An Analysis Of The Impact Of Social Media On Rational Voting Behavior Of Generation Z

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Abstract

Developing Information and Communication Technologies have significantly changed lifestyle and many areas of life. As the new media has increased effect in intelligence, content producing etc., and network systems have become an integral part of life, we are witnessing accelerated flow of information. Individuals have started to quickly access all kinds of information their countries and across the world. All these developments are inevitably reflected in political life. As a matter of fact, political actors inevitably need to update and innovate their methods of reaching Generation Z. In particular, social media platforms have been actively used since the 2000s, and they have become one of the most important political communication channels for reaching Generation Z. This study explores the factors affecting the rational voting process of Generation Z using the qualitative research method, surveying to evaluate the findings. In addition to this method, the statistical data of the Supreme Electoral Institution were used to assess the participation of Generation Z in the Turkish Presidential and Parliamentary General Elections held in March 2023. Considering that Generation Z will be an important voter group in the next elections, it is essential to understand the characteristics of this electorate and to determine political communication strategies accordingly. In this regard, the research identifies the factors affecting the rational voting behavior of Generation Z, and within the framework of the findings, it provides a holistic perspective on the political communication strategies that political actors should follow in order to address Generation Z voters during and after elections. In conclusion, the research brings forward several suggestions for political actors to effectively use social media to affect and persuade Generation Z in their election strategies depending on the factors that affect their rational voting behavior.

Keywords : Generation Z; persuasion; political communication; rational voting behavior; political participation

INTRODUCTION

Advancing Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have paved the way for major changes in numerous areas of life ranging from the ways of business to politics. In particular, the developments in the last 40 years have been ongoing up to today. The speed brought by ICT to everyday life is reflected in the political behavior, habits and attitudes of voters, as it is in all walks of life. The biggest factor in this has been the development and change in forms of communication thanks to developing ICT.

In the course of history, ICT development started with military communications during World War II, and later with the invention of computers and development of software as well as package software that end-users can easily use paved the way for using computers at home. Followed by these developments, the emerging need for communications network infrastructure again for military purposes led to the invention of the Internet. All these developments triggered the major shift in civilian life as well. While computers and software entering homes initially enabled individuals to communicate faster with web 1.0 compared to other tools, they also laid the groundwork for international communication and the development of news channels.

Technology continues to evolve rapidly and has taken on a new dimension with the development of software and hardware for end users to customize their computers. In Castells' words, with the means at their disposal, users are now in control by prioritizing the features they want. New features have been added and offered to users over time, and communications via the Internet networks has changed dimension. Today, the world has turned into a global network interconnected by the web system. Now, users can communicate simultaneously, while they can also access news in any region of the world through this web system. In this context, we now have new sources and platforms of news defined as the new media.

The most important feature that distinguishes the new media from conventional media is that it has an interactive structure. Thus, new media platforms enable interactive communication. On new media platforms, individuals can both follow content feeds and create, post and disseminate content themselves. These platforms, called social media, have naturally affected political communication. Political actors such as leaders, political parties and party members can interactively reach the electorate, influence or persuade through these channels. In addition, they can publicize their political activities and measure reactions to what they have done or will do.

They have the opportunity to use social media feedback to test the pulse of society and determine their policies.

Therefore, during election periods, political parties have recently added social media planning to their election strategies. The main reason for this is their ability to get quick feedback and to engage with their constituents in an interactive way thanks to social media. Indeed, these are the best channels for reaching the new electorate born into the age of technology and information. It is seen that communication activities with young voters over the Internet have an impact on their political preferences and behaviors. In this context, communication is important for persuading voters and it is possible to shape voters' political preferences and behavior through social media platforms that enable this communication.

The generation to which voters belong matters. According to the literature, the concept of generation consists of individuals born in the same specific period. Each generation, therefore, has common characteristics that are influenced by the period in which they were born. In other words, individuals of a given generation exhibit a number of similarities, from the means of communication they use to their political behavior.

This study investigates the factors affecting the rational voting behavior of Generation Z. Since Generation Z was born into technological developments, they are also referred to as the Internet generation. Born in 2000 and after, members of this generation constitute the new electorate in the world and in Türkiye.

The research aims to investigate the factors affecting the voting behavior of Generation Z between the ages of 19-25 and to determine the level of importance these factors bear. The theoretical framework of the study is established according to the fact that Generation Z is the technology generation. In this vein, the study is titled The Development Process of Information and Communication Technologies, Information Society and Theories, addressing the historical development process of information technologies in addition to providing insights on the emergence of new communication technologies as well as the characteristics and conceptual framework of these communication technologies.

To examined also Political Communication, New Media and Persuasion analyzes theoretical approaches. In this context, the emergence of political communication and its conceptual definition and development will be examined after providing a historical perspective of the concepts of politics, communication and political communication. Another higligtinf of

theories sence of dwells on the effects of social networks on political behavior and voting tendency through literature review. Ends of the this theories with the history of the concept of persuasion and the factors affecting persuasion in addition to providing insights on the persuasion process itself.

After that important think of Types of Political Behavior and Political Participation, presents the literature review. The discuss the conceptual framework of political participation in addition to the factors affecting such participation.

In the last theoretical chapter will explore the relationship between Generation Z and Persuasion. After explaining the concept of generation, Generation Z and the characteristics of this generation are briefly explained in this chapter. The theoretical analysis in the study will be completed by explaining the political behavior of Generation Z and the relationship between Generation Z and persuasion.

