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UNDERSTANDING ONLINE INTERACTIONS IN TURKEY:
THE FUNCTION AND THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS ON
POLITICAL VIEWS

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TÜRKİYE'DE ONLINE ETKİLEŞİMLERİ ANLAMAK:
SİYASİ GÖRÜŞLER ÜZERİNDEKİ İŞLEVİ VE ETKİLERİ

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TABLE OF CONTENT

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Content.....	v
Abbreviations.....	vi
Abstract.....	vii
Özet.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO	
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
2.1. The Relationship Between Internet and Democracy.....	7
2.2. The Concept of Public Sphere.....	8
2.3. The Relationship Between Internet and Public Sphere.....	11
2.4. The Risks for Polarization.....	14
2.4.1. The Filtration Issue.....	15
2.4.2. Selective Exposure and Concept of Homophily.....	17
2.4.3. The Echo Chamber Environment.....	20
2.4.4. The Formation of Cascades.....	22
CHAPTER THREE	
3. METHODOLOGY.....	24
3.1. Netnography.....	24
3.2. Netnographic Field Study.....	30
CHAPTER FOUR	
4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS.....	33
4.1. Who are the participants?.....	34
4.2. The Analyses.....	43
4.2.1. The Crisis of Women's Day March.....	43
4.2.2. The Crisis of Local Elections.....	51
CHAPTER FIVE	
5. CONCLUSION.....	74
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	78
APPENDIX A.....	85
APPENDIX B.....	89
APPENDIX C.....	92

ABBREVIATIONS

AKP: Justice and Development Party / Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi

CHP: Republican People's Party / Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi

FETÖ: Fetullahist Terrorist Organization / Fetullah Gülen Terör Örgütü

HDP: Peoples' Democratic Party / Halkların Demokratik Partisi

ICT: Information and Communication Technologies / Bilgi ve Bilişim Teknolojisi

MHP: Nationalist Movement Party / Milliyetçi Halk Partisi

PKK: Kurdistan Workers' Party / Kürdistan İşçi Partisi

SP: Felicity Party / Saadet Partisi

TUİK: Turkish Statistical Enstitute / Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu

TRT: Turkish Radio TV Enstitute / Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu

YSK: Supreme Election Council / Yüksek Seçim Kurulu

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the function and the effects of the Internet's social media platforms on political views in Turkey. The function of social media platforms are evaluated in literature within the context of a habermasian public sphere. Public sphere addresses the deliberative space where citizens come together freely and equally with the purpose of dialogue and debate without any restrictions. In literature, there are optimist and pessimist views on the effects of the Internet's platforms. Optimists believe that these platforms contribute to democracy by functioning as a public sphere however pessimists consider that these platforms harm democracy by reinforcing polarization and fragmentation through forming echo chamber environments. This research aims to analyze the role of social media platforms by conducting a netnographic field study in Turkey. In this field study, the data gathered through in-depth interviews and journals which consist of participant's online interactions on Facebook and Twitter. The analyses are made throughout the crisis on Women's Day march and the March 31 local elections which triggered polarizing disputes within Turkey. With these analyses this study tries to answer following questions: What are individuals' main attitudes when they are partaking in social media platforms? Can these platforms be considered as a democratic public sphere within the confines of Turkey? Does social media have an impact on polarization in Turkish society? How does the usage of social media affect the political views of Turkish people?

Keywords: Democracy, Echo Chamber Environment, Netnography, Social Media, Polarization, Public Sphere

ÖZET

Bu çalışma sosyal medya platformlarının, Türkiyede politik görüşler üzerindeki işlevini ve etkilerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Literatürde, bu platformların işlevi, habermasçı kamusal alan çerçevesinde değerlendirilmektedir. Kamusal alan, vatandaşların eşit bir ortamda, özgürce diyalog kurmak ve tartışmak amaçları ile bir araya geldiği, müzakereci alanı tasvir etmektedir. Literatürde internet platformlarının etkileri üzerinde iki farklı temel görüş bulunmaktadır. Optimistler, bu platformların kamusal alan sağlayarak demokrasiye katkıda bulunduğunu savunurken, pesimistler ise bu platformların yankı odası atmosferi oluşturarak kutuplaşmayı derinleştirilmesiyle demokrasiye zarar verdiklerini düşünmektedirler. Bu araştırma, Türkiye'de netnografik bir saha çalışması yürüterek sosyal medya platformlarının rolünü analiz etmektedir. Bu saha çalışmasında data, derinlemesine görüşmeler ve katılımcıların çevrimiçi etkileşimlerinden derlenen günlükler aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Analizler, Türkiye'de, kutuplaştırıcı anlaşmazlıklar yaratan, Kadınlar Günü yürüyüşü krizi ve 31 Mart yerel seçimler krizi çerçevesinde yapılmıştır. Yapılan analizlerle, bu çalışma dört ana soruya cevap aramaktadır: İnsanların, sosyal medya platformlarında takındıkları ana tutumlar nelerdir? Bu platformlar Türkiye'de demokratik kamusal alan olarak ele alınabilir mi? Sosyal medya platformlarının Türk toplumundaki kutuplaşma üzerinde etkisi var mıdır? Bu platformların kullanımı Türklerin siyasi görüşlerini nasıl etkilemektedir ?

Anahtar Kelimeler: Demokrasi, Kamusal Alan, Kutuplaşma, Netnografi, Sosyal Medya, Yankı Odası

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Social media is about sociology and psychology more than technology"
- Brian Solis, 2007

We are living in the age of information, accessing the information is easier than ever for a large portion of the world's population. We not only access the information but also change and create this information. The Internet as a platform has been in use ever since 2004 (O'Reilly, 2007). The platforms of the Internet have become an irreplaceable part of our lives. According to the Digital Report of We Are Social (2019), the 45% of the people in the world are active social media users. Between the year 2018 and 2019, 288 million people became active social media users in the world (We Are Social, 2019). These numbers prove how the usage of these platforms is on an exponential rise. The question remains, is it adequate to evaluate social media platforms by only viewing them as a tool of technology? How is it possible to ignore the effects of these platforms on individuals' lives? The interactions of people on these platforms are a mirror to their lives. People reflect their experiences, sentiments, behaviors and political views on these platforms. In essence, these platforms have become a crucial part of people's lives. The average amount of time per day that people spend using social media in the world is two hours and sixteen minutes (We Are Social, 2019). People spend countless hours every day on these platforms learning something, sharing the visuals from their lives and reading multitudes of information on a spectrum of subjects. The usage of these platforms has modified the habits of people on how they receive information and communicate with others. The interactions of people on these platforms provide a limitless archive for social scientists who are interested in people's behavior, attitudes, actions and ideas.

In fact, social media platforms proved that they are more than a technological tool in current society. During the Arab Springs, Twitter and Facebook played a crucial role playing as a gang up tool against their authoritarian governments (Howard et al., 2011). In essence, people utilized these platforms as a place for meeting and communicating without the prying eyes of the government. People announced demonstrations, times and dates on these platforms and these platforms became a sphere for civic engagement (Mitchell, Brown and

Guskin,2012). During the Gezi Protests in Turkey, social media platforms played a crucial role in anti-government demonstrations by spreading awareness and gathering unlikely people (Hutchinson,2013). Social media platforms gave direction to the ebb and flow of social movements. These platforms have not only changed the lives of people, but have also changed the political landscape. Many political figureheads express themselves on Twitter and in this respect, diplomacy has reshaped through the usage of these platforms (Unver,2017). Social media's extensive usage, its great role in social movements and its power in politics triggered a cascade of scholars to research the function of social media platforms. One of the aims of this study is to evaluate the function of these platforms in the context of their contribution to democracy.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the role of the Internet and social media platforms within the frame of their contributions to democracy (Sunstein,2007; Iyengar and Hahn,2009; Best and Krueger,2005; Wellman,2001; Schlozman, Verba and Brady,2010; Erdogan,2017; Sunstein,2007; Norris,2001; Curran,2011; Gruzd and Roy,2014; Brundidge,2010). The role of the Internet's platforms on democracy are evaluated by using the concept of a public sphere. A public sphere is an environment of debate for citizens who come together under an equal and free atmosphere and it is a building block for modern democracies (Habermas,1991). In literature, the function of these platforms in the context of democracy is controversial. Optimists (Wellman,2001; Polat,2005, Benkler,2006) evaluate the function of these platforms as a tool for furthering democratization and the pessimists (Sunstein,2007; Giddens,2005; Garret,2009; Timisi,2003; Stroud,2010; Levendusky,2013; Fukuyama,2018; Erdogan and Semerci,2018) argue that these platforms harm democracy instead of promoting it. Pessimists argue that mechanisms and individuals' attitudes such as filtering, selective exposure and homophily prevent social media platforms from contributing to democracy. Furthermore pessimists argue that these platforms serve polarization due to the echo chamber effect they substantiate. People attempt to interact with the echoes of their own voices on these platforms and thus, social media leads to increased polarization (Erdogan and Semerci,2018:147). The aim of this study is to evaluate the function of these online platforms within the framework of polarization and democracy by questioning the function and the effects of social media usage on Turkish youths' political views.

This study aims to evaluate the function of social media platforms in Turkey. Turkey is one of the nations where social media platforms are utilized by the vast majority. Turkey with

its 43 million users, is the 9th nation where Facebook is used most and with 9 million users, it is the 5th country where Twitter is used most in the world (We Are Social,2019). 63% of the population in Turkey actively utilize social media platforms (We Are Social,2019). 8 out of 10 households in Turkey have the internet access (TUIK,2018) and in Turkey, people spend on average two hours and forty six minutes per day using social media platforms (We Are Social,2019). Yet contrary to common belief, Turkey is the one of the nations where affective polarization is highest in the world (Erdogan and Semerci,2019). A significant dimension of political polarization, the concept of affective polarization is used when the sense belonging to a political party becomes an individuals' social identity (Erdogan and Semerci, 2018:15). In other words, affective polarization indicates how political differences and disagreements turn into a sense of group belonging. Turkey is the 3rd nation in the world that has the highest score for affective polarization after Kenya and The United States (Erdogan and Semerci,2018:41). The high presence of affective polarization in Turkish society leads to pessimistic predictions for democracy. Not only do the ideological characteristics of individuals and the strategies of political parties that shape political polarization, the realm of politics also has a great impact on polarization (Erdogan and Semerci,2018). In essence, the functioning or non-functioning public sphere plays a crucial role in the presence of political polarization in society. If observed as a realm of politics, the functioning public sphere may prevent political polarization by ensuring dialogue and tolerance between citizens (Sunstein,2007). If so, what is the function of social media in Turkey where there exists intense political polarization deeply rooted within society? This study aims to analyze the role of social media among Turkish people by evaluating whether or not it functions as a public sphere in preventing polarizing attitudes.

In a nation where social media usage is so high, how can this usage be evaluated within the frame of polarization and its contribution to democracy? The methodology of this study is a question by itself due to the fact that the function of social media in these frames has not been qualitatively studied before. There have been quantitative studies on the selective exposure, homophily and the echo chamber effect among Internet media consumers (Garrett,2009; Levendusky,2013; Liao and Fu,2014) however, the previous studies of social media platforms have not dealt with the qualitative analysis on the role of these platforms in the frames of polarization and contribution to democracy. In this respect, this study aims to answer the question that how to perform qualitative research on the role of social media usage. This study attempts to address the following research questions: What

is the function of social media usage on political views in Turkey ? Can social media platforms be considered as a democratic public sphere within the confines of Turkey? Does social media have an impact on polarization in Turkish society? How does the usage of social media affect the political views of Turkish people? What are individuals' main attitudes when they are partaking in these platforms?

The methodological approach taken in this study is a netnography. Netnography is an ethnographic method used for the communities which partake in social interactions within an online sphere (Kozinets,2011). This method is suitable for this study because ethnographies offer opportunity to both write and represent the attitudes and behaviors of particular individuals. To evaluate the online interactions of people, this method is appropriate because with the techniques of ethnographic study, the researcher attains a detailed understanding of a social phenomenon (Kozinets,2010). For this study, data was collected over the course of three months, between March and May by conducting two different methodologies. To begin with, the in-depth interviews were conducted twice with a total of eight participants (four male and four female) whom happen to be supporters of the four different main political parties within Turkey, AKP, MHP, CHP and HDP. Furthermore, as a participant-observer, I personally observed their online interactions on Twitter and Facebook with their consent and prepared eight separate journals, one for each of the participants. This harvested data which consisted of in-depth interviews and journals were analyzed in the context of two different social crises. On Women's Day, a band of female protesters caused a crisis in Turkish society, people blamed women for insulting ezan during the demonstrations and women ignored this accusation (Mahmut Hamsici,2019). This dispute turned into a polarizing crisis in Turkish society due to the involvement of the issues of gender and religion. The participants' online and offline interactions on this crisis is crucial in demonstrating how people perceive a value-based crisis. Furthermore, it helps demonstrate how the social media platforms cope with this value based polarizing crisis. The crisis to be examined arose with the coming of the local elections which were held on 31th March due to the uncertainty of the results. The online interactions of the participants on the night of election is crucial to demonstrate how the elections reflect polarization in society and how social media plays a role under this polarizing atmosphere.

This study is significant for several reasons, to begin with this study is interested in the questions that are crucial in the real world due to the fact that the usage of social media increases day by day and the function of these platforms has become a real concern in the world. Furthermore, this research aims to contribute to literature by evaluating the function of social media platforms within the confines of polarization and their contribution to democracy and its foundations. Finally, this study is a consequence of my personal curiosity towards the role of these platforms within a growing democratic society. As a person who lives in Turkey and an active user of Twitter, I have constructed this research through my concerns that Turkish society is becoming more and more conflicting, tense and polarized. In this respect, I have taken upon myself to question the role of social media platforms on these atmospheres in Turkey. Yet another reason why I partook in this research is to evaluate the motivations of people and to understand and perceive these crises on an individual level. One of the most elemental factors of a qualified democracy is that the citizens have a consensus on the function of democracy and the electoral process (Erdogan and Semerci,2018:121). In this respect, the interactions of participants on the local elections of March 31 is significant to analyze the predisposition of participants towards polarization and democracy. The common values which hold society together play a crucial role in terms of preventing or reinforcing polarization (Erdogan and Semerci,2019). In essence, the value-based crisis that took place on March 8th is important for evaluating how the religion influences polarization in Turkish society. By performing these analyses, this study attempts to demonstrate the role of Twitter and Facebook by evaluating how these platforms influence these crises. The question resides; did these platforms encourage people towards making dialogue or did these platforms raise the walls between people and reinforce the already existing polarization?

This study has been divided into five parts. After the introduction part, the second chapter of this paper consists of a vast literature review. This chapter draws a theoretical framework between the Internet's platforms and democracy through the concept of a public sphere. In this chapter the arguments of optimists which evaluate the Internet's platforms as a tool for furthering democratization are mentioned. The pessimists' arguments which assess social media platforms in terms of reinforcing political polarization and harming democracy is also taken into consideration. In this chapter, the political homophily, selective exposure and the filtering issues of these platforms are evaluated within the frame of existing literature and the arguments on the presence of an echo chamber environment is stated.

The third chapter of this study focuses on the methodological approach of this research. In this chapter, the method of netnography is clarified in detail and the field study of this research is explained. The fourth chapter deconstructs the findings of this research in the frame of the crisis of the Women's Day march and the crisis of the local elections. In this chapter, each crisis is defined in detail and the participants' online and offline interactions are evaluated according to the journals and the in-depth interviews. The last chapter concludes the analyses in the frame of the research questions of this study. This chapter assess whether social media platforms function as a public sphere according to the participant's online interactions. Finally in the last chapter, the significant breakdown which occurred with the cancellation of the metropolitan local elections for Istanbul on May 6th is evaluated by the participants' online interactions.

CHAPTER TWO

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Relationship between Internet and Democracy

Throughout the literature of political science, there have been many crucial debates within the confines of the Internet ever since the Web 2.0 revolution (O'Reilly,2007) , ever since these discussions have spread like wildfire.

