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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES



AN ANALYSIS OF TWITTER USE BY FEMALE CANDIDATES
DURING 2014 LOCAL ELECTIONS

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“I, Ayşenur Ordulu, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.”



AYŞENUR ORDULU

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ABSTRACT

AN ANALYSIS OF TWITTER USE BY FEMALE CANDIDATES DURING 2014 LOCAL ELECTIONS

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Master of Arts in New Media

Advisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Perrin ÖĞÜN EMRE

January, 2017

In this study, the usage of Twitter by the elected women candidates for mayor in 2014 local elections have been examined. The purpose of this study is to find out to what extent and for what reasons elected women candidates were using Twitter during the election campaign. In 2014 local elections, 36 women have been elected either as Metropolitan Municipality Mayor or Municipality Mayor. It has been observed that 10 of them were using Twitter during the election campaign. Those 10 Twitter accounts have been analysed according to various categories such as mutual interaction with followers, the usage of hashtag, embedded photos and videos or the issues they mentioned in their tweets.

Keywords: Twitter, local elections, new media, women, Turkey

ÖZET

2014 YEREL SEÇİMLERİNDE KADIN ADAYLARIN TWITTER KULLANIM ANALİZİ

Ayşenur Ordulu

Yeni Medya, Yüksek Lisans

Danışman: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Perrin ÖĞÜN EMRE

Ocak, 2017

Bu çalışmada 2014 yerel seçimlerinde belediye başkanı olarak seçilen kadınların, adaylıkları süresince Twitter kullanımları incelenmiştir. Çalışmanın amacı, Twitter'ın, seçim döneminde kadın adaylar tarafından ne amaçla ve ne derece kullanıldığını ortaya çıkarmaktır. 2014 yerel seçimlerinde Büyükşehir Belediye Başkanı, İl Belediye Başkanı ve İlçe Belediye Başkanı olmak üzere seçilen 36 kadın vardır. Bunlardan 10 tanesinin seçim dönemi Twitter kullandığı gözlemlenmiştir. Bu 10 Twitter hesabı; seçmenle karşılıklı etkileşimde bulunmak, hashtag kullanımı, video ve fotoğraf paylaşımı, tweetlerinde bahsedilen konular gibi çeşitli kategoriler altında incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Twitter, yerel seçimler, yeni medya, kadınlar, Türkiye



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1. Introduction

Samuel Morse's very first message– 'What Hath God Wrought' – on telegraph wire between Baltimore and Washington on 24 May 1844 includes 21 characters. 'Mr. Watson – come here – I want to see you' which was Alexander Graham Bell's first message on the telephone to his lab assistant on 10 March 1876 includes 42 characters. 'QWERTYUIOP', including only 10 characters, was the first e-mail has been sent by Ray Tomlinson from one computer to one another in 1971.

On 21 March 2006, Twitter, appearing as something more liberal, has been created by Jack Dorsey. The first tweet on the website includes 24 characters: 'just setting up my twtr'. At this point in time, Twitter is considered the most popular microblogging service ever. Even though Twitter is restricted to 140 characters, it has methods of connecting tweets to the specific people, groups and lots of issues. Also, tweets can be classified by a symbol which is called 'hashtag'.

In addition to that, with Twitter, people found a place where they can talk about one-time taboos. In 1950s 'abortion' was one of the words that could not be used in newspapers. Instead it was mentioned as 'illegal operation'. Or you could not use the word 'screw' then, but at the present time it is not a big deal. However still there are some issues and various words which could or would not be mentioned on the traditional media. Thanks to Twitter, people can mention whatever they want and type every word they would like to talk about.

Although some people still have limited Internet access as a part of the digital divide which continues to exist as age, gender, socio-economic status and race-related (Witte and Mannon, 2010) and Twitter is not an exception to this situation (Kolko et al., 2000; Nakamura, 2002, 2008). Being able to send tweets with photographs and videos which can be taken by smartphones leads to a convergence of photographic and textual information. Moreover, it made Twitter both a news source and a public sphere during important occasions and times such as the election campaigns especially for the marginalized populations who might not get a proper time and place on mass media to express themselves.

The censorship is another issue which is supposed to be mentioned since it is one of the reasons behind that social media, in this case Twitter, has become an alternative platform to express opinions. Before the Internet, the censorship was about inspecting the content of newspapers, news broadcasts or books by the government before the date of the release and suppressing or changing them in a way they would like. Starting with the 21st Century, Internet has become an important player in terms of spreading the news to the public, so the way of censorship has also changed. In theory, new technologies in the information age make it more difficult, for governments to control the flow of information. However, the new ways are found such as filtering and blocking to make censorship possible.

For instance, during the Arab Spring in 2011, social media seemed to give the democracy seekers a huge advantage against their governments. As protesters triumphed in Egypt, Google executive Wael Ghonim spoke to Wolf Blitzer, *“If you want to liberate a government, give them the Internet.”* However, four years later, lots of journalists have been jailed in Egypt, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Amnesty International reported having obtained internal documents that

explain a government contract to build a system to spy on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and other social media platforms (Bennett and Naim, 2016).

In Turkey, the situation is not better. The lack of press freedom has become one of the proofs of the dysfunction of the democracy in Turkey. For instance, an amendment to the Internet law on Regulating Broadcasting in the Internet and Fighting Against Crimes Committed through Internet Broadcasting (2007) gave the Telecommunications Directorate the authority to close any kind of website or content “to protect national security and public order, as well as to prevent a crime.”. The urgency to undertake reforms in the area of press freedom as well as in human rights has been stated by the EU Commission Turkey 2010 Progress Report and Commissioner of Human Rights of the Council of Europe Thomas Hammerberg’s Report on media freedom in Turkey in April 2011 as well as by various international human rights and freedom of expression associations. The World Press Freedom Index 2013 listed Turkey among the worst offenders, ranking it 154th among 180 countries (Tunç, 2013). In 2016, Turkey is ranked 151st among 180 countries. The report highlighted President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s crackdown on media: *“President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has embarked on an offensive against Turkey’s media. Journalists are harassed, many have been accused of ‘insulting the president’ and the Internet is systematically censored.”*(Bianet, 2016).

With all those problems regarding the mainstream press, the population, especially the young ones, in Turkey the Twitter users averaged 23.5 years (Statista, 2013), turn their attention to the social media platforms to receive news in a more open way.

The Internet can reshape the power distribution. However, there is not a simple technological fix for governments and their leaders who are determined to concentrate power. Whilst social media may not offer a long-term solution, it can create an effective short-term strategy to spread information during important times. In wounded democracies like Turkey, social media might offer new hopes as an alternative field in this restricted media environment.

Favouring official, male voices is another pattern we are witnessing on traditional news sources for decades. Over the years, scholars questioned how the media improves the democracy in the event that it does not represent women and minority groups as much as they represent men and majority groups (Silver, 1986). With the existence of social media, specifically Twitter, where women outnumber and spend more time than men (Blakley, 2011; Brenner, 2012), this pattern can change and we can finally witness a pluralism on media (Hermida, 2012). This is the reason behind that I have chosen women over men in my study.

My first hypothesis is that the issues they are mentioned are mostly about women. My second hypothesis is that they have used Twitter as a supportive and subsidiary tool rather than a public sphere.

In regard to elections, as democracy developed, there were found new methods and innovative ways to communicate with the electorate, which was proved to bring about attractiveness to a certain extent. Through new ways, it may become possible to reach to “marginalized” kind of people that may be “inaccessible” through the traditional election campaigns. By many academics, journalists and politicians, the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election has been identified as “the first social media election” mainly because of the wide concern of Barack Obama for the utilization of

new media while conducting his campaigns. Arianna Huffington, for instance, who was the chief editor of The Huffington Post at that time, explained the role of the new media in 2008 U.S. Presidential Elections as follows: “*Were it not for the internet, Barack Obama would not be president. Were it not for the internet, Barack Obama would not have been the nominee.*” (Hattotuwa, 2010). This saying widely reflects how big the influences of new social media could be even in election of the president of one of the most powerful countries in the world. Furthermore, on 9 November 2016, Donald Trump has won the Presidential Election in the United States. A report suggests that one of the things keeping Donald Trump in the presidential race against Hillary Clinton is his savvy use of social media (El-Sharawy, 2016).

In Turkey, as a bit belated, new media has just gained importance, namely since 2011 local elections. It is emphasized that social media started to be used as a tool of political communication as of general elections in 2011 (Acar, 2012). This issue is fairly new in terms of academic literature because of its nascent nature. For the very reason, I would like to contribute to the literature with this study as much as I can by examining to what extent and for what reasons elected women candidates were using Twitter during 2014 local elections which will help to understand the usage of new media by women.

In this study, the usage of Twitter in Turkey by the elected women candidates for mayor in 2014 local elections have been examined. The purpose of this study is to find out to what extent and for what reasons elected women candidates were using Twitter during the election campaign. First, the literature is reviewed to understand the political communication in new media and the usage of Twitter for political

campaigns in Turkey. Then, I have examined 2014 local elections regarding this research. In 2014 local elections, 36 women have been elected either as Metropolitan Municipality Mayor or Municipality Mayor. It has been observed that 10 of them were using Twitter during the election campaign. Those 10 Twitter accounts have been analysed with a quantitative method according to various categories such as mutual interaction with followers, the usage of hashtag, embedded photos and videos or the issues they mentioned in their tweets.