RESULTS

Depending on the findings and conceptual framework obtained as a result of this research, the following findings and suggestions are presented as the contribution of the study.

The survey study explored the influence of social media, reference group and attitude towards integrated marketing activities for political marketing on the rational voting behavior of Generation Z. The findings of the study are consistent with previous studies in the literature.

According to the results of the survey data, Generation Z uses social media channels to get news and follow the political agenda. These data also indicate that in order for political communication and persuasion efforts to reach Generation Z, it is important to plan social media communication in a way to attract the attention of this generation. It is critical to plan in accordance with the interactive nature of Generation Z that produces and disseminates content.

Although Generation Z consults family members for information about the parties running for power in the elections, they remember at least two of the people who reached them in the last six months at the decision-making stage. During this stage, they refer to the people who interact with them more than family members. Therefore, in order to address this generation in the political communication plan, it is important to interact with this generation in the last month of

the campaign. In the data evaluating the influence of the reference group, it was found that Generation Z makes their own decisions.

Generation Z uses social media tools rather than mass media in election campaigns and integrated political marketing activities. In addition, they do not tend to use communication methods such as home visits or phone calls. Since this generation has individual behavioral characteristics, the type of communication that enters their private spaces, such as home visits, may have a negative impact on their voting behavior. In order to bring these voters to the polls, communication methods suitable to their lifestyles should be implemented.

Generation Z, as a part of the information society, wants to be informed about the parties participating in the elections. In the survey results, the attitudes of this generation of voters towards the publication of party programs in the media and new media tools came to the fore. In this line, generation Z brings two factors to the forefront in electoral behavior. First, Generation Z voters evaluate parties based on their electoral performance in previous periods. Secondly, they opt for the political party that will provide the most benefit for them. In this context, political parties need to take these factors into consideration in their efforts towards voters.

DISCUSSION

Information and Communication Technologies are changing at an extraordinary pace today, thanks to the many innovations that have been and are being made in the world of science, therefore, the history of emerging technology and communication needs to be included in this study. The change in Information and Communication Technologies over the last four decades has been at an unprecedented pace compared to previous decades. There is no doubt that understanding, keeping pace with, internalizing, and adapting to change in many aspects of life can be seen as one of the biggest challenges that humanity has suddenly faced.

When discussing the concept of social media—which has entered our lives thanks to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)—as part of political communication, it will be useful to mention the history of ICT that has created this medium in order to better understand the voting behavior of young people, namely those between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five.

The rapid development and widespread use of defense innovations during World War II dates back to the 1970s (Castells, 2000). After the invention of the transistor, an important step was taken in the spread of microelectronics to machines with the installation of the microprocessor in computers in 1971. Although the start of computer production dates back to the 1946s, competition started in this field after IBM produced its first computer in 1953. It would be right to mention Apple Computers in this history flow, as it joined the computer revolution in 1976 and became the best in the world.

It would not be wrong to say that the competition in computer models continued with Microsoft, the software and computer company founded by Bill Gates and Paul Allen in 1976. Portable computers, connection to electronic networks, sharing information processing infrastructure and increasing memory and processing capacity paved the way for interactive use of computers and data storage and processing in the 1990s.

In addition to all these technical features mentioned above, it can be uttered that it was with the emergence of the Internet that information and communication technologies revolutionized many aspects of life. In this respect, the emergence of the Internet is of great importance among the innovations in the world of information and communication technologies. Research initiated in the defense industry 15 years after the invention of computers and whose aim was to connect computers on a network led to the birth of the Internet (Simcoe, 2002).

The network connection, which was invented for military purposes during the Cold War, started to find its place in the defense industry as well as its use in the academic world in the 1980s. In this way, academics working at different universities were able to exchange information quickly and with a method that was much easier than other methods. In the first half of the 1980s, commercialization efforts were initiated under the name ARPANET. Thanks to ARPANET, the defense industry, universities and public institutions became connected to each other to carry out joint work. The MILNET network continued to be used for military purposes. In addition to these two networks, the National Science Foundation also joined the race and made its network infrastructure called NSFENT available to universities (Arun Rai, 1998).

The commercialization of the Internet infrastructure to a wider audience became possible in the 1990s with the emergence of the World Wide Web, known as www. This feature, called web for short, started to be preferred by users in a short time (Castells, 2000). Thus, users had access to Internet browsers, which we are still using today. These browsers include Mosaic, Internet Explorer, Chrome, Firefox, Opera and Safari (Abate, 200). As a result, thanks to the development of the Internet and computers, information and document sharing can be done easily and quickly today.

In the field of Information and Communication Technologies, the development of computers, software, hardware and the Internet has accelerated the use of individual users and profoundly affected many processes such as communication, production, consumption and sharing.

As a result of the technological innovations over time, computers and the Internet have been able to quickly enter daily life and have become products accessible to end consumers. It is at this point that users have started to customize these technologies and adapt them to their needs and wishes. As Castells propounded, end-users have begun to gain control over these opportunities offered to them and to reshape them according to the features they prioritize and attach importance to (Castells, The Rise of the Network Society, 2000).

Influenced by the developments in information and communication technologies, the concept of new media emerged with the Internet technology, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. What is meant by the concept of new communication technologies is all the Internet-based communication tools. This concept is in constant development and change thanks to advancing technology (Alankuş, 2005).

