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Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială

ISSN: 1583-3410 (print), ISSN: 1584-5397 (electronic)

Selected by coverage in Social Sciences Citation Index, ISI databases

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Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială, 2017, vol. 59, pp. 86-103

The online version of this article can be found at:

www.rcis.ro, www.doaj.org and www.scopus.com

Published by:

Expert Projects Publishing House



On behalf of:

„Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University,

Department of Sociology and Social Work

and

Holt Romania Foundation

REVISTA DE CERCETARE SI INTERVENTIE SOCIALA

is indexed by ISI Thomson Reuters - Social Sciences Citation Index

(Sociology and Social Work Domains)



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The Role of Social Media as a Negotiation Sphere for ‘Public Good’: The Case North Cyprus

Eda Hancer AKKOR¹

Abstract

This study stems from accepting the idea that through new media technologies, a public sphere can be created where issues and policies regarding the future of a society and *public good* can be discussed. Within the framework of this research, the potential for social media to create more democratic and collective communication and to mould public opinion in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is also questioned. For this purpose, in the context of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, three popular politicians’ official Facebook pages were chosen for data collection and analysis. Their activities on their official Facebook pages and public comments on their posts taken from a four month period were studied by using the Critical Discourse Analysis model. Consequently, it reflects that the political actors do not reply to the comments of citizens from their official Facebook pages, yet they share their opinions through replying the private or direct messages of citizens. This indicates a fast and dual communication between the political actors and voters via social media. Additionally, citizens assert whether they agree or disagree with the posts on such official Facebook pages, and a discussion environment is established through expressing different opinions among the citizens. Hence, ‘public good’ can be negotiated through social media and that can contribute on the formation of a public sphere.

Keywords: democracy, political participation, public sphere, social media, North Cyprus.

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Introduction

This study is based on the acceptance of the assumption that a public sphere can be created through social networks where existing societal issues and policies in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus can be discussed, which will allow people to express their opinions, discuss the ‘public good‘ by suggesting new ideas and solutions and that also creates the opportunity to realize a common benefit. The use of social media channels for the purposes of improving political participation will, undoubtedly, create a more democratic environment within the society. However, aside from using social media for political participation, its use by the majority of citizens as a platform where ‘free time‘ experiences are shared, puts them at risk of being a producer of consumerism culture and a customer of the culture industry. The young people, who raise awareness on social issues and question, create ideas, formulate different opinions and discuss them by using the new media technologies and social media platforms, can have a significant contribution to the creation of opportunities for public platforms, while aiming to determine what the public benefit is in the discussions.

As social media platforms do not have an extensive history of being used effectively for the purposes of political participation in the North Cyprus, academic research in this area is also very limited. For this reason, the importance of this research is exemplified by the contributions it will make to resolve this deficiency in the literature and for providing an insight into the social media use for political participation purposes within the Turkish Cypriot community. Firstly, in this study, a literature review will be conducted on the existing limited academic work that has been conducted in this field in the TRNC. Subsequently, the methodology of the research will be followed by analysis of the Facebook pages of the three most popular politicians in the context of the overall research aim. In the final chapter, the findings from this analysis will be evaluated in relation to the *public sphere* and *political participation*.

New Media and Public Sphere

Today, through the social media platforms that form a vast network which is regenerating and improving at an extremely rapid pace and by the participation of millions of people from different countries around world, it is possible for citizens to share their views verbally, vocally and visually, to share their opinions, to inform the masses and to promote interaction. Digitality, interactivity, multimedia formatting, user-driven content creation, hypertextuality, dispersal and virtuality (Lister et al., 2009) are among the features of Web 2.0 and are characteristics that differentiate new media from traditional media (Binark & Koray, 2011) and have made the use of Facebook, which is a social media platform, essential in political