There is an enormous contribution in the form of liberties from the internet towards democracy. Many scholars (Sunstein,2007; Fukuyama,2018; Iyengar and Hahn,2009; Erdogan,2017; Best and Krueger,2005; Wellman,2001; Schlozman,Verba and Brady,2010; Grossman,1995; Sener et al.,2015; Yegen,2013; Topbas and Dogan,2016; Norris,2001; Curran,2011; Kellner,1997; Boyd and Ellison,2007; Gruzd and Roy,2014; Liao and Fu,2014; Brundidge,2010; Bayraktutan et al.2014) have focused on the function of the Internet in the context of its contribution to democracy. There is no consensus in literature on the issues that the internet raises within the confines of democracy (Erdogan,2017; Yegen,2013; Topbas and Dogan,2016). Optimists (Wellman,2001; Tolbert and McNeal,2003; Polat,2005; Grossman,1995) focus on the positive function of Internet for democratic societies. These optimistic studies delve in the fact that Internet usage may be a solution towards the problem of freedom deficits within democracy and these approaches claim that the opportunities of the Internet trigger citizens to participate in politics (Erdogan,2017). Moreover, the Internet creates a foundation for the abundance of information and the usage of the Internet may conduce towards public awareness (Karakaya-Polat,2005). With Internet usage in social platforms, people reinforce their relations with others by sharing their ideas and concepts, thus becoming more active citizens (Wellman,2001; Cambie and Ooi,2009). On the other hand, the Internet provides an opportunity for a limitless source of information to all of its participants and therefore, disadvantaged groups may benefit from the Internet in terms of reaching otherwise unobtainable information similar to the rest of society (Tolbert and McNeal,2003). In essence, the Internet contributes towards democratization by mobilizing alternative groups and minorities to partake within debates and concurrent discussion (Curran,1997). Moreover, with the opportunity of equal access to the Internet, social platforms may create new areas to discuss controversial and political topics, thus within these areas people may become part of modern politics (Rheingold,1993; Grossman,1995). To conclude, the optimistic viewpoint argues that the Internet provides a plethora of equal opportunities for

accessing information and for sharing ideas, thus creating a pool of more active political participants otherwise secluded from discussion. Moreover, with social platforms, the Internet serves democratization by putting different voices together creating an environment for stark contrast. Within this frame, the optimistic approach evaluates the function of the Internet as a tool for furthering the ideal concept of democratization (Erdogan,2017).

In contrast to this approach, the more pessimistic viewpoint has significant objections about idealistic arguments in relation to the Internet and democracy. The proponents of the pessimistic approach claim that the Internet reinforces inequalities and differences rather than being inclusivistic in nature (Erdogan,2017 ; Fukuyama,2018 ; Verba, Schlozman and Brady,1995; Yegen,2013; Liao and Fu,2014). The Internet in their viewpoint does not place people together in inclusivist sense and does not serve democracy due to the fact that the Internet and social platforms facilitate to divide societies into smaller sub identities and create self-contained communities (Fukuyama,2018). Furthermore, contrary to optimistic belief, participation within the Internet does not prove equal for every citizen due to the fact that the frequency of participation shows deviations according to several factors such as income, financial status, education, gender and profession (Erdogan,2017). In other words, every citizen could not benefit from the opportunities of the Internet equally due to their pre-ordained conditions (Papacharissi,2002:15). Moreover, due to the fact that the controlling power and its interventions of government, it is impossible to refer to the atmosphere of social platforms of Internet as democratic (Kaplan,1991:141).

2.2. The Concept of Public Sphere

As can be observed in the topics of “political participation” and “equal access” there exist crucial links for debates between the relations of democracy and the functionality of the Internet. However, to make an in-depth analysis of these debates, focus is required on a much more pressing link; the concept of the “public sphere” (Habermas,1989). Debates of whether the Internet creates a public sphere or not are located in the center of relation between democracy and the Internet. For Habermas (Habermas,Lennox and Lennox,1964), the public sphere can exist in all echelons of our social life where public opinion is formed. In essence, the notion of public opinion was emphasized specifically by the eighteen century political philosophers. There was an enormous split between the views of Rousseau and Kant on the topic of public openness (Habermas,1991). Rousseau designed an idea of an intrusively political society in which the autonomous private sphere had no place

because in Rousseau's social contract, there was a demand for self-surrender and the individuals are absorbed by the concept of citizenship (Habermas,1991:97). The core notion behind Rousseau's idea of democracy was a general gathering rather than a rational and critical conflict, in this regard, the concept of the public sphere was defined as a place where citizens assembled not for making rational public debate but to merely give consent (Habermas,1991:99). Habermas criticized the fact that Rousseau desired democracy without public debate (Turan,2004:28). In contrast, Kant envisioned the concept of the public sphere as the principle of legal order and *modus operandi* of the Enlightenment (Habermas,1991:104). Kant's idea of publicity makes possible the convergence of politics and morality (Turan,2004:29). The use of reason is crucial for Kant's idea of self-enlightening and Habermas (1991:104) remarks that the process of self-enlightening synchronizes with thinking vocally in the context of the public and for the public to use reason it is required to speak out vocally without the intervention of the interests of government due to the fact that the sphere of public use should be completely free (Turan,2004: 30). When private people engage in rational and critical debate publicly, the public use of reason is formed and private people become citizens (Habermas,1991:104). Kantian public use of reason shows the transformation of human beings into citizens, contrary to Rousseau, it gives a higher quality to human beings rather than absorbing individuals (Turan,2004:30). For Habermas on the public sphere, the Kantian public use of reason plays a crucial role. On the contrary, the other great contribution to the Habermasian public sphere comes from Hegel by evaluating the concept of public opinion. Hegel defined public opinion as a subjective freedom of individuals which appears as their own private judgments and opinions about the affairs of state, he defined public sphere as "the subjection of domination to reason" (Habermas,1991:117).

The concept of the public sphere is referred frequently in order to answer the burning question of does the Internet make people democratic? To highlight the relation between Internet and democracy, there is need to expand on this concept. The most significant characteristic of the public sphere is its accessibility to all citizens (Habermas,1964). In other words, public sphere represents an environment of debate for private people who are coming together under an equal and free atmosphere. The public sphere should strictly stay out of the interests of both state and companies (Habermas,1991). Turan (2004) analyzed the concept of Habermas's public sphere and listed the main conditions of the public sphere: first of all, the dialogue or conversation should take place in a publicly accessible area, the participants of conversation should be private persons and should not be influenced by the

commercial and governmental interests. In other words, accessibility, autonomy and rejection of any hierarchy and participation are the main principles of the concept of the public sphere (Habermas,1991(1962)). Arendt (1994) defines the public sphere as a space where liberty is at the forefront and where people come together without any restrictions or hindrances. On the other hand, Fraser (1990) draws attention to the function of the public sphere by indicating that the public sphere is a circle for discourses rather than a space for market relations, in essence deliberation and debates rather than selling and buying. In other words, the public sphere is independent from the sovereignty of capital (Habermas,1991). Sener (2006) refers to the concept of public sphere as a sphere of critical debates. Colleoni, Rozza and Arvidsson (2014:318) claim that the public sphere should allow public reasoning through wideness of information that lead to deliberation. Moreover, the public sphere is a specific area within the civil society to solve political conflicts and to develop rational and critical debates (Calhoun,1992). In this regard, public sphere is the main principle of democratic politics (Hansen,1993).

The concept of the public sphere is a strong figure for democracy because it represents equal participation of people without any obedience and intervention. Public sphere is the fundamental mechanism of democracy (Habermas,1991) because the act of debate is the main principle of deliberative democracy (Sunstein,2007). By referring to deliberation, Habermas (1990) means social cooperation and deliberative democracy represents an ideal political system based on the practical reasoning of citizens through deliberation (Bohman and Rehg,1997). Governing by the way of public deliberation is the main principle behind a deliberative democracy (Cohen,1989) and public communication is crucial for this type of democracy (Witschge,2004). In a deliberative democracy, there should be a large degree of reflection and debate, both within citizens and within government (Sunstein,2007). Young(1996) indicated that democracy can be viewed as a process that builds a public where citizens come together to debate about collective problems, ideals, goals and actions. In other words, rational public opinion has a great importance for democracy and for the formation of rational public opinion, the concept of the Habermasian public sphere plays crucial role (Dahlberg,2004). Benhabib (1996:68) noted:

“Democracy, in my view is best understood as a model for organizing the collective and public exercise of power in the major institutions of a society on the basis of the principle that decisions affecting the well-being of a collectivity can be viewed as the outcome of a procedure of free and reasoned deliberation among individuals considered as moral and political equals.”

Within this framework, the most important function of the public sphere is providing a free and reasoned deliberation among citizens. Therefore, for this study, the concept of a public sphere would be addressed as the significant essence for democracy.

2.3. The Relationship between Internet and Public Sphere

With the Web 2.0 revolution, people have started to use Internet for not only ascertaining information but also for sharing and criticizing ideas. Due to these developments, the function of Internet has become a much more heated topic within literature. In this respect, the main focus of these debates is the link between the Internet and the public sphere. Despite the fact that Habermas (1991) indicated the decline of public sphere and mentioned end of the classical period of public sphere because of the invasion by the interests of the free market relations and state, the debates about public sphere have regained its effectualness since 1990s. In these debates, one side claims that the Internet may contribute democracy by creating a fresh public sphere (Benkler,2006;Norris,2001; Rheingold,1993; Schalken,1998;Kellner,1997) and the defenders of other side object the function of the Internet as a public spearhead and argue that the usage of Web 2.0 platforms harm democracy instead of promoting it (Sunstein,2007; Conover et al.2011; Giddens,2005; Iyengar and Hahn,2009; Garret,2009; Brundidge,2010; Karlsen et al.2017; Colleoni, Rozza and Arvidson,2014; Liao and Fu,2014; Gilbert, Bergstrom and Karahalios,2009; Huckfeldt et al.2004; McPherson et al.2001; Gruzd and Roy,2014; Durusoy,2018; Timisi,2003; Kuran&Sunstein,2007; Levendusky,2013; Stroud,2010; Fukuyama,2018).With the expansion of high-tech societies, Kellner (1997) argues that there is need to redefine the concept of the public sphere, in this frame, he claims that the Internet and other new modes of communication have created new platforms for discussion and debate. These spheres may serve democracy if new technologies are utilized for democratization, however if not, the usage of Internet can be detrimental towards democracy due to the fact that there is real danger that the usage of social platforms may increase the inequalities among citizens in relation to class, gender and race (Kellner,1997). Is the increase in existing inequalities among citizens the only obstacle for the Internet in terms of being a public sphere? There are many problems for supposing internet and its social platforms as a public sphere. First and foremost, the Internet and its social platforms are not suitable for being a public sphere in the Habermasian sense (Sunstein,2007; Yegen,2013; Kaplan,1991; Timisi,2003). Habermas's most significant condition of a public sphere is the equal access for every citizen. However, the participation is not equal; men, educated, students and employees

exhibit more participation compared to women, uneducated and young people who are neither employed, nor educated. Alongside these the level of income is a strong determining factor (Erdogan,2017). The participation shows an alteration according to societal inequalities and this situation causes a numerical gap thus it is impossible to mention equal access to Internet (Şener,2006). In other words, the Internet is seen like a weapon of power instead of a public sphere (Schlozman, Verba and Brady,2010). On the contrary, in a public sphere it should be allowed to discuss questions openly (Sunstein,2007) and it should be independent from interventions and interests of government (Habermas,1991) however, the Internet and its social platforms facilitate surveillance from government and in this respect it is impossible to state that the internet can be substituted as a democratic process due to interventions from government. (Kaplan,1991). That is to say that people are involved in the mechanisms of superintendence by using the Internet both consciously or unconsciously. Therefore the Internet may cause a superintended social structure (Toprak et. al.2009). Moreover, in the public sphere, there is no place for market relations and it should be independent from economic interests (Habermas,1991) The Internet and its platforms are included in the market economy and the purpose of these social media platforms is to make profit (Toprak et. Al. 2009). In this regard, the internet is seen as a sphere of consumption and monetary gain rather than a public sphere thus citizens are morphed into consumers (Şener, 2006). Information is gradually becoming commercialized due to monopolies whom are established on the Internet (Şener,2006). The commercialization of information is a significant issue towards the ethical function of the Internet. Companies are interested in the production and distribution of information and data rather than production of goods and services (Davidow and Malone,1992). In this frame, the public sphere is invaded by the competition between private sectors (Habermas,1991) in this information age, ideas and social relations are becoming commodities which have prices and which are tradable (Giddens,2005). With these shifts in the political and consumerist landscape, the Internet and its social platforms are becoming an ideal market for private companies. In this regard, whether the new technologies involve monopolistic behaviors or manipulation by companies or not it is a crucial question for debates about the function and form of these new technologies, (Sunstein,2007:16). Sunstein (2007:15) making a significant contribution to this question by indicating that in Internet sites, consumers are seen as a commodity which are sold to advertisers in exchange for monetary gain. Economic interests and commercial competition become involved on the Internet and its social platforms to steer consumers' attention since

their attention is the essential commodity, if companies can shift these attentions from one direction to another, they gain a significant advantage (Sunstein,2007:15). For this reason, on the Internet's platforms, private companies are applying different methods to become influential, grabbing peoples' attentions such as filtering the choices of consumers (Sunstein,2007:15). There is a pressing tension between being a citizen and being a consumer throughout the usage of the Internet thus to understand the function of the internet as a public sphere or as a consumer market, there is need to analyze this tension. Sunstein (2007:38-43) mentions consumer and political sovereignty to demonstrate this tension. The consumer sovereignty and the political sovereignty can be observed as the idea behind free markets and the concept behind free nations (Sunstein,2007:38). Therefore, these two concepts are going to shift toward different directions such as; in the usage of Internet, for consumers, designing a unique virtual platform (Daily Me) according to their desires by filtering is a magnificent opportunity. However for citizens or for political sovereignty, complete personalization weakens democratic ideals (Sunstein,2007:213) because for citizens, the principle revolves around the echoing phrase "We The People" and being a citizen stands far from becoming the architect of one's own world (Sunstein,2007:40). For political sovereignty, deliberative culture and public discussion are the key concepts in terms of existing as a citizen and if individuals are constructing their own world solely with their own choices, they cannot carry out the requirements of citizenship due to the reality that consumer choices create an obstacle for accessing public discussion (Sunstein,2007:40-41). In other words, each individual has rights and duties as a citizen not simply as a consumer, public discussion is a political duty for democracy because citizens should not be inert for freedom and democratic societies (Sunstein,2007:42). Individuals should evaluate the Internet by asking how it affects the people as a whole (Sunstein,2007;119) The Internet – as system of communications – is crucial for promoting a democracy and for being a citizen however, in the Internet's platforms, the efforts towards making people simple consumers does not allow individuals to evaluate themselves as citizens (Sunstein,2007:43). In other words, the consumer sovereignty is preventing "deliberative forces to prevail over the arbitrary" (Sunstein,2007;43) but for democratic societies, political sovereignty is required in the social platforms of Internet. As long as the Internet serves consumer sovereignty, it and its social platforms would not suitable for a Habermasian public sphere.

In essence, the public sphere must grant equal communication rights for citizens and should be independent from invasion of economic and governmental interests (Habermas,1991;

Habermas,1996). In this respect, there are many arguments that claim the Internet and its social platforms cannot fulfill the pre-requisite conditions of a public sphere because of the unequal and exclusivist dominance of private companies and state.

In contrast to these concepts, the other important principle of a public sphere is deliberation. Deliberation is the main idea behind the concept of public sphere because the public sphere is expected to create a deliberative space (Habermas,1996). In other words, to provide deliberative spaces, the existence of public forums is necessary (Sunstein, 2007). Can social platforms of Internet be seen as a public forum? To evaluate the function of Internet as a public sphere, there is need to observe whether or not deliberative spaces exist within the Internet's social platforms. Heterogeneity improves democracy and it is crucial for deliberation (Sunstein,2007) in this regard, the public forum should create an opportunity for "general access to heterogeneous citizens"(Sunstein,2007:26). Moreover, diversity of opinions is a necessity for democratic debate and public forum with diverse speakers and diverse viewpoints (Sunstein,2007). Interactions with different views are essential to comprehend the perspectives of others and for effective debate (Benhabib,1996). Mutz (2006) defines the existence of different views as the *raison d'être* for deliberation. Debate, consultation and meeting with others is a necessity for a deliberative space (Sunstein,2007).The important focus point of discussions surrounding suitability of the Internet with the public sphere is, whether its social platforms provide a deliberative space or not. In this regard, there is a stalwart obstacle towards the existence of a deliberative space within the Internet: the risk of polarization and fragmentation (Sunstein,2007).