Such technological innovations enable users to access information without any time/space limitations and to interact and communicate with other users. On the other hand, these technologies, which are called "new" for the opportunities they offer to users, also have similarities with "old" or "traditional" communication technologies (Geray, İletişim ve Teknoloji: Uluslararası Birikim Düzeninde Yeni Medya Politikaları., 2003).

According to Rogers, three main characteristics that come to the fore in the studies investigating the characteristics of new communication technologies. These features are:

mutual interaction, demassification and asynchrony, respectively (Geray, Yeni İletişim Teknolojileri, 1994).

Mutual interaction: Also known as "two-way communication" in communication jargon, this characteristic feature is an important capability of new communication technologies. In old communication tools, such as television, newspapers, etc., there was mostly one-way communication, and users received the message, but could not interact and respond to the message and maintain the communication.

Demassification refers to the ability to send different, personalized messages to specific groups of users. The last feature, asynchrony, means that users can view messages sent through this channel at any time.

Gürbüz stated that these three characteristic features of new communication technologies enabled new media and traditional media channels to transform into each other, closing the gap between them (Gürbüz).

Thanks to all these features offered to users, individuals have not only gained the opportunity to access information whenever and wherever they wish, they have also become competent in sharing information whenever and wherever they wish and have assumed the role of a kind of publisher (Tükel, 2015).

In Burgelman's study, another study on new communication technologies, we see an effort to explain their differences from traditional communication technologies (Timisi, 2003). This study features the sub-headings of distribution technologies and information technologies within new communication technologies. The table below shows new communication technologies under the heading of information technology.

When traditional tools are compared with the tools offered by new communication technologies, the most important differences are in terms of target audience, content, hardware and quality. These technologies are open to two-way communication and thus bring interaction to the forefront, and the communication opportunity between users differentiates them from traditional technologies.

Like every technology that touches human life and transforms the way of living and doing business, new communication technologies inevitably have transformative effects. As these technologies affect interpersonal relations, social lifestyles, business methods, political interactions, intellectual accumulation and ways of spending time, there are

differing views and opinions as to the degree of influence or ways of influencing of these technologies.

There are studies in the world of science attempting to understand the change and the future through researching various aspects of what fundamentally affects human life. The Internet and new communication technologies that have emerged with technological advances have become the focus of discussion and criticism in many disciplines. It is possible to categorize social effects as technological determinist and critical approaches.

Referred to as a major reference author in communication studies, McLuhan analyzed the social effects of communication tools via the concept of "global village" for the temporal and spatial effects of these technologies, and underlined that such technologies liberate and equalize people (Alankuş, 2005). McLuhan also adds that the development of technology depends on human beings, and that these means of communication can bring forward some of the human senses while eliminating others (Mcluhan, 2001; Merrifield, 2012, s. 25).

Manuel Castells, whose work on the network society has been taken into consideration and referenced by scholars in many disciplines in recent years, is one of the researchers who address technological advances from a determinist perspective. Analyzing the network society, information technology, and the change experienced by societies from a sociological perspective, Castells emphasizes that technology does not determine society, on the contrary, it represents society. On the other hand, he also argued that technology should be included in research in order to understand society. To him, society cannot determine the direction of change of technology, and many different factors affect this change (Castells, 2005).

Raymond Williams, who is critical of the technological determinism approach, however, emphasizes that social values and culture cannot be determined solely by technological developments. According to Williams, in order to understand technological innovations, one must take into account the economic and social effects of the period in which they occur (Timisi, 2003). Those who are critical of the determinist approach state that this approach ignores the problem of power and that those adopting this approach examine societies from a reductionist perspective (Kejanlıoğlu, 2004).

There are opinions in the literature that new communication technologies in the use of individuals reduce physical interaction and increase group communication. It is also stated that individuals are psychologically at risk by moving away from society as they use new communication technologies (Sınmaz, 2015). As communication through new communication technologies becomes a habit, individuals become alienated from themselves, may experience health problems, may spend less time with family members as it replaces face-to-face communication, and thus may harm the concept of family. However, despite these negative aspects, even if such a decision is made on an individual basis, it is not possible to completely stop using these technologies that have penetrated every aspect of life.

These technologies, which eliminate the boundaries of time and space, have also led to the phenomenon of false reality. According to Baudriallard, these technologies cause individuals to move away from reality and continue to exist in a simulation world in a false reality (Baudrillard, 2014). Since this false reality can be used to create certain perceptions, it has also made room for phenomena that can be considered ethically criminal. Ethical crimes refer to copyrights, which are the subject of many debates today, the use of contents without reference, violation of the right to privacy and the accompanying damage to the concept of privacy, spreading untrue information to provoke individuals, failure to protect personal data, causing individuals to fail to distinguish between news and advertisements published on new media, the circulation of misleading content, and the increase in hate speech (Okmeydan, 2017).

The opportunities offered by mobile technology have increased group communication. Indeed, thanks to mobile technology, individuals have shaken the place of the media and started to broadcast as amateur content producers (Çakır, 2013). On the other hand, new communication technologies have also led to the experience of what Foucault expressed as the concept of "surveillance society". Technological developments have made individuals controllable and observable, and this has affected all aspects of social life (Foucault, Hapishanenin Doğuşu, 1992). In this context, individuals are monitored not only by the state but also by many institutions, and that is how the dominant discourses, tendencies and orientation strategies are determined. With the widespread use of mobile communication technologies, data sharing has increased; it has become unimportant for

individuals. Moreover, individuals share every step they take through these channels, voluntarily becoming a helper of surveillance (Foucault, Özne ve İktidar, 2014).