participation processes, particularly during election campaigns. This situation is particularly attractive for political actors and social media platforms are commonly used by politicians to communicate with the citizens. The importance of using social media platforms is continually increasing for both citizens, who generally do not have the opportunity to convey their opinions directly to the politicians through traditional media tools such as the radio, TV and newspapers, and also for political actors, whose visibility may be low and can experience challenges with making their voices heard. There is a consensus that the features of new technologies such as interaction, feedback communication might positively affect the democratic mechanisms (Chadwick, 2006; Cindio & Schuler, 2012; Zissis & Papadopoulou, 2009). Pursuant to such features, the new media allows the fast dissemination of opinions that are not covered under the traditional media in addition to the opinions or comments of opposing groups and individuals, and their inclusion to these discussions and dialogues (Rheingold, 2000; Kellner 1999). The new media also provides opportunities to the small sized parties and individual candidates to raise their voices respectively (Davis, et al., 2009). By utilizing the features of social media platforms, it has become possible for everyone with access to establish the agenda and to escape from the monopolization of the traditional media. Furthermore, the contents produced by social media users are attracting the attention of traditional media and the contents produced on social media are now increasingly represented in the mainstream media (Goksu, 2016). Compared to the traditional forms of media, these platforms provide a broader opportunity to create/share/circulate one's opinions, and can even influence or change/transform politicians' discourses through criticism. With the increasing use of blogs, social media spaces such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace and websites like YouTube, the individuals allow people to be active in political life rather than passive, to think about the problems of country, to discuss and to communicate interactively in terms of audio-visual level (Çankaya, 2015). Social media platforms, predominantly Facebook and Twitter, which are also actively used for political participation, enable the possibility for public contribution. Thus, this makes it a necessity to consider this subject in the context of the public sphere and democracy.

Habermas defined the public sphere as an arena in which citizens attempt to debate issues on general interests of common affairs through an equal and free process of participation and negotiation, which is distinct from the state and where discourse that is critical of the state is produced (Fraser, 1990) and people gather, organise and express their opinions (Habermas, 1974). In the 18th century, coffee houses, saloons and guilds functioned as public spheres where individuals shared their opinions and discussed societal issues (Habermas, 1997). Following coffee shops and saloons, the media was included in the list of institutions with a public function. With advancements in technology, radio, television and the print media became tools for communication in the public sphere (Habermas, 1974).

However, the increased intervention of the state on the one hand, and the commercialisation of the media on the other hand has led to privileged private groups influencing the public sphere (Habermas, 1997), which means that the media's public function could not be sustained and Habermas' public sphere has collapsed on many levels. On the other hand, today, it is argued that social media platforms are now creating a public sphere of discussion. While one group suggests that because citizens do not have equal opportunities in terms of access, new communication technologies, the Internet and social media are obstacles preventing the creation of a public sphere the other group argues that social media platforms are providing new opportunities for creating a foundation on which an environment can be constructed where citizens have the capability to discuss societal issues. In consideration with such discussions, a part of studies argued that without any equal access to online technologies and information, Internet, as a public sphere, would not go beyond an illusion (Pavlik, 1994; Williams and Pavlik, 1994; Williams, 1994). On the other hand, the argument of Papacharissi (2002) underlining the distinction between the public sphere and public space, indicated that Internet, as a public space, allows political discussion while as a public sphere, it creates a discussion environment for the democratic exchange of ideas and opinions. The studies indicating the political benefits of social media emphasize that such network bring discussion culture to the citizens and generate diversity in topics and opinions under the political domain (Gueorguieva, 2008; Williams & Gulati, 2012). Hence, the positive impact of new communication technologies such as Internet and social media on the increase of political participation is emphasized (Bimber & Copeland, 2013; Hong, 2015) and the former roles of traditional media on transforming the society into more democratic structure are now expected from the Internet and new communication technologies (Hamelink, 2001). When compared to the traditional media, these new opportunities not only enable individuals to be a consumer, but also to become a creator of content by moving from a passive standpoint to an active position. Rather than an environment in the mainstream media filtering the views with gate keeping, Peter Dahlgren (2009) noted that with the new communication technologies, the users could create content with the opportunities for the transaction of citizen participation. Features such as offering different views and content, allowing different voices to be heard, thereby diversifying the public opinion and facilitating political participation (Goksu, 2016) are discourses that support the assertion that social media platforms are important for creating a new public sphere.

Use of Social Media for Political Participation in the Northern Cyprus

Despite the limited academic research on social media use for political participation purposes in the TRNC, these studies provide significant important indicators on this topic. Simge Kurban, in her research analysing the social media strategies of the National Unity Party (NUP) and the Republican Turkish Party (RTP) during the 2013 TRNC General Elections, stated that when the social media use is examined, it can be observed that both parties lack an extensive history of exploiting the potential of social media, and that face-to-face communication is regarded as the most effective method in the country. According to the findings of this research, the NUP did create Twitter and Facebook accounts shortly before the 2013 General Elections, and the perspective on social media was shaped as a one-way communication strategy, with the social media policies focused on the election campaign; consequently, rather than being a long-term strategy, social media was only used tactically during the election campaign itself. While the research showed that the RTP did not have an extensive history of social media usage either represented by the fact that it created a Twitter account in 2011, and only joined Facebook in 2013. Unlike the NUP, the RTP's social media strategy was more long-term and was integrated with its traditional communication work (Kurban, 2014).

