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## Use of Social Media for Political Purposes: The Case of Diyarbakir

Remziye ERDEM<sup>1</sup>, Ibrahim OZEJDER<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

The use of social media, which has turned into a different area of communication with the developments in technology, creates a participatory, free and democratic space according to some approaches, and can turn into an easily controlled surveillance and pressure area according to some approaches. The main point in these different approaches is whether social media creates an alternative space that increases the opportunities for political participation, provides freedom of expression to opposing views and contributes to the advancement of democracy. In this study, individuals' political preferences and identities of social media political-based use of the axis, effect, inhibiting factors of the use of social media what is happening has been aimed to examine regarding the current discussions in Turkey, in Diyarbakir where ethnic identity is the focus and in this sense having an identity opposing to the widespread political say. Questionnaire technique was used as data collection tool in the study. The survey was conducted face-to-face to 618 people with the method of "random sampling". Survey forms of 540 social media users out of 618 people were included in the evaluation. The data obtained from the field study were analysed by using descriptive statistical techniques. In terms of the level of political participation, the percentages of the participants towards the behaviours of political participation in the axis of both political identities and political preferences were found to be relatively different from each other.

*Keywords:* Social media, use of social media for political purposes, political identities, political preferences, political participation, influence, obstructive factors.

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## Introduction

As a new communication tool that emerged as a result of technological developments in mass media, the Internet has become increasingly massive and has led to some transformations and changes in economic, social and political areas. Whether the rich interaction possibilities created by the developments in internet technologies reveal new possibilities in terms of participation in political processes has been the subject of research in many fields, especially in communication sciences.

In the political sphere, the relationship between the internet and democracy is discussed on the basis of the supposed nature of internet-based communication tools that promote freedom and participation. In this context, the internet has been described as a liberating tool that makes the user active, makes it difficult to control the content, increases the possibilities of political participation with its widespread nature, provides freedom of expression to alternative views (Castells, 2013: 480, Shirky, 2017: 157-172; 159-169). Social media, which has been added to the system with the interactivity-based nature of internet technologies, made new communication mediums (Twitter, blogs, Facebook, etc.) possible. It is stated that the feature of social media that enables content creation, direct sharing and dissemination of information and thoughts is one of the reasons why it started to play an important role in social and political processes in the world (Bronstein & Aharony 2015). Especially, with the intensive use of social media tools in their organization processes, discourses and practices, social media has led to an increase in views that social media is an alternative area that provides freedom of expression to alternative and different views, increases the opportunities for political participation, and a tool that strengthens democracy (Earl & Kimport, 2011: 13, Ghannam, 2011: 4).

In addition to the fact that the Internet and social media offer different opportunities or possibilities to engage in political activities, discussions on political inequalities, actual use, turning into a field of surveillance and control in terms of political cultures and regimes of countries are increasing. The decisive point here is the relationship of governments with social media. Governments can evaluate the internet and social media as a threat and create new control and surveillance mechanisms against social media (Deibert & Rohozinski, 2010: 43-57; Howard & Hussain, 2011: 45-38; Morozov, 2011: 212). Therefore, the use of social media based on politics, its potential and power of influence may differ according to social, cultural characteristics and political climate. In this sense, it is important to evaluate the contribution of the internet and social media in particular to democracy and political participation in the actual use and in different political and social conditions.

The reality created by new communication technologies and its relationship with democracy and politics have led to the emergence of different approaches. These

approaches progress through two points of conflict, namely critical and liberal approaches. However, there are also approaches that try to reconcile two different approaches and look at the social, political, cultural and economic reflections of new communication technologies from an interdisciplinary perspective (Toprak *et al.* 2009: 191).

Liberal approaches state that the development and spread of communication technologies contribute to the development, consolidation and deepening of democracy and democracy culture. According to this approach, new media, which is not for profit and assumed to be independent, has a stronger potential in increasing political participation and inclusiveness and in the functioning of democracy, in the face of traditional media that are single-centred, commercialized and difficult to access (Croteu & Hoynes, 2003: 46; Gimmler, 2001: 32; Murru, 2009: 143). In the context of democracy and political participation, the characteristics of the internet and social media in particular make it an alternative to the monopolistic, censorship and one-centre structure of traditional communication tools and environments. Therefore, the liberal approach addresses the contribution of the internet and social media to democracy and political participation with its technological qualities such as its liberal nature, its low cost of use and its prevalence, its potential to eliminate the time and space barrier, its openness to everyone, its ability to produce content. According to these, the internet and social media in particular offer opportunities for organizing, knowledge, discussion, dialogue and participation in the political process, making it possible for a freer, more participatory socio-political structure (Castells, 2013: 480; Castells, 2008: 90; Kim, Hsu, & Zuniga, 2013: 498; Lee & Ma 2012: 332; Theocharis & Lowe, 2016: 1465; Varnelis & Friedberg; 2008: 36). In this context, social media is seen as an alternative field that allows the suppressed / excluded groups and less political discourses to become visible and weaken the dominance of political elites in the political field (Dahlberg, 2007: 133; Rahimi, 2011: 161; Ghannam 2011: 4; Jenkins 2016: 199-220). Therefore, it is assumed that internet-based new communication tools will increase equality among people and contribute to pluralism by enabling the participation of differences (Dahlberg, 2001: 625; Gimmler, 2001: 31; Halpern & Gibbs, 2013: 1166). According to this view, social networks, which are relatively independent from the government, expand the participation possibilities of groups excluded from politics, strengthen participation / participatory culture and contribute to the functioning of democracy.