2.4. The Risks for Polarization

The presence of polarization and fragmentation is a strong blockade towards the existence of deliberation on the Internet's social platforms (Stroud,2010; Sunstein,2007; Levendusky,2013; Iyengar and Hahn,2009; Mutz,2006;Liao and Fu,2014). The public sphere cannot exist without deliberation due to this issue. As long as deliberation is absent on the Internet's social platforms, it is impossible to see Internet's platforms as a public sphere. Many social scientists focus on the different attitudes of people which can be observed in the usage of the Internet to evaluate polarization and other risks for democracy on the Internet's social platforms. Their main concern is that new information and communication technologies (ICTs) would trigger a crisis towards democracy. The source of this concern is the unique capacity of these technologies for managing limitless information flows (Garett,2009). To analyze this concern, there is need to ask that what

individuals do when they encounter so much information? Individuals choose among far-reaching kinds of attitudes in the sphere of ICTs (Bimber and Davis,2003) and the mechanism of filtering, selective exposure, homophily are the main common attitudes of individuals in their usage of Internet. Moreover, the concept of cyber cascades and echo chambers are the possible consequences of these attitudes (Sunstein,2007). These concepts are aiding to concretize the mechanism of polarization in the usage of Internet's platforms and because of this reason, they should be analyzed thoroughly.

2.4.1 The Filtration Issue

The filtration issue is a good way to show the whole picture of the usage of the Internet due to the fact that it all started with filtering content. In other words, the issue of filtration is the source of all other concepts which are relevant to polarization in the Internet. The ability to filter what people want to see, hear or read raises serious problems (Sunstein,2007; Pariser,2011; Conover et. Al.2011). Although it sounds delightfully pleasant to design one's own world according to only ones desires, it is a very dangerous concept for democratic societies (Sunstein,2007). As a consumer, it may sound magnificent in theory to see only the things one is interested in however, as a citizen it may be a horrible fate and would raise serious maladies for a democratic society (Sunstein,2007). The main principle of public forum is to gather different people for debate and discussion yet filtration of content restricts people from accessing different ideas and it prevents the existence of a deliberative space. The power of limitless content filtration makes it difficult for mutual understanding and this situation may cause fragmentation within society and its echelons (Sunstein,2007). When people establish their own world in the bowels of the Internet and its plethora of platforms by filtering other's presence, fragmentation is bound to occur and with this fragmentation, different groups may tend to polarize (Sunstein,2007). There is a significant concern that when individuals avoid information and opinions of other people, their personal thoughts and opinions become increasingly extreme (Conover et. Al.2011). Moreover, the public forum should ensure the spread of information, however in an individually filtered speech universe, information cannot spread beyond a narrow range of audiences (Sunstein,2009). The ability to filter plays a crucial role in the presence of selective exposure and echo chambers further mentioned below. However, the act of filtering is applied by not only the users of Internet, but also is practiced by private companies and owners of social media platforms (Sunstein,2007; Pariser,2011). Social platforms of the Internet gather information about people's interests and further orchestrate

their usage of said platforms (Pariser,2011). When a company knows which kind of article people are interested in, or which mood people are in, it serves up advertisements related to said topics and moods thus creating a specific world of information for each individual, aptly named “filter bubbles” (Pariser,2011). These filter bubbles represent a presence of each individual in the cyber world and the problem is that the techniques of some companies design these bubbles by deciding what people can see or what people can know from the Internet’s platforms (Pariser,2011). These mechanisms of filtration dominate every part of the Internet without the awareness of its users. In contrast to Garrett’s (2009) argument that the Internet allows individuals to have more choices and more control over their information exposure, Pariser (2011) argues that this technology of information and communication is designed towards giving us more control our lives, however it in actuality takes control away.

As can be observed in the statement of founder of Facebook , Mark Zuckerberg: *“A squirrel dying in front of your house may be more relevant to your interests right now than people dying in Africa”*, people cannot decide which information gets in their online universe and more significantly they also cannot know which information is kept out (Pariser,2011). These mechanisms are the polar opposite for understanding peoples public spheres and also harm democracy due to the fact that communication or dialogue leads people to shape their society democratically and it is impossible to have a functioning democracy without dialog between citizens (Sunstein,2007). With communication or dialog, people start to participate in a *“pool of common meaning”* (Bohm,1996) since communication pushes the notion of common ground and compromise (Pariser,2011). The algorithms and software engines are preventing individuals from communicating with one another by filtering individuals’ online lives (Pariser,2011). For a democracy, shared views and shared experiences are touchstone (Sunstein,2007) due to the fact that in a democracy individuals should think beyond their self-interests and individuals should contact with the lives, needs and desires of others (Pariser,2011). As Arendt states in *The Human Condition* (1998:50), *“the presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves...”* the presence of others ideas is crucial, however these filtration mechanisms prevent individuals from seeing and hearing others and creates a personalized catered atmosphere. In contrast to Benkler’s view (2006) which argues that a networked public sphere is immune from the dangers of fragmentation and polarization, the creation of personalization through filtration mechanisms, the structures of the Internet are disposed to fragmentation and local homogeneity (Pariser,2011). Personalization is both a cause and

a consequence of fragmentation because personalization destroys common experience and creates the foundation to something similar to a public sphere which is hostile to dialogue, manipulated and fragmented by algorithms (Pariser,2011).

Because of existing filtration mechanisms, the Internet's structures are seen as tools for fragmentation and polarization rather than as a Habermasian public sphere.

2.4.2 Selective Exposure and Concept of Homophily

The filtration mechanisms narrow down the range of information yet for deliberation, random exposures and shared experiences are crucial (Sunstein,2007). Exposure to dissimilar views is a necessity for maintaining a democratic and mentally diverse society (Mutz,2006). There are two different theoretical arguments on the relation between Internet usage and democracy: the first one of them views the usage of the Internet as a detriment to democracy since Internet usage facilitates selective exposure, yet on the other hand, according to the other argument, the usage of Internet contributes to democracy because it increases exposures to political variance and differentiated opinions (Brundidge,2010). To understand the reality of selective exposure and its risks, there is a deep requirement to analyze the concept of homophily because the existence of polarization on all platforms of Web 2.0 can be explained with homophily (McPherson et al.2001). Homophily can be observed closely where individuals on social platforms tend to gather with similar political views or similar backgrounds and interests. Homophily is seen as a mechanism which operates fragmentation in social platforms (Colleoni et al.2014). Homophily is the answer to why people prefer to engage in filtering. People prefer to filter due to the fact that they want to listen to and partake in discussions which defend their subjective perspectives and because of the tendency towards homophily on the Internet's platforms, many people are mostly hearing their own voices or the echoes of their voices (Sunstein,2007). Adamic and Glance (2005) focused on 1400 blogs to analyze the degree of interaction between conservative and liberal bloggers and they found that ninety-one percent of the links belong to like-minded sites further proving the echo chamber effect of political views. Sunstein (2007) claims that in blogs, liberal citizens of U.S link mostly to liberals and conservatives are likewise, further proving that individuals cannot reach one another for argumentation due to this selective nature. In other words, people are usually reading blogs which correspond to their own preexisting beliefs (Sunstein,2007). Homophily lends toward the creation of homogeneous networks and these homogenous networks lead toward polarization of online and real life communities (Stroud,2010). In this regard, the platforms

of the Internet narrow political horizons of its active users rather than widening them by creating a favorable milieu for homophily (Iyengar and Hahn,2009).

Dissonance in ideas is valuable for creating an atmosphere for debate (Festinger,1957) but the new information environment also known as the Internet makes it possible for people to reach information which only they as an individual find favorable or agreeable (Mullainathan and Shleifer,2005). Homophily manifests itself in not only Internet's platforms, but can also be observed at all echelons where information can be obtained such as educational institutes or the mass media. Homophily is seen as a common attitude in the usage of Internet's platforms and it creates tendency for selective exposure.

Selective exposure is the answer to how do people decide what information to choose or what information to ignore. Selective exposure means that people select information according to their beliefs (Stroud,2008). The most suitable theory for this attitude is the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger,1957). This theory elaborates on how individuals feel better when they encounter a snippet of information that verifies their opinion and it shows the tendency of people to seek information which is preferred personally (Festinger,1957). In this regard, the Internet as a new form of communication, is leading people to reach information selectively and in platforms, people prefer to attain information which is supportive of their ideas (Iyengar and Hahn,2009). Contrary to common belief that the Internet is leading citizens' exposure to political discussion (Holt,2004), in the Internet's platforms, individuals are exposing themselves to information that strengthens their existing notions and beliefs. (Garett,2009). Simultaneously individuals exclude opinions and flow of information which they disagree upon (Garett,2009). In other words, when people are confronted with making a choice, they avoid opinions which they disagree upon (Karlsen et. Al. 2017).

The phenomenon of selective exposure prevents the Internet's social platforms from being a Habermasian environment by nature and also its presence constitutes a serious problem for democracy (Sunstein,2007). In the sphere where there is a tendency for selective exposure and homophily, could people use the Internet to explore diverse ideas? Most individuals are not searching for other viewpoints on the Internet (Garett,2009). If people are using the Internet to reinforce their existing opinions, how it will contribute democracy? The fears on the risk of fragmentation are related to the concept of selective exposure. Garett (2009) argues that the worry that the Internet may lead to fragmented society has been overstated regardless of however many social scientists (Sunstein,2007; Stroud,2010; Iyengar and Khan,2009; Levendusky,2013; Mutz,2006; Adamic and Glance,2003; Gruzd

and Roy,2014; Conover et. Al. 2011) emphasize the role of the Internet for the danger of polarization and fragmentation of society. By listening to and citing only like-minded arguments, individuals that dwell on the internet develop more polarized attitudes and selective exposure causing a more fragmented dissonant public (Stroud,2010). If rephrased, discussing topics such as politics with like-minded people, creates a more polarized political opinion in the direction of the group norm (Huckfeldt et. Al.2004). These group norms lead to motivated reasoning and with motivated reasoning, users affix their preferred sources of information automatically regardless of if they are factually correct or not (Iyengar and Hahn,2009), alongside this motivated reasoning facilitates people to stick to opposite poles (Levendusky,2013). In contrary to the argument of Kinder (2003) that the phenomenon of selective exposure in the Internet is not completely pervasive, the tendency towards selective exposure on the platforms of the Internet causes a less informed and more polarized society (Iyengar and Hahn,2009). On account of this phenomenon people wall themselves off from the opinions which they dislike (Sunstein,2007). In this respect, when the like-minded opinions come together, the feared outcome is polarization (Mutz,2006) because a huge decrease in exposure to different political opinions increases political fragmentation (Galston,2002). Selective exposure to similar views prevents diversity in arguments and the main factor behind polarization is the presence of “*limited argument pool*” (Sunstein,2007:64).

The fact that, being exposed to dissimilar views is extremely valuable for a democratic society (Mutz,2006), for providing deliberation. Mutz (2006) also argues that technological developments should lead public debates to a more pluralistic form. Unfortunately, instead of creating democratic discussions, the Internet reverberates existing political views due to the tendency of selective exposure and homophily (Mutz,2001; Bimber and David,2003; Sunstein,2007). The greater access to information on the Internet promotes selective exposure to ideologically like-minded opinions and the phenomenon of selective exposure, resulting in a formation of echo chambers which facilitate political polarization (Iyengar and Hahn,2009).

2.4.3. The Echo Chamber Environment

The metaphor of echo chamber is used for solidifying polarization among society. The environment of an echo chamber represents a digital sphere where people hear only like-minded opinions without being exposed to varied and random opinions which may or may not contrast personal viewpoints. The description of an echo chamber is one of the most prolific methods to explain the plausible dangers of polarization in society (Sunstein,2007). In other words, the formation of an echo chamber environment is the biggest evidence that selective exposure leads to a polarized society on the Internet.

With the power of filtering and the existence of selective exposure to congenial opinions, the Internet increases its users' probability to hear echoes of their own voices (Sunstein,2007). The Internet makes it easier for people to ignore the opposing viewpoints (Gruzd, and Roy,2014) and surround themselves with the ideas of the like-minded (Sunstein,2007). In other words, the clustering effect around political views on Twitter causes a stronger echo chamber environment rather than providing a suitable environment for people to connect with a diversified pool of individuals. Gruzd and Roy (2014) also discovered in his study that supporters of four different parties prefer more to tweet to other supporters of their parties than to supporters of opposing parties. Yet contrary to belief that the Internet facilitates the development of different and new ideas (Wellman,2001; Norris,2011), the issues which are discussed on the blogs of the Internet, are mostly mimics of issues in the mainstream media due to the echo chamber effect (Gruzd and Roy,2014). Blogs also isolate readers into echo chambers by disengaging their exposure to different opinions (Gilbert et. Al.2009). The reason for the existence of the echo chamber effect on the Internet's social platforms is that individuals tend to create a homogenous milieu by affiliating other people who are like-minded (Colleoni, Rozza and Arvidson,2014). The echo chamber effect manifests itself when people are selectively avoiding opposing arguments and exposing themselves to only agreeable opinions in online debates (Karlsen et. Al.2017). People attempt to interact with the echoes of their own voices on these platforms and thus, social media leads to increased polarization (Erdogan and Semerci,2018:147).The echo chamber effect is seen both as a consequence and as a cause of polarization on the Internet's social platforms, Sunstein (2007) warns people that social platforms which act as an echo chamber polarize users intensely. Due to the fact that the Internet makes it easier to gather like-minded individuals together, disparate and disconnected communities are constituted and the echo chamber effect strengthens the borders of these communities which may serve towards further polarization

(Sunstein,2007; Gruzd and Roy, 2014). Further polarized attitudes could lead to extremism in these groups (Conover et. Al.2011). With the echo chamber effect on the Internet, deliberation can only exist between like-minded groups and the Colorado Experiment shows that deliberation with like-minded groups may trigger individual opinions towards extremity because it produces *‘an amplification of preexisting ideological tendencies’* (Sunstein, Hastie and Schkade,2007:3). This amplification may create different poles in ideological opinions and these poles constitute a significant danger for democratic societies which aim for non-extremist and diverse opinions (Sunstein, Hastie and Schkade,2007). Garrett (2009) argues that there is not sufficient evidence that peoples usage of the Internet’s social platforms creates echo chambers. Sunstein (2007) opposes this argument by claiming that people design their echo chambers in social platforms and in these platforms, polarization is a real phenomenon. When people come across with only like-minded opinions, they are being pushed towards the extreme and thus developing polarized attitudes (Sunstein,2007; Levendusky,2013; Gruzd and Roy,2014). In fact, for a democratic society, individuals definitely must hear opposing views which are generally avoided. Because of its echo chamber environment, the Internet’s social platforms are becoming a most convenient ground for group polarization which harms democracy (Sunstein,2007). Furthermore, group polarization which occurs on the Internet (Sunstein,2007) leads to a high degree of fragmentation because like-minded individuals discuss without hearing contrary views and arguments (Mutz,2006).

Democracy cannot benefit from echo chambers (Sunstein,2007) due to the fact that if people are surrounded with only like-minded opinions, they cannot be aware of the legitimate arguments of other possibly beneficial individuals (Mutz,2006). The concept of tolerance could decrease the attitudes towards alienation (Semerci, Erdogan and Onal,2017) and ignoring the other side contributing towards tolerance (Mutz,2006). If people hear only similar ideas, negative attitudes towards other people will become inevitable and in this respect, tolerance will decrease (Mutz,2006).

The concern about the presence of polarization in social media, prevents the Internet’s platforms as being viewed as a democratic public sphere (Gruzd and Roy,2014). In spite of this, Garret and colleagues (2011) argue that people are not constrained within echo chambers due to the usage of the Internet’s platforms, many scholars on the other hand (Levendusky,2013; Sunstein,2007; Mutz,2006; Colleoni, Rozza and Arvidson,2014 ; Karlsen et. Al.2017; Liao and Fu,2014) are warning that the echo chamber effect on the Internet is a real phenomenon and it leads to polarized attitudes in society. With the risk of

polarization and fragmentation, the Internet's platforms should be seen as echo chambers rather than a democratic public sphere due to the alienation factor (Sunstein,2007).