The reason of choosing this specific issue is that local elections give candidates more option to show themselves on social media comparison to the general elections where the accounts of the political parties are more active and the candidates can only be seen as a part of corporate existence of their parties. For this reason, I have tried to analysed every single Twitter account of the elected women candidates for mayor during the election campaign in 2014 to see what kind of political communication they had chosen.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Political Communication in New Media

Thanks to Web 2.0 which has brought social media to our lives, the political communication works hand in glove with Internet. Especially during political campaigns, politicians are using social media a lot since more and more people started to involve on these sites (Aziz, 2013). Before jumping the impacts of new media on political communication, we need to mention what political communication means.

With the development of political science in 19th Century, the communication has become one of its important parts. In 20th Century, political communication developed as a scientific discipline (Aziz, 2013). According to Wolton (1989), at first, political communication involved the communication between government and the citizen. Afterwards, especially during the election campaigns, the borders of this field have expanded by involving other issues such as the relation between concerns of public opinion and the behaviour of politicians. Today, political communication includes the examination of the role of communication in political life, in a broad sense, in terms of both media and public polling, as well as political marketing and advertising.

With the use of new media technologies as a tool in politics, Karlsen made a classification of political campaigns (Karlsen, 2009). According to this classification, there are three phases; newspaper phase (pre-modern campaigns), television phase

(modern campaigns) and digital phase (post-modern campaigns). Karlsen made this classification according to two big changes in media technologies; the development of television in 1960s and new information and communication technologies in 1990s.

Jay Blumler and Dennis Kavanagh, the communication and media theorists, had mentioned about the third age of political communication in which we witness a broad personalization and decentralization of media (1999). More recently, Jay Blumler introduced a new age, the fourth age of political communication which includes lots of opportunities both for expression and learning what other people are saying elsewhere (Blumler, 2013). Interpersonal communication in politics among family and friends has been transformed into something else. The lives of politicians have also changed in terms of managing news and publicity to their advantage. In the past they were only dealing with television, radio or press outlets however at this point in time a multi-dimensional impression management is needed since the Internet and social media have created an immense platform to deal with. At all times, election campaigns have been existent and can be taken to be one of the most significant elements of political communication, where the candidates are trying to reach people. Along with the decentralization of media, the ways of election campaigns have also evolved.

Widespread usage of Internet became the main driver for that kind of evolution (Vaccari, 2008). However, it is obvious that this increasing usage of Internet has not been equally observed in all parts of the world. Therefore, different countries experienced this evolution of political campaigns in different times. In western democracies, for instance, the social media has been used by politicians during the election campaigns in a more impressive way.

The traditional media with a liberal broadcasting understanding tries to make profit and the producers of television programs prefer the politicians who may be consumed easily by the viewers (Devran, 2011). However, those who did not get adequate attention by the traditional media can offer more effective projects. For this reason, an alternative way to the traditional campaigning may create a lot of opportunities. In the sense of political actors and the elements of new media such as digitalization, interactivity, virtuality which have been detailed in the below sections regarding this study; there are some basic factors that lead candidates to use social media according to Bayraktutan (2013):

- a- To promote the political party and the leaders themselves and their discourses,
- b- Announcing the electorate about party activities by providing regular information flow,
- c- To compile opinions of voters on certain topics,
- d- Collecting financial support for the party in the event that political arrangements are allowed,
- e- To support and monitor the activities of the political party and the leader in the offline environment.

Euler (2009) also classifies the opportunities of online campaigns as segmentation, online fundraising, message delivering and citizen activation. Another classification involves two features. First, direct contact with the citizen became possible. Second, electorate can also interact easily with the candidates. In the absence of these two features, the usage of social media could not provide anything new.

Since 1996 US Presidential Elections, Internet has been used as a part of campaigning to reach people (Drukman, Kifer & Parkin, 2007). Back then, online

campaigning was not including any kind of interaction with electorate. Internet had only been used to transfer the offline materials of the campaigning - like brochures - to the online environment. In 2004 US Presidential Elections, this situation started to change. Candidates used Internet not only to reach people but also to interact and communicate with them. In 2008 US Presidential Elections, Obama's achievement made many candidates from other countries believe that they can also be successful thanks to the social networks. In 2016 US Presidential Elections, once again social media has played an important role, especially for the winner, Donald Trump.

According to a research, the candidates of 2016 Elections have used social media even more than the candidates of 2012 Presidential Elections. Moreover, Trump's unique engagement with the public on Twitter stands apart not just from the other 2016 candidates but also from past presidential campaigns (Pew Research Center, 2016).

As emphasized before, new media in Turkey has just become an important tool, with the 2011 Local Elections and since it can be count as new in terms of academic literature I would like to contribute to the literature with this study.

There are various of new media sources regarding reaching the data. For instance, Facebook can provide a detailed information on you or LinkedIn has the biggest database of professional knowledge ever created. However, the capacity of Twitter to spread real-time information on what is currently happening can beat the other social media platforms. And it can be highly powerful, and can help us understand a great many things. That's why I have chosen Twitter instead of others.

The most popular microblogging service, Twitter, forces users to deliver a message with 140 characters or less but in the meantime it allows to create personalized and

interactive system which can be accessed anywhere in minutes via Internet connection. The character restriction also helps to gain the reader's focus as followers can cast an eye lots of brief tweets in a really short time.

The website of Twitter includes following information and statistics about the service; *“Twitter can be used through various clients: 78 percent of the active users correspond with Twitter via mobile phones. Users tweet an average of 500 million tweets per day and all information is real-time dispersion of information.”* (Twitter, 2014c). In 2014, nearly 255 million active users throughout the world connect at high speeds, get quick response and able to send direct messages between each other in seconds, today the number is over 320 million (Statista, 2016). Having a Twitter account can help to gain much more popularity across the world. It can be one of the reasons behind the fact that candidates are using Twitter during the elections as a part of the campaigning.

Another reason might be related to that study of Pew Research Center in 2013 about practices of new media users which shows that over 30 percent of the population get their news from social networks. These rate has been increasing as more and more people have Twitter accounts. According to a study of Gahran (2011), 65 percent of social network users have only one platform in regard to read the news and the rest of the users look more than one site to verify the news they get. Since most of the users prefer to use one site to reach the news, credibility of that news is highly important. For that reason, following the official Twitter account of the candidate seems the most credible way to learn about her/his campaigns.

Because of the lacking direct media influence, Twitter provides a free environment where candidates can connect with their electorate in a quick and personal way. In

spite of the fact that there are other social network sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, Twitter differs from those sites with its advantageous features such as reaching lots of users with short messages in seconds. Thanks to the ‘followers’ system, electorate can follow a certain candidate just because they have a specific interest in her/him. Since candidates are aware of their followers, they have to send tweets as much as they can so the electorate would know that they can learn the latest updates about the candidates they follow. They can retweet from the candidates and spread the news to their own followers which would help to reach more and more people at the same time.

Furthermore, since 1990s, Internet technology has been recognized as a tool for relationship building (Kent and Taylor, 1998). Twitter, as an important part of this tool, gives the ability to engage in contingency interactivity with the citizens and provides a kind of relationship-building communication. Lovejoy (2012) suggested that Twitter’s potentially contingent interactive messages like replies and mentions can help in communicating with other users.

2.2 Women and Twitter on Political Campaigns

It is obvious that men still have the dominance in the political institutions where women are slowly trying to gain parity.

In 18 general elections held between 1935 and 2002 in Turkey, it is observed that the ratio of woman parliamentarians in Parliament is maximum 4.5 percent. In 2007, the rate was 9.1 percent with 50 women parliamentarians. In 2011, the rate has increased to 14.4 percent with 79 women (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2012). In 2004 local elections, only 0.56 percent of mayors were women. In 2009 local elections the rate was 0.9 percent (Şahin, 2011). In 2014 local elections, only 2.9 percent of all the

mayors were women (Yüksek Seçim Kurumu, 2014). Because of the above mentioned ratios, the underrepresentation of women in politics has been observed.

There are several reasons that cause to women's underrepresentation in the political arena. Fighting against gender stereotypes over the years is one of these reasons (Fox, 1997; Herrnson & Lucas, 2006; Kahn, 1996; Kahn & Gordon, 1997).

Mainstream media is not treating male and female candidates in the same way.

Women get less coverage than males throughout the history and even if they get a proper time and place, the stereotypes that are mentioned above hit them very harsh (Kahn, 1993; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991).

The traditional social structure is another obstacle that stands in front of women's political representation. The role of the women generally includes "in-house activities" and the spatial limit of their activities is home. The men, on the other hand, are more involved in outside activities. Therefore, it is considered normal for the men to engage in politics within this structure. The role that society attaches to the women is primarily to be wife and mother. This structure, which creates a negative situation for politics, causes women to fall behind men economically. The lack of technical knowledge of women is one of the important reasons preventing representations. As a reflection of social roles, women may not be interested in political life. Therefore, they do not have sufficient level of knowledge and experience in politics (Negiz and Ucer, 2012).