1.1. Brief History and Characteristics of the Internet

Explored in the first chapter when analyzing the historical development of information and communication technologies, the concept of the Internet will be further scrutinized comprehensively in this chapter as it has a profound effect on many aspects of life including political communication.

In the early years of the Internet technology, its high cost limited the access of individual users. However, over time, the cheaper cost of this technology has helped individual users to use it more easily. As the number of users has increased, the use of new media has become widespread in health care, education, communication and many other areas of life.

The Internet, which has an undeniable share in shaping new media, is basically a computer network that allows computers and databases located anywhere in the world to be connected to each other (Gülsoy, 1997). The Internet enables data communication as well as the distribution and storage of information and makes it accessible to anyone with an Internet address and technical equipment (Süleyman Sadi Seferoğlu, tarih yok).

In Luhan's definition, the Internet has turned the world into a global village, eliminating borders and enabling people to communicate easily (McLuhan, 1964).

A more detailed look at the Internet technology, which was invented for military purposes, in its historical development process will help us better understand the changes it has undergone over time. Research was started to prevent possible attacks for defense purposes and to eliminate the possibility of interruption of communication. Licklider, who carried out this research, became the head of the unit known as DARPA in the US, which conducted research on computers. Lawrence Roberts implemented the ARPANET project under this unit, officially starting to develop the Internet technology (History, 1968).

In addition to developing the technology for military purpose, external support was also provided, and Paul Baran of the Rand Corporation, which serves Pentagon, developed "packet switching" technology in California, while Donald Davies was working on the same technology around the same time in the UK (Castells, 2004). As both were working

on this technology, the main purpose of the packet switching was to develop a flexible communication network to prevent communication systems from being disabled in the event of a possible nuclear attack. This technology was used in the development of ARPANET and the main features of the project were that computers far away from each other could connect to each other and send files (Derebaşı, 1999).

As a result of all the work mentioned above, the first connection between four computers was established in 1969, where the Internet model was tested. The four computers that made up the ARPANET project were based at the University of California, the University of Utah, the University of California at Santa Barbara and the Stanford Research Institute (Gromov, 2012).

Over the years, various technical improvements have been made, which will be detailed in this study, and the evolution of Internet technology has continued at full speed. It was only in the 1990s that the technology began to be used by individuals (Türkiyede İnternet, 2005).

Evaluating the development of the Internet technology in our country, we see that Turkish Universities and Research Institutions Network (TÜVEKA) was first connected to the European Academic and Research Network (EARN), Because It's Time Network (BITNET) in 1986 (Türkiye'de İnternet, 2003).

Due to capacity limitations, the Middle East Technical University and TUBITAK (Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye) initiated a joint project in 1991 and succeeded in making the first connection with the Netherlands in 1992. Thanks to the line provided with this first connection, the Internet development started in our country primarily for academic purposes (Türkiyede İnternet, 2005).

This connection, which was provided on METU, was provided to institutions through the National Academic Research Network after 1997 (Ulusal Akademik Ağ ve Bilgi Merkezi, 2022).

One of the basic characteristics of the Internet, which forms the backbone of information and communication technologies that have developed rapidly over time and have become an indispensable communication means for individual users worldwide, is that it is decentralized, that is, it is not managed from a specific, single center. Another characteristic is that it is free, which means that although various restrictions and

prohibitions can be imposed on users, it cannot be completely banned. A third characteristic is that it is a global means without geographical borders, rather than being confined to specific regions. The fact that anyone who wishes can access any content published anywhere in the world is one of the most important indicators of its globality and limitlessness. Since users can also create contents, it has a dynamic nature. Finally, thanks to its asynchronous nature, users can access information and communication anytime, anywhere (Civelek, 2009).

One of the most important qualities that the Internet offers its users and makes it indispensable is that it allows interaction. Both interpersonal and synchronous and asynchronous interactions between groups provide users with an unlimited communication environment (Timisi, 2003).

In this new world of communication offered by the Internet, one of the emerging topics of discussion is the concept of censorship. Censorship and therefore blocking access to a particular site is not possible in this environment. To access a site that is officially blocked, users can use a VPN to access it through other country networks (Alankuş, 2005).

It is important to indicate the negative consequences of the Internet, albeit not in-depth, besides its opportunities in order to have a holistic look at the concept. In this regard, Civelek emphasizes in his study black market activities, illegal gambling activities, child pornography, fraud, terrorist activities, copyright infringement, sale of drugs and over-the-counter medicines, and fake accounts (Civelek, 2009).

1.2. The concept of Web and Its Historical Transformation

With the development of technological means, new media and the Internet technology has been in a constant state of change. With each new feature added, the communication that end users establish with others using this channel has developed, diversified and become more involved in human life. To better understand the opportunities offered information and communication technologies, it is of great importance to look at the concept of web, which has become a must-have for us along with the Internet and social media tools, as well as its evolution throughout history.

The most important area that paves the way for the concept of social media, which will be detailed in the next chapter, is the web and the innovations realized in this field.