In the debates of the relation between polarization and the Internet, a different point of view also draws attention, the social platforms of the Internet isolate people by pushing them towards a pilgrimage for an online identity (Sener,2010). Moreover, with the usage of these platforms, people desire a sense of belonging to like-minded communities (Sener,2010). In this regard, the sense of belonging is causing people to support views of communities without questioning, rather than support their own views (Durusoy,2018). On the social platforms of the Internet, the group identity is inflated and due to this the opposing views are alienated, it become impossible to reach an atmosphere of dialog and communication between different views (Durusoy,2018). On the other hand, the sense of group identity prevents deliberation between different ideas and the logic of identity politics divides societies into smaller sub-groups (Fukuyama,2018). Furthermore, the Internet's platforms are contributing towards the existence of identity politics and by doing so, the Internet facilitates social fragmentation (Fukuyama,2018). In this respect, social media platforms are being casted into a sphere for fragmentation and secession rather than an Eden of peace and consensus (Durusoy,2018).

2.4.4. The Formation of Cascades

The echo chamber effect is not the only risk for democracy on the Internet. The internet provides a suitable ground for like-minded peoples peaking with each other and this situation may cause the formation of cascading viewpoints in the Internet – this is aptly named cyber cascades (Sunstein,2007). Cyber cascades can be seen as a process of information exchange and with this exchange, certain facts or points of view may become a reality for millions of peoples (Sunstein,2007). It becomes widespread because many people desire to believe and the cascades are the evidence of that. People are exceedingly influenced by what others are doing because as Sunstein (2007:90) indicates:

“... people end up believe something whether or not that is true or false simply because other people in the relevant community seem to believe that is true.”

The Internet is a most favorable ground for cascades (Sunstein,2001) due to the fact that when individuals create their own echo chambers, individuals are not listening to different viewpoints and in this type of environment, false information can spread within the group as a reality like a wildfire (Kuran and Sunstein, 2007). In other words, the fragmented

structure of the Internet's platforms prevents the spread the true information whilst facilitating the spread of so called "Fake News" (Sunstein,2001).

Cyber cascades cause many errors and misinformation because people can believe something which is at its core false information. Why do people take misinformation as a reality? People may simply believe its reality due to the influence of other group members (Kuran and Sunstein,2007). People can believe truthfulness of misinformation because of its acceptance by the other followers. On the other hand, people accept information to gain the approval of group members to gain standing and kudos (Kuran and Sunstein,2007) so in order to make a good impression on other members, people may share misinformation. Cyber cascades demonstrate that social interactions can shape peoples' perceptions of reality even skewing them beyond recognition (Kuran and Sunstein,2007). Group polarization and fragmentation in the sphere of the Internet constitute crucial dangers in terms of creating a misinformed society (Sunstein,2007). Moreover, the existence of cyber cascades proves that Internet's social platforms are far from being a democratic public sphere (Sunstein,2007).

CHAPTER THREE

3. METHODOLOGY

The section consists of two parts. The first part begins with several definitions of ethnography and their historical evolution. Furthermore it will delve in to the importance of an online social world as a field of research. This section is concerned with the tension towards literature for new definitions further giving a description of netnography by indicating its stages, complementary methods and different practices, presenting the processes of data collection and the types of netnographic data. This section also highlights the ethical frame of netnographic studies. On the contrary, the second part demonstrates the intricacies of my personal netnographic field study. This section demonstrates why netnography is the suitable method of research and how netnographic study on the function of social media in a particular society is elementary.

3.1. Netnography

The research method is located at the heart of each scientific study. It should be chosen meticulously due to the fact that the method is considered to be a mirror to the study. There are several research methods for all studies and ethnography is one of the most popular qualitative methods amongst them. Ethnography is an anthropological term and it is referred to the studies which explore the culture, habits and behaviors of communities. Over the past century, there have been significant developments in ethnographic studies alongside the technological developments of mankind.

The innovation of the Internet has changed the frames of ethnographic studies especially after the Web 2.0 Revolution. With the coming of Web 2.0 technologies, the role of both the Internet and people has changed. In the context of Web 1.0 technology, the Internet was utilized only as a source of information similar to a public library and the only role of people was consuming information. However with the coming of Web 2.0 technologies the Internet has become a platform for sharing information and partaking in debate. Within this system, people have started to share ideas, opinions and thoughts becoming active users. Due to this transformation occurring, the Internet has become a new sphere for collecting data and for research. In this regard, the frames of ethnographic methods have changed and several social scientists have redefined ethnography appropriately to cater to this new online sphere. In this redefinition processes, different terminologies have come to being

such as cyber-ethnography, virtual ethnography and netnography. Ethnography has gained popularity in cultural and sociological studies and in many other disciplines of social sciences. Ethnography is a research design of inquiry which stems from anthropology. In ethnographic studies, researchers have studied the shared patterns of actions and behaviors of cultural groups (Creswell,2014). In other words, ethnography means describing a culture or a group in a scientific way and in this frame the ethnographer can be considered in a sense a storyteller. Qualitative methods offer an effective way of interpretation and ethnography allows numerous interpretations of factual evidence. Ethnography is an impressive method due to the fact that ethnographers do not tell stories from an outside perspective, they become part of the aforementioned group they are researching. Fieldwork is the most vital part of ethnography (Fetterman,1998) because the field makes the researcher become the participant and the whole story depends on the state of the field. Ethnographies offer opportunity to both write and represent culture. By virtue of ethnographic study, the researcher attains a detailed understanding of a social phenomenon (Kozinets,2011). Ethnography is interconnected with several other methods such as: interviews, discourse analysis and literary analysis. Hobbs (2006) defines ethnography as “a cocktail of methodologies” to understand a social setting or a particular culture. Interviews are the most common technique in ethnographies to gather data (Fetterman,1998). Interviews help the ethnographer create and define a larger context of what he/she has observed and experienced. Fetterman (1998) offers four periods of ethnography namely: inception and prenatal care, gestation and birth, childhood and finally adolescence and adulthood. In prenatal care stage, the ethnographer selects a problem or a topic of interest, in the birth stage, he/she writes a proposal that includes a research question and a purpose, in the childhood stage, the ethnographer prepares his/her field and finally in the adolescence period, the field work is completed.

On the other hand, to understand the necessity of changes within the frames of ethnography, there is need to analyze the historical evolution of ethnographic studies. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) point out different moments of ethnographic researches in history such as: the traditional moment, the modernist moment, the blurred genres moment, the crisis of representation moment, the postmodern moment, the post-experimental inquiry moment and the methodologically contested moment. From the early 1900's until the end of World War II, during the traditional moment, ethnography followed anthropology. In the modernist moment (from post-World War II years to 1970), ethnographers attempted to perform ethnographies in a more quantitative manner but they failed. Between the years of

1970 and 1986 there existed a significant excess in different methods, paradigms and theories, thus the frames of ethnography became blurred. From the late 1980s until 1990, there was a crisis of representation between ethnographers caused by the problem of how to locate themselves into an ethnography. In the postmodern moment of ethnography (1990-1995), ethnographers construed science as a social process. Between the years of 1995 and 2000, with the coming of post-experimental inquiry ethnographers started to use the field for developing the realities of representation. Towards the year 2000, a contestation about methodology between ethnographers has begun and today this great methodological diversity lives on.

The new technologies and the role of the Internet are the focal points of methodological diversity amongst social scientists on the subject matter of ethnography. The greater usage of the Internet and its platforms creates new online communities thus to make research on these new communities, using ethnography is inevitable. However, social scientists have created different paths in order to use ethnography for online communities and they have different nomenclature such as: online ethnography, netnography, cyber-ethnography and virtual ethnography. All these paths aim to make ethnographic research on online communities or to make ethnographic research by using the online world as a field. The Internet and its social platforms are not solely for creating new communities but are also to create attractive fields for further study. Online connections influence citizens' social behaviors and the online world causes qualitative shifts in each society (Kozinets,2011). In this respect, online spaces carry cyber culture because in within these spaces, identities and culture are reproduced and ethnographers are interested towards research on this area. According to Kozinets (2011) online spaces are no longer disparate from the real world, it is a part of reality, and everyday life.

With the study of Rheingold (1993) on virtual communities, many social scientists have redefined ethnography for these communities and have defined virtual methodologies (Hine,2000). Hine (2000) developed these methodologies and named them aptly: a virtual ethnography as a special form of ethnography. Virtual ethnography uses methodologies implemented by the Internet and through the Internet (Hine,2015). Cyber-ethnography is another redefinition of ethnography for online communities and the online field. Also ethnography of online groups or online ethnography is another name that is used to describe ethnography in an online space. Some social scientists (Teli, Pisanu and Hakken, 2007) avoid the use of virtual ethnography due to the inherent meaning of virtual. According to them, cyber-ethnography gives a more appropriate picture of the virtual community rather

than virtual ethnography. However, these debates for names is nonsensical because Hine (2000) does not describe something disconnected from real life by using the word “virtual”. Nowadays, the virtual and physical realms are interrelated, it is difficult to separate them due to the fact that online platforms have become one of the most real parts of peoples’ lives.

In classical research, there are two main sources for data such as field and textual data however the Internet can be seen both a library and a field for study. With this opportunity, social scientists have redefined some frames of ethnography. In this respect Kozinets (2011 and 2015) collected all efforts towards redefining ethnography appropriately within the online world and gave it a general name: netnography. Kozinets (2015) listed five different practices of netnography for all ethnographic studies regardless of which nomenclature is used. Netnography aims to describe not only social interactions but also technological interactions. Finally, netnography should focus on data acquired through the Internet and also netnographers should interview people in person and understand their online habits and behaviors within online spaces, noting that for each netnography there exists strict ethical standards. Netnographic research involves insight for analysis and interpretation. Online ethnography, a virtual ethnography, cyber-ethnography and netnography are just as socially constructed as ethnography (Kozinets,2015).

In this respect, netnography is a suitable research method for the communities which partake in social interactions within an online sphere (Kozinets,2011).

Before going into the details of a netnographic approach there is need to mention four different types of netnography. Digital netnography is a crucial part of netnography and in digital netnography, the researcher uses technical, computer-assisted tools (Kozinets,2015). Symbolic netnography is mostly used for social questions about the online impact on people. In auto-netnography, the researcher focuses on his/her own cultural and ethnic group (Kozinets,2015). Humanist netnography tries to represent an honest understanding of the world, and tries to find positive solutions for the sake of all peoples. In netnography, online social interaction is crucial because it has real consequences for social identity and for social life. One of the most common features of netnographic studies is focusing on online social experiences and in this respect, there are four types of online social experiences within sites of the Internet (Kozinets,2015). These can range from mingling media enthusiasm, living social experiences to sharing social expressions and organizational social enterprises. Mingling media enthusiasm represents online interactions which are socially weak and the reasons of this type of interaction can stem from business

or necessity. LinkedIn can be an example of this type of experience. In living social experiences, there exists strong social relationship between members however they don't focus on a shared purpose, Whatsapp can be the example towards these experiences. Within sites for sharing social expressions like Vine or Youtube, the purpose is to share content but there is not a deep-seated engagement in social relationship. Social networking sites like Twitter offer a chance to establish social ties between people and Kozinets defines them as organizational social enterprises. On these platforms, people share information and are unified around a common interest or a project.

Netnography is one of the most crucial components of ethnography because in netnographic studies, researchers use online data to reach an ethnographic understanding of social experiences. There are five different concepts that demonstrate the differences between ethnography and netnography such as alteration (it represents the changes between types of communication and changes in vocabulary), access (accessibility to data and the field), archiving (in an online space, interactions are automatically archived), analysis (mass data capture is unique for netnography) and ethics (the ethical standards of netnography are unique) (Kozinets,2015:72).

There are six main components of a netnographic study as follows: research planning, entrée, data collection, interpretation, ensuring ethical standards, presentation (Kozinets,2011). Designating the type of online social interaction and the method for collecting said data are the two crucial elements of netnography. Netnography does not represent a strict research method and many different methods can be utilized in tandem with netnographic studies (Kozinets,2015:54). Surveys can be helpful for netnographic study. Survey data may shed a light on people's online activities, it can be helpful towards obtaining a big picture of online social phenomena and survey findings can provide numerical estimations. However, surveys are not suitable for researches that aim to uncover a complex understanding of a phenomenon (Kozinets,2015:57). Interviews and journal methods can contribute towards netnographic studies and in depth-interviewing is commonly used because it provides a broad understanding. The internet journal allows the collection of documents from participants and thus a more complete picture of human social experiences can be established. However these methods are not useful to quantify relationships. Moreover, social network analysis can be useful towards furthering netnographic researches by showing that social networks manifest through computer technology. However, this method is not appropriate for the analysis of social

practices and to obtain a detailed understanding of the past experiences of people (Kozinets,2015:62).

The other crucial part of netnography is data collection. Data can be considered as the raw material of netnographic research. There are three types of netnographic data: the collected data, the co-created data and the produced data (Kozinets,2015:165). The collected data is gathered from social media communities. The co-created data represents the social interactions of the researcher which are saved in different formats. The produced data is created through the netnographer's fieldnotes, this data represents experiences of researcher in the field. Moreover netnographers may construct a research web-page towards collecting data from participants of this web-page, otherwise they may create surveys or interviews to collect interactive data.

In the data collection process, if the researcher is going to enter the qualitative data manually, the amount of data should be manageable but if he/she prefers to gain a wider view, researcher may use computer assisted qualitative data analysis software for categorizing his/her large amounts of data (Kozinets,2015). Data choices are closely related with analysis choices. For instance, big amounts of data require more digital analysis but for a more humanistic analysis, small amounts of condensed data is required.

The final crucial part of netnography is ethical standards. In netnography, the netnographer interacts with another people to gather information by communicating with people and also by utilizing archival material. However archival data is located in the personal pages of participants. In this regard, there is need for ethical frames. Boellstorff and colleagues (2012) offer ethical standards for research online such as ; the principle of care (researchers should take good care of informants), informed consent (the researcher should inform informants about the purpose of research), mitigating legal risks (the researcher should be aware of laws for accessing to online field), anonymity (the researcher should avoid to share the identities of informants and any information about them), deception (the researcher should avoid any deception), sex and intimacy (the researcher should avoid from sexual relationships with informants), doing good and compensation (the researcher should establish positive impact on the informants), taking leave (the researcher should finish the interaction delicately), accurate and empathic portrayal (the researcher should depict the informant's lives accurately).

In conclusion, netnography is a specific ethnographic method for online communities or communities which partake in online interactions. Netnography has specific characteristics for fieldwork and ethical standards. Netnography is appropriate for many qualitative

researches which are interested in the social behaviors, actions and experiences of a community within an online space.

3.2. Netnographic Field Study

Netnography is an appropriate method for this research since the research is interested with the function of social media and it requires the analysis of the usage of social media. Democracy and polarization are located at the center of the discussion on the function of social media in the literature. In this respect, the questions of how people use social media platforms and what are the effects of this usage on their political views are crucial in discussing the functions of these platforms. This research requires the analysis of both online and offline experiences of people. The function of social media within the frame of polarization and democracy yet to be studied with a qualitative method. For this reason, this study aims to answer the question of how perform qualitative work for the function of social media platforms in the frame of democracy and polarization.

As a researcher, I realized that polarization is a dangerous phenomenon in Turkish society and it increases its presence day by day and I am interested in the role of social media platforms on this phenomenon. In this respect, I focus on the questions of how people use social media platforms? What are their main attitudes when using these platforms? How the usage of social media platforms contribute to or harm democracy?

For my topic, I preferred to focus on Twitter and Facebook because on these platforms, people establish social ties with each other. For my research, I planned to find Twitter and Facebook users who use these platforms actively and who have differentiating political views and I planned to make in depth interviews with them. In Turkey, there exists four main political parties; Justice and Development Party (AKP), Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Republican People's Party (CHP) and Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) I searched for users of Twitter and Facebook who are supporters of these main parties. I attempted to find these people by asking my acquaintances and I reached one male and one female supporters of each party who use Twitter or Facebook actively utilizing snowball sampling. In other words, I found four men and four women who are active supporters of different political parties and whom all use these platforms actively. These eight people live in İstanbul and their ages range between 23 and 31.

After I obtained consent from each of the eight participants, I started to observe their interactions on Twitter and Facebook. After the observation process, I planned to construct my fieldwork with two different types of data. I decided to use their accounts on Twitter

and Facebook and I collected data from their accounts with their consent. As an observer, I prepared journals for each of them and I used their shared content on Twitter and Facebook. In this respect, I collected their tweets, retweets and facebook shares from their pages. Alongside this, I collected data through in-depth interviews which were performed with each of them twice with the goal of obtaining more detailed information about them and for understanding and analyzing their motivations whilst they are using the platforms of Twitter and Facebook.

