature that examine the effects of new media platforms on political and democratic participation. These studies generally suggest that new media platforms can be considered a sub-category of political socialization and that the impact of social media use on political participation tends to be limited. Additionally, the assumption that digital environments create a new space for communication is largely confirmed, and meaningful data has been obtained regarding the relationship between demographic characteristics, capital accumulation, and the purposes of media use. However, issues related to trust and privacy often emerge in the context of political sharing.

This study provides an opportunity to reconsider this two-pronged debate in the literature in the Turkish context. The impact of new media usage practices on political participation in a densely populated and socio-culturally heterogeneous metropolis like Istanbul provides a suitable societal setting for testing both optimistic and pessimistic approaches. Therefore, the findings are important in terms of showing how the existing literature is shaped in Türkiye's conditions.

Most of these studies yield similar findings, with their differences largely stemming from variations in sample groups. This indicates that the results of these studies are largely consistent with one another. However, the present study differs from previous ones in that its sample is not limited to students and the chosen province has distinct sociological characteristics. Furthermore, the findings of this study contribute to the existing literature, reinforcing its coherence and offering a more comprehensive perspective.

The fact that the research was conducted specifically in Istanbul provides important clues for understanding the use of new media at the intersection of urbanization, digitalization and political culture. The social diversity of Istanbul ensures that the findings represent trends related to a broad urban population and not just a specific user group. This feature places the study in a more comprehensive position among studies on the new media-political participation relationship in Turkey.

Participants generally spend 0-2 hours daily on social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, online media such as online news, and traditional media such as

radio, television, and newspapers. The most frequently used tool for new media is mobile/mobile phone. In addition, individuals stated that they use social media frequently, which is essential in their daily lives. The most frequently used social media platforms are WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube. The purposes of using new media tools are to pass the time, follow the agenda, and chat. In addition, the things that the participants follow most on social media are current news/events, daily life issues, economy, and fashion-magazine-entertainment content. The relatively low amount of time participants spend on media tools suggests that political participation is shaped around the axis of “passive consumption.”

Participants generally use new media platforms to follow the agenda at a rate of 78% and access news at 55.9%. This shows that new media platforms play an important role in users' access to political information. Thus, it can be said that new media platforms open a space for participation in political processes and democratization. At the same time, it is also understood that these platforms function as an information resource center and as interactive channels where political debates and democratic participation are carried out.

It is possible to say that as the participants' level of political interest increases, the rate of access to news and sharing of political content also increases. In particular, 85.7% of individuals with a very intense political interest use new media platforms to access news and follow the agenda. This shows a correlation between political interest and the use of new media platforms. This correlation reveals that new media platforms have turned into an important information and interaction channel for individuals with high political interests. This result demonstrates that political interest is a determinant of digital participation. However, what is striking here is that as political interest increases, users not only access information but also tend to produce political content. This demonstrates that the digital sphere is a platform that strengthens political socialization processes.

While 84.7% of individuals with almost no political interest use new media platforms to follow the agenda, they prefer not to share political content. In contrast, 57.1% of respondents with high political interests share political content. This shows a clear distinction between passive information consumers and active political participants. Regarding gender, 86% of women and 81.6% of men use new media platforms to pass the time. This usage pattern is for entertainment and socializing rather than political participation. However, the rate of men (10.1%) is higher than that of women (6.3%) in terms of sharing political content. The difference in the rates of political posting between male and female users suggests a gender-

based "political visibility gap" in new media. The fact that male users, in particular, produce more political content suggests that gender roles are being carried over into the digital realm.

While 20% of political party members tend to share political content, 7.1% of non-political party members prefer not to share political content. The expected result here is that political party members share political content much more. However, the difference is relatively small, suggesting, that the impact of party membership on political participation in digital space may be limited. On the other hand, the rate of those who follow the agenda is very high (78.3%), but the rate of those who share political posts is low (8.2%). This suggests that individuals remain observers rather than participate in political processes.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that individuals generally use new media platforms to get information but are limited in political participation and digital interactions. This may shed light on future studies in the context of the "audience democracy" approach.

Overall, the findings suggest that the impact of new media on political participation is not one-dimensional; it varies across platform use, age, gender, political interest, and digital habits. Therefore, when assessing the relationship between political participation, digitalization, and new media, both structural (platform characteristics) and individual (interest, motivation, consumption habits) variables should be considered together.

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