Thanks to the rapid and continuous change of the Internet technology, social media, which is powerful enough to affect the lives of individual users and their views and decisions about life, continues to exist by constantly renewing itself much faster than other media channels.

Web 1.0, web 2.0 and web 3.0 are used to describe the characteristics of this evolution in the Internet technology. Web 1.0, which we can call the most primitive era of the Internet, offered users the simplest level of opportunities. These opportunities included visiting websites, communicating via e-mail, and simple instant chatting. To better define this period, it would not be wrong to state that users were consumers of contents, not producers.

With the emergence of Web 2.0 in the 2000s, the above-mentioned consumers started to become both consumers and producers of content. The reason why they are referred to as producers is that with Web 2.0, users started to share their own written and visual content on websites (Genç, 2010). Thus, content consumers have become producers, leading to an increase in the amount of information and resources available on the Internet. In this vein, users stepped into an unlimited world of information instead of accessing only limited information. Although it was a positive development that every user with Internet access had access to much more information than ever before on any subject, the world started to witness what we call as "information pollution". Although it is not the main focus of this study, it would be useful to point out that information pollution and misinformation have become damaging over time, and therefore, it has become more important than ever to be conscious consumers. As a matter of fact, the power of manipulation of false or incomplete information is effective in many areas. In this sense, political parties might also be harmed if users who make a political choice by voting accept misleading information without verification. From this perspective, it is of utmost importance for Internet users to receive training on issues such as accessing accurate information and verifying the accuracy of information, or to develop themselves with this awareness. Moreover, companies, political parties, institutions and organizations that previously did not attach much importance to their presence on the Internet have had to become active due to the increasing number of content producers and their ability to create contents on various topics on their websites. On the other hand, others talking about them, i.e. creating contents on websites, especially consisting of misinformation, has started to harm these organizations. Thus, organizations

have inevitably had to be active on websites and social media platforms over time in order to provide users with accurate information about themselves and protect their reputation.

The opportunity offered by Web 2.0, together with the production of a large number of content, has led to the emergence and rapid spread of social media platforms, the details of which will be explained in the next chapter. Furthermore, device technology has also continued to evolve, enabling Internet users to access information and create contents from anywhere at any time.

With the rapid user adaptation and content production after Web 2.0, the web continued to develop and evolved into Web 3.0. Web 3.0 is also referred to as the "semantic network". At the heart of the semantic network is the automatic exchange of data between systems, thereby reducing the amount of work required from users. In other words, web 3.0 technology enables semantic and fast communication between databases and devices (Genç, 2010).

Analyzing these three stages of the web world, it can be understood that social media platforms have started to increase with the increase in the opportunities offered to users. The next chapter will elaborate on the history of the concept of social media and the major platforms offered to users.

1.3. Social Media and its Key Tools

To define social networking sites, which constitute social media and are the main subject of this chapter, it can be stated that these sites are web-based services that offer users the opportunity to create a public or semi-public profile within a virtual space with clear boundary limits, to add other users to their lists and to see their lists and those of others they follow (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

It is accepted that increased user interaction, habits of spending time and socializing on Internet-based platforms started in 1997 with the introduction of the website sixdegrees.com. This website was followed by a number of other platforms offering similar opportunities, and ryze.com became one of the most important platforms that emerged in what is considered the second wave, around 2001(İbid,2007).

The rise of web-based social media platforms gained momentum after 2003. Last.fm, one of the most popular websites at the time, allowed users to create contents and design

their pages according to their interests, in addition to providing services in music by allowing audio sharing. The emergence of Facebook, which is still one of the most popular music platforms in the world, dates back to 2004, YouTube to 2005 and Twitter to 2006.

One of the most important features of the above-mentioned social media platforms is that each of them has become thematic in a particular field. Thanks to these thematic platforms, users obtained the opportunity to express themselves through video sharing, news reading/posting or blogs, and the number of users who preferred such platforms increased rapidly in a short period of time (Başaran, 2010).

Furthermore, the rapid evolution of mobile devices contributed greatly to the fast development of social media, allowing users to connect to these platforms anytime, anywhere. As technology facilitated access to the Internet and online platforms, users became increasingly interested.

Kim et al. explained the opportunities provided by social media platforms to users according to their thematic features under eight headings. Accordingly, social media platforms enable users to create personal profiles, establish instant connections, join groups, communicate through instant connections, share user-generated contents, express user opinions, access the information they are looking for, and retain users (Kim, Jeong, & Lee, 2010).

The most important feature that distinguishes social media from traditional media is that users, in other words ordinary individuals, can be involved in, comment on and contribute to the contents created through this channel. Thus, people can enjoy various opportunities using social media channels (Bostancı, 2015).

The aforementioned opportunities that individuals can enjoy include being liked, appreciated or accepted by others. For example, one might express that they do not like a popular movie/series that have watched, unlike the majority, to feel their need to show that they are different from everyone else with this post (Uyanık, May 2013). Consequently, the purposes of using social media platforms vary from person to person, and as a result, people prefer to use these platforms to satisfy different needs. For some people, social media is an environment where they can avoid socializing by getting away from the crowds and remain as a spectator, while for others, on the contrary, it can be an environment where they find the opportunity to socialize and being liked or appreciated. It should be noted that healthy

individuals may sometimes prefer to be alone or socialize and this is reflected in their preferences in their use of social media (Hazar, 2011).