Furthermore, electorate expects more feminine characteristics from female candidates such as being caring, kind and helpful, and more masculine characteristics from male candidates such as being strong, aggressive and independent because of the afore-mentioned stereotypes (Brown, Heighberger, & Shocket, 1993; Leeper,

1991; Rosenwasser & Seale, 1988; Fridkin & Kenney, 2009; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). Moreover, the issues related to the economy and foreign policy are seen as “male” issues and the issues like health care, child care, the environment or poverty are seen as “female” issues (Brown et al., 1993; Dolan, 2010; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Koch, 1999). Because of these stereotypes, the tone of the campaigns of women candidates might be different than their male counterparts. It can also mean that male and female candidates have different campaign tactics for the elections.

In studies on election campaigns, gender differences usually refer to the differences between men and women candidates in terms of the policy issues, appeals and personal qualifications portrayed in the campaign materials. For instance, Panagopoulos (2004) examined television ads for U.S. House and Senate races. According to his study, there are lots of differences regarding characteristics of the ads of men and women candidates and argued that the differences tend to reinforce gender-based stereotypes. The biggest difference was about that women candidates stressed compassion more often, though men stressed toughness and performance more often.

It can be fair to claim that although women and men politicians do have different values and concerns, women candidates may deemphasize their femininity to fight negative stereotypes. They may need to fight the assumption that a woman is less qualified than a man by adopting certain strategies, such as emphasizing one’s educational qualifications (Fox, 1997; Johnston and White 1994).

Because of these challenges they face, women candidates are more likely to use the new media where they can fight against stereotypical news coverage, though there is no explicit stereotypical new coverage against women candidates in Turkey, and try

to get votes from their supporters. Since Twitter has more than 300 million active users, it is a good place to reach and communicate to the potential voters so the candidates would not have ignored this platform.

As reporters use Twitter to collect data, reach campaign details of the candidates, enhance audience reach, and follow the activities of the politicians (Parmelee, 2013), there are other beneficial elements of Twitter which make the female candidates use it for campaigning: Controlling the message, discussing issues as they would like, presenting themselves, their stuff and their decisions to the public without the bias of the traditional media. Why yes, these opportunities are offered to all candidates not just to the female ones but the minority can benefit more. Majority of the population or the dominant characters of the politics, in this case males can get the support of the traditional media but on Twitter they all are using the same free tools which are really important for the ones who have limited resources. Twitter also offers a limitless space to use without any restriction of number of tweets (Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009).

Namely, the restrictions, bias and less screen time on the traditional media are no longer a problem for the women candidates since now they have their own platform to use freely and they can recreate their public images with their own words.

Therefore, the female candidates are more likely to have a Twitter account and use them more often in comparison to the male candidates according to the research (Gainous & Wagner, 2014; Hargittai & Litt, 2011; A. Smith & Rainie, 2010).

2.3 The Usage of Social Media in Political Campaigns in Turkey

One cannot expect that the usage of social media in politics does not differ from one society to another. Obama's success in 2008 US Presidential Elections, for instance,

encouraged many candidates in many countries which are closely away from elections, to conduct an online campaigning and to reach people via social networks. However, even being used very efficiently, it may result in losses, as it did so in the case of 2010 Polish Presidential Elections. An independent candidate, the former foreign and fiscal minister of Poland, Andrzej Olechowski could not even managed to proceed to the second part of elections, even though he had used social media more than his followers regarding the number of tweets and interactivity (Miscicka, 2011). In addition, we cannot conclude that the results of elections are in correlation with the online activities of political parties in Turkey.

As was mentioned before, the use of new media in Turkish politics is something relatively new. Therefore, two recent elections, 2009 Local Elections and 2011 General Elections, will be analysed before analysing the main focus of this study, 2014 Local Elections.

One of the distinguishing feature of the 2009 Local Elections was that for the first time ever online media was utilized to a reasonable extent. For delivering their messages, the candidates of political parties, especially those of governing and opposition parties, set up websites, in which they tried to explain their successes, achievements and projects. Moreover, they started to utilize these websites for sharing their programmes, audios and videos from their meetings, TV speeches, party songs, main mottos and the public support (Devran, 2011). The political parties did not confine themselves to these traditional-like steps and initiated to utilize the advertisement areas of internet portals in order to publicize their projects, promises and the dates of their meetings. Nevertheless, the main goal of the Internet usage here is to strengthen the ties with the electorate and to enhance the online communication in order to support offline communication (Aziz, 2013). To

conclude, online campaigning in the 2009 Local Elections remained limited to the use of Internet in a unilateral way, which solely provided the traditional offline campaigns with an online view.

2011 General Elections can be taken to be the first elections in the course of whose campaigns, social media started to be used more intensively than ever. First of all, in the occasion of the country was more or less one year away from the elections, an increasing socialization of political communication has been witnessed. This had several reasons. Primarily, a mass of youth, who had used the social media generally for apolitical objectives started to be politicized for several reasons. One of these reasons is that it has been claimed that an encryption algorithm is used for 2011 Higher Education Examination in Turkey. So over 1.5 million students who took this exam have raised their voices online. In addition to that, a new Internet law that is expected to enter in force on August 2011 has been criticized because of its ability to help online censorship. So users started to send tweets via related hashtags which become trend topic among country. The censorship of Youtube in 2008, the censorship of Fizy which is an online music search engine in 2010, and the censorship of blogspot.com in 2011 are also the reasons behind that young people started to politicize over time (Kucukyilmaz, 2011).

Furthermore, the change in leadership in main opposition party, CHP, in 2010 was labelled as a challenging development for the approaching elections, in that it created some hopes in certain parts of the society. The new oppositional leader, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, as an innovation in many ways for the party, has been in favour of a more intensive usage of the social media at all times, which would somehow enforce his rivals to follow him in this issue.

As expected, Kilicdaroglu initiated and went online in Facebook and Twitter. And then his party, CHP, was compelled to reform its official web-site in line with the interactional possibilities of the social media.

There was also a Twitter account for the AKP Chairman back then, the Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, which has been updated by his officers regularly. One could not see any interaction in his Twitter account instead he had only used Twitter for repeating his speeches.

According to a research conducted in 2013 (Sener et al., 2013), 55% of the Turkish Members of the Parliament (MPs) have twitter account. 67% of the CHP MPs, 55% of the BDP MPs, 51% of the AKP MPs and 47% of the MHP MPs have Twitter accounts. As for the constituency-based distribution of MPs with Twitter accounts, 29% of the Marmara Region MPs, 17% of the Central Anatolia Region MPs, 14% of the Aegean Region MPs, 11% of the Mediterranean Region MPs, 11% of the Eastern Anatolia Region MPs, 9% of the Southeastern Anatolia Region MPs, and 9% of the Black Sea Region MPs have Twitter accounts. 54% of the male MPs and 58% of the female MPs have Twitter accounts. In average, AKP MPs have 6.879.849, CHP MPs have 2.377.693, MHP MPs have 773.753, BDP MPs have 741.945 followers in Twitter. Responding rates of MPs in Twitter out of 12 is as follows: AKP 3.61, BDP 3.5, CHP 3.38 and MHP 3.28. Average responding rate of MPs is 3.5. This data reveals that the MPs are barely in contact with their followers in Twitter.

One of the most important findings of the same study (Sener et al., 2013) is that the usage of Twitter by MPs in Turkey is really low. Lots of the MPs have created a Twitter account during 2011 general election campaign which means that political parties sees Twitter as a part of their election campaign strategy. It also means that

by having a Twitter account, MPs are following the strategy of their parties rather than a personal decision.

Although local elections give more space to the individuals as candidates, it is still important that how their party uses the social media since the parties can give their support on social media campaigns to their candidates if they have enough knowledge and awareness of new media. If the social media is one of the priorities of the party, candidates may use it much more effectively and regularly.

According to another research conducted in 2012, the usage of Internet also depends on regional factors. In urban areas 57,8% of the population have Internet access. In rural areas, only 27,6% of the population have Internet access. Moreover, in rural areas only 10,6% of women are using Internet (Alternatifbilisim.org, 2013).

The gap in access to the new communication technologies in Turkey is also reflected in the use of Twitter by the members of parliament. For instance, MPs from Marmara Region are using Twitter more effectively than the MPs from other regions. One can claim that because of the differences between regions in the access of Internet and new media, MPs from the regions where this access is low are using traditional ways in terms of making politics for campaigning and they do not need a high incidence of communication through Internet.

2.4 2014 Local Elections in Turkey

The 2014 Local Elections were really intense in terms of the race between political parties. There has been a political campaign process in which party leaders, as well as the local candidates organized party rallies. The ongoing dissidence between AKP and Gulen community, especially in the 17th and 25th of December process, can be seen as the reason for this intensity. All attentions have been drawn to these

channels through process called “corruption operation” by the political power was evaluated as a “coup attempt” (Yenisafak, 2014) and spreading of some audio recordings on social media commonly known as tapes. For all these reasons, local election race was competitive as much as in general elections.

Also, Twitter had been blocked by Turkish government 10 days before the elections because of the intense situations. However, it brought a lot of tension from the opposition groups.

The low cost of the Internet and its ability to provide accessibility for thousands of citizens allows small groups and movements to exist there. Moreover, the fact that the Kurds and BDP members, while falling socially behind in various respects, instrumentalized Internet as a political platform is pretty striking.