The critical approach, which defends that internet-based new communication tools may have negative consequences against all these positive evaluations of the liberal approach, focuses on the features of these new communication tools such as an interactive, creative and free tool, an equal platform for all, while the views claiming that the internet is a tool of democracy. It states that it ignores the actual use and the social-political context of use (Van Dijk, 2016: 156). First of all, the fact that the internet is an active and creative tool does not guarantee that it will be used actively and creatively (Van Dijk, 2016: 157). In addition, the digital divide

is the biggest obstacle to this. Van Dijk (2016: 274) states that those who have access to politics have more opportunities to participate. The unequal participation in these areas increases the personal, social and political inequalities that exist.

One of the most important debates against the view that the critical approach will strengthen democracy through the internet and based communication tools is that governments use the internet and social media as a means of surveillance and control within the scope of security policies. Possible consequences such as the governments' following users and messages over the internet and social media, surveillance, application of control mechanisms for user content, and the ability to conduct investigations due to the posts they consider as a criminal factor are strengthened by eliminating the approaches that the internet can be used as a tool for anti-democratic practices (Deibert & Rohozinski, 2010: 51-52, 54-55; Howard and Hussain, 2011: 35, 48; Morozov, 2011: 212). Control and surveillance methods ultimately lead to the development of self-censorship and the onset of inaction in society and opponents (Deibert, 2015: 69; Calingaert, 2010: 65). While censorship systematically prevents opportunities for collective action, surveillance causes fear and suppresses online activities of individuals (Hawks, 2015; Penney 2017: 14-15). Recent research has shown that when surveillance is available, citizens are less likely to search for sensitive information online and participate in online discussions (Penney, 2016; Stoycheff, 2016); both functions undermine individual participation. Beyond the dominance provided by control and regulation mechanisms, the perception of control created in people's minds becomes more determinant. Therefore, in addition to offering opportunities for participation in opposition and political and social issues, social media also includes features that are limited and threatening to individuals and restrict freedoms due to its effective surveillance power (Baumann & Lyon, 2013: 17-18).

Freedom House (2019), in its "Freedom on the Internet 2019, "Social Media Crisis" report, in which it evaluates internet freedom around the world, states that social media, once considered "technology to liberate people", has become a tool of surveillance and election manipulation (Freedom in the World 2019). Again, Freedom House, according to the "Digital 2020" report, although the internet and social media enable a free, participatory and transparent socio-political structure, the control mechanisms and pressure power of the governments are increasing (Freedom House, 2020). The most important example of social media use for political events in Turkey is Gezi Park. The intense use of social media in Gezi Park demonstrations than ever before increased the effect of social media on political participation (Sener, Emre, & Akyildiz, 2015: 91). After 2013, social media in Turkey, especially Twitter, has also been used to receive news and to express political views. Polarization and its reflection in the media in Turkey have made social media, especially Twitter, a political discussion arena.

US-based think tank Freedom House, in the Freedom of the 2019 Internet Report in Turkey, China, Russia, along with countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia is included in the "non-free" category. According to the report, among

the reasons for the inclusion of Turkey's in "non-free countries" category; are "Blocking political, social or religious content on the Internet, manipulating the discussions on the Internet by pro-government commentators, arresting, detaining or technical attacks on dissidents" (Freedom in the World 2019). Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2020 ' , the report shows that Turkey maintained its position in 2019. According to the report, although a political debate of the internet and social media occasionally provides a free, pluralistic environment for political participation, restrictions are increasing.

### *Subject and Purpose of the Research*

This study focuses on the politically based use of social media and its effect on political preferences, attitudes and behaviours, and the factors that prevent social media from being used for political purposes. In this context, the main purpose of the article is to reveal the use of social media as a tool of political practice, the level of influence of social media on political attitudes, behaviours and preferences, and what are the factors that prevent political activities in the axis of political identities and political preferences. On the basis of political identity and political choice, it aims to discuss whether social media is used as a functional tool in terms of creating a space that provides a space for political emancipation and increases participation. The main point that makes the research unique and is expected to contribute to the literature is to compare the political-based use of social media, its effect and its hindering factors in individuals with different political views and preferences.

## **Methodology**

### *Data collection tool*

The survey technique, which is the data collection tool of the quantitative research method, was used in the study. The first part of the questionnaire, which consists of 32 questions, includes demographic information. In addition to demographic information, questions about the political usage practices of the participants in social media and political identities were asked to reveal the effects of political issues in social media and the factors that prevent their use. The surveys were reinterpreted after pilot studies with 50 participants, and the final version of the questionnaire was applied to the participants between June-July 2020, and the data collection process was completed.

### *Research Universe and Sample*

The population of the research consists of people aged 18 and over living in Diyarbakir. In the study, there are important factors affecting the determination of

Diyarbakir province as a population. The first of these factors is that Diyarbakir has diversity of ethnic and religious groups, and these identities are a determining factor in political preferences and this is the main focus of politics. Another factor to be associated with this situation from a historical point of Diyarbakir has been a continuing widespread opposition politicians say against the country's political culture and has been structure one of the important topics of the political agenda in Turkey.

The "random sampling" method was used to determine the sample of the study. Calculation table was used to determine the sample size to represent the universe (Yazicioğlu & Erdoğan, 2007: 70). The sample size for the non-homogeneous population was calculated as 385 with 95% confidence interval and 5% sampling error. In the research, face-to-face questionnaire was applied to 618 people over the age of 18. Surveys of 540 social media users out of 618 people were evaluated.

### *Analysis of Data*

The data obtained from the field study were processed electronically using the SPSS 17.0 statistics program. In the analysis of the data, descriptive statistical techniques were used in order to reveal the data about the participant profile of the research, the sharing / following of the political content in the social media environment, the effects of the political content and the blocking factors. The Chi-Square test was applied to determine the differentiation of social media in line with the profile of political identities and political preferences of the participants.