The field work was conducted between March and May. Within this period, I continued to observe their online interactions and keep an eight separate journal logs for each of the participants. Whilst the local elections were held in Turkey on 31st of March, I performed an interview and I performed one in depth interview with each participant before the elections. In the first in depth interviews (see Appendix A), I asked personal information to get to know each of the participants better. In these interviews, I asked their involvement in politics, their political views and their loyalty to their ideologies. Also I questioned the similarities and differences between their political views and their families' and friends' political views. I tried to get information about their interactions in daily life. Moreover, I asked them to indicate the groups of people they dislike and I asked them who they are and why they specifically dislike them. I focused on their emotions and I tried to observe their tolerance levels. In the last two sections of interviews, I asked questions about the usage of both traditional and social media and their main news sources to evaluate the presence of selective exposure and I asked questions about the local elections to seek information about their offline and online activities for local elections. In this part, I also asked their purpose for using social media platforms and I asked for the information details of their followers and followings to observe any political homophily.

I preferred to carry out the second in depth interviews (see Appendix B) after the local elections and I completed the interviews during April. The atmosphere in Turkey which was extremely tense because of the local elections, became more and more strained because of the objections to election poll results and with uncertainty, some events and serious disputes took place within Turkish society. The local elections turned into a crisis and in these interviews, I asked the participants for their opinions and feelings towards the outcomes of the elections. I also asked their online and offline interactions about particular current disputes. I tried to get information about their usage of these platforms under the polarizing atmosphere of elections. I asked them which sources they followed the news from concerning the elections and current events. Moreover, in the atmosphere of the

elections, I asked what they saw most in their timelines of Twitter and Facebook to observe echo chamber environment.

In conclusion, because this research aims to evaluate the function of social media and to analyze the online interactions, netnography is a suitable method for this study. For conducting this netnographic research, I followed two paths for data collection. I kept journals by collecting the participant's tweets, retweets and facebook's shares and I made in depth interviews with each of the eight participants twice. This field study has a limitation for this research because in order to get participants' consents for observing and analysing their online interactions, I indicated clearly that how I will follow them. In other words, they all have been aware that their online interactions are watched and they could change their online attitudes. Thus, this situation creates a limitation for analyses.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This research aims to evaluate the function of social media platforms within the confines of democracy and polarization. In this part, utilizing the two separate data sets that were gathered by journals and in depth interviews will be analyzed. The participants' online interactions were kept as a journal and these interactions will be evaluated. Moreover, in this section, the participant's political views will be analyzed through in depth interviews and will be interpreted such that an observation can be made on how these political views are expressed in social life and on social media platforms.

Adhering to the discussions within literature, this netnographic field study which was carried out in Turkey will be analyzed in the frames of two different arguments. The argument that social media platforms provide a public sphere for strengthening democracy and the counter argument that these platforms deepen polarization will be deconstructed through this field study.

This analysis will be performed by taking into consideration the election atmosphere which has dominated Turkish society since the beginning of March. In this four-month period whilst the field work was conducted, the atmosphere has been very tense due to the local elections in Turkey. When the ruling party (AKP) and the president Erdogan contested the election results in İstanbul, the tension had further increased in Turkish society. Under the polarized and uneasy atmosphere, particular disputes occurred. For instance, the local elections of March became one of the biggest crises in society and the rally of women's day which occurred in 8th of March created a heated discussion environment in Turkey. The analysis will be carried out within the frame of these two events. The analysis will be performed separately and at the individual level dissecting what the participants think, what they do and how they reflect their views in social media platforms, under the atmosphere of these two events. If rephrased, the analysis will be made by utilizing these different societal events. Participants' attitudes and online interactions in these polarizing happenings are crucial to evaluate the function of social media platforms within the confines of democracy and polarization.

The analysis will start with the introduction of each participant. Without giving their names, the eight participants will be presented in detail. Their ages, their educational backgrounds, their political views, political activities and their preferred news sources will be cited. In the second section of the analysis, the crisis of the 8th of March will be introduced in the

context of value-based polarization. In this part, the participants' online interactions and their viewpoints on this crisis will be analyzed. In the third section, the crisis on the 31st of March will be introduced in the context of party polarization and through the participants' tweets, retweets and Facebooks' interactions an analysis will be performed with their thoughts and my interpretation. In the final section, the analyses will be evaluated by addressing similarities and differences between the interactions of participants.

4.1. Who are the Participants?

The participants consist of eight individuals whom are voters and supporters of different political parties in the form of four men and four women. There are two participants one woman and one man for each political party. In other words, two of participants support AKP, the other two of them support MHP, the other two of them support CHP and the last two support HDP.

WHO ARE THE PARTICIPANTS?	AKP		MHP		CHP		HDP	
	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE
AGE	23 Years old	25 Years old	25 Years old	27 Years old	24 Years old	31 Years old	31 Years old	25 Years old
POLITICAL IDENTITY	Right-wing supporter Conservative	Milli Görüş (national vision)	Turkish Nationalist Traditionalist	Turkish Nationalist Kemalist	Kemalist	Social Democrat Kemalist	Libertarian Socialist	Leftist
DOES NOT WANT TO LIVE TOGETHER WITH	Others (she sees others as infidel)	Supporters of PKK & FETO	Supporters of HDP	Supporters of HDP	Supporters of AKP & HDP	Supporters of AKP & HDP	Political Islamists	Supporters of MHP
PREFERRED ONLINE/OFFLINE NEWSPAPERS & NEWS CHANNELS	Mainstream media NTV, TRT1	Pro-government newspapers	Bengü Türk & TRT1	Türk Gün	Halk TV, Fox TV, Sözcü	NTV, CNN	Opponent online news	Opponent online news channels
UNPREFERRED ONLINE/OFFLINE NEWSPAPERS & NEWS CHANNELS	Halk TV	Every opponent news	Sözcü	Sözcü, Halk TV, Fox TV	Mainstream & Pro-government channels	Pro-government Channels	Mainstream & Pro-government channels	Mainstream TV Channels
FOLLOWING & FOLLOWERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS	Like-minded accounts	Like-minded accounts	Like-minded accounts and especially Devlet Bahçeli	Like-minded accounts & the head office of MHP	Like-minded accounts	Like-minded accounts	Like-minded accounts	Opinion leaders of different political parties & journalists

The first participant of the study is a 23 year old female lawyer whom supports the political party of AKP. She originates from the province of Hatay but she currently resides in Istanbul. She is fairly interested in politics and she believes that politics is omnipresent and

elemental for any society. She defines her political views as being both right-wing and conservative thus she emphasizes her sense of belonging to this particular viewpoint. She presents her sensitiveness in patriotism and religion thus she harbors a culture of respect. The first participant states that she has strong bonds of love towards AKP and actively supports this political party. She was formerly a candidate for the position of deputy in the province of Hatay and she continues to support AKP by volunteering in organizations. Also she works towards actions of propaganda before the coming of each election. She attended all demonstrations that took place for the events of the 15th of July. She is politically aligned with her families views however, her friends have differentiating political views. The first participant has deep thoughts on how many of her friends betray the nation by criticizing and humiliating the government. She avoids consensus with her friends due to the fact that she believes her friends display aggressive behavior. She underlines that she feels pity towards her friends who have political views that are not in concordance with hers. She attempts to present herself as a tolerant person however it is clear that she sees her political views as superior to others thoughts on politics. Although she underlines that she is not radical in her ideology, she feels very distant to other political parties and other opinions. She defines criticizing of state as an infidelity and she does not want the nation to harbor people who betray Turkey and she strongly emphasizes her anger towards these disparate social groups. She uses social media platforms most to emphasize political issues as a channel of communication. She uses Twitter regularly to obtain information and also is willing to increase her presence on Twitter to influence people with her political views. She states that she is a follower of all sources of mass media with the exception of Halk Tv (opposition television channel). She follows accounts with similar aspects on Twitter and also she follows people that peak her interest in terms of political views. In other words, more than half of the people she follows on Twitter, have like-minded views and ideological goals. She avoids entering one on one discussion on Twitter thus absolving herself from political discord. She echoes her thoughts about particular issues on her page however she criticizes people openly by citing names and personal information to incite mob mentality. She states that she always performs background checks on the information which she obtains from social media platforms which is questionable for all of the participants of this study. She sees the algorithms and the filter mechanism of Internet as a disadvantageous for the general public. She follows the local election process on Twitter and she finds Twitter to be a reliable source of information. After our meeting was over,

she demonstrated news articles and video snippets from A Haber (a pro-government channel) and she tried to convey that the candidates from CHP are traitors.

The second participant is a male supporter of AKP and is at the age of 25. He originates from the province of Sivas yet his abode is in Istanbul. He is a university student whom is interested in politics an example of this can be how he worked for the youth section of AKP throughout the last year. He underlines that he always follows politics closely and prefers to enter into political discussion only with particular people from a tightly knit group. He defines his political view as a conservative national vision (milligörüş) and he states that the Turks are the leaders of Islam yet he underlines that being a Muslim is more significant than being a Turk. He retains a similar political ideology to his parents and family however his father is a supporter of the Felicity Party (SP). He has friends from each walk of the political spectrum and when he is discussing politics with them, he tries to stay calm however he emphasizes that he cannot do so when he partakes in conversation with people whom happen to be supporters of Fetullah Gülen and he emphasizes his hatred towards these people. Alongside these he does not want to reside in the same nation with supporters of Fetullah Gülen and supporters of PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) because he believes that they are a threat towards the unity of Turkey. He indicates that country, nation and culture are significant and when someone threatens these values he feels frustration. The second participant thinks that he is a convincing person in nature especially when it comes to political issues and thus defines his loyalty to AKP as a love towards "Reis" (President Recep Tayyip Erdogan). He works towards propaganda for AKP, an example of this can be when he organized a demonstration for building a masjid in his school and he states that they were successful. Another prominent example can be when he participated in the protests which were performed in front of embassy buildings. The second participant utilizes mostly Twitter as a communication channel and he indicates that he reads the newspapers of opposing political faction to comprehend their arguments and to produce counter arguments for convincing people whom are from the "opposite side". He uses Twitter to follow up on political events and conveying information and making analyses. The second participant stated that he follows multiple well-known people from different parties. However on his twitter account, he follows solely one person who is a member of CHP and the other political Twitter accounts belong to AKP. Alongside this, all the journalists whom he follows on Twitter, write for the pro-government newspapers and he states that the majority of people whom he follows on Twitter have similar political views

with him. The second participant also delves into discussion on Twitter about current political issues and he states that he always follows up on the news from Twitter. According to him, the filtration mechanisms on the Internets' platforms is advantageous and yet he also states that he obtained information about the local elections from the advertisements on the Internet.

The third participant is a female supporter of MHP whom is 25 years of age. She studied history and sociology during her undergraduate education and she originates from Malatya but she resides in Istanbul. She is interested in politics and further defines herself as a Turkish nationalist. The third participant underlines that she is a traditionalist and therefore national values are crucial for her. She has similar political views to her husband but her friends have differentiating political opinions and thus the third participant states that she avoids discussion on politics with her friends to protect their personal relationships. She states that she secretly feels frustration towards her friends therefore she thinks people will not understand her ideology without recourse. She evaluates Turkish nationalism as a something special and therefore she states that she does not want to reside in the same nation alongside people whom support HDP. The third participant wants the state to implement more rigid policies towards HDP and an example of this can be how she avoids connecting with supporters of HDP when within close quarters with them. The third participant states her end limits and she underlines that she has a no tolerance policy towards the supporters of HDP. She defines her loyalty to MHP as a bond of love and thus she individually carries out propaganda work for MHP and she attends the meetings or protests of the quote unquote Ülkü Ocakları. She has an administrative role in foundation of Ülkü Evleri which is led by MHP. She uses social media platforms as a common communication channel and she prefers to follow the news from Bengü Türk (a pro nationalist channel), Haber Türk and TRT (the national public channel). She underlines that she is strongly opposed to the Kurdish broadcast of TRT and she utilizes Twitter to follow Devlet Bahçeli (the leader of the MHP) and she uses Facebook proactively to obtain and spread information. Although she follows her friends which have different political views, she indicates that the majority of people whom she follows, have conservative right-wing political ideas. She enters into discussions only on the topic of Devlet Bahçeli in order to protect his upstanding image. She performs background checks on the information which she comes across on social media platforms therefore according to the third participant, the filtration mechanisms on the Internets' platforms are disadvantageous as they may taint the purity of information. She states that she will vote for the AKP candidate due to the requests

of Devlet Bahçeli and his decision for an alliance and alongside this the third participant underlines that she never votes for the candidates of CHP due to the fact that that they in her mind cannot not protect national values. The third participant further indicates that the candidate of CHP, Ekrem İmamoğlu was popularized to resemble a sculpture of a priest and she questions how this man came to be the mayor of Istanbul. She obtains information about the local elections from the personal online accounts of prominent political leaders and she indicates that she avoids reading Sözcü (an opposition newspaper). The third participant states that she gives support towards the candidates of MHP on her accounts of Facebook and Twitter.

The fourth participant supports MHP and is 27 years old. He lives in Istanbul and he is a high school graduate whom is working with his father within a private sector. When the fourth participant speaks, he speaks within the form of first person plural. In other words, he always uses phrases such as "we" and "us" instead of "I" and "me". He is thoroughly interested in politics and he is the head of the neighborhood organization under the MHP. He is a member of Ülkü Ocakları and he defines his political identity as Kemalist and idealist (ülkücü). He states that he follows the path of Alparslan Türkeş (the founder of MHP) and he defines his ideology as a Turkish nationalist and quote unquote türk islam ülküsü. He underlines that he has never betrayed his cause and that all of his family members have aligned political views. He states that his family have been supporters of MHP since its foundation. Yet he has friends from different political backgrounds thus he indicates that his primary purpose is to carry the Turkish flag to the peak and he wants all of his friends to love the Turkish nation, flag and religion. The fourth participant conveys that he feels frustration when discussing with his friends who have different political views. He thinks that people who are from different political views, would never understand his cause and his ideology therefore he wishes not to live in the same nation with people whom are supporters of HDP. He blames HDP for creating conflict between Kurds and Turks yet he has a friend who supports HDP, he further states that he has never trusted these people demonstrating disbelief for even his closest circle. He believes that it is impossible to convince people who steer far away from nationalist views and that he cannot feel empathy for the people who support HDP. He underlines that his loyalty for MHP comes from within and that he carries out propaganda work, attending both house meetings and participating in the demonstrations for the 15th of July. The fourth participant utilizes social media platforms mostly as a channel for communication. He prefers to read only Türk gün (the newspaper of MHP) and he avoids reading Sözcü (an opposition newspaper) yet he also

avoids to watching Halk Tv and Fox Tv (both of them are opposition channels) furthering an image of ignorance. He indicates that he feels hatred towards Fatih Portakal (news anchor of Fox Tv) and he blames opposition channels of humiliating their values. He utilizes Twitter and Facebook furthermore the fourth participant indicates that every day, he receives messages from the head office of MHP and thus shares this information on social media platforms. He uses these platforms for gathering and distributing information. The fourth participant solely follows people on social media platforms depending on their political views and he indicates that the majority of people he follows have politically aligned views to him this can be seen how he only enters discussion on social media platforms when someone criticizes MHP. He checks on the news and current events through social media platforms and when asked on his thoughts on filtering mechanisms, he stated that he was not informed on this issue and after I explained, he found these mechanisms advantageous. He underlines that he will vote for the candidate of AKP because of Devlet Bahçeli's support (the leader of MHP) further stating that in all situations, he obeys the decision of Devlet Bahçeli. He follows the news on the local elections through the use of social media platforms and he supports both their candidates and AKP's candidates on these platforms.