Research conducted by Arslan and Secim (2015) on the 2013 TRNC snap parliamentary elections, studied the importance of social media in providing opportunities for citizens to be acquainted with political affairs, as well as two-way political dialogue between the electors and voters. The findings from the field study on this topic were analysed using the descriptive relational analysis method. In the research, it was demonstrated that the social media is a crucial tool for accessing political information, and that 88.5 percent of the voters studied as part of this research satisfied their need for political information through social media. It was revealed that 57.1 percent of the participants in this research used social media when expressing their demands and opinions regarding political issues. Additionally, 78.3 percent of the participants had commented on posts with political content shared on social media, and 30.2 percent had created a discussion group or created their own space for discussion. According to the results of the study, as the access of voters to political information increased through the convenience of social media tools, the frequency of citizens conveying their demands and opinions on political matters also increased through the same tools. This information therefore predicts that the significance of social media platforms in the democratic process will continue to increase (Arslan & Secim, 2015).

Method

To serve the purpose of this study, three politicians' official Facebook pages were selected to investigate their social media activities. These politicians were chosen for this study because they were candidates in the 2015 Presidential Election. Thus, this research was conducted on the intense political agenda of the TRNC, which was observed during the 2015 Presidential Election campaign held between 1st January and 30th April.

Participants, Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

In this research, the conditions and/or possibility of creating a platform with equal and free participation through the use of social media is studied, in which views can be shared on the political issues concerning the future of a society is discussed. Aside from the data obtained from the social media platforms, interviews with professionals who were responsible for managing the politicians' social media accounts were conducted. For ethical reasons, the names of the participants have not been given. Instead, they are coded as follows: The three politicians are coded as P1, P2 and P3. Interviews were conducted with three professionals who were responsible for managing the politicians' social media accounts. The interviewees are coded as follows: (1) The Social Media Consultant of P1 is coded as C1; (2) The Social Media Consultant of P2 is coded as C2; (3) The Social Media Consultant of P3 is coded as C3.

In this study, the data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Interviews lasted approximately two hours and were aimed at obtaining the views of the interviewees on the role of social media in terms of whether the participation of citizens contributes to the democratic environment.

The study sought to find answers to the following research questions:

- Is it possible to create an environment where the 'public good' can be discussed and public opinion can be moulded through posts on Facebook, either by political actors or by citizens and where views, opinions, problems and concerns on the social, economic and political future can be expressed?
- The characteristics of creating an environment that will establish the opportunity to share, disseminate and negotiate opinions is studied and the main research question focuses on how effective this environment is or could be in the future? Within the framework of this main research question, the potential for social media to create more democratic and collective communication and to mould public opinion is also questioned.

In this study, van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis model was used to analyse these Facebook page activities in order to determine whether the public were involved in political participation by means of these posts on the politicians' pages. With this method, the background of the politicians' messages, the comments from citizens in relation to these messages, the discussions that occurred, and the degree of politicians' involvement in this process were all studied.

Adaptation of Critical Discourse Analysis to Social Media

Methodology problems have arisen related to social media used in communication studies, and therefore it is necessary to adapt research methods specifically for social media. Teun van Dijk's discourse analysis is one of the most commonly preferred methods for investigating politicians' social media use, and for determining whether they follow a transactional model of when communicating with the citizens.

Teun van Dijk (2000) focused on how ideologies are expressed, legitimised and reproduced in a society through discourse. Many researchers have focused on notions such as 'power', 'domination', 'hegemony', 'ideology', 'gender', 'race', 'discrimination', 'class', 'interest', 'social structure' and 'social order' through Critical Discourse Analysis, which exposes the disclosed structures of power. Critical Discourse Analysis is centred on the abuse of societal power, the factors of domination and inequality through texts and speeches in social and political contexts, its reproduction and the actions taken in opposition (van Dijk, 2001). Van Dijk (2001) underlined that all levels and structures of text and speech can largely be controlled by powerful speakers, and such power can be abused. Van Dijk (1995) focused on exposing the secret and covered structures of some elitists' discourses that are possessed by the minority instead of the oppressive majority, yet are influential in the society, and can directly or indirectly affect people's consciousness and thoughts, and this is one of the main aims of critical discourse analysis.