## **Results**

### *Demographic and Descriptive Characteristics of the Participants*

In this section, firstly, results regarding demographic and descriptive characteristics of the participants were given. Demographic and descriptive characteristics of the participants were tried to be revealed by frequency analysis. The results regarding the frequency analysis were shown in *Table 1*.

It is seen that 225 (41.7%) of the participants are women and 315 (58.3%) are men. Considering the educational status of the participants, 30 (9.3%) were primary school graduates, 102 (18.9%) were high school graduates, 72 (13.3%) were associate degree graduates and 242 (44.8%) were undergraduates, 74 (13.7%) of them were postgraduates. When the participants were classified according to age groups, it was seen that 143 of them (26.7%) were between 18-25, 265 (49.1%) were between 26-35, 132 (24.4%) were between 241-60 years old. 150 (27.8%) of the participants regarded themselves from Turkey, 30 (5.6%), of them Turkish, and 360 (66.7%) of them Kurdish. When examining the professions of the participants, 119 (22%) of them were unemployed, 179 (33.1%) in the public sector, 43 (8%)

of them students, 122 (22.6%) in private sector, 77 (14%, 3) were self-employed. When the interests of the participants on the current political issues were examined, it was seen that 75 (13.9%) said I would not be interested, 155 (28.7%) would be a little interested, 310 (57.4%) would be very interested.

Table 1. The Frequency Analysis

		Frequency	Percentage(%)
Gender	Female	225	41,7
	Male	315	58,3
	Total	540	100
Education	Primary	50	9,3
	High School	102	18,9
	Associate Degree	72	13,3
	Undergraduate	242	44,8
	Postgraduate	74	13,7
	Total	540	100
Age	18-25 Age	143	26,5
	26-35 Age	265	49,1
	41-60 Age	132	24,4
	Total	540	100
Occupation	Unemployed	119	22
	Public Sector	179	33,1
	Student	43	8
	Private Sector	122	22,6
	Self-employed	77	14,3
	Total	540	100
Identifying oneself	From Turkey	150	27,8
	Turkish	30	5,6
	Kurdish	360	66,7
	Total	540	100
Interests of the participants on the current political issues	I am interested	75	13,9
	I am a little interested	155	28,7
	I am very interested	310	57,4
	Total	540	100



Use of Social Media for Political Purposes

In the study, the activities and sharing approaches of the participants that can be evaluated on a political basis in social networking networks or environments where tried to be examined with a series of quantitative questions on the axis of political identity.

Table 2. The Use of Social Media for Political Purposes and Cross-table of Political Identities

The Use of Social Media for Political Purposes	Political Identities of Participants												X <sup>2</sup>	P	
	Nationalist		Conservative Right		Islamist Right		Social Democrat		Socialist Left		Total				
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Following important political developments on the internet and social media	Yes	23	62,2	43	88	25	62,5	243	67,9	49	88	383	70,9	18,559	0,001
	No	14	37,8	6	12	15	37,5	115	32,1	7	13	157	29,1		
Having political discussions on social media about the political issues I encounter in social life	Yes	8	21,6	11	22	12	30	71	19,8	6	11	108	20	5,769	0,217
	No	29	78,4	38	78	28	70	287	80,2	50	89	432	80		
Expressing my democratic demands on social networking sites	Yes	5	13,5	16	33	4	10,0	72	20,1	21	38	118	21,9	5,769	0,217
	No	32	86,5	33	67	36	67,3	286	79,9	35	63	422	78,1		
I share content such as news, articles, videos, and pictures in line with my political view on Social Media.	Yes	6	16,2	17,00	35	7	17,5	110	30,7	34	61	174	32,2	16,809*	0,002
	No	31	83,8	32	65	33	82,5	248	69,3	22	39	366	67,8		
Participating in a social activity organized through social media (protests, marches, etc.)	Yes	16	43,2	15	31	9	22,5	79	22,1	13	23	132	24,4	29,630*	0,00
	No	21	56,8	34	69	31	77,5	279	77,9	43	77	408	75,6		
Supporting demonstrations, walking events through social media (like, sharing, retweet, etc.)	Yes	4	10,8	7	14	5	12,5	98	27,4	29	52	143	26,5	9,312*	0,05
	No	33	89,2	42	86	35	87,5	260	72,6	27	48	397	73,5		
Following a political party representing its political view on the internet (Facebook, twitter, websites and)"	Yes	11	29,7	29	59	16	40	179	50	42	75	277	51,3	30,991*	0,00
	No	26	70,3	20	41	24	60	179	50	14	25	263	48,7		
Participating in the campaign launched by the political party I support.	Yes	7	18,9	17	35	6	15	127	35,5	31	55	188	34,8	22,987*	0,00
	No	30	81,1	32	65	34	85	231	64,5	25	45	352	65,2		
I do not follow political content other than my own opinion on social media	Yes	7	18,9	20	41	16	40	80	22,3	25	45	148	27,4	21,522*	0,00
	No	30	81,1	29	59	24	60	278	77,7	31	55	392	72,6		
Being uncomfortable with, blocking and unfollowing the posts of my friends or people I follow with different political views	Yes	8	21,6	9	18	6	15	79	22,1	23	41	125	23,1	21,976*	0,00
	No	29	78,4	40	82	34	85	279	77,9	33	59	415	76,9		
Total		37	100	49	100	40	100	358	100	56	100	540	100	12,518	0,014

\*p<.05

Considering whether the participants, which is the first statement in *Table 2*, follow political news and developments on social media, "Following important political developments on the internet and social media"; Socialist Left (87.5%) and Conservative Right political tendencies (87.8%) were significantly higher than the Social Democrat (67.9%), Islamist Right (62.5%) and Nationalist (62.2%) groups ( $\chi^2 = 18.559$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Considering the general total of the answers given to this statement, it was seen that the rate of following important political developments on the internet and social media is high (70.9%).