To reach a kind of democracy in the social media platforms, in regard to the political discussion, the interaction between candidates and the voters is important as much as the online accessibility of candidates by the citizens. For that reason, this study also aims to reveal that on what degree the female candidates are interacting with their potential voters on Twitter.

Another one of the findings of the research of Konda reveals that the young people between the ages of 18 and 22 are using the social media in an efficient way in Turkey which means that the young voters are getting more and more engaged to the virtual platforms. According to this research, 61 percent of Twitter users are between the ages of 18-28 in Turkey (Bianet, 2011). So in order to reach young generation, social media offers some great opportunities. With the increasing effectiveness of social media, political parties had used these tools very actively in their campaigns for 2014 Local Elections.

Before mentioning the activities of political parties during the election campaign, another organization is needed to be mentioned in this regard. Vote and Beyond (Oy ve Ötesi), is a non-governmental organization inspired by Gezi protests founded in 2014. Starting with 2014 Local Elections, the volunteers worked in this organization to promote participation to the elections, increase awareness about the candidates and ensure transparency in ballot count. For the first time ever, thousand of people, non-partisan citizens, took part in a political process without having official ties to politics (Hurriyet Daily News, 2014). The organization have also used the social media, especially Twitter, effectively to gather volunteers for its purpose. The hashtags they created have widely used such as “#müşahitaraniyor”, “#sandığabekliyoruz”, “#oyveötesi”.

In the 2014 Local Elections, AKP planned to form a team of 6000 to take active part in social media and to this end, social media personnel were appointed at all province and district governments to be trained at local AKP offices. Along with the social media personnel, many government personnel were chosen to be trained in major cities. In the politics school of AKP, where educational programs were held in AKP province and district offices, 'social media' classes were compulsory (Hurriyet, 2014). In response to this, CHP aimed to strengthen its social media presence with a team operating under the name 'informatics volunteers' who monitor the voting procedure from start to end, make online reports of voting results to provide an alternative control mechanism which works in a similar way with the Vote and Beyond organization.

MHP, in the 2014 Local Elections, along the lines of the other parties, is a party that focuses on the use of social media. In this context, MHP decided that all of its candidates for mayor should work with a social media specialist. Thus, all the works

of MHP municipal candidates, meetings and election work were posted to the social media and voters had reached to that information via Twitter, Facebook and Instagram etc. After all of the candidates are publicly announced, the ones who are responsible for information communication and technology in charge of the social media in provincial organizations and social media experts to work with the candidates were called to the MHP Headquarters, in the organized training program, information about party's election campaign and the election strategies were given to the social media specialists of candidates. How they will actively use social media, the common narrative to be used in the social media in the election campaign period was targeted (Anadolu Ajansi, 2014).

As emphasized before, the number of women in the parliament and other fields of politics has been slowly growing in Turkey. To reach a gender balance in political institutions, gender quotas in political parties to include a certain percentage of women for elections can be useful. Party quotas are implemented by party congresses or party programs (European Parliament, 2003). In Turkey, civil societies and NGOs like the Association for Education and Supporting Women Candidates (KADER) had oppressed the government to establish the gender quotas since 1990s. They also organized panels and presented reports in the parliament in this matter (Mencutek, 2013).

In 2014 local elections, only two political parties, CHP and BDP, have implemented the gender quotas supported by party bylaw. CHP had a 33 percent gender quota for women. Even though BDP had not used a projected social media strategy as a party as much as the other parties, it supported the women more than others with a 40 percent quota for female candidates (Yenilmez, 2016).

In regard to my research, with all these quota strategies there are 36 women who are elected for the city and municipality mayor in 2014 Local Elections. I find out that out of 36 women, 11 of them were using Twitter by sending tweets, retweets, mentions or replies during the election campaign – the period from 1 January 2014 to 31 March 2014 - with a total of 1532 tweets.



3. Research Design

3.1 Research Question

Public sphere, in its broadest sense, spaces where individuals gathered to discuss their common public affairs and to organize against arbitrary and oppressive forms of social and public power. It is strongly linked to the democracy which is usually a goal for the nations. Despite the fact that elections seem the main way to reach to this goal, it is not quite possible even being hold in a free, fair and frequent manner in light of the fact that any kind of limitation causes the lack of participation both as quantity and quality. This situation led to the conclusion by many political scientists that democracy is in crisis, so is the public sphere.

Regarding democracy, new methods and innovative ways were found to communicate with the citizens, and some of these methods have brought success to a certain extent. The main success is reaching people who may probably be unreachable through traditional way.

Through the years, every technological device is seen as a tool to create the ideal public sphere, in the event that the device is not a public sphere itself. According to Habermas (1989), public sphere is defined as a domain of uncoerced conversation oriented toward a pragmatic accord. Therefore, in my opinion, the majority of the technological devices cannot be counted as a kind of public sphere since there are power holders behind them. For instance, TV programmes cannot be aired without the advertisers. If the media bosses want the support of the advertisers, they

should air programmes in accordance to their wishes. In a realm like this, we cannot talk about uncoerced conversation. In addition, scholars like Sujata Moorti claims that tools like television cannot function outside of existing commercial and state institutions and at the same time claim an influential and a representative function as a forum for oppositional activity and debate (Moorti, 2002). Habermas also argues that there is a lack of face-to-face interaction and reciprocity in the society (2006). The self-regulated system of the mass media is creating the dynamics of mass communication which polarises the information. The influence of mass media increases the ignorance and low-level trust in politics. And it causes an alienation of citizens from politics (Habermas, 2006).

The Internet creates a pluralism regarding views and it increases the participation. It provides another point of view rather than the state and power holders so in this sense the Internet reverses the effects of mass media. The Internet-based structures of communication include various of participants, events, views and topics. It seemed to offer that possibilities for formation of public opinion. It also means that Internet can be a medium between citizens and political institutions. Several studies have showed that digital platforms have the capacity to create engagement, and critical discussion about important issues of common public interest (Coleman and Gotze, 2001). However, Habermas is not claiming that the Internet can be an alternative to formal politics. In order to have political impact on the Internet, message of the user must be picked up by the mass media (2006).

In Turkey, the alienation of citizens from politics that Habermas mentioned also caused a late arrival of election campaigning innovations. But first, one should understand the reasons of this alienation.

Because of the 1980 Coup d'état, lots of political traumas have been observed, which led Turkey to its current socio-political situation. To construct a new society, public sphere has been destroyed, the importance of private sphere has been increased and citizens were depoliticized by the new authoritarian rulers (Ozkazanc, 2007). It became really hard for Turkish society to get politicized again. The interaction between politicians and citizen was also rare except for the election campaigns.

Although the politicians and party leaders gave their promises for democratization, the legal changes could not destroy the authoritarianism since the roots were so deep. During this process, populism in politics has increased. Politicians were not trying to create a public discussion, instead they were become word acrobats in competition of insult to draw more attention.

Since politics has become an entertainment tool, media also used this in its advantage to make profit. In the headlines of newspapers, for instance, one could see a phrase like "*Scramble between Erdogan and Baykal*". That kind of things results with never-ending discussions on TVs (Devran, 2011). The ones with the rational projects might not always find a place on TV shows since it would not draw attention more than the endless discussions of politicians. According to Devran (2011), the issue is how electorate can get rid of this deadlock, what functions the global capital and global media, which are the stakeholder of the power, may have in this process and how functional internet, telecommunication and social media would be in order to activate the individual citizens.

With the rising of the Internet, especially the social media platforms, a solution to the mentioned crisis can be possible through its inclusive nature. It also helps to find new ways to live and transforms the things we do in our daily lives. In spite of the fact

that there are still some doubts about whether the usage of the Internet by millions of people is going to create a qualified political participation, then public sphere and finally democracy that could extinguish the above mentioned crisis, many successful cases have been observed in which people both individually and collectively were able to achieve certain political objectives. Social media made this participation more real and more possible. 2008 US Presidential Elections is a proper example to the successful cases.

To interact and communicate on a relatively fair platform to share their ideas and plans during election campaigns, candidates may choose to use social media. For women, it is even more important to find a better place where they can talk about whatever they want in a way they would like without the prejudiced pressure of the traditional media. Because of this prejudiced media, while women are presented with topics such as personal characteristics, appearance, status within the home and family such as the white suit and kerchief of Tansu Ciller, the hair style of Hillary Clinton or the plain and unpretentious suits of Angela Merkel have often become an issue of news. For male candidates, a presentation is made that includes the achievements, professions and experiences. (Derdiyok, 2014).

As was emphasized before, in this study, the usage of Twitter by elected women candidates for mayor in 2014 local elections will be examined comparatively. This research tries to find an answer to the following question and to test the below given hypotheses.

- During the local election campaigns in 2014 to what extent and for what reasons elected women candidates were using Twitter?

My first hypothesis is that the issues they are mentioned are mostly about women.

My second hypothesis is that they have used Twitter as a supportive and subsidiary tool instead of a public sphere.

3.2 Research Methodology

Quantitative method had been used to conduct this study.