According to van Dijk (1993), by considering the complexity and variety of societal issues, the manner in which inequality and injustice are enforced, sustained, legitimised, permitted or ignored by the power elites should be analysed critically. Critical discourse analysis is based on a socio-political stance, and the political aim of this work aims to transform this dominance and inequality by evaluating it in a critical sense. Critical discourse analysis is a trans-disciplinary approach that studies structure in textual and contextual dimensions: in the textual dimension, the structures of text and speech, the relationships between the structures, and the functions and processes are investigated systematically; in the contextual dimension, the cognitive, social, cultural and historic contexts of these structures are considered (van Dijk, 1991).

The discourse analysis developed by van Dijk to analyse discourses in the news was tabularised by Ozer (Ozer, 2009). This study employs the tabularised discourse analysis model developed by Ozer, and the Facebook interface template created by Aygul with the intention of being used for group page analysis (Aygul, 2013). In this context, based on the abovementioned template, the comments section that was originally under the schematic structure, consisting of news sources as well as verbal reactions and comments made by the parties on the news events, was changed and adapted to be the comments and the responses to these comments, considering the interactive nature of social media. This section will be the focal point of the research into the possibility of creating a public sphere. The comments made in reaction to politician's posts, whether they responded or not, and the degree to which the response was satisfactory are particularly valuable factors for this research. The table used in this study in its official Facebook page-adapted version is as follows:

A. Macro Structure

1. Thematic Structure

- a. Name of the official account
- b. Type of the official account
- c. Profile and cover pictures of the official account

2. Schematic Structure

- a. Status
 1. Narrative voice of the post
 2. Background information
 3. Contextual information
- b. Comments
 1. Comments to the post
 2. Responses to the comments

B. Micro Structure

1. Syntactic Analysis

- a. Whether the sentence structure is active or passive
- b. Whether the sentence structure is simple or complex

2. Local Cohesion

- a. Causal relationship
- b. Functional relationship
- c. Referential relationship

3. Choice of Words

Word choices

4. Rhetoric

- a. Images
- b. Convincing information

Facebook as a Public sphere: Analysis and Findings

Social media can be defined as the activities and behaviors that result from the information and opinions shared online (Karakose *et al.*, 2016). In this research, the samples selected from the posts with the most comments were subjected to critical discourse analysis. In the review of the official Facebook pages of the politicians, it was found that the most frequently discussed topic was the Cyprus problem. In other words, the posts analysed below were specifically chosen due to their importance in regards to the Cyprus problem. Facebook offers various interactive features that enable the users to engage in text-based communication with others via walls, inboxes, and chat formats, which in turn permit the sharing of pictures, videos, links, and so on (Lin, 2016). This study places emphasis on how the politicians used social media, as well as the influence they attempted to create over the Turkish Cypriot community through their written, visual and vocal posts on their official Facebook pages.

With the scope of this research, when the official Facebook pages of P1, P2, P3 was investigated, it was found that the pages were created shortly before the Presidential elections, for campaign purposes. Following the second ballot that took place on April 26, all politicians, with the exception of P1, actively continued the use of their social media pages. They disseminated their views on various issues through social media. When the official Facebook pages of the politicians were studied individually, it was observed that P2's page had 17,822 likes and followers. The page information included details on his date and place of birth, his position, his biography, along with profession, education and contact information. Additionally, his Instagram and Twitter accounts as well as web page were also included (August 18, 2016). It was found that P1's official Facebook page was liked and followed by 16,427 people. In terms of page information, there were only phone number details, web page address, and also his title, which had been added previously and had clearly not been updated. When attempts were made to access P1's web page, it was found that this web address was no longer active (August 18, 2016). P3's official Facebook page was followed by 15,804 people. The page details contained information on the politician's place of birth, position, email address and web page address. Attempts to access P3's web page revealed that the page was also no longer available (August 18, 2016).