When it comes to the question of whether the participants actively participate in the political issues in social media, according to the situation of "having political discussions on social media about the political issues I encounter in social life"; Conservative right (22.4%), nationalist (21.6%) social democrat (19.8%), socialist left (10.7%) Islamist right (30%), no significant difference was found between political tendencies ( $\chi^2 = 5.769$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Looking at the total rate of the data, it was seen that the rate of discussing the problems faced by the participants in social life on social media is quite low (20.0%).

Likewise, when "expressing my democratic demands on social networking sites" were taken into consideration, the percentage of those in the Socialist Left (37.5%) and Conservative Right (32.7%) categories are significant compared to those in the Social Democrat (20.1%), Nationalist (13.5%), and Islamist Right (10.0%) categories were found to be high ( $\chi^2 = 16.809$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Looking at the results in general, the rate of expressing their democratic demands on social networking sites (21.9%) is low.

Regarding "I share content such as news, articles, videos, and pictures in line with my political view on Social Media", Socialist Left (60.7%), Conservative Right (34.7%), Social Democrat (30.7%), Islamist Right (60.7%), 17.5%) were found to be significantly higher than nationalist (16.2%) political identities ( $\chi^2 = 29.630$ ,  $p < .05$ ). According to this, while the political identity with the highest rate of content sharing in the social media in line with its political view is the Socialist Left, the rates of the Conservative Right and social democratic political identities are close, and the lowest political identities were seen as the Islamic Right and Nationalist, respectively. Considering the total result of the responses of the participants to this statement, it was seen that the rate of sharing political content (32.2%) is low.

Looking at the status of "participating in a social activity organized through social media (protests, marches, etc.)" for the purpose of determining whether the political issues encountered in social media are moved outside the virtual space, the participants with nationalist tendencies (43.2%) were compared to those in the Conservative Right (30.6%), Socialist Left (23.2%), Islamist Right (22.5%) and Social Democrat (22.1%) categories had higher levels of participation respectively ( $\chi^2 = 9.312$ ,  $p < .05$ ). According to this, the political identity that has the highest rate of transferring the political issues encountered in social media out of the

virtual space is the Nationalists, followed by the Conservative Right. Those with the lowest level of political participation were seen as the Socialist Left, Islamist Right and Social Democrats, respectively. Considering the answers given to this statement, it was seen that the rate of the participants to use social media as an organization area is quite low (24.4%).

Similarly, when we see the cross-table findings about “supporting demonstrations, walking events through social media (like, sharing, retweet, etc.)” and political party preferences on social media; Those in the Socialist Left (51.8%) group was found to be significantly high ( $x^2 = 30.991$ ,  $p < 05$ ) compared to those in the Social Democrat (27.4%), Conservative Right (14.3%), Islamist Right (12.5%), Nationalist (10.8%) group. According to the analysis results, the political identity with the highest rate of support for demonstration activities on social media is the Socialist Left, while the lowest level of support is seen as the Social Democrat, Conservative Right, Islamist Right and Nationalist, respectively. When the total result of the responses given to this statement was evaluated, the rate of support of the participants for demonstrations and walking activities via social media was found to be quite low (26.5%).

Considering the status of “Following a political party representing its political view on the internet (Facebook, twitter, websites and)” for the purpose of following the political party it supports on social media and determining whether they have participated in the campaign it has launched; The proportion of Socialist Left (75.0%) trends was found to be significantly higher than the Conservative Right (59.2%), Social Democrat (50.0%), Islamist Right (40.0%) and Nationalist (29.7%) political tendencies ( $x^2 = 22.987$ ,  $p < 05$ ). When looking at the total rate of the responses (48.7%) given to this statement, it was seen that following the party representing its political view is the highest participation behaviour.

Similarly, the answers given to the statement “Participating in the campaign launched by the political party I support” on social media were analysed; Socialist Left (55.4%) tendencies’ participation in the campaign was determined to be significantly higher than that ( $x^2 = 21.522$ ,  $p < 05$ ) is compared to Social Democrat (35.5%), Conservative Right (34.7%), Nationalist (18.9%) and Islamist Right (15.0%), respectively.

Within the scope of the study, when the responses given to the statement “I do not follow political content other than my own opinion on social media” aiming to question the thesis that social media brings people with similar political views together and polarizes them; Socialist Left (44.6%) tendencies was found to be significantly higher than Conservative Right (40.8%), Islamist Right (40.0%), Social Democrat (22.3%) and Nationalist (18.9%) political tendencies ( $x^2 = 21.926$ ,  $p < 05$ ). According to the results of the analysis, the rate of not following political contents other than one’s own opinion on social media is close to each other in the socialist Left, Conservative Right and Islamist Right, while the lowest percentage of political identities were seen as Social Democrats and Nationalists.

In addition, when looking at the situation of “being uncomfortable with, blocking and unfollowing the posts of my friends or people I follow with different political views”, the rate of socialist left (41.1%) tendencies were found to be significantly higher than political trends ( $\chi^2 = 12.518$ ,  $p < .05$ ) of Social Democrat (22.1%), Nationalist (21.6%), Conservative Right (18.4%), and Islamist Right (15.0%).