There are some restrictions regarding my research. First of all, out of 36 elected women candidates in 2014 Local Elections in Turkey, only 17 of them had a Twitter account back then. Moreover, only 11 of them were using Twitter by sending tweets, retweets, mentions or replies as it is mentioned above. And one of them, Gultan Kisanak who has become the first woman mayor of Diyarbakır when she is elected in 2014 local elections, recently closed her account. For this reason, for my study I had a sample of 10 out of 36 elected women candidates.

After choosing the sample out of all elected women candidates, I have reached the tweets of them during the determined time thanks to the advanced search feature of Twitter since the advanced search offers various kind of filtering options that can help you find very specific content. One could see every tweet from past, by someone as your interest, with the phrase of anything. It is also possible to filter to see everything of a particular account. The data has been collected and stored at the same day from every account for a fair result. There are restrictions here too due to the nature of Twitter. For instance, tweets that are sent by account owners can be deleted at any time. Also, reaching the number of followers of the candidates during the election campaign was not possible.

To test my hypotheses, I have analysed every tweet posted by 10 candidates for the 2014 local elections during the three months prior (01.01.2014-30.03.2014) to the

Election Day (30.03.2014). The period covers the days from announcing all the candidates, the campaign process to the election day. It may count as another restriction of the study since some of the candidates were using Twitter for their campaign process even before the January 2014. However, this period is chosen because of the intense tweet flow. As a matter of fact, even during this period of three months, 1532 tweets are taken into the sample.

Technical features of Twitter such as hashtags, mentions, photos, videos, interactions with the candidates, tweet rates after the censorship of Twitter in Turkey (21.03.2014), URL links that are used in tweets have been accounted by quantitative method. In regard to this study, thanks to the opportunities of Twitter what kind of sharing has been done by the elected women candidates is obtained with the quantitative findings of their Twitter accounts. The issues that are mentioned by the candidates will be analysed in various categories. Those categories are determined according to the data I have collected.

The determined categories are sorted as follows: Public Meetings, Rival Candidates and Their Parties, Election Projects, Activities, Propaganda of the Party, Women Issue, Announcements, Local Openings and Activities, Visitations, Expectations from the Electorate, Wishes, Gratitude, Propaganda of the Candidate, Social Events, Condolences, Celebrations, the Agenda of the Local Area.

4. Research Findings and Analysis

4.1 Technical Details

In the light of my observations based on the categories, I am going to analyse the technical information I gathered in this section.

4.1.1 General Information about the Data

In 2014 Local Elections, 36 women are elected as mayor in the municipalities including the metropolitan ones as Table 4.1 displays. 23 of them were the candidates of BDP (Peace and Democracy Party), 6 of them were the candidates of AKP (Justice and Development Party), 5 of them were the candidates of CHP (Republican People's Party) and lastly 2 of them were the candidates of MHP (Nationalist Movement Party). Since BDP had also the highest number of woman candidates, it is not a surprise that it got the highest number of woman mayors.

In this study, first of all, I have looked into that whether or not those elected women candidates had a Twitter account during 2014 local election campaign (01.01.2014 – 30.03.2014). 17 women candidates out of 36 had a Twitter account at the specified time. 6 of them had a Twitter account however they have not sent any tweet between the dates I have chosen for this study; Ozlem Cercioğlu (CHP), Sibel Uyar (CHP), Filiz Ulusoy (AKP), Fethiye Atli (AKP), Saliha Ozcinar Sengul (MHP), Leyla Imret (BDP). One of them, Gultan Kisanak (BDP) had a Twitter account and she was

actually active on Twitter in terms of sending lots of tweets during the election campaign but her account has recently been closed so it would not be possible to analyse her data on Twitter.

Table 4.1: Elected Women Candidates in 2014 Local Elections in Turkey

MAYOR	MUNICIPALITY	PARTY
Fatma Sahin	Gaziantep / Metropolitan	AKP
Gultan Kisanak	Diyarbakir / Metropolitan	BDP
Ozlem Cercioglu	Aydin / Metropolitan	CHP
Dilek Hatipoglu	Hakkari	BDP
Havva Yildirim	Ankara / Gudul	AKP
Filiz Ulusoy	Ankara / Kalecik	AKP
Fethiye Atli	Elazig / Keban	AKP
Zeynep Akgun	Eskisehir / Mihalgazi	AKP
Fatma Toru	Konya / Meram	AKP
Zehra Ozyol	Amasya / Gumushacikoy	CHP
Saliha Ozcinar Sengul	Izmir / Kiraz	MHP
Birsen Celik	Denizli / Bozkurt	MHP
Hanay Handan Toprak Benli	Istanbul / Avcilar	CHP
Sibel Uyar	Izmir / Urla	CHP
Sema Pekdas	Izmir / Konak	CHP
Hazal Aras	Agri / Diyadin	BDP
Birsen Kaya Akat	Diyarbakir / Baglar	BDP
Cemile Eminoglu	Diyarbakir / Bismil	BDP
Petek Elyuse Capanoglu Celik	Diyarbakir / Egil	BDP
Güler Ozavci Dogu	Diyarbakir / Hazro	BDP
Rezzan Zugerli	Diyarbakir / Lice	BDP
Yuksel Bodakci	Diyarbakir / Silvan	BDP
Ruken Yetiskin	Hakkari / Yuksekova	BDP
Zeynep Sipcik	Mardin / Dargecit	BDP
Sabahat Cetinkaya	Mardin / Derik	BDP
Necla Yildirim	Mardin / Mazidagi	BDP
Sara Kaya	Mardin / Nusaybin	BDP
Figen Yasar	Mus / Bulanik	BDP
Sabite Ekinci	Mus / Varto	BDP
Leyla Imret	Sirnak / Cizre	BDP
Emine Esmer	Sirnak / Silopi	BDP
Zeynep Uren	Sirnak / Uludere	BDP
Sevil Cetin	Van / Edremit	BDP
Diba Keskin	Van / Ercis	BDP
Aygul Bidav	Van / Ipekyolu	BDP
Handan Bagci	Van / Ozalp	BDP

Due to the reasons given above, I have collected the data from 10 elected women candidates who are displayed at Table 4.2. Those 10 women candidates have sent 1532 tweets in total. It should be indicated that because of the technical features of Twitter deleting tweets is possible. For that reason, it is likely that there were more than 1532 tweets but the account owners may have deleted some of them. Moreover, they may also delete any tweet as they wish after the observation for this study. This is because all tweets from these Twitter accounts of 10 candidates have been gathered and saved at the same day to analyse the data in a fair way.

Table 4.2: Elected Women Candidates in 2014 Local Elections and Their Twitter Accounts

MAYOR	MUNICIPALITY	PARTY	TWITTER ACCOUNT
Aygun Bidav	Van / Ipekyolu	BDP	https://twitter.com/aygunbidav
Figen Yasar	Mus / Bulanik	BDP	https://twitter.com/figenyasar49
Cemile Eminoglu	Diyarbakir / Bismil	BDP	https://twitter.com/cemileeminoglu
Rezan Zugurli	Diyarbakir / Lice	BDP	https://twitter.com/rezanzugurli
Necla Yildirim	Mardin / Mazıdagi	BDP	https://twitter.com/neclatatvan
Zehra Ozyol	Amasya / Gumushacikoy	CHP	https://twitter.com/zehraozyol
Sema Pekdas	Izmir / Konak	CHP	https://twitter.com/semapekdas
Hanay Handan Toprak Benli	Istanbul / Avcilar	CHP	https://twitter.com/drhandantoprak
Fatma Toru	Konya / Meram	AKP	https://twitter.com/fatmatoru
Fatma Sahin	Gaziantep / Metropolitan	AKP	https://twitter.com/fatmasahin

Between the dates of 01 January 2014 and 30 March 2014, three women become prominent in terms of tweeting as Table 4.3 implicates; Handan Toprak Benli (574 tweets), Fatma Sahin (417 tweets) and Fatma Toru (332 tweets). Additionally, those

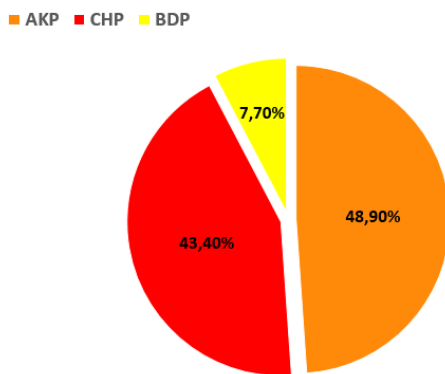
three women are the top three followed users on Twitter in comparison to the other elected women mayor candidates regarding the sample.

Table 4.3: Number of Tweets Sent by Candidates between the Dates of 01 January 2014 and 30 March 2014

MAYOR	PARTY	NUMBER OF TWEETS
Aygul Bidav	BDP	71
Figen Yasar	BDP	19
Cemile Eminoglu	BDP	9
Rezan Zugurli	BDP	2
Necla Yildirim	BDP	17
Zehra Ozyol	CHP	2
Sema Pekdas	CHP	89
Hanay Handan Toprak Benli	CHP	574
Fatma Toru	AKP	332
Fatma Sahin	AKP	417

Regarding the date of sampling (01 January 2014 – 31 March 2014) in terms of numerical distribution of tweets from the political parties out of 1532 tweets in total, AKP takes the biggest part with 749 tweets (48.9 %) by two candidates. CHP has the second biggest part with 665 tweets (43.4 %) by three candidates. And lastly BDP becomes the third party in terms of tweet numbers with 118 tweets (7.7 %) by five candidates.