When the Facebook pages of P1, P2 and P3 were analysed, it was observed that posts sharing information such as announcements and news about the politicians' visits to institutions, organizations and villages, press releases, announcements on the TV programs he would be appearing on and videos of these programs, posters, and slogans were found. When the contents of these politicians' shares on their Facebook pages is examined, parallel to the emphasis in Irvan's (2015) evaluation, it is understood that, although the content that can be censored on the traditional media is present in social media, when the content production is

studied, it is concluded that traditional media is still irreplaceable, as the majority of the content on social media is formed based on the content that is regularly produced by the traditional media. Irvan emphasised that because politics in North Cyprus is still predominantly conducted on traditional media, as it creates the opportunity to access more voters, it is premature to conclude that the power and influence of traditional media has diminished. The politicians' press releases were also published on their own websites as well as on numerous Internet news sites. The politicians shared links to these press releases from their websites or news sites on their Facebook pages by adding short descriptions. Many of these shared texts consisted of press releases prepared for traditional media. While the politicians' tour schedules and the TV programmes on which they were scheduled to appear were also announced on their official Facebook pages, the supporters of the politicians expressed their praise and posted supportive messages.

Aside from the supportive messages mentioned above, there were also some criticisms and various comments directed towards the politicians. It can be observed that the politicians or the professionals operating their social media campaigns only responded to the comments and criticisms by the citizens in a limited manner. In the semi-structured interview on this topic conducted with C2, it was stated that when P2 receives criticism on a particular topic through social media, this creates the opportunity for them to enable an older, respected person who is highly competent on the given issue to respond via the comments section (Personal Interview, June 11, 2015). Another important point on this issue is that when the supporters of a politician respond to criticism on a politicians' political discourse, a discussion space is thus created by revealing different opinions. The citizens had the opportunity to direct questions on societal issues or to voice their criticisms by commenting on the politicians' shares. As stated in the semi-structure interviews, the citizens also had the capability of reaching out to all the politicians through private messages. Nevertheless, in the present study, it was observed by analysing the social media pages of the politicians that a bilateral discussion platform between the citizens and the politicians was not created exactly. The findings from studying selected posts on the politicians' official Facebook pages, particularly based on the importance they held in the context of the Cyprus problem using van Dijk's Discourse Analysis are discussed below

Politician 1

Macro Structure

Thematic Structure: Name of the Official Page: The name of P1 is used. Type of the Official Page: Politician. Profile picture and cover photo of the official page: In P1's profile picture, his portrait was used. In terms of the cover photo, it was found that a total of 12 images were used throughout the duration of this research. After the first picture that contained slogans, there was an image with a message celebrating Women's Day, and the following pictures were of the politician together with members of the public.

Schematic Structure: The statement "Let's make a claim on the state, freedom, democracy and Turkey's right to guarantee by going to the polls", made by P1 to journalists from Turkey was shared on his official Facebook page on April 25, 2015, along with a link to the news on his website that was also given to the press. With the expressions used here, it is emphasized that those who demonstrated support for P1 will make a claim on the government and Turkey's right of guarantee. With this statement, the political discourses that P1 uses during his political life are emphasised. The sentence also highlights P1's political point of view or position regarding the Cyprus problem and he is also appealing to citizens who share the same political opinions to demonstrate their support for his campaign.

Comments: In the comments that were made in response to this statement, P1 is depicted as the protector of the position of the TRNC. It is frequently expressed in these comments that if P1 were to lose political power, the continuity of the government would be threatened. In some comments, it was stated that the ruling party had previously been involved in unfair practices, and the commentators demand that these unfair practices be eliminated as soon as possible. Furthermore, it was claimed that with P1's political power, the continuity of the state would be achieved, and thus the risks presented to Turkish Cypriots by the Annan Plan could be averted. In the same comment, emphasis was placed on "Turkishness" with the statement, 'How happy is the one who says I am a Turk', in reference to those who had originally established the state and defended it. In regard to 15 comments made on P1's post, no response was received from either the page owner or the social media experts responsible for monitoring his social media accounts. Furthermore, no responses were written by others who had seen the post and comments in relation to above-mentioned 15 comments, and thus no discussion space was created.

Micro Structure

Syntactic Analysis: This used text written in a news format, where the preference was to use an active narrative voice. It can be seen that the sentence structures are simple and easily comprehensible.

Local Coherence: Emphasis on supporting P1 to claim the state, for independence and Turkey's right of guarantee were all prominent. It can be observed that the underlying strategy behind this post was to attract support, particularly from those citizens who had right-wing political leanings.