To sum up, in terms of political identities, the extent to which each identity uses social media for political purposes is examined and it was seen that the participants who use social media for political purposes the most are the socialist left group. Those who declare that they are conservative are the second ones. The percentages of those who declare their social democrat, Islamist right and social democracy differ relatively according to their participation behaviour (Table 2). When with the analysis results of the participants in the study using social media as a political practice tool were analysed, it was seen that the rates are quite low. It was thought that this can be explained by the high rates of “fear of being traced” and “avoiding negative situations in business and social life” (Table 4, Table 5). In addition, the rates of the participants towards their behaviour in the form of political participation were found to be relatively different from each other. While some of the participants participate in participation practices, some of them have a very low participation rate. Considering the general results, it was seen that discussion and expression behaviours are lower than follow-up and sharing behaviours (Table 2). In addition, it was observed that the rate of polarization and segregation of the participants in terms of different political identities in social media is low.

The activities and sharing approaches that can be evaluated on a political basis in the social networks or environments of the participants are included in the table 3 in the axis of political identity.

Considering whether they follow the political news and developments in Table 3, “Following important political developments on the internet and social media”; It was observed that HDP (74.8%) voters and AK Party (71.2%) voters have a significantly higher rate of following political developments on the internet and social media than voters who selected the Other (56.2%) option ( $\chi^2 = 11.781$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Accordingly, HDP voters have the highest rate of following political developments on the internet and social media, followed by AK Party voters. Those with the lowest rate of following political developments on social media were seen as voters who marked the other option. In general, it was seen that more than half of the non-voters follow important political news on social media. Whether the participants actively participate in political issues on social media, when compared to the situation of “having political discussions on social media about political issues I have encountered in social life”; there was no significant difference among the voters who selected the HDP (17.1%), AK Party (25.4%), Other (23.6%) option ( $\chi^2 = 4.618$ ,  $p > .05$ ). According to the data, it was seen that

the rate (20.0%) of the political events encountered in the social life of the voters on social media is quite low.

Table 3. Cross table of voters' use of social media for political purposes

Participation in the following statements	The party voted for in the last general elections (24 June 2018)										X2	P
		Ak Party		HDP		Other		Total				
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Following important political developments on the internet and social media	Yes	84	71,2	249	74,8	50	56,2	383	70,9	11,781*	0,003	
	No	34	28,8	84	25,2	39	43,8	157	29,1			
Having political discussions on social media about political issues I have encountered in social life	Yes	30	25,4	57	17,1	21	23,6	108	20,0	4,618	0,099	
	No	88	74,6	276	82,9	68	76,4	432	80,0			
Expressing my democratic demands on social networking sites	Yes	27	22,9	75	22,5	16	18,8	118	21,9	943,62	0,624	
	No	91	77,1	258	77,5	73	82,0	422	78,1			
I share content such as news, articles, videos, and pictures in line with my political view on Social Media.	Yes	28	23,7	126	37,8	20	22,5	174	32,2	12,580*	0,002	
	No	90	73,3	207	62,2	69	77,5	366	67,8			
Participating in a social activity organized through social media (protests, marches, etc.)	Yes	29	24,6	79	23,7	24	27,0	132	24,4	401	0,818	
	No	89	75,4	254	76,3	65	73,0	408	75,6			
Supporting demonstrations, walking events through social media (like, sharing, retweet, etc.)	Yes	16	13,6	114	34,2	13	14,6	143	26,5	26,847*	0,000	
	No	102	86,4	219	65,8	76	85,4	397	73,5			
Following a political party representing its political view on the internet (Facebook, twitter, websites and)"	Yes	57	48,3	192	57,7	28	31,5	277	51,3	19,833*	0,000	
	No	61	51,7	141	42,3	61	68,5	263	48,7			
Participating in the campaign launched by the political party I support.	Yes	32	27,1	144	43,2	12	13,5	188	34,8	31,349*	0,000	
	No	86	72,9	189	46,8	77	86,5	352	65,2			
I do not follow political content other than my own opinion on social media	Yes	45	38,1	92	27,6	11	12,4	148	27,4	16,964*	0,000	
	No	73	61,9	241	72,4	78	87,6	392	72,6			
Being uncomfortable with, blocking and unfollowing the posts of my friends or people I follow with different political views	Yes	50	42,4	174	52,3	34	38,2	125	23,1	7,324	0,026	
	No	68	57,6	159	47,7	55	61,8	415	76,9			
Total		118	100,0	333	100,0	89	100,0	540	100,0			

\* $p < .05$

Likewise, when looking at the situation of “expressing democratic demands on social networking sites”; there was no significant difference between the voters who selected the HDP (22.5%), AK Party (22.9%), Other (18.8%) option ( $X^2 = 943.62$ ,  $p > .05$ ). According to the analysis data, it was determined that the rate of voters using social media as a place to express their democratic demands (21.9%) is also quite low. When “sharing content such as news, articles, videos and pictures in line with my political view on social media” was analysed, It was determined that HDP (37.8%) voters have significantly higher sharing rates than AK Party (23.7%) and Other (22.5%) voters ( $X^2 = 12.580$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In general, it was seen that the rate of voters sharing in line with their political views (32.2%) is quite low.