The fifth participant is a 24 year old female whom supports CHP. She resides in Istanbul and she is a university student working on a blog page. She is interested in politics elaborating that she is a board member of the Atatürkçü Düşünce Kulübü in her university. She underlines that politics is a lifestyle and that everyone should be interested in politics further defining herself as a Kemalist. She thinks that being a Kemalist is special and requires certain responsibilities demonstrating a separatist mentality with undertones of superiority. The fifth participant has similar political views with those of her family and her friends have similarly aligned political views due to the fact that she selects her close circle carefully. She underlines that she wants to discuss politics with like-minded people yet her mother-in-law has different political views therefore she avoids speaking on the topic of politics with her. She tries to communicate with people who have different political views but she feels frustrated when people don't concord with her arguments. She does not want to live under the same nation with the supporters of HDP and AKP and she underlines that she does not want to be in a similar circle with ignorant people. She feels pity for supporters of AKP and hatred towards supporters of HDP and she thinks that the supporters of AKP will never comprehend the oppositions' ideals and that they will remain forever

ignorant. The fifth participant underlines that she must speak with these people for the sake of the nation however she is pessimistic towards convincing people whom have different political views. She feels empathy towards these people and in some respect, she could understand their motivation and outlook. The fifth participant underlines that she is not loyal to a party, and that her loyalty comes from Atatürk. She does not participate political activities of party yet she participated in the demonstrations during the Gezi protests. She follows news from Halk Tv, Fox Tv and Sözcü (opposition channels) and she uses Twitter for gathering information and for spreading her political views yet the fifth participant avoids following A Haber, ATV, YeniAkit and Kanal D (mainstream and pro-government channels). She follows people on Twitter mostly depending on their political views and she prefers following people whom have similar views with her. She gets involved in discussions on Twitter to correct information or protect her political views. She claims to check the credibility of information which is obtained from social media platforms yet this is questionable for most of the participants. According to her, filtering mechanisms are disadvantageous because it prevents access to different views and perspectives. She follows the news on the local elections from Halk Tv, Sözcü and Fox Tv and she indicates that she uses social media platforms mainly for raising awareness among people.

The sixth participant happens to be a supporter of CHP whom is 31 years of age. He resides in Istanbul and he holds an undergraduate education working in the culinary sector. He is interested in politics and defines himself as a Kemalist and a social democrat. The sixth participant has similar political views with his family and most of his friends also have similar political views with him however, he indicates that he has some friends whom have differentiating political views from him. He attempts to convince his friends who have different political views and he discusses with them frequently however, he indicates that because of the government a polarizing atmosphere dominates and it is difficult to create a consensus within this atmosphere. The sixth participant feels rage when people lie about historical facts and according to him, polarization is one of the biggest problems in Turkey indicating that he makes extreme effort to be a comprehensible individual. The sixth participant states that he does not want to reside together with the supporters of AKP and HDP who have fascist views and he further indicates that the abuse of religion and Kurdish nationalism are fascist views. He feels fear and anger towards these groups and he claims that he feels empathy with these people however he finds the demands of Kurds nonsensical. He underlines his loyalty to Atatürk and yet he does not carry out political

activity within the party he supports displaying a disparity between his ideology and his actions. He attended the Gezi protests and he usually participates demonstrations for women's rights and animal rights. He uses Twitter actively further proven through his distrust of the mainstream media due to government intervention. The sixth participant sometimes takes a glance at NTV and CNN Turk (mainstream channels) and he avoids pro-government media channels. He uses Twitter to share his opinions and to get information alongside the purpose of building consensus. He underlines that this distance between different views is dangerous however he follows people who have common interests and political viewpoints with him. He gets involved in discussions often on political issues on Twitter and he criticizes the government in these discourses. He checks on the credibility of information which he encounters on social media platforms. The sixth participant thinks that the internet's algorithms prevent us from seeing different views. He gets news about the local elections mainly from social media platforms and he states that he prefers to defend truths on Twitter instead of advertising specific candidates.

The seventh participant is a 31 year old female supporter of HDP whom holds an undergraduate education. She is a scenarist and she resides within Istanbul whom is interested in politics. She states that she has a politically active family for instance her mother works for HDP and her father works for a labor union. She defines herself as a libertarian socialist and her political views with her family are in concordance. There appear to be only slight generational differences on politics between her and her family. Her friends also have similar political views with her because she underlines that she cannot stand quote unquote silly people. Alongside this the seventh participant feels tired of explaining to others that she is not a terrorist. She tries to elaborate on her views only on the topic of women's issues and rights yet when it comes to other issues, she does not believe that people will understand her political perspective and she does not make an effort to be comprehensible for others sake. She does not want to live together with political islamists, especially with the followers of the sharia regime mindset. She feels hatred towards what she defines as "others" due to the fear she harbors within against any opposing factions. The seventh participant feels empathy only for women and she indicates that she follows decisions of HDP concerning the elections. She worked in political parties' activities before and this can be seen in how she joins protests very often. She participated in the strike of TEKEL, the Gezi protests and almost every protest that sparked against government. She uses Twitter as a channel of communication and thus she does not prefer

following mainstream media as a source of information. She prefers using alternative opposition media channels and she utilizes Twitter as a source of obtaining information. After the 15th of July, she eliminated many followers from her accounts and she started to follow people who have like-minded views with her. She underlines that she has no patience or tolerance towards extreme opinions and she avoids following people on Twitter who have differentiating political opinions. She gets involved discussions especially concerning women's issues. She generally performs checks on the information that has been obtained on social media platforms and she finds the filtering mechanisms advantageous in the sense that it helps find people who have similar political views however, due to the unfair benefits of companies, she criticizes these mechanisms as being profit oriented. She gets information for the local elections from Twitter and she supports the candidates of HDP by sharing their information on Twitter.

The final participant, a male who supports HDP is 25 years old and is a student. He lives in Istanbul and he has been interested in politics since his high school years. He defines himself as a leftist and holds contrasting political views to that of his family. He avoids discussing with them on the topic of politics and his friends have similar political views with him. He underlines that his tolerance towards different political views has decreased over the past several years. He does not want to live under the same nation with the supporters of MHP because he believes that it is impossible to build consensus with them due to their underlying racist undertones. He thinks that the supporters of MHP define their presence as the absence of supporters from HDP and he harbors anger, fear and hatred towards them. He has partaken in political activities before but nowadays, he does not attempt much political activism. He joins all protests against the government, including the Gezi protests. He uses social media platforms and he does not prefer television due to the fact that the eighth participant does not trust the mainstream media. He avoids utilizing all forms of mainstream publishing and prefers using various opposition news sources. The eighth participant uses Twitter mostly for obtaining information and he follows people on Twitter with a random nonchalant pattern. He follows people on Twitter who are opinion leaders from different political parties often getting involved in discussions on Twitter. He checks on the information he obtains before he retweets it and he evaluates the filtering mechanism of Internet as disadvantageous for the general public.

4.2. The Analysis

The analyses will be made focusing on two main crises, the crisis of the 8th of March and the crisis of the 31st of March. The participants' online interactions and their thoughts on these events will be evaluated. The function of social media platforms in these polarizing crises will be discussed within the context of these questions: Did online platforms encourage people towards making a dialogue? or Did they raise the walls between people by reinforcing pre-existing polarization?

4.2.1. The Crises of Women's Day March

Women's Day has been celebrated for many years in Turkey without many detrimental side effects. On the 8th of March 2019, police intervened in the Women's Day March in İstanbul with tear gas and rubber bullets presenting an atmosphere of turmoil rather than constructive demonstration. On 9th of March, a journalist working for Yeni Şafak, a pro-government newspaper, published a video clip from the protest on Twitter (Hamsici,2019). He claimed that the women demonstrating were protesting ezan thus this video spread to many platforms of Internet. The video clip was recorded during the demonstration when the ezan was recited where it appears that the recital had no impact on the protesters which may appear as a sign of disrespect. President Erdogan and government officials stated that people protested against ezan intentionally with slogans and whistle blowing (Hamsici,2019). They blamed these people for being impudent and also claimed that this group is directed by the political interests of CHP and HDP. Erdogan stated that these people were a threat to the future of the nation by disrespecting ezan and religious ideals. Also, he declared these people as enemies of the Islamic religion and the Turkish flag thus promising the people he would fight against these alleged enemies. Devlet Bahçeli (leader of the MHP) held CHP, HDP and İYİ Party responsible for this protest regardless of it being a regular occurrence in the nation (Hamsici,2019). In other words, the ruling party and its alliance party (MHP) blamed the opposition parties and the women who partook in the demonstration for protesting against ezan. On the contrary, the women's rights groups rejected these claims, elaborating that many of the protesters stated that they did not hear ezan. All of the female groups underlined that the protests were made for the rights of women in order to stop violence and abuse against women emphasizing that it had nothing to do with ezan (Hamsici,2019). These disputes created polarities in society and also strengthened existing ones. Religion is held as one of the strongest values in Turkey and the issue of gender is a polemical topic. In Turkey, religion is used as a tool for dividing people as us versus them, furthering an alienating atmosphere.

Alongside this with the pre existing gender equality issues the distance between these polarities increases. The debates on the topic of the 8th of March events triggered a value-based polarizing atmosphere in Turkey.

The first participant of the interviews, the female supporter of AKP indicates that she witnessed many videos which show the protests against ezan, in this manner, on Twitter she comes across the arguments of the ruling party rather than the counter arguments and it shows the presence of political homophily on Twitter. In her interview, she indicated that she has come across with many videos on Twitter that show how people protested against ezan but she underlines that this action was made against AKP. She states in her Twitter account that:

'A group trying to ensure that women are "equal" with men in terms of social and political rights, went mad, and surprised by the value of Islam given to women and they opened a banner in Taksim and screamed'.

She further states that some of the reaction was a protest against ezan but most of the protesters could not hear it. According to her, there is a group of protesters who attempt to humiliate ezan due to their inherent hostility towards AKP. She states that people see Islam and AKP as a whole rather than separate concepts and people who have hatred to AKP, demonstrated their hostility towards the party by protesting ezan. Moreover, she finds the demonstration of Women's Day as nonsensical because she does not believe in the inherent equality of women and men. She thinks that the role of men are different from that of the roles of women in society further elaborating to her followers on Twitter, that she sees this incident as proof of how CHP and other opposition parties humiliate religion.

The first participant ridicules the people who attended the demonstrations for the 8th of March on Twitter and she published on Twitter a message of celebration and she emphasizes the justice between men and women:

'When the justice between women and men is achieved, March 8 will not be meaning. The best March 8 is the one which will not happen. For now, let's them to celebrate'.

However this attitude is nonrealistic because in her interviews, the first participant underlines that she does not want equality between men and women to begin with. In this respect, her social media usage does not reflect her real thoughts and ideals. This situation supports the argument that for her interactions, social media platforms provide a polarizing environment by putting similar voices together.

The second participant the male supporter of AKP represents his polarizing attitude on Twitter, in other words, for the debates on the 8th of March, he used Twitter as a scene to reflect his polarizing claims. He became involved in a multitude of discussions on the 8th of March through the platform of Twitter. For the debates of the 8th of March, he interacted with different political views on Twitter however he insisted on his own arguments rather than trying to build consensus. Although, he came across counter arguments on Twitter, he did not change his opinions and thus the first participant showed effort towards strengthening his side rather than creating dialogue on Twitter. He replied to the tweets of a lawyer whom is a supporter of CHP, stating that:

" Protesting ezan is not a fiction. It is an attitude they have made intentionally with resentment and accumulated anger. There is no aspect to defend."

He added that:

"Ms F. , people disrespect beliefs using feminism as a tool."

Homophily is easily seen on his online interactions because he often retweets like-minded tweets and videos. For instance, he retweeted an article of a pro-government columnist who claims that people who humiliated ezan on the 8th of March, have the same mentality with those who attacked mosques on the 15th of July. He retweeted this article by stating that:

"Excellent, concise and full of information. This article ends the discussion."

The second participant believes that there is a connection between the protests and large scale geopolitical plans of foreign states. He is not tolerant towards people who joined this demonstration and he tried to delegitimize them by addressing the large scale geopolitical plans of other nations as the true cause of these events. For instance he stated on Twitter that:

"First the EU's report that the Hagia Sophia cannot be mosque, then the protests of ezan in Istanbul, and then in the New Zealand attack, the discourse that Istanbul will be the Christian city again was mentioned, you still not wake up?"

The second participant strengthens polarized atmosphere on social media platforms rather than decreases it by ensuring deliberation. He underlined that the demonstrators protested against ezan intentionally without recourse further elaborating that the people who support LGBT rights, feel rage against imams.

In this respect, with homophily and avoidance to build a consensus, his usage of a social media platform in this crisis was far from establishing an atmosphere for public sphere.

The attitudes of third participant, whom was the female supporter of MHP, demonstrates that on social media platforms, there are many walls between different views. She did not publish

anything in regards to the 8th of March because she thinks that social media platforms provoke argumentation rather than constructive criticism. She indicated during her interview that when she looks at the incident with a neutral atmosphere, she thinks that people did not protest against ezan intentionally. However, when she glances at Twitter and Facebook, she underlined that she lost her neutrality and she started to accumulate frustration with the discussions that unfolded. The third participant thinks that it is impossible to stay neutral on these platforms, thus coming to the conclusion that social media triggers her into becoming a partisan. It is difficult to evaluate these platforms as a democratic public sphere with the presence of walls between people. She avoids publishing content on Twitter and Facebook when she is willing to stay neutral, thinking that there are always sides on social media platforms. In other words, her online interactions could not show Twitter as a suitable ground for being public sphere because she could not reflect her opinion in social media without belonging to a particular side.

In the interactions of the fourth participant, the male supporter of the MHP, it is seen that the party identity is at the forefront in his usage of social media platforms and this interaction serves towards polarization. The fourth participant sees Twitter and Facebook as platforms for boasting his party identity and for gathering support rather than a sphere for debate and publishing political views freely. He avoids sharing his views freely on social media platforms with the fear of collateral damage to his group identity and harm to his upstanding image. He did not publish anything concerning the debates of the 8th of March because he stated that he is afraid of saying something that may harm the integrity of his party. He prefers to publish his views in Facebook and Twitter according to messages which come from the head office of MHP thinking that people who joined the demonstration for Women's Day, insulted ezan and Islam. This kind of interaction is contrary to the arguments of optimists who claim that social media platforms provide a democratic public sphere for argumentation due to the fact that they merely create a cacophony rather than an atmosphere of discussion. Also, homophily is highly observed in his usage because that he saw videos in Twitter as evidence of this protest and he believes that the opposition parties – he called them as “zillet ittifakı”- arranged this protest.

The fifth participant, the female supporter of the CHP's online interactions on Twitter on the issue of the 8th of March do not substantiate any democratic debate because she follows people who have similar political views with her. She got involved in the debates of the 8th of March.

It can be clearly observed that in her online interactions, she preferred to blame AKP and its supporters for the creation of this discourse rather than true and honest reporting.

On Twitter, she supports the hastag of :

"Ezan tezgahına gelme".

The fifth participant openly states that it is impossible to build a consensus with Islamists due to their stubborn and hypocritical attitude. She retweeted on this issue:

'One day everybody will understand that it is impossible to comprise with islamists''.

The fifth participant also came across multiple videos which attempt to show how AKP is impudent and she retweeted this content, instead of finding a midway, she preferred to utilize polarizing language on Twitter. For instance, she stated on Twitter that:

"I say for the thousandth time that in this country, there is no dirt that cannot be covered with a flag and there is no opinion that cannot be suppressed by the ezan. AKP is doing this in a best way."

"It was understood a few hours ago that public meetings of AKP have not been cut during ezan."

"It has been 5 years since that supporter of MHP R... indicated ezan was prevented and was silenced for the public meeting of AKP. Also it has been 5 years too since müftü did not refute this."

During the fifth participants' interview sessions, she indicated that it is impossible for people to hear the ezan due to the noises of the crowd. She blames AKP for continuing their public meetings and their propaganda music when ezan is recited and states that this sort of propaganda is a double edged sword. According to her, this debate is wrong and nonsensical, underlining that social media platforms support violence instead of preventing it. Twitter could not provide the fifth participant with a suitable ground for democratic debate because her online interactions are under the influence of like-minded videos. In other words, her online interactions concerning the Women's Day March reflect her polarizing views instead of solving the crisis of polarization.

The sixth male participant, supporter of CHP's online interactions show that how homophily plays crucial role on the function of social media platforms. Regarding the Women's Day March, he published his opinions openly concerning the Women's Day March and he used Twitter with the sole purpose of stopping these polarizing accusations. He called for common sense through Twitter:

“ In this country nobody protests ezan intentionally. Nobody drinks alcohol in the mosques. Nobody disrespects woman because of her turban. Do not ridicule with our mind! Don't produce new slanders without account for your previous lies! Get all the seats for you, we are disgusting and we can not cope with your greed no longer! Don't divide people anymore!”