Figure 4.1: Distribution of Tweets



Although lots of the elected women candidates are BDP members, they have the lowest number of tweets. The situation may have various reasons but one of them can be explained by the gap in access to the new communication technologies in Turkey. As in the case of MPs, the candidates from the regions where the access is low may prefer traditional campaigning methods more than social media. And the candidates of BDP were trying to get elected in cities like Mardin, Diyarbakir, Mus where the Internet access is really low in comparison to the cities like Istanbul or Izmir.

4.1.2 The Usage of Twitter after the Censorship in Turkey

On 20 March 2014, access to Twitter was blocked in Turkey hours after the Prime Minister then, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, vowed to "root out" the social media network where some voice recordings and documents have been leaked and this situation damaged the reputation of the government just before the local elections. According to those recordings and documents, there was a strong evidence of corruption among the government. For that reason, a protection measure had been taken against Twitter.

In spite of the fact that Twitter had not made a formal statement about the censorship, the company had sent a tweet about it by advising the users in Turkey that they can send their tweets through their mobile phone text messaging feature. Users were also sending tweets by reaching the site in some illegal ways such as using VPN which makes one's location look like in another country rather than the real location. In that case, another country but Turkey.

By those ways Twitter users in Turkey started immediately to protest the decision of blocking by saying that it is a kind of censorship. Moreover, the hashtag of

“Twitterisblockedinturkey” had become a top trending hashtag globally in a couple of hours. On 27 March 2014, Istanbul Anatolia 18th Criminal Court of Peace suspended the afore-mentioned court order. By extension, Turkey's constitutional court ruled that the ban is illegal. Accordingly, the Twitter ban was lifted two weeks after the Turkish government blocked the social media site (Rawlinson, 2014).

For this study, I have looked at the usage of Twitter among the candidates who are in the sample of this research. Seven candidates have not sent any tweet after the blocking of Twitter. Only three of the candidates had continued to use Twitter in spite of the censorship in Turkey. Two of them were the candidates of CHP, the opposition party, and one of them was the candidate of BDP. It is not a surprise that there has not been sent a single tweet after the ban by the candidates of AKP, the ruling party which was the reason behind the ban.

In details, 10 percent of the total tweets by Aygul Bidav (BDP) had been sent after the censorship. Sema Pekdas (CHP) had only sent 2 tweets after 21 March 2014 until the elections. Hanay Handan Toprak Benli (CHP) kept using Twitter at most by sending 90 tweets after the ban. She also had the highest numbers of tweets in total with 574 tweets as it is mentioned above.

However, the content of the tweets which is going to be examined later on this study after the censorship was not about the censorship at all. Those three candidates had never mentioned about the government's decision of blocking in their tweets. They used the site as if nothing had happened and sent tweets for their election campaigns.

4.1.3 The Usage of Technical Features of Twitter

Twitter involves a lot of features which helps its users to express themselves even more in 140 characters. Sending tweets with photos, videos, URL links and GIFs for

richer content, adding polls to the tweets to get opinions from other Twitter users, using hashtags to reach more focused information about one's interest, retweet of other user's tweets and mentioning someone else's user name or replying to other's mentions to become more interactive are some of these features of Twitter.

Regarding this study, I am going to analyse a couple of them to understand how and why the candidates had used these features.

First of all, attaching media in the format of photo, video or GIF to their tweets without sacrificing the characters that Twitter users have is something that they rely on most of the time. URL links are also used in tweets to refer a website or a specific webpage to enrich the content of tweets.

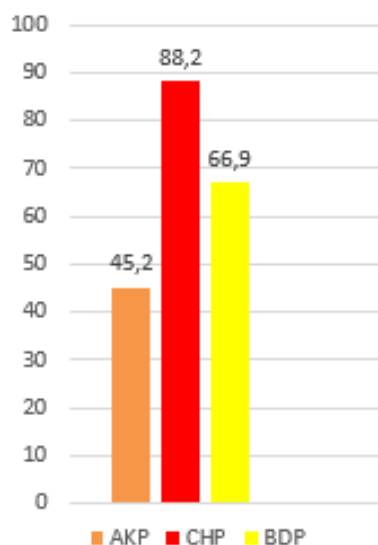
One another feature of Twitter is called "hashtag". A hashtag is written with a "#" symbol before a relevant word and it is used to index keywords or topics on Twitter. This function allows Twitter users to easily follow the issues and topics they are interested in. Thanks to the elements such as reply and mention, one can join the conversation on Twitter by replying to others and by mentioning them in their own tweets. It also increases the interaction among users all over the world.

As the rest of the users, the elected women candidates who are the sample of this study, were also using these features of Twitter during their election campaigns. In general, 84 percent of all tweets (1288 tweets out of 1532) from all parties include at least one of these above mentioned features. CHP has the highest rate with 94 percent (625 tweets out of 665) which includes various technical features of Twitter. BDP is the second party with 85.6 percent (101 tweets out of 118) and AKP has the lowest rate with 75 percent (625 tweets out of 665).

The analysis of the usage of photo, video and URL link can provide us hints about the engagement of the candidates in terms of Twitter literacy. In this matter, nearly all of the candidates had attached photos to their tweets usually to show that they are meeting with the local people, the citizens who may vote for them in their electoral district. Some of them had also used URL links to refer other websites for more information about the things they would like to share with their followers.

Candidates of CHP has the highest rate in terms of using either photo, video or URL links in their tweets. 88.2 percent of all tweets include at least one of these mentioned features. The candidates of BDP are following CHP with a rate of 66.9 percent. AKP has the lowest rate as the tweets of their candidates contain 45.2 percent above mentioned multimedia. Hanay Handan Toprak Benli, one of the candidates of CHP, has the highest number of tweets like that since she sent 535 tweets with multimedia (photo, video or URL link) out of 574 tweets in total. In contrast to others, one of the elected women candidates of BDP, Rezan Zugurli have not sent any tweet which includes multimedia. She is the only one in that matter.

Figure 4.2: The Usage of Photo, Video or URL Link

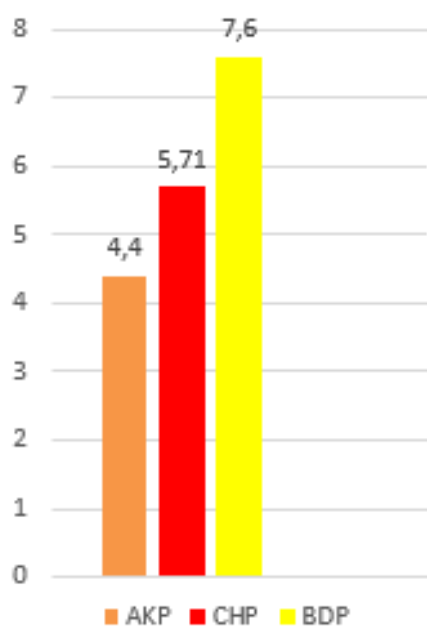


In sum, it can be said that most of the elected women candidates have some kind of Twitter literacy but it does not create a certain result since some of them if not all possibly gets help from social media experts provided by their parties.

Using hashtags in tweets is one of the helpful features of Twitter as it is mentioned before. In spite of the fact that this feature is highly used among Twitter users, the candidates in this sample have not used it very much. Four of them, Cemile Eminoglu (BDP), Rezan Zugurli (BDP), Figen Yasar (BDP), Zehra Ozyol (CHP), have never sent a tweet with any kind of hashtag. Sema Pekdas (CHP) has the highest rate since 31.4 percent of her tweets include at least one hashtag. However, BDP has the highest percentage as political party in general as 7.6 percent of the total tweets that are sent by its candidates involve hashtag.

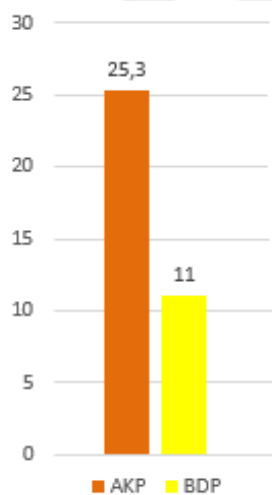
CHP is the second party with 5.71 percent. AKP becomes the last because of the fact that its candidates sent 33 tweets with hashtag out of 749 which means only 4.4 percent of the entire tweets of the candidates of AKP involve hashtag.

Figure 4.3: The Usage of Hashtags



Interactivity which includes mentioning and replying is the last technical feature of Twitter that I am going to analyse for this study. Six of the elected women candidates out of ten have used neither mentioning nor replying on Twitter. None of the elected women candidates of CHP used those features in contrast to the candidates of AKP since all of them have often used both mentioning and replying. Namely, 25.3 percent of the whole tweets of the elected women candidates of AKP include some kind of interactivity. Last of all, 11 percent of the whole tweets that are sent by the elected women candidates of BDP include interactivity in either replying or mentioning form.

Figure 4.4: The Usage of Mentions and Replies



In conclusion, the majority of the sample prefers attaching some kind of multimedia to their tweets whilst the other features such as hashtags, mentioning and replying are not used very often by the elected women candidates.