There are many alternatives on social media platforms for users to share any content in the format they want. Thanks to these opportunities, also called social media tools, users can share their experiences in their daily lives, follow contents of other users if they are interested, and share their thoughts with other users as comments.

1.4. An Overview of The Concept of Political Communication Through Politics and Communication

The concept of political communication emerged from the combination of politics and communication sciences. Therefore, in order to interpret political communication correctly, it is essential to address the conceptual infrastructure of these two fields of science. Politics emerged for the first time when human beings began to live together and the concept of governance developed. As a matter of fact, the concept of communication came into existence with the transition of people to the communal life. Undoubtedly, these two concepts have developed and transformed together with societies, and with the effects of technological developments, they have evolved into very different dimensions from where they first started. The combination of these two concepts in interpersonal relations as well as mass relations has brought in the concept of political communication.

In this vein, it will help us to better understand the concepts to note that the science of communication—which has an impact on the formation of political communication—has gone through various phases, from oral communication to written communication. Similarly, the transformation of the concept of political communication has also been affected by all the aforementioned developments, and at the same time, this concept has started to be fully realized with the shaping of freedom of thought and the concept of information ceasing to be a monopoly.

Addressing all these concepts at this point of the study without deviating from the subject matter is important in order to comprehend the language of politics and the activities of political actors on virtual platforms in the course of history.

1.5. The Concept of Political Communication

Since the concept of political communication consists of the concepts of "politics" and "communication", which are too broad to be explained by a single definition, it is necessary to first present a general framework of these two concepts. Based on this general framework, this chapter of the study will dwell upon the concept of "political communication" itself and its development in the course of history.

It is not possible to explain the concept of political communication with a single definition, either. Moreover, the fact that it has undergone many changes in its history eliminates the possibility of presenting this concept with a single definition. The history of political communication dates back to Ancient Greece, and it has been shaped and position by the development of mass media and technology as well as the transformation of societies. Hence, as societies and technology have changed, the content of political communication, the actors involved in the process and the techniques used in its execution have also changed. As in other disciplines, it is accepted that the field of political communication has developed a unique jargon over time and has its own methods (Aziz, 2007). It was in the United States of America after World War II that political communication found its place as a discipline and began to be dealt with in a systematic way, and especially after 1960, it was widely used in European countries (Topuz, 1991). Defined as "an interdisciplinary academic field consisting of research on the relationship between politics and communication" (Mutlu, 1994), political communication draws theoretical, philosophical and practical benefits from disciplines such as history, communication, political science, sociology and psychology (Miller & McKerrow, 2010).

Powell and Cowart approach the concept of political communication in terms of campaign communication and define the concept accordingly. They cover the messages given by politicians to the electorate not only during election periods but also during other times (Powell and Cowart, 201). In the same vein, according to Kentel's definition of the concept, it is "a way of understanding and explaining each other in the political area". To consolidate this definition, Kentel refers to the violent incidents in Türkiye before 1980 and emphasizes that in the process that followed, violence was replaced by "understanding and explaining" and that one of the goals of political communication was to build peace in society (Kentel, 1991). Furthermore, he states that in this process of transformation, political parties identified

commonalities and no longer talked about differences, thus starting to play an active role in solving the problems of the country.

Emphasizing that political communication should continue after election periods, Yavaşgel said: "There is a misconception that political communication should end the day after the elections. However, political communication, whether for the party in power or for those in opposition, has to continue after the election period. While ruling parties try to convince their voters that they have made a good choice at every opportunity, opposition parties endeavor to convince the public that they will make a good choice by electing them in the next elections by comparing them with the government's actions" (Yavaşgel, 2004: 147). Here, it is underlined that political communication must continue incessantly without any interruption, and Uztuğ divides this into two periods as pre- and post-election periods (Uztuğ, 2007)

While defining the concept of political communication, McNair underlines a form of communication that is in the axis of politics. In addition, he suggests that actors in the political sphere inform the electorates about their political activities through mass communication tools, thereby involving these processes in political communication. McNair takes the written and verbal discourses of political actors one step further and emphasizes that elements such as hairstyle, clothes and logos also affect political communication (McNair, 1995:).

Also pointing out to mass communication tools and media, Aziz purports that media has a major role in today's political communication processes (Aziz, 2014).

We see the elements classic communication including the sender, receiver, channel, message and feedback in political communication as well (İbid, 2014). It would be useful to reiterate that the sender of the message in this process is the political actor, the content of the message is political and the receivers are the electorate. Finally, feedback is important in political communication activities and it is often reflected on election results.

1.5.1. The Persuasion Process

There are many definitions of persuasion. Accordingly, Perloff (2010) defines persuasion as a symbolic tool used in a free-choice environment that changes people's attitudes and behaviors about a given issue through the message in addition to explaining the stages of persuasion.

According to Perloff's definition, the persuasion process consists of five fundamental steps: First, the recipient is actively involved in the persuasion process composing of certain steps. Second, the persuasion process is consciously intervened by third parties in order to influence the recipient or the target audience. Third, the target audience is tried to be persuaded but there cannot be coercion against their free will. Only the communicator will try to influence the target audience to change their attitudes and thoughts voluntarily by stimulating the recipients' desires and reflecting the logic underlying their thoughts while preparing the message. Fourth, persuasion, as a communicative act, requires taking into account environmental factors. What is meant here is the effect of society on individuals. Individuals living in society can be persuaded by appealing to facts or emotions, without looking for logic, verbally and non-verbally, with individuals or with messages conveyed through media tools, as well as written and visual media. In some cases, on the other hand, people can persuade themselves to change their thoughts and attitudes when they are regularly exposed to well-designed messages with strong evidence and trust in the source.