“I think that nobody is evil insomuch to protests ezan but even if they did, please do not target them in this way, do not turn this issue into crisis for political gain evilly. There is nothing about hate in religion. You did this dangerous manipulation in Gezi. Give up to support this dangerous game.”

In order to decrease polarization, it is required that his calling should reach people whom accuse women of protesting against ezan. However, he stated in the first interviews that the people who follow him on Twitter have similar views with him.

In the sixth participants' interviews, he emphasized that religion should not be utilized by politics as a tool for support. He stated that he watched videos of protests and he underlined that this protests have nothing to do with ezan, according to him, the ruling government uses religion for targeting people and creating a mob mentality. He emphasized that he found these debates very dangerous towards peace in Turkey. Also he stated on Twitter that:

“It is easily seen that women protested polices who pevented the march and these women did not hear ezan. In any case, nobody who is compos mentis protests ezan intentionally. The claim that they protest ezan invites only conflict in society.”

In this respect, although he interacts on social media platforms with democratic purposes, homophily prevents different ideas from coming together making his message nullified in the long run.

It can be clearly observed in the online interactions of seventh participant female supporter of HDP on the topic of this crisis, that she did not use Twitter to open a rational discussion or to build a consensus and for her, Twitter does not function as a public sphere. Homophily is highly observed in her interactions because she avoids following people whom have different political views from her, thus she prefers to see like-minded views giving her a narrow understanding margin for others. The seventh participant sees herself as an ignored individual and she feels under threat from a furthering alienating society. She is damaged due to this value based polarization as a being woman and an Alevi she suffers from rising political polarization. However the seventh participant does not use Twitter as a victimhood

platform and she does not use Twitter to decrease polarization but rather she uses this online platform to spout her aggression. She was present during the Women's Day March and she published many tweets on this discussion demonstrating her rebellious nature. She criticized news that stated that an investigation will be conducted against women who joined the demonstration:

*"If you do not open an investigation, you're not a man, though if you do, you're not a man anyway, in any case, let your d**k fall."*

The seventh participant is not tolerant to contrasting political views an example of this can be how she gave an answer to journalist who accused women with video for protest against ezan. She gave answer to this journalist for vituperating rather than trying to find a midway:

"Shut up imbecile! Your father is despicable"

Also she wanted to end the discussion about ezan:

*"I hope that you are not retarded as much to not realize the dangers for discussing this bullsh*t."*

In the seventh participants' interviews, she stated that this issue is not solely about religion, it is also about hatred towards women. She blames AKP for trying to normalize this hatred and she mentioned that when the concept of religion and women comes side by side, people lose all sense of reality.

Social media platforms strengthen her polarizing views instead of decreasing and she did not show an effort to convince people and thus she merely added fuel to the pre existing fire by using Twitter.

According to online interactions of the final eighth participant of the interviews whom is the male supporter of HDP, it is clear that Twitter plays crucial role in terms of effecting individual's political attitudes. During the eighth participants' interviews, he stated that this crisis played determining role on his decision to vote during the local elections, underlining that, after he saw the intervention of police forces and the accusations towards women, he decided to vote for CHP. His interaction shows that he did not intend to solve this polarizing crisis through discussion on social media platforms. He published tweets and retweets on Twitter about this crisis. He retweeted the news of Evrensel Gazetesi (opposition channel) and he criticized the police force who used tear gas against women by saying:

"You are vile."

He stated the necessity for using self-defense to those who protest Women's Day March inciting further violence rather than discussion:

"Everybody who can, should self defend and for people who cannot, they should be learnt for self-defending."

As a result, interactions of all participants show that this crisis demonstrates the effectiveness of social media platforms due to the fact that the tweets which blame women for insulting ezan and the videos of demonstration turned this issue from a dispute into a polarizing social crisis. In this case it is difficult to consider Twitter as a suitable ground for dialogue and deliberation because Twitter did not succeed in reducing the polarizing effect of crisis rather it amplified a discourse into an environment of hatred and conflict. This situation unveils the existence of political homophily on Twitter and it shows also how political homophily builds walls between the interactions of people who have differentiating views and opinions. Individuals evaluated this crisis according to their timelines which they see on their accounts, and thus all participants of this research emphasized that the majority of the people which they followed in Twitter were in concordance to their own political perspectives. According to these analyses, under the atmosphere of a polarizing crisis, Twitter did not carry the necessities for being public sphere -as a sphere of free dialogue-. The best example of this was the male participant who is a supporter MHP clearly stated that he does not publish his opinions independently from his party principles on social media platforms.

This attitude is completely opposite to the understanding of a democratic public sphere. It can be seen that in stark contrast to the analyses that the seven participants out of eight did not intend to solve the crisis by using social media platforms. Participants utilize these platforms to boast their personal ideas rather than establishing a dialogue between different views. The online interactions of the female supporter CHP is likewise to that of the male supporter of AKP. In fact, regardless of the political party and their support, the forms of action are similar. In essence, their polarizing practices are mirror images. Both evaluated this crisis by accusing the quote on quote opposition. Both published tweets on Twitter that accused the opposition and they both did not believe that consensus or dialogue could be established. The crucial fact is that they constructed their polarizing practices on Twitter and they revealed these practices by utilizing Twitter. In essence, these analyses make it difficult to see Twitter as a Habermasian public sphere - as a sphere of deliberation and democratic debate-.

4.2.2. The Crisis of Local Elections

On March 31st, the 2019 local elections were held in Turkey. The ruling party (AKP) allied with MHP and in many districts, they presented a common candidate. On the contrary, the main opposition party (CHP) allied with İyi Party (nationalist opposition party). In Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, MHP supported the metropolitan mayor candidate of AKP and İyi Party gave its support to the metropolitan mayor candidate of CHP. HDP (pro-Kurdish opposition party) did not present mayoral candidates for these three districts and demonstrated covert support for the metropolitan mayor candidates of CHP. Anadolu Agency is the state-run international news agency and it is the only channel which receives a stream of official data concerning the election results from YSK (Supreme Election Council). On the night of election, Anadolu Agency halted data entry for the elections results when the votes of between Binali Yıldırım whom is the AKP candidate of Istanbul and the votes of Ekrem İmamoğlu whom is the CHP candidate of Istanbul were head to head (Aktan,2019). This incident caused a dispute on social media platforms. On the night of the election, candidates, Yıldırım and İmamoğlu claimed victory over Istanbul. According to the first results of the elections, the ruling party (AKP) obtained more than 51% of the vote in Istanbul however, CHP claimed victory in the capitol Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir. In 1994, Erdogan was elected mayor of Istanbul and since then, the mayoralty has been in the hands of parties linked to Erdogan (BBC News,2019).

AKP as a ruling party of Turkey has challenged the election results in Ankara and Istanbul by accusing the opposition of stealing the election. AKP performed an application to YSK with the demands of examining the election results for Istanbul and Ankara under the claims of invalid votes and irregularities in ballot box (Göksedef,2019). The contestation of AKP against the victory of Ekrem Imamoglu has created a critical dispute within Turkish society. Erdogan, AKP officials and Devlet Bahçeli claimed that there was corruption behind the Imamoglu's victory (BBC News,2019). On social media platforms, the supporters of AKP blamed the opposition for stealing the elections and they claimed that FETO (Fethullahist Terrorist Organization) interfered with the elections of Istanbul and thus they demanded the cancellation of the local elections of Istanbul. On the other hand, the officials of CHP and İyi Parti emphasized that the people elected İmamoglu as the mayor of Istanbul and they blamed AKP and MHP for subverting the local elections (BBC News, 2019). The supporters of İmamoglu used social media platforms to demonstrate the victory of Imamoglu in the elections. They claimed that the ruling party refused to concede and

behaved unlawfully. The supporters further demanded from the YSK to hand over the certificate of election to İmamoglu. Due to the uncertainty of the results, objections and disputes, the local elections of March 31 turned into a crisis within Turkey. Moreover, the ruling party played a significant role in terms of turning the elections into a polarized crisis. As the President of Turkey and the leader of AKP, Erdogan used polarizing language through the narrative of Zillet İttifakı (Ogreten,2019). AKP officials, Bahceli and both mainstream and pro-government media used this narrative during the election to create an atmosphere of animosity. By stating Zillet İttifakı, they targeted the opposition parties, the purpose of usage of this term is to denigrate the opposition parties. Whist the alliance established by AKP and MHP (Cumhur İttifakı) was defined as best for national interest, all opposition parties were accused of being under the guidance of terrorist organizations. This effort to divide society into two alliances has deepened political polarization in Turkish society.

The first participant, the female supporter of AKP interacts with only like-minded opinions thus the echo chamber environment is dominant on her Twitter account. She engages on Twitter with the negative arguments against Imamoglu. For instance, she viewed on Twitter that İmamoglu managed the Beylikduzu municipality with poor performance and she stated that she witnessed many documents on Twitter which demonstrate the irregularities on the victory of Imamoglu.

On her Facebook accounts, she published a video of Imamoglu and blamed him for collaborating with PKK. On her account, people mention the support of PKK to Imamoglu. She generally encounters tweets that explain how Imamoglu was a bad mayor in Beylikduzu.

During the interview, she strongly stated that she feels antipathy towards the smile of Imamoglu. She regards CHP as responsible for the anger of people and she clearly indicated that the insistence of CHP for the election certificate and the signature of Imamoglu as the mayor of Istanbul bothered her deeply. She retweeted Binali Yıldırım's tweet which criticizes the visitation of Ekrem Imamoglu to Anıtkabir as a mayor of Istanbul:

"Everyone can visit Anıtkabir however it is wrongful act for him to sign as a mayor of Istanbul. Be patient my brother. If you deserve and if it is your right, you will take this title in a few days."

She felt frustration when she saw the celebrations for Imamoglu on social media platforms and she believes that Anadolu Agency stopped the data for results on the election day when

they realized the irregularities from the election results. She finds the slogan of CHP (the end of March is spring) provocative by claiming that bad events have always happened during past Springs and she gives July 15th and Gezi Protests as example. Her online interactions could not reflect an understanding public sphere because she does not see social media platforms as a free sphere for deliberation rather she believes social media provokes people and it should be blocked by the government during election days. Also during her interview, she criticized Imamoglu for provoking the youth on social media platforms.

In interview, she implied the support of foreign powers to Imamoglu. She does not see Imamoglu as a elected mayor of Istanbul and she published a message for Miraç Kandili of Mevlut Uysal whom is the former mayor of Istanbul on Twitter by emphasizing:

" Let him who has a election certificate speak."

Because of high homophily, she came to the conclusion that on social media that people do not trust Imamoglu. She further added that on Twitter, she saw multiple tweets that point out irregularities in the elections. On Twitter she stated that:

"Now one question in the minds of millions of hearts: Have you prepared the sheath that stole the minaret? #donotafraidtotransparency."

She retweeted the tweet of the deputy of AKP which explains AKP's reasons for objections towards the election results by stating that:

" The security and reliability of the election is the job of all political parties. As a political party, we try to ensure the security of elections. Protecting the vote of people is our job! "

She also emphasized that the wait for the certificate of election is a standard for every election whilst evaluating existing objections:

"In 2014 local elections of Istanbul, the mayor candidate of AKP, Kadir Topbaş got 47,9% of the votes and the candidate of CHP, Mustafa Sarıgül got 40,1% of the votes. 686 thousand votes left behind in the election of the CHP, while the number of invalid votes 395 thousand, with CHP objections, the votes were counted again and Kadir Topbaş waited 8 days for the final results. "

She evaluated these elections as inappropriate for Turkey and demanded the cancellation of this particular election for Istanbul. Furthermore, she claimed that she witnessed the irregularities in the ballot box in Hatay. She emphasized that from an individuals' appearance, it can be clearly understood whether they will vote for AKP or CHP and whether they are Alevi or Sunni and the polling clerks manipulated the elections.

On the other hand, her online interactions reinforce her highly polarized political views instead of decreasing them by ensuring a public sphere. Political homophily can be

observed through her online interactions because she follows close to no people whom have different political views however, after our interviews, due to the fact that she knew her interactions would be analyzed, she started to follow people who are members of or supporters of CHP to present a falsified persona.

Furthermore, she uses Twitter for obtaining news and spreading her political views. For her online interactions, she avoided discussion with people on social media. She emphasized that generally, in order to convince the people to vote AKP, she uses Twitter by the means of constantly expressing her political views. She has supported the AKP mayoral candidate of Hatay during the election atmosphere by publishing his promotional videos. She gave support to Binali Yıldırım by publishing his videos on her Twitter account. She stated that:

" With humility, sincerity and endeavour I say AKP. "

She also indicated that Twitter did not cause the changes in her political views but stated that it is effective for getting to know individuals whom are supporters of her party. She used Twitter, NTV (mainstream media) and Anadolu Agency to receive news concerning the elections. Instead of searching sphere for dialogue, she used Twitter for promoting AKP candidates during the electoral process. Her online interactions are not based on an effort for dialogue due to the fact that she avoids communicating with people personally. She also avoided using social media platforms actively during this election because of her fear of harming her parties' image and her political views by publishing something disruptive under the aggressive atmosphere of social media. Her online interactions don't reflect an atmosphere of public sphere because she carries a fear of harming to her political parties' image when she is using Twitter and Facebook.

Affective polarization is highly seen when she is speaking on election crisis. She identifies herself with the identity of her political party and she refers to her values by excluding people whom support the opposition party and she sees these people as a threat against her values. According to her, the supporters of Imamoglu behave disrespectfully towards her ethic values and she desired that the mayor of Istanbul should be from AKP because she thinks that if CHP's candidate will be elected, the consumption of alcohol will rise and mosques will not be valued adequately. She indicated that in her account, users mostly criticize CHP supporters for their ridiculing behavior against religion. Social media platforms strengthen her polarized identity by ensuring echo chamber environment. For instance, she saw on Twitter that people who voted for the CHP candidate in Ankara, deeply regretted their decisions and felt frustration on the new fact that alcohol has started being sold in municipal facilities. With her polarized identity and homophily, her online

interactions do not support the argument that social media platforms put different voices together and enhance a democratic understanding but rather opposes them.

The second participant of the study, the male supporter of AKP, has both highly polarized political views and he reinforces polarization with his online interactions.

He used Twitter actively by publishing multiple tweets and retweets concerning the elections. Generally, he acted in an aggressive manner in order to preserve his political views. He followed unaccredited news accounts which targeted the opposition parties and their members. He supported the AKP candidate and also he defamed other figureheads of the opposition parties by utilizing fake news. The participant is not tolerant towards different political views and thus he identifies himself as a strong supporter of Erdogan and his political movement. He feels frustration when people criticize Erdogan and AKP and therefore he connects with his political party affectively. The accounts that he uses on social media platforms are manipulative and partisan. Similar to the first participant, he does not trust the validity of the election results. On the day of the election, he published multiple accusations towards CHP through the usage of photos and manipulative videos from unaccredited accounts:

"They protested ezan, swore at the muezzin who reads Sela, mocked the time of Fatiha, humiliated the headscarves, insulted the headscarves, insulted, attacked and tried to humiliate. Do we have to slap the CHP mentality in the ballot box?"

Furthermore, the participant retweeted the tweet of Melih Gökçek:

"Think about it, opened ballot boxes on the evening of March 31, CHP convoys on the streets, PKK flags swinging from vehicles, Apo posters, Kandil cries of joy, victory speeches from FETO, greeting messages from the United States. If this situation won't touch your blood, vote for the CHP-Iyi Party-SP-PKK-FETO-US union."

He blamed CHP for stealing the outcome of the elections:

"CHP has undertaken the production of Organized Jobs: Election, it has a higher rating rate than @yilmazerdogan s Organized Jobs: Sazan Sarmalı #theexamofdemocracy. "

The participant believes that there are irregularities in the election results and he further stated that the comments of AKP's opponents makes him feel frustration. The demands of CHP for certificate of election results causes discontent within the participant and he states that he feels frustration when he witnesses the hashtag #mazbatayıver. Alongside this he openly desires the votes to be recounted and he emphasized that he strongly supports the hashtag of #oylaryenidensayılısn. The participant feels joy when he sees the mistakes of Imamoglu the newly elected mayor of Istanbul.