4.2 The Content of the Tweets

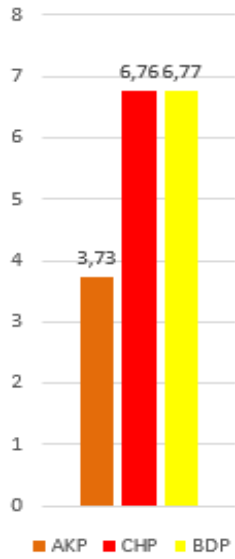
In this section, I am going to analyse tweets by categorizing according to the parties in terms of content that the elected women candidates sent during the period this study covers.

In general, the issues that are mentioned in tweets of the candidates are as follows:

Informing about public meetings, comments on rival parties, projects that are pledged in case of getting elected, activities, making propaganda of her party, announcements, woman issue, local openings and activities that the candidate will attend or have already attended, condolences, celebrations, the local agenda and local news.

The very first issue that is needed to be mentioned is about women. Since the candidates are also women, one could expect from them mentioning about women in a more visible way. However, only 6 candidates out of 10 have mentioned women in their tweets (2 candidates from each party) and only 81 tweets out of 1532 (5,3 % of all tweets) were about women. The candidates of AKP have the lowest number of tweets about women with 28 tweets (3,73 %). The candidates of BDP sent 8 tweets about women (6,77 % of all tweets). Last of all, the candidates of CHP sent 45 tweets about women (6,76 % of all tweets). Those tweets were either to encourage women for contributing to the elections and changing the world or the violence against women. Furthermore, in general the candidates have not made a pledge for woman issue in their tweets. They were just making statements about the current situation and sharing their thoughts about importance of the women.

Figure 4.5: Tweets about Women



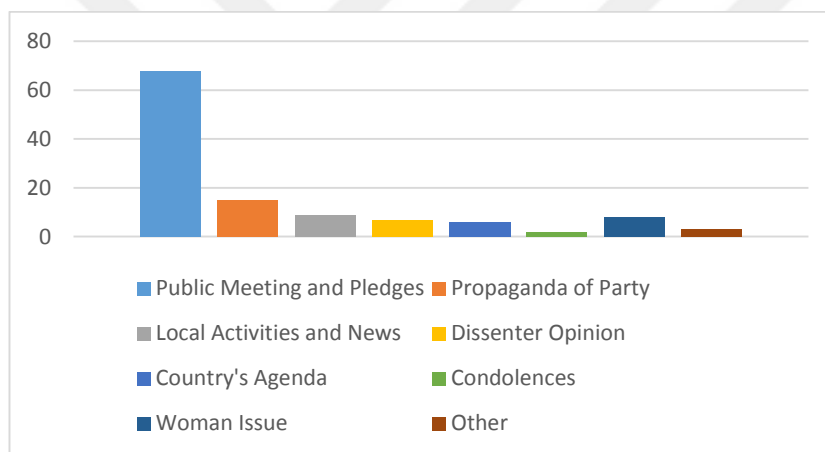
For instance, Sema Pekdas from CHP sent a tweet by saying that “*there are women, women everywhere*” with an attached photo for celebrate the International Women’s Day. One of the woman related tweets of Aygul Bidav from BDP is sent for celebrating Women’s Day; “*woman means life, woman means effort, woman means mother.*”. Fatma Sahin from AKP has also sent a tweet for Women’s Day; “*Democracy without women, production without women, development without woman is not possible.*”.

Figure 4.6: A Tweet of Aygul Bidav



While the candidates of CHP and AKP sent tweets only in Turkish, the candidates of BDP sent tweets both in Turkish and Kurdish since most of the support to the party comes from the Kurds, 17 percent of all the tweets was sent in Kurdish. Due to the fact that mainstream media could not show all of them, most of those bilingual tweets are related to the public meetings, local campaign visits and pledges, 68 tweets out of 118 (57,62 %) as Figure 4.7 indicates, so followers can see all the activities of the candidates. Secondly, 12,71 percent of all tweets (15 tweets) from the candidates of BDP involve ideological opinions and propaganda of their parties.

Figure 4.7: The Distribution of Topics Mentioned by the Candidates of BDP on Twitter



It is also observed that the candidates of BDP sent tweets for ideological reasons by mentioning some kind of autonomous governance with or without hashtag. For instance, Aygul Bidav sent a tweet about the autonomy of a neighbourhood which is something BDP was rooting for; *“Although there is a heavy rain in Bostanici, we are with our people to celebrate the autonomy in Rojava.”* Candidates have also shared their opinions against AKP government in 5,93 percent of their tweets with or without hashtags. 7,62 percent of all tweets (9 tweets) are about local news or local openings that candidates have attended. 2 tweets involve condolences such as *“Sleep in lights beautiful boy #BerkinElvanisimmortal”* sent by Aygul Bidav. And lastly, 6

of the tweets are about the agenda of the country or an important day which is celebrated among world such as International Women’s Day.

As Figure 4.10 illustrates, the candidates of CHP sent 497 tweets out of 665 (74,73 %) about the public meetings, local campaign visits and pledges for the same reason with the candidates of BDP. For instance, Sema Pekdas sent a tweet which involves a pledge; *“It is just a beginning, we govern Konak together. People from Konak will be in governance in their own municipality”*. The tweet from Handan Toprak includes both a pledge and support for its party; *“For a free and happy Avcılar, choose CHP”*.

Figure 4.8: A Tweet of Handan Toprak



4,51 percent of their tweets (30 tweets) involve ideological opinions and propaganda of their parties such as mentioning the ideas of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of CHP, supporting the secularism and so on. 29 tweets (4,36 %) were against the government such as blaming it for some crimes. For instance, Berkin Elvan who was a 15-year-old boy and hit on the head by a tear-gas canister fired by a police officer in Istanbul during the June 2013 anti-government protests in Turkey died on 11 March 2014 and it is observed that the candidates of CHP used hashtags for him and

blamed government for that incident. 4,66 percent of their tweets (31 tweets) are about the agenda of the country or an important day for the world. Last of all, 12 tweets are for condolences, including the ones for Berkin Elvan, and 5 tweets are for local news or local openings which candidates will attend or have attended such as the tweet by Handan Toprak; “*With a beautiful and enthusiastic crowd, we have opened another party unit of us*”.

Figure 4.9: A Tweet of Sema Pekdas

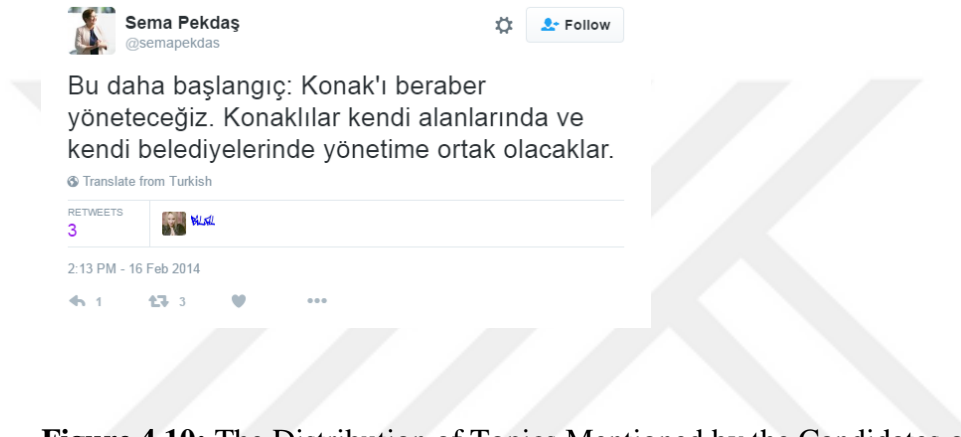
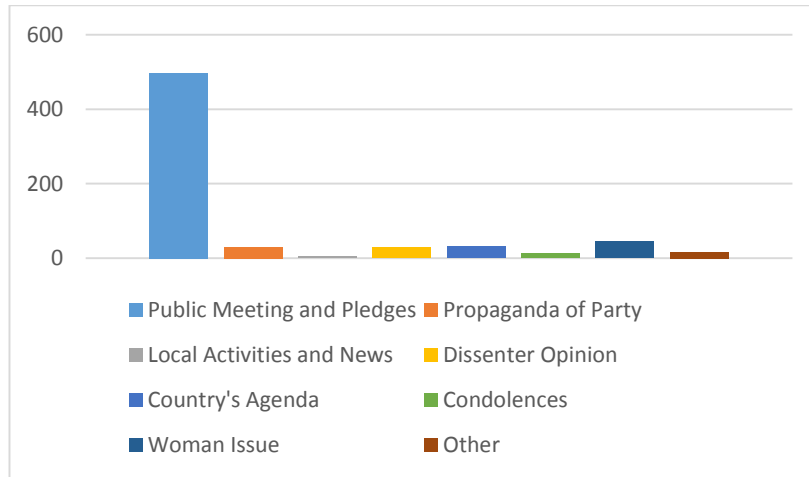


Figure 4.10: The Distribution of Topics Mentioned by the Candidates of CHP on Twitter



As rest of the candidates, the candidates of AKP sent most of their tweets, 594 out of 749 (79,3 % of all tweets) to share their meetings with public, to make pledges or inform about the visits such as the tweet by Fatma Toru: “*we have visited the Konya Press Council*”. 64 tweets of them (8,54 %) are about their party and specifically

most of these are about the party leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. For instance; Fatma Sahin sent a tweet about Erdogan: *“Like a painting... the public meeting of our Prime Minister in Uşak”*.