Choice of words: It is observed that word groups such as *independence*, *guarantee* and *claiming the government* were used, and these are phrases that were aimed at convincing patriotic groups.

Rhetoric: The statements can be evaluated as attempts to attract the support of the people who hold nationalistic political views.

Politician 2

Macro Structure

Thematic Structure: Name of the Official Page: The name of P2 is used; Type of the Official Page: Politician; Profile picture and cover photo of the official page: The same photo appeared on both the cover and profile pictures of P2's page. However, it was generally observed that the photograph on the cover page symbolized P2's political perspective. During the research period, all three cover pages used were arranged in the same manner.

Schematic Structure: A link to the news on P2's website that was also given to the press was shared on April 6, 2015, with the caption 'Our youth should be on the fields where they deserve to be, not at the stadiums or in front of a screen' along with an image of P2. Discussions on Turkish Cypriot football was one of the most important topics in the society that was being discussed at that time. On one hand, it was discussed that if the Cyprus Turkish Football Association' (CTFA) was granted membership to the Cyprus Football Federation (CFF), it would be possible for Turkish Cypriot teams and players to have the opportunity to compete in international football competitions; however, on the other hand, it was discussed this would represent the end of CTFA's 60 history, in addition to the assertion that, under the authority of the CFF, Turkish Cypriot Football would be answerable to Greek Cypriots. In a period where intense discussions were observed on this topic, this post shared on P2's page conveys the message that such victimisation in sporting activities could be overcome if there was an effective resolution to the Cyprus problem.

Comments: In the comments section, emphasising that Turkish Cypriot youth is generally excluded from sports due to the Cyprus problem, it was stated that if a solution could be found to resolve the issue, the youth could be represented in the international arena and would therefore become ‘world citizens’. In the comments made by those in opposition to P2, it is evident that the world public opinion is considered responsible for the abovementioned victimisation of the youth. Responses to the comments of those against the CFF process were given by people who are supportive of this strategy and emphasise its necessity. This post by P2 regarding Turkish Cypriot Football was liked by 858 users and shared by 63 people as of April 24, 2015. Under this post, comments were made by supporters of the CFF membership process, and opposing comments were posted by approximately 20 people. No responses were given either by the page owner or the social media experts.

Micro Structure

Syntactic Analysis: A simple and active narrative voice was used in the sentence structures.

Local Coherence: The Republic of Cyprus participates in international sports events along with Turkey; however, the youth from the TRNC, a country only recognised by Turkey, is not permitted to participate in such events and this has engaged a considerable amount of space in the society’s agenda during this period of division. Turkish and Greek football teams‘ participate in the same European competitions and the opportunity for Turkish Cypriot youth to take part in international competitions through CFF membership without the necessity to wait for the Cyprus issue to be resolved was presented as an example of the possibility of mutual collaboration prior to a solution. This post, made on behalf of P2 in a period when CCF membership initiatives were active and this issue was being intensively discussed, was targeted at Turkish Cypriot youth, who are forced to watch sports competitions involving the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey on screens or at the stadiums, thus encouraging them to take P2’s side, who displayed his willingness to find a solution to the Cyprus issue.

Choice of words: Words that were influential on the youth who experience victimization due to the sports embargo and the subsequent sense of exclusion were selected. While the message that *we need to stop being the audience* was conveyed by saying *not at the stadiums or in front of screens*, it was attempted to represent the method of eliminating this victimization with the words *that is deserved*.

Rhetoric: P2's supportive messages supportive of the CFF were particularly effective on youth and groups who favour a solution to the Cyprus issue during a period when Greek Cypriot and Turkish teams were competing internationally. Thus, it appealed to the mutual sentiments of both those who are 'pro-solution' with the potential to show him support, and also the young people in society.

Politician 3

Macro Structure

Thematic Structure: Name of the Official Page: The name of P3 is used. Type of the Official Page: Politician. Profile picture and cover photo of the official page: On P3's official page, the profile picture was a photo of the politician posing while holding a pair of glasses. The four images used as the cover photo reflected the colours of her political party and included some text, which was the name of the political party to which she belongs.