Finally, persuasion requires a free environment and opportunities where people can make their own choices. Therefore, the process of persuasion must be based on reasoning, proof and acceptance of the individual's free will without coercion or imposition (Elden & Bakır, 2010).

It is stated by Jamieson that persuasion does not always aim to change the thoughts of the target audience, but in some cases it is a method applied to maintain the thoughts and orientations of individuals (Ceylan, 2021). In this context, intention is important in the persuasion process and planning. Considering the electoral work of political parties, a political party prepares messages according to the voters already won to maintain their support, as well as drafting messages to converge those who they want to win with their thoughts in order to suceed in elections. From this perspective, it can be understood that persuasion has a bidirectional structure. In this regard, many factors have the potential to influence the persuasion process. Since persuasion is a communicative process, it is important to use the above-mentioned factors of communication. In addition, one should not ignore the human factor in the persuasion process as well as the external factors

affecting people such as culture, geography, religion, customs and traditions and the psychological state.

Consequently, since persuasion efforts require a multidisciplinary approach and a detailed planning, design and communication process, it is important that each effort is carried out with close attention to details. In this sense, especially in communication to influence voters' behavior, there is a need for methods that will allow voters to freely decide as a plausible mechanism. In the planning of persuasion efforts, knowledge of voter characteristics such as psychological factors, environmental factors, age range of voters, and characteristics of the relevant generations will properly guide persuasion efforts. Hence, the fifth chapter of the dissertation specifically tackles the definition of the concept of generation and the characteristics of differnet generations.

1.6. Types of Political Behavior and Political Participation

In political science, liberal theories made the right to vote an important human right as a requirement of democracy in the 1920s. The right to vote in political participation, the third of Dalh's seven sine qua non criteria of democracy, is critical in that thanks to this right, people have a say in governance (Dahl, 1971). The understanding of voting, as an important part democracy in the world, became a subject of study in political science with a focus on investigating how voters decide on which party to vote for after World War II. These studies found that voters unconsciously determine their voting behavior depending on the conditions and the influence of the period (Damlapınar & Balcı, 2005). Since voting preferences have an underlying complex structure, multi-disciplinary research is conducted on voter behavior. Indeed, voting and political participation are the subject of analysis in social sciences such as psychology, sociology and political science.

Studies aimed at understanding political behavior have led to the emergence of the field of "Political Psychology" by combining political science and psychology. In its early stages, the aim of this discipline was to understand the behavior of leaders and individuals. Specifically in the period between 1940 and 1960, scholars adopting the behavioral approach tried to understand the attitudes and behaviors of leaders and their personalities. The second period of political psychology prevailed between 1960-1980 examining voter behaviors and political attitudes with the survey method (Erişen). In this context, scholars of political psychology explored the psychological reasons for voting and decision-making

mechanism of voters. However, in should be noted that voting decisions involve many factors and cannot be explained only in relation to the social structure. Thus, factors such as individual attitudes, culture and the nature of society also have an impact on political decisions.

Types of political behavior generally emerge as a result of the interaction of individuals with their environment, but they show consistency over time and emerge as a political tendency. As a result, the aim of political participation is to make sure that individuals effectively get involved in politics, influence the political authority and the decision-making mechanism (Özer & Meder, 2008).

There are four main theories of voting behavior in the literature. These theories are sociological, psychological, economic or rational model and strategic voting models. The sociological model asserts that the socio-cultural environment, ethnic origin and the sociologically affiliated group have an impact on voting behavior.

The party identification model, on the other hand, is a psychological model analyzing voter behaviors through voters' psychological association with a party. Based on the analysis of attitudes and behaviors, this model is used to identify voting preferences and behaviors via examining current developments on the agenda.

In the third model, called the economic model, voters are defined as rational individuals as they are deemed to evaluate the conditions of the day in each election period to decide which party to vote for. In this context, voting behavior is shaped by considering cost-benefit and self-interest as in economic theories.

In the strategic voting behavior model developed on the basis of the economic voting model, voters are accepted as rational individuals making a choice according to their cost-benefit. However, unlike the economic model, this model entails that voters are informed by researching the election rules in order to reach an effective result in voting behavior led by choosing a party rationally rather than opting for the most preferred party.

The factors affecting political participation come to the fore, regardless of whether political participation is defined broadly or narrowly. Voters, who are the main component of political participation, make political choices by the effect of socioeconomic, psychological, political and economic factors. In this vein, individual preferences are

shaped by the material and spiritual reasons surrounding them, and these factors affecting the individual can direct their political preferences.

Another factor is that there are two different views in the literature in relation to the culture of democracy. While the first view argues that there is a lack of interest in political participation in Western societies with developed democracies, scholars with the other view argue the opposite. Theorists of the second view emphasize that political participation is the most important element for democracy. In addition, these scholars hold the believe that there is no decrease in political participation and that the form of political participation has shifted to a new structure with the development of technology. This can be observed in the effect of mass media on the dissemination and transmission of meetings and rallies to large masses (Özdemir, 2019, s. 256). Today, the development of information and communication technologies has brought a new approach to political participation, allowing everyone to receive news simultaneously and participate interactively.