Considering the status of participating in a social activity (protests, marches, etc.) organized through social media for the purpose of determining whether the political issues encountered in social media were transferred outside the virtual space to the real area; There was no significant difference between the voters who selected the HDP (23.7%), AK Party (27.0%), Other (18.8%) option ( $x^2 = 401$ ,  $p > .05$ ). According to the total results of the responses given to this statement, the political issues encountered in social media outside of the virtual space (24.4%) are quite low. In addition to this, when the findings of the statement “Supporting demonstrations, walking activities via social media (like, sharing, retweet etc.)” on social media was analysed; It was determined that HDP (34.2%) voters’ support rate was significantly higher than AK Party (13.6%) voters who marked the Other (14.6%) option ( $X^2 = 26.847$ ,  $p < .05$ ). According to this, HDP voters have the highest rate of supporting demonstrations and marches on social media, while the lowest were seen as voters who marked the AK Party and the other option, respectively. When the total result of this statement was evaluated, it was seen that the rate of support (like, sharing, etc.) of the voters for the demonstration and walking activities via social media is quite low (26.5%). Considering the status of “Following the political party representing their political view over the internet (Facebook, twitter, websites etc.)” with the aim of determining whether they follow the political party they support on social media; HDP (57.7%) voters were found to be significantly higher than AK Party (48.3%) and Other (31.5%) voters ( $X^2 = 19.833$ ,  $p < .05$ ). According to the results of the analysis, the rate of voters who use social media as an arena to support the party, marking the Ak Party and the other option seems lower than that of HDP voters. In addition, it was seen that HDP (43.2%) voters ‘participation in the campaign launched by the political party they support on social media’ is significantly higher than the AK Party (27.1%) voters and the rate of voters who selected the Other (13.5%) option ( $X^2 = 31.349$ ,  $p < .05$ ). According to these results, the rate of voters who marked the Ak Party and other option using social media platforms as areas where party activities were carried out is lower than that of HDP voters.

Within the scope of the study, the respondents were also asked whether they followed political content other than their own, in order to question the thesis that social media brings people together with similar political views and polarizes them.

In this context, when looking at the statement “I do not follow political content other than my opinion on social media”; It was observed that AK Party (38.1%) voters and HDP (27.6%) voters are significantly higher than those who marked the Other (12.4%) option ( $X^2 = 16.964$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Similarly, with the aim of questioning the hypothesis that social media gathers and polarizes people with similar political views, the respondents were also asked about their attitudes towards those with and without their own political views on social media. In this context, when the statement “Sharing of my friends from different political views or people I follow annoys me, I block it and I am unfollowed” was analysed; it was found out that there is no significant difference between voters who chose HDP (52.3%) AK Party (42.4%) and Other (38.2%); ( $X^2 = 7.324$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

Although it was seen that HDP voters rank first in terms of the level of use of social media based on politics, the rates of the voters who marked the HDP, AK Party and the other option were relatively different from each other. While some of the participants participate in some participation practices, their participation rates seem quite low for some. Looking at the general results, it was found that discussion and expression behaviours were lower than follow-up and sharing behaviours. In addition, it was observed that the rate of polarization and segregation of the participants in terms of political preferences in social media is low. In general, it was seen that the rates of the voters participating in the study using social media as a political practice tool are quite low. It was thought that this can be explained in parallel with the high rates of “fear of being blackened” and “avoiding negative situations in business and social life” (*Table 8 & Table 9*)

### *The Effect of Social Media Content on Political Attitudes, Opinions and Preferences*

Within the scope of the research, the extent to which the participants agree to some judgments about the effects of political content they encounter in digital social environments on their political attitudes, behaviours and preferences were examined in the axis of political identities. Participants’ participation rates for each jurisdiction were listed in *Table 4*.

Table 4. Cross table of political identities influencing political content and attitudes and opinions encountered in social media

		Having an effect on political attitudes and opinions Political contents encountered in social media							
		Yes, can affect and change my preference		Yes, affects but does not change my preference		No, it does not affect or change my preference			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	Total	%
Political identity of the participants	Nationalist	10	27	10	27	17	45,9	37	100
	Conservative Right	4	8,2	24	49	21	42,9	49	100
	Islamist Right	15	37,5	10	25	15	37,5	40	100
	Social Democrat	45	12,6	119	33,2	194	54,2	358	100
	Socialist Left	1	1,8	24	42,9	31	55,4	56	100
Total		75	13,9	187	34,6	278	52,5	540	100

$$X^2 = 37.182, p = .000$$

When the cross-table findings between the political tendencies of the participants and the effects of social media on political attitudes and behaviours were examined, it was found to be significant ( $X^2 = 37.182, p < .05$ ). 27.0% of the nationalist leaning participants were affected and they could change their political preference; that it affected 27.0% but could not change their preference; 45.9 of them stated that it did not affect them. On the other hand, 8.2% of the conservative Right-leaning participants were affected and that they could change their political preference; That it affected 49.0% but could not change their preference; and that it did not affect 42.9%. On the other hand, it was seen that 37.5% of the Islamist Right-leaning participants were affected and they could change their political preference; that it affected 25.0% but could not change their preference; it was also observed that it did not affect 37.5%. On the other hand, 12.6% of the Social Democrat leaning participants was affected and they could change their political preference; that it affected 33.2% but could not change their preference; others stated that it did not affect them (54.2%). On the other hand, it was found out that 1.8% of the participants with a Socialist Left leaning were affected and they could change their political preferences; that 42.9% of them were affected but could not change their preference; 55.4% did not get affected.

According to these results, it was seen that the participants in the Socialist Left and Social Democrat groups were less likely to be influenced by the political content they encounter on social media and change their preferences compared to



the participants in the Nationalist, Conservative Right, and Islamist Right groups. In general, it was seen that the rate of affecting political attitudes and opinions (13.9%) of the political contents encountered in social media is quite low.

Participants' political use of social media in the axis of political preferences, in which they agree with some judgments about the effects of political content they encounter in digital social environments on their political attitudes, behaviours and preferences, was shown in *Table 5*.