Schematic Structure: In a post from April 13 that included a photograph of P3, it was stated that 'the only thing that was not attempted to achieve a solution in Cyprus was to have woman at the negotiation table', adopted from a report published by the International Crisis Group following the signing of the February 11 Joint Declaration. P3 is a female politician and due to this reason, the posts that were shared through her social media pages have a 'female' theme. The intention of posting such photos was to demonstrate the importance of women in politics, that they should assume important positions of responsibility and should have an important role in handling important topics, such as the Cyprus problem.

Comments: This post is aimed at strengthening the key political message with the inclusion of the International Crisis Group's report, and the majority of the 24 comments on the post were of a supportive nature. While some others found the statement strange and questioned it, other comments emphasised youth and regional problems and criticised that insufficient focus was placed on these problems. In one of the comments on this post, P3's previous successful positions were mentioned and it was underlined that politicians should have extensive knowledge on the Cyprus issue. No comments were received in relation to the criticisms of P3's post from the more than 500 people who liked it, the 41 people who shared the post, or from the 24 people who made comments. Moreover, no responses were received from the page owner or the social media experts who were responsible for the online activities either.

Micro Structure

Syntactic Analysis: This post, written in an active voice, utilised simple and easily understandable language.

Local Coherence: In the post, emphasising the need for a feminine perspective on the Cyprus issue, it is understood that this was considered in order to receive positive feedback for P3, as a female politician. By supporting these statements on an international report, the intention was to provide scientific support for the proclamation.

Choice of words: As the February 11 Joint Declaration, the final official document of negotiations for resolving the Cyprus problem, was used, emphasis was placed on the ‘international document’ and ‘female’ words were prominent.

Rhetoric: The post emphasised the need for a female perspective on the negotiations. By providing support for this assertion with an international report it was assumed that positive feedback would be received, but this also reveals that the politician and acknowledged the criticisms of the role of women in the political process and responded accordingly. With this post, the rhetoric indicating that the inclusion of a female is sufficient to make a difference in the process is prominent, regardless of the extent of her political knowledge.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted in order to support and elaborate on the discourse analysis on the posts on the Facebook pages, as well as to determine the strategy that were followed to reach citizens, the advantages that social media provided and to question the relationships that were established with citizens through the use of new media. In these semi-structured interviews, the common ground for all politicians, except for P1, was that they provided individual responses to private messages sent to them by citizens via social media. In his interview, C1 mentioned that responses were not made to the private messages sent to P1. C1 expressed that these messages were evaluated by the team, and after the most important correspondence were determined, the respective message sender were contacted directly via phone or in person by P1 himself (Personal Interview, November 23, 2015).

In response to the question of how the comments or private messages written by the citizens were grouped and prioritized, it was stated that 65 per cent of the messages delivered to P1 were related to personal problems and consisted of issues regarding personal employment and finances. In these interviews, it was stated that both societal and personal matters were conveyed to P2; however, when the messages and comments received by P3 were ranked based on frequency, the most frequent theme of the messages was related to their support, personal requests and demands were second, and criticisms came third. It was also indicated that comments containing offensive language and accusations on all the politicians’ Facebook pages were deleted, and those who posted these comments were

either blocked or deleted from the pages. C2 stated that the platform they used most frequently to connect with citizens was social media, and that even many volunteers reached them via Facebook. C2 emphasised that communication with the volunteers was performed via social media, and that even appointments for face-to-face communications were scheduled on this platform (Personal Interview, June 11, 2015).

Conclusion

Selected posts related to the Cyprus issue on the official Facebook pages of the three politicians were studied using van Dijk's critical discourse analysis, including the comments made by the public on these posts. According to the results, it was determined that politicians did not respond to the majority of the comments made on their Facebook pages and only responded to private messages. While regular responses to private messages indicate that the citizens' messages attain their objectives, this can also be evaluated as an added value of social media for the citizens. This indicates that it is possible to establish a rapid form of two-way communication through social networks between the political actors and the citizens, instead of political actors communicating using a one-way form of communication to deliver messages. Moreover, this research also shows that compared to traditional media, social media contributes to a more efficient and open-to-interaction type of communication between the citizens and the political actors. Another important point concluded from the analysis is that criticisms related to a politicians' discourse often receive responses by individuals who have internalised the politicians' views. Furthermore, this critical discourse analysis performed on the general observations on the abovementioned politicians' official Facebook pages and predetermined posts is closely related to fully establishing the conditions for creating a public sphere through social media and to increase in its use in terms of political participation.

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