When considered as an action, it can be observed that political participation is influenced by personal characteristics and environmental conditions along with various other factors. In this sense, political participation has a psychological dimension depending on the opinions of individuals. An individual can participate in political life if they believe that their future will directly or indirectly be affected, and that the role they will play in political participation will affect the outcome. Otherwise, individuals may not get interested in political participation (Dursun, 2012, s. 233).

In summary, it is stated in the literature that the attitudes, behaviors, socio-economic factors and the political system as well as the opinions and beliefs of individuals, who are the main actors of political participation, affect political participation.

1.7. Political Behavior of Generation Z

Generation Z has become important in elections. In the 2023 presidential elections, they will vote for the second time. Understanding this new generation of first-time voters—7 million or so in number—and capturing their attention is an important strategic issue given their short attention span. Hence, it is necessary to understand the political behavior of this generation in order to influence them, as they are said to be cautious and do not have a specific political tendency.

Generation Z voters, born into the age of technology and digital development, determine their political orientation by using different channels than previous generations. For this reason, Generation Z needs to be analyzed well in order to understand the political orientations of this new electorate and to determine the methods of influencing and persuading the new generation. It can be argued that Generation Z cannot live without the Internet, care about their families, have high willpower and are aware of their responsibilities, and they also care about acceptance by their peers (Williams & Page, 2011). In this context, there is great influence on the choices of Generation Z by groups such as family and friends. In addition, social media channels are important channels to reach this generation. Indeed, according to Generation Z's relationship with technology and digital media, they use these tools as information and news channels when making their election choices. However, Aydın and Özbek (2004) state that family members and peers have a great influence on 69.8% of young voters in Türkiye.

Political interest is stated in the literature as another variable that has an impact on the electoral behavior of Generation Z. Lyons and Henderson (2005) define interest as the attention, enthusiasm and excitement that consumers feel towards a certain product. In the context of political marketing, it is considered as the interest that Generation Z (consumers) will show in political party discourses and activities that will influence voters. In this sense, interest has an important place in terms of ensuring electoral participation, determining voting preference and informing before elections (Yoon, Pinkleton, & Ko as cited in Küçük & Toklu, 2020). The concept of interest is associated with the level of knowledge and it is stated that the level of knowledge is positively affected depending on the level of interest. In this context, there is a correlation between the young generation's level of interest in politics and their level of knowledge. If a young person from Generation Z has a high level of interest in politics, they are likely to do research in order to have detailed information about political parties and their leaders. At the same time, young individuals' desire to hear, see and follow political messages will increase in proportion to their interest.

Voter interests reveal themselves as active and passive interests. Voters with active interest participate in political party propaganda activities, try to spread their political ideas by establishing relations with other voters, act as an intellectual leader and take part in a political movement. On the other hand, voters with passive interest follow the agenda and political news from visual or printed media and social media (Koç, 2019). If there is an increase in economic

and social concern during the election period, voters will show increased political interest. O'Cass and Nataraajan (2003) argue that factors such as concern and worry experienced periodically by voters in the political conjuncture increase the level of their interest. At such times, how politicians manage crises gains importance. In the period before the 2023 elections, disasters such as the 2019 Covid pandemic in Türkiye, the Ukraine-Russia War and the earthquake that affected eleven provinces increased voters' interest in the elections. In the first round of the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections on May 14, 2023, the voter turnout rate was 88.84%, and in the second round on May 28, 2023, the voter turnout rate was 83.97%.

CONCLUSION

The generation referred to as Generation Z in the literature was included as voters to vote for the first time in the 2018 and 2023 Presidential and Parliamentary General Elections held in Türkiye. In the 2023 elections, Generation Z gained importance as an important voter generation both by political parties and in the studies conducted in the literature before the elections. The main reason for the importance of this voter group is seen as the increase in its proportion in the population in the May 2023 elections and its potential to affect the distribution of votes.

The information society into which Generation Z was born, the rapidly changing and developing technology and the transformation of communication tools from conventional media to social media also contribute to their interactive communication. In this context, the study investigates whether new communication networks and social media tools have an impact on the rational voter behavior of Generation Z voters.

The main subject matter of the research was to determine the voting behavior of the voters between the ages of 19-25, defined as Generation Z, and to determine the importance of the factors that motivate or influence these voters. The development of ICT and communication technologies has also led to a change in the sources of information of voters. Technological developments, indeed, have led to the rapid dissemination of information through social networks and the creation and dissemination of users' own content has led to changes in interaction and persuasion methods. In this regard, both the theoretical and analytical framework of the study concludes with the survey method by testing the hypotheses on the impact of social media communication in the daily life of Generation Z on rational voting behavior. In addition, depending on the election results, it is seen that political actors in Türkiye are unable to influence

the voting behavior of Generation Z voters who voted for the first time in the 2023 Presidential and Parliamentary General Elections. The lowest turnout among Generation Z voters manifests that there are insufficient efforts by political actors for the rational voting behavior of Generation Z and that communication plans and strategies fail. It is also stated in other studies in the literature that this generation needs leaders and cadres who will benefit them and be in communication. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a need to understand the characteristics of Generation Z and to develop rational strategies for this generation that needs to understand that they are listened to.

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