Figure 4.11: A Tweet of Fatma Sahin



The hashtags that they used in their tweets are also ideological to support their party and its leader. As Figure 4.12 indicates, 6 percent of the tweets (45 tweets) are related to the agenda of the country and all of them are involved good news and none of them involved any kind of criticism. So, there are not any dissenter opinion against government as expected.

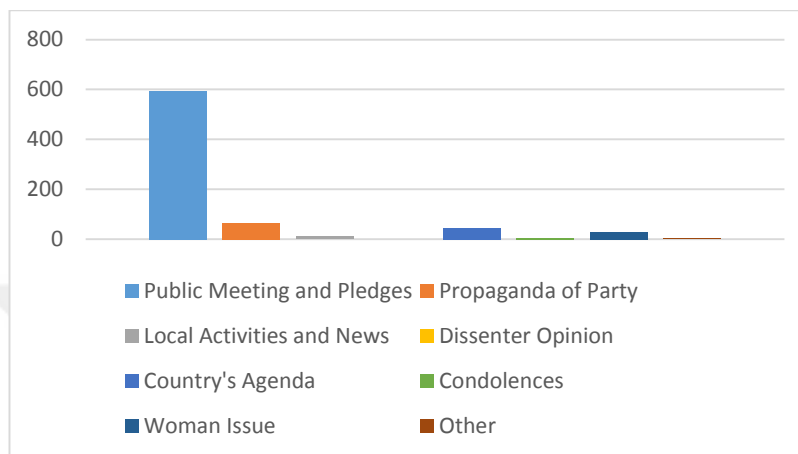
In the final analysis, 5 tweets are for condolences and 10 tweets are about both local news and local openings that candidates will attend or have attended. For example, this tweet of Fatma Sahin was to inform about the visit she made: *“Women are with us again... from the opening of serinevler neighborhood polls.”*

In conclusion, the candidates of all parties have attached high level of importance to share what they have done for the electorate from whom they would get votes.

Therefore, the elected women candidates have constantly informed them with the

activities which they were in and let the electorate know about their pledges. While the candidates of BDP and CHP have criticized government activities, the candidates of AKP who have only mentioned about the good things in terms of news.

Figure 4.12: The Distribution of Topics Mentioned by the Candidates of AKP on Twitter



Regarding my hypotheses, the content of tweets provided some answers. One of my hypotheses was about whether or not the elected women candidates used Twitter to raise their voice for women issue since they are not getting enough attention from the traditional media. The findings I have analysed show that the candidates are not using their opportunity to mention about women, not at least in a visible way.

Although the photos they used in their tweets involve women too and there were congratulations for International Women’s Day, it has not done in a way to underline the women issue by most of the candidates.

Regarding the another hypothesis of this research, it is observed that elected women candidates have used Twitter as a supportive and subsidiary tool rather than a public sphere. As mentioned, public sphere requires a huge amount of interaction however the usage of Twitter by the candidates was mostly one-sided. Instead of being interactive or attaching importance to the relationship building communication, they

used Twitter for informing their followers about the policies they would like to implement and mentioning about the things they have already done.



5. Conclusion

In today's network society, Internet and Internet-based communication have become an important component in political communication studies. With the rapid increase in the Internet accessibility of people in Turkey and the involvement in social networks based on web 2.0 technology, politics is also oriented towards this way and politicians are making political propaganda on social networks to win the citizens' resentment.

Twitter, along the lines of all kind of social media websites, allows candidates to communicate directly with their followers in a quick way, giving a bye on the gatekeepers of the traditional television and newspaper media.

In this study, I have analysed the relation between the women candidates who are elected in 2014 local elections and their Twitter accounts during the election campaigns. It was aimed to reveal the practices of Twitter usage of the candidates during the 2014 local elections.

Quantitative findings have been revealed at first, then the findings related to the technical features of Twitter have been displayed, and finally the topics that politicians share on Twitter have been discussed.

It is observed that some of the candidates have really relied on social media whilst some others have not. Nonetheless, there are several common points that are heavily mentioned in their tweets. First of all, every single one of the candidates in the

sample has mentioned about their political parties presumably to get votes from the supporters of the party. Secondly, they all used Twitter to spread the news about themselves and their electoral district. They also shared URL links of other media platforms when they are related to candidates' agenda such as the news about what they have done for the public regarding elections, what they will do if they are elected, the meetings with the public and so on.

As a result of the findings in general, the dominant issues that politicians shared on Twitter in 2014 local elections are as follows. First of all, candidates mostly used Twitter to make announcements such as informing their followers about a public meeting or a traditional media program they are going to attend. One of the other dominant issue of the posts they send is that the instant sharing from the public meeting platform so they could share their opinions on Twitter at the same time with the public meetings.

As it is mentioned before, the woman issue is not something the candidates have effectively mentioned on Twitter. It was expected in the beginning of this study that women candidates would have used Twitter in a way to support and point other women. Despite the fact that the mainstream media neglects this mission throughout the history, the women candidates have also not attached importance to the women issue. They also have not put excessive emphasis on the fact that they are a woman. However, it is important to point that, in the electoral context it may not matter that you are a woman or a man at the end of the day. Elections are organized by geographical support groups which may intersect with some ethnic and religious groups or particular social classes but it is not seen that people take sides as women and men during the election campaigns (Lee, 2007). Furthermore, elections are held through the medium of political parties which present their candidates as if they can

represent the party's politics, agenda and goals in an effective way. For all of these reasons, the candidates may not lay emphasis on the fact that being a woman since that is not the agenda of their parties.

The language that is used in tweets by the elected women candidates is stressed with compassion rather than toughness and performance.

It is also observed that politicians are trying to be visible on Twitter in terms of political communication in Turkey, as revealed by findings from this research.

Because of the fact that candidates have an account on Twitter, and sharing during the campaign process here shows that they are in a participative position. In this context, we can say that there is an awareness of the new media in terms of political communication. Candidates have also used the technical features provided by Twitter, which shows that Twitter literacy is also good. For instance, hashtag usage identifies trending topics of Twitter; thus hashtags create Twitter's public agenda. It has been observed that the candidates used hashtags, not much though. However, one cannot say that all of these have shown us that the candidates used this social media platform effectively. Of course there could be external reasons such as the censorship of Twitter just before the elections or the regional gap in terms of accessing Internet as mentioned above.

In general, one can claim that the use of new media in 2014 local elections was similar to the 2009 local elections in terms of emphasizing traditional offline campaigns with an online view.

In terms of political communication, the use and effectiveness of social media platforms during the political campaign period is a fact that is increasing day by day.

The biggest difference of Web 2.0 technology from the traditional media and web 1.0

era is that it allows the passive individuals to become active thanks to the interactivity. Participation of the politicians in these channels are also going to increase as much as the citizens because of the relative ease of access to the Internet and the fact that they are in a more participative position in social networks.

It was also seen that the interaction between the candidates and voters were inadequate. In Turkey, we cannot talk about the engagement of politicians in a true usage of Twitter yet regarding this research. As was elaborated in particular campaign, the candidates of political parties have generally intended to deliver their messages through Twitter but have not engaged so deeply yet to interact with the people personally. As a result, the usage of Twitter by the candidates was mostly one-sided instead of being interactive or attaching importance to the relationship building communication.

As a matter of fact, politicians have made interactions more often with a deputy, television program producer or journalists. Therefore, the interaction that politicians have established has been realized with these groups more than the citizens. Also, an important part of the interaction with citizens is with the followers who sent tweets to support them. It cannot be said that politicians have generally developed a relationship on Twitter to negotiate with those who have dissenter opinion. In sum, one of the important findings of this study is that in Twitter, the communication practices of the politicians are mostly the monologue-oriented which has already been a problem of the traditional media due to its one-sided communication nature.

It is in my view that this interaction-effect that requires further – more structured and interdisciplinary – research. Soon scholars from the fields of Political Science, International Relations and Communication Studies will be forced to study the new

tools of media within the relation of socio-political structure. “Twitter Revolution” may not be a real thing or could be something exaggerated but the technology of today is surely going to keep on changing the world as we know it. Moreover, it is also going to force policymakers, scholars and analysts to look at an ever bigger picture. This thesis was a first attempt in doing so.

Another important problem that is needed to be solved is the lack of new media literacy in Turkey. Accessing information in a more equitable way is important to reduce the inequalities among the country. Even though Turkey has significant ICT(Information and Communication Technologies) resources, experienced people and national telecommunication infrastructures in operation; Turkey has some important problems that reduce its ability to benefit from ICTs because of the digital gap which is ignored when liberal policies are started to be implemented on information society since 1980s. A high level of unemployment, unequal income distribution, a low level of education, together with a variety of gender issues and barriers in ICT-related fields are some of these problems. If the new media literacy increases, the engagement of civil society in all kind of policies and regulations would also increase, thus a broad public participation can be provided (Törenli, 2006).

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