*Table 5.* Cross table on the political content of the voters on social media influencing political attitudes and opinions

The influence of political content encountered on social media on political attitudes and opinions									
		Yes, can affect and change my preference	Yes, affects but does not change my preference		No, it does not affect.				
		N	%	N	%	N	%	Total	%
The party voted for in the last general elections (24 June 2018)		26	22	33	28	59	50	118	100
		28	8,4	120	36,8	185	55,6	333	100
	Other	21	23,6	34	38,2	34	38,2	89	100
Total		75	13,9	187	34,6	278	51,5	540	100

$$X^2 = 25,079, p = .000$$

Cross-table findings between the political tendencies of the participants and the effects of social media on political attitudes and behaviours were found to be significant ( $X^2 = 25.079, p < .05$ ). 22.0% of AK Party voters were affected and that they could change their political preference; that it affected 28.0% but could not change their preference; 50.0 of them stated that it did not affect. 8.4% of HDP voters were affected and that they can change their political preference; that it affected 36.8% but could not change their preference; it was stated that it did not affect 55.6%. Others say that 23.6% were affected and that they could change their political preference; that it affected 38.2% but could not change their preference; it was also stated that it did not affect 38.2%. According to these results, it was seen that HDP voters are less likely to be influenced by the political content they encounter on social media and change their preferences compared to those who marked the AK Party and other option. In general, the rate (13.9%) of voters' attitudes and behaviour affected by the political contents encountered on social media seems to be quite low.

*Blocking Factors in the Political Use of Social Media*

Within the scope of the study, the concerns of the participants while sharing political shares in digital social digital environments were examined in the axis of political identities. The rates of the responses of the participants regarding the anxiety of filing were given in *Table 6*.

*Table 6.* Cross table of political identities on fear of being branded while sharing political posts on social media

		Fear of being labelled while sharing politically on social media					
		Yes		No		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Political identity of the participants	Nationalist	23	62,2	14	37,8	37	100,0
	Conservative Right	27	55,1	22	44,9	49	100,0
	Islamist Right	20	50,0	20	50,0	40	100,0
	Social Democrat	307	85,8	51	14,2	358	100,0
	Socialist Left	54	96,4	2	3,6	56	100,0
Total		431	79,8	109	20,2	540	100,0

$X^2 = 62.235, p = .000$

Considering the participants' fear of being labelled while sharing politically on social media; Socialist Left (96.4%) and Social Democrat (85.8%) political tendency groups had the rates of fear of being labelled and surveillance, Nationalist (62.2%), Conservative Right (55.1%) and Islamist Right (50.0%) was found to be significantly higher than those in the trend group ( $X^2 = 62.235, p < 05$ ). According to the results of the analysis, the political identity with the highest fear of being tagged is the Socialist Left, followed by Socialist Democratic and nationalist political tendencies, respectively. The proportion of the conservative right and Islamist Right tendencies for fear of being blackened seems to be close. According to the answers given to this statement, it was seen that 79.8% of the participants have fear of being labelled.

Within the scope of the research, "the state of being afraid of encountering negative situations in business and social life", participating in political sharing in digital social digital environments was examined in terms of identities. The rates of the responses of the participants regarding the state of fear were given in *Table 7*.

Table 7. Cross table on the state of having fear to face negative situations in business and social life while sharing political on social media

		Refraining from encountering negative situations in business and social life while sharing politics on social media					
		Yes		No		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Political identity of the participants	Nationalist	15	40,5	22	59,5	37	100,0
	Conservative Right	35	71,4	14	28,6	49	100,0
	Islamist Right	17	42,5	23	57,5	40	100,0
	Social Democrat	256	71,4	102	28,5	358	100,0
	Socialist Left	45	80,4	11	19,6	46	100,0
Total		368	68,1	172	31,9	540	100,0

$X^2 = 31.065, p = .000$

Considering the cross-table data of the participants to the state of “refraining from encountering negative situations in business and social life while sharing politics on social media”, the rate of those in the socialist left (80.4%) category was found to be significantly higher than those in the category ( $X^2 = 31.065, p < 05$ ) of those in the socialist left (80.4%) category hesitating to face negative situations in business and social life, Conservative Right (71.4%), Islamist Right (42.5%) and Nationalist (40.5%). According to these results, it was seen that the rate of the participants in the Social Democratic and Conservative Right groups is close to avoid negative situations in business and social life while sharing political issues on social media, while the rate of participants in the Nationalist, Conservative Right and Islamist Right groups is lower. Considering the overall ratio of the answers given to this statement, it was seen that 68.1% of the participants are afraid of encountering negativities in their business and social life due to political sharing on social media.

When *Table 3* and *Table 4* data were evaluated together, the feeling that people are under surveillance and their concerns about the possibility of harm are not limited to the possible sanctions that can be applied by higher authority authorities at the institutional level. As a result, it has been concluded that these worries and anxieties may cause individuals to stay away from practices that may expose themselves in social media environments, or to distance themselves from activities with political content, or to apply self-censorship over their political activities and shares in these environments.

Within the scope of the research, the rates of the responses of the participants regarding the anxiety of being labelled on the axis of their concerns, political party preferences, sharing political shares in digital social digital environments were given in *Table 8*.

Table 8. Cross table of voters' fear of being blacklisted while sharing political posts

		Fear of being labelled and being watched while sharing political media on social media					
		Yes		No		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
The party voted for in the last general elections (24 June 2018)	AK Party	61	51,7	57	48,3	118	100,0
	HDP	299	88,8	34	10,2	333	100,0
	Other	71	79,8	18	20,2	89	100,0
	Total	431	79,8	109	20,2	540	100,0

$$X^2 = 78.182, p = .000$$

When the participants' fear of being labelled and being watched while sharing political media on social media, it was found that HDP (88.8%) voters had a significantly higher rate of fear of being branded among the AK Party (51.7%) and voters who marked the other option ( $X^2 = 78.182, p < 05$ ). When the total responses given to this statement were evaluated, it was found that the rate of the participants experiencing fear of being blackened (79.8%) while sharing political shares on social media was found to be quite high.

Within the scope of the research, the status of the participants to be afraid of encountering negative situations in business and social life while sharing political in digital social digital environments was examined in the axis of the preferred political party. The rates of the responses of the participants regarding the situation of hesitating to encounter negative situations were given in Table 9.

Table 9. Cross table on the state of being afraid of facing negative situations in business and social life while sharing political media on social media

		Refraining from encountering negative situations in business and social life while sharing political media on social					
		Yes		No		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
The party voted for in the last general elections (24 June 2018)	AK Party	57	48,3	61	51,7	118	100,0
	HDP	251	75,4	82	24,6	333	100,0
	Other	60	67,4	39	32,6	89	100,0
	Total	368	68,1	172	31,9	540	100,0

$$X^2 = 29.44, p = .000$$

When the cross-table data between party preferences and refraining from encountering negative situations in business and social life while sharing political media on social media was analysed; It was determined that HDP (75.4%) voters' rate of hesitation was significantly higher than those of AK Party (48.3%) voters who marked the other (67.4%) option ( $X^2 = 29.44, p < 05$ ). When the total responses

given to this statement were evaluated, it was seen that 68.1% of the participants are afraid of encountering negative situations in business and social life while sharing political shares on social media while 31.9% of them believed they do not expect to encounter any problems. It is very clear that that HDP almost doubled AK party.

When *Table 8* and *Table 9* data were evaluated together; People's concerns about the possibility of encountering negative situations and being harmed are limited only to possible sanctions that can be applied at the institutional level and by higher authority authorities. In conclusion, it is seen that these concerns and worries may cause self-censorship on online political activities and posts.

In global media policies, it is observed that two tables reveal information about considering the internet endorsement and its component areas. *Table 8* is the symbol of fear that continues in the field of global policy tools which is a sign of the gradual disregard for the public freedom, and the realization of a new endorsement design on the freedom of communication as a reflection of the change in the capitalist conditions of power.

## Conclusion

With the opportunities provided by internet-based technologies, political activities have gained a new dimension with social media. With social media, individuals have turned from being passive to active participants who are decisive with discourse and actions. However, the aforementioned differences of individuals with different political / social conditions, different interests, knowledge and opinions have also reflected in their practices in the political field of social media. The diversity of use in line with political differences has also brought about a differentiation in this context, reflecting on the level of influence and concerns. In this study, in Diyarbakir, where these identities play a determining role in political preferences and has a diversity of ethnic and religious groups, and in this respect, the widespread political discourse in the country, the use of social media tools on a political basis, understanding the level of influence and preventing factors were examined.

When the results obtained within the scope of the research were evaluated; Although it was seen that the socialist left voters rank first among political identities and HDP voters in terms of the level of using social media based on politics, the percentages of the participants towards the behaviours of political participation in terms of both political identities and political preferences were relatively different from each other. While some of the participants participate in participation practices, some of them have a very low participation rate. On the other hand, it was seen that the rate of following the political agenda in social media is high. Looking at the general results, it was found that discussion and expression behaviours were lower than follow-up and sharing behaviours. These

results explain the potential of social media as a political field. However, the findings regarding the level of realization of this potential show the limits of the political-based use of social media. In general, the low rate of using social media as a political practice tool of the voters participating in the study, is thought to be parallel to the high rates of “fear of being labelled” and “avoiding negative situations in business and social life” In this respect, it can be said that social media differs according to the political social contexts in which it is used and its contributions to political life depend on the political / social structure.

The media has an important role in individuals’ political attitudes, behaviours and preferences. On the other hand, when the findings of this study were evaluated, it was seen that the content shared on social media has a low effect on political behaviour attitudes and preferences within the scope of both political identities and political party translations. It was also seen that especially the socialist left political identities and the political attitudes, behaviours and preferences of HDP voters are the least affected by the political content in the social media. These results are said to be related to Turkey’s polarized political and social structure.

According to the results of the research, when the data were evaluated in terms of political identities and political preferences, it was seen that the rates of the participants are quite high. These results explain the low rate of participants’ use of social media tools for political purposes. As Stoycheff (2016) states, it can be said that when surveillance is available, citizens reduce the possibility of participating in online discussions. Analyses based on the data obtained from the participants seem to be insulated with the transformative power of the ‘rebellion and hope’ networks emphasized by Castells (2013) of the use of social media for political purposes, and the social and political interventions of time and space.

It still seems important to acknowledge that it provides opportunities for freedom of expression and relatively free space and opportunities for political participation, considering that “the internet is a complex structure between polyphony and monophony, democracy and authoritarianism, participation and monologue, emancipation and surveillance” (Doğu *et al.*, 2014: 29) and digital platforms are “cheap, fast and effective communication across borders”.

### *Recommendations*

Social media allows people to express their own opinions and attitudes on political issues as a tool for political participation. However, the practical impact of social media on political participation in Turkey is still controversial. It is recommended that political use of social media with people living in different regions of Turkey will be made on the Internet and private practices and participation in comparative studies will provide important contributions to academic literature. By using the data of this study obtained by face-to-face interview method, it may be suggested to obtain more in-depth data by using qualitative methods in future studies.

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