Also, in his online interactions selective exposure is highly observed. He participant thinks that Yeni Şafak is the best news source and he participant mainly utilized Anadolu Agency for obtaining information concerning the election results. He emphasized that he mostly reads Yeni Şafak (pro-government newspaper) and during the election process he used Twitter actively to obtain information on current events. The participant followed the news on the election night through Yeni Şafak. Oddly the male participant did not criticize Anadolu Agency for halting the entry of data for the results most likely due to his trust placed on this form of media. The participant claimed to understand the decision made by the agency and he stated that Anadolu Agency was not able to show the results which were in contention with Imamoglu's victory due to a speech previously given by Yildirim.

Moreover, homophily is observed throughout his Twitter usage because on Twitter, the participant always comes forth with arguments that mention irregularities in the electoral process. The participant clearly stated that during the election process, what he witnessed most on Twitter is the criticisms of people focused at CHP for their demand of the certification of the election. He explained his online and offline interactions within the frame of the local elections. He witnessed on Twitter that multiple people voted for Imamoglu erroneously by supplanting him as an AKP candidate due to his religious surname. The candidate further stated that he came across with multiple tweets that show irregularities in ballot box system on the day of the elections. He claims to have heard from Twitter users that there were irregularities in the appointment of polling officers.

Twitter does not influence his political views in terms of softening his rationale, rather his views become more conservative through his usage of Twitter. This particular participant does not believe in the dialogue based atmosphere on social media.

Online interactions with other users did not divert his political views further stating that that he as an individual became more loyal to his political views through his usage of Twitter. The participant attempted to utilize offline interactions to convince people to vote for Yildirim such as one on one speech and convincing argumentation. He published the picture of Binali Yıldırım with students with the comment of:

"sincerity".

The participant also published many pictures and videos of Binali Yıldırım to show his support. However, he emphasized that on platforms such as Twitter such convincing argumentation was impossible due to the hateful atmosphere that is present on the platform. According to his interactions, Twitter, by ensuring an echo chamber environment, polarizes his political views rather than increasing his tolerance towards different ideas. He

uses Twitter provocatively by targeting opposition parties and he demonizes the opposition parties by portraying them as traitors to the nation. He claimed that Imamoglu resembles the supporters of FETÖ and he emphasized that he is neither national nor indigene. He denigrates Kemal Kilicdaroglu (the leader of CHP) by stating:

" You're disgusting Mister Ke'mal disgusting."

He implied that FETO supports the alliance of CHP and İyi Party (Millet İttifakı):

"First, Ekrem Dumanli spoke to the zillet ittifakı and asked for your vote. Then, Meral Akşener spoke as if she had taken orders by saying that, on 15 July, soldiers are Mehmetçik and they were send to prison. After that, the İYİ Party will start to speak openly."

He retweeted a video that claimed the presence of a relationship between terrorist organizations and Millet İttifakı:

" It is not the alliance for the nation is an alliance like matryoshka doll, #perception."

He criticized a member of İYİ Party and another opposition supporter by stating:

"Then they say, wow friend why we can not win the election, why the AK Party wins. If you fight with this nation, if you ignore your values, if you hate vomit, people will BURY you in the ballot box."

He retweeted a video from a pro-government manipulative account which claimed that Imamoglu was unnerved by the name of Omer Halisdemir (a martyr of July 15th) and he added:

"Here is the real Ekrem İmamoğlu."

He reminded the attack of an İyi Party deputy candidate on children during the previous elections:

"The power of these supporters of İyi Party is probably only enough for children. If you recall, the candidate of the İyi Party deputy attacked the children with flags sticks before the June 24 elections."

The participant highlighted the demand of the Minister of Internal Affairs resignation:

"Those who want the resignation of Süleyman Soylu also agree to become the PKK's dog two days later."

In Twitter, he targets not only the opposition parties but also the individuals who criticize AKP. He replied to a critical tweet that:

"Either you speed up the job and your party will be on the scene as soon as possible. Instead of criticizing, you make promises with solutions. If you will come without a solution, do not go out at all."

According to his usage during the election process, Twitter does not create the foundations for debate against different views and does not ensure deliberation rather it increases walls by reinforcing polarized views. In this respect, according to the participants' usage, Twitter cannot be regarded as a democratic public sphere.

The third participant whom happens to be the female supporter of MHP, used social media platforms for introducing MHP candidates and for demonstrating support for her political figureheads and ideals under the atmosphere of this electoral crisis. She preferred to use Facebook more actively than Twitter, however instead of publishing her opinions, she uses the platform to support Devlet Bahçeli by publishing his photos and his words. During the election process, she strongly supported the MHP candidate of Silivri. Before the elections, she published a photo of Erdogan and Bahçeli hand-in-hand on Facebook and she showed her support towards the alliance between MHP and AKP by stating:

"Cumhur İttifakı is the heart, giant courage, rising flag that strikes from Mete Han to Atilla, Bilge Kagan, Osman Gazi, Fatih to Abdulhamid Khan, Mustafa Kemal to present and many future centuries."

She does not use social media platforms to ensure dialogue or deliberation because she is prejudiced about the role of social media because she does not believe that these platforms can change her perspective. During her interviews, she emphasized that she avoids getting involved in discussions because according to her the atmosphere of social media is aggressive and conflicting. In essence, she finds social media provocative and she indicated that it is impossible to stay neutral in these platforms. The female participant indicated that instead of trying to convince people on social media, she prefers to promote her party and candidates on these platforms because she thinks that social media plays a significant role in leading people and their group behavior. She often published brochures of the MHP candidate of Silivri on both Facebook and Twitter and she used the hashtags:

#itistimetochangeinSilivri #Silivriwillwin .

On the other hand, selective exposure leads her to see and hear mostly governments propaganda because she refused to follow the opposition channels and she is exposed to like-minded views. She follows the personal accounts of state officials and she stated that during the election process, she obtains the necessary information from these accounts. The participant often looks at the Twitter accounts of Bahçeli, Erdogan and MHP mayoral candidates for guidance rather than indulging in journalism or contested information.

The information which she obtained from social media reinforces her polarized views and thus she avoids getting involved in debates and she refuses to comment and tweet on topics she does not like. This type of interaction is contrary to the understanding of a public sphere. Generally she obtains news from TRT1 (official channel of state) and she indicated that she views every channel with the exceptions of Fox TV and Halk TV (pro-opposition channels). She blames Fox TV and Halk TV for being extremely partisan and for provoking people further mentioning her hatred towards Fatih Portakal (newscaster of Fox Tv). According to the participant, the attitudes of opposition channels are antipathetic.

Moreover, homophily is observed on her online interactions because in essence, she is no more than a mere proxy for her political party and views rather than an individual with personal thoughts and conceptions. This participant holds similar complaints and arguments to what she follows in the election process. For instance, she frequently came across comments and tweets that blame CHP for provoking people.

Due to selective exposure and homophily there are reinforced walls between her and the real world. Because of existing homophily, her social media platforms led to a distorted understanding of the truth under an echo chamber environment. For instance, she supposes that the Turkish people -except the supporter of terrorist organizations- have think like her concerning the elections. Also in her final interview, she strongly emphasized that the people were unified on the will the cancel the elections in Istanbul. With the events of the elections, her political views became more polarized and thus her online interactions failed to decrease the degree of polarization. The participant claims to have witnessed multiple debates on social media concerning the alliance between AKP and MHP but she states that she does not prefer read these debates according to her, the only important words are those that come from her political leaders. The participant emphasized that she always stands behind decision of her party leader. The candidate further retweeted the tweet of Binali Yıldırım in which he acknowledged MHP for their support in the elections. She publishes the photos from party events and from propaganda field missions for the elections. Her social interactions do not trigger any change in her political views because she emphasizes that the comments of the opposing factions cannot make any changes on her political position due to the fact that she claims to have a strict and clear political views.

She identifies herself with her party identity and she has a no tolerance policy towards criticisms because her online interactions cannot ensure ground for debate and dialogue. Like the other participants whom happen to be supporters of AKP, she sees opposition parties likewise with terrorist organizations. She does not believe that HDP represents

Kurdish votes and she claims that HDP is the party of terrorists that descend from the mountains. She further claims that IYI Party is a political structure of FETÖ. She mentioned that she rarely comments on social media, an instance of this can be seen where her old friend who supports IYI Party celebrated the triumph of Imamoglu and the participant commented stating that Imamoglu won with the votes of PKK. She worries that under Imamoglu, terrorists will start to work in municipalities and she stated that she obtained this frightening information from social media. The demands of the CHP supporters for the certificate of election irritates her and the participant stated that she avoids reading comments and tweets that criticize MHP as a whole. She desires the cancellation of the election like the previous participants because she emphasizes that she witnessed documents as a proof of irregularities during the election process on social media platforms. This sort of behavior can be seen in parallel to the past US presidential elections where the opposition claimed the alleged involvement of Russia in the election of Donald Trump, yet as history has demonstrated these allegations are generally without merit or solid evidence and are mainly emotional. She indicated that she is not content with the election results for Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir because she believes that the opposition parties allied with FETÖ and PKK. She indicated that she cannot stand the words concerning the quote unquote triumph of CHP because she feels frustrated. She felt shocked when she saw celebrations of CHP supporters in the hashtags.

The participant did not criticize Anadolu Agency and she finds the allegations towards the agency for misconduct misguided. She stated that Anadolu Agency prevented the flow of information concerning results to prevent misleading, early conclusions.

According to the analyses of this participant, it is clearly seen that with highly echo chamber environment and homophily, these platforms could not function as democratic public sphere for her, under the atmosphere of the elections.

The fourth participant whom was the male supporter of MHP, is absolutely closed minded towards different political ideologies, in other words, he does not desire an atmosphere of dialogue or deliberation because he views his political ideas as vastly superior. Although he avoids partaking in discourse on social media platforms, the participant used these platforms aggressively by targeting opposition parties during the election process. The participant sees different views as a threat or effort towards dissuading him from his views and therefore he is strongly prejudiced and intolerant towards different political views. Like other participants who support AKP and MHP, he tends to demonize opposition parties and

his identity is highly ideological. He feels anger towards people who support opposition parties and he used the term "zillet ittifakı" to address people whom do not support MHP and AKP furthering an alienating doctrine. Alongside these, he often retweeted Devlet Bahçeli's tweets:

"Austria is uncomfortable with our wolf! The CHP's and the İyi Party's terrorist partner, HDP are also annoyed. A terrorist is saying that the one who makes wolf hand sign can not be our brother . Be hey fool, be hey low; Who calls you brother? Who makes you brother? Kandil your side, Bozkurt's side is a great Turkish nation. "

He replied to a tweet from Mehmet Aslan (Assistant Secretary General of İyi Party) and he blamed him for infidelity:

"Betrayel to the case is betrayal to the country, you are a traitor my friend. Don't you dare use the name of Turkish Nationalist Movement for politics."

The participant replied to Imamoglu's tweet about Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan and Hüseyin İnan (leftist youth from the generation of 68):

"@ekrem_imamoglu Atatürk has never followed anarchy and illegal bussiness. Considering that the bank thieves, police murderer puppets of Soviet's are respectfully following and honouring Atatürk is a sign of brain freeze."

The participant further published histories from Facebook for targeting opposition parties:

"How great you are Istanbul! Marksist/Leninist, communist, emparialist, masonry, HDPKK men and worthless ones are looking at you in the eye and telling you that everything will be great. Whereas you're already great the way you are and don't you ever worry Turkish kids are forever with you...! "

The participant indicated his hatred against Canan Kaftancıoğlu (Provincial Chairman of CHP):

"Canan Kaftancıoğlu who proudly shared eating pork meet with her husband and said "The God you believe should rescue you", is now praying to the God she did not believe. These people will dress up as anything for collecting votes."

He utilized Facebook first and foremost out of all the other platforms. On Twitter, he generally published wise sayings concerning the Turkish nation and the words of Devlet Bahçeli. On Facebook, he preferred to publish mostly the political events which he participated in and he gave support to MHP's alliances' and candidates.

In the participants' interviews, he indicated that he actively works for the elections of his party. He participated actively in the public meetings of Cumhuriyet İttifakı (alliance of MHP and AKP). The participant further stated that they physically clashed with the supporters of

IYI Party and CHP in another public meeting. He utilized social media platforms during the election process with the sole purpose of convincing people, announcing party meetings and promoting candidates. According to this participant, social media platforms are useful mainly for following the publications of a party's headquarters.

In the electoral atmosphere, he utilized Twitter to give support his party, for instance he announced the television channels which Bahçeli would appear on:

"Devlet Bahçeli is on the NTV and Star Tv."

He announced a marching event:

"Come on youths; We will run to Turan #youthrunofülküocakları".

He further supported the alliance of MHP and AKP by stating:

"Cumhur İttifakı is the name of consciousness that is born from the love of the Turkish nation and kneaded with love, we say Cumhur İttifakı!"

His online interactions do not support the public sphere argument for social media platforms because he strongly avoids to entering into discussion and discourse to prevent damage to the MHP image.

The participants' online interactions during the election process strongly demonstrate presence of selective exposure and homophily. The participant avoided following different news channels and therefore selective exposure is dominant on his online attitude. The participant proclaimed to have followed the news through a nationalist news channel Bengü Türk TV and through social media platforms. The participant strongly emphasized that he refused to ingest news coming from Halk Tv and Fox Tv and he claimed that they are both communists and traitors. He indicated that he had not heard the discussions concerning Anadolu Agency and stated that he was unaware of the data flow being halted during the electoral process. The participant further stated that he frequently came across tweets and comments that ridiculed Imamoglu and demonstrated his link between terrorists and opposition parties. He intentionally refuses to see different views in social media platforms and thus the participant solely uses these platforms to defend his party and give support. On Facebook, he published his visitations to Devlet Bahçeli and MHP's candidates stating: *"Yesterday, today, tomorrow we will always be there with your side our Türkmén Men #whatevertheleadersays."*

He criticized to opposition parties:

"If a wolf doesn't make the other dogs bark behind them, with what they have done, is not a wolf at all."

He posted a photo of the Turkish flag with the comment:

" If it takes life or it takes blood, so be it. As long as you are up above."

He often showed his support for district candidates of his alliance by sharing their brochures with the comment:

" For perpetuity (beka) National Decision, For continuation Cumhuriyet! They are one of us." and "what ever the leader says."

In essence, the participant lives in an echo chamber both online and offline due to the fact that the people he surrounds himself with have parallel political views and his online interactions do not differ from offline interactions. The news which he obtained from his online interactions are manipulative and polarizing. Due to the fact that he consumes manipulative and provoking opinions in social media platforms, these platforms lead to his political views becoming more extreme.

The participant feels frustration and becomes defensive when MHP and his leaders on social media are insulted or questioned. He stated that on social media platforms, many videos and photos were used to dissuade them from allying with other government parties but he furthers they were not deceived. He blames CHP for accepting support from terrorists and he stated that he obtained information from Twitter in the form of quotes from HDP's leaders in which they will control Istanbul under Imamoglu's mayoralty. The participant stated that he heard on a tweet from one of his friend the voice recordings of Canan Kaftancıoğlu and in this voice recording he claimed that the opposition parties will rustle up a civil war by inciting terrorist attacks. Also, in parallel to the other participants who support AKP and MHP, he demanded the cancellation of the elections due to the existence of irregularities however, he thinks that Imamoglu would have claimed victory again due to his support from terrorists.

In this respect, according to his online interactions during the election process, these platforms reinforced his polarized views rather than softening them by ensuring a public sphere.

Dissimilar from the participants whom were supporters of AKP and MHP, the fifth participant whom is a female supporter of CHP attempted to establish a dialogue on social media platforms. It should be noted that when these interviews were made, the elections had not yet been canceled therefore the fifth participant sees herself on the winning side. In other words, it is expected that the supporters of CHP were calmer in these interviews than those of AKP due to the election results. Her online interactions show inconsistency before the elections and just after elections. Before the election results were announced she used

Twitter more aggressively and had a more frustrated tone however after the elections, she became more tolerant towards supporters of AKP and her language on Twitter softened. After the election day she published tweets and retweets on the triumph of Imamoglu:

"I have one word. I AM SO HAPPY!" " Let's embrace everyone who thinks that there is trick. Let's be the bigger person, it's the first time in 17 years for them, whatever they say is all lies and they made up the lies, but still, sad."

"..The ones who made us this way should be ASHAMED. I thank you on my behalf for reminding me hope MY LEADER"

"This man has too much of neccessity of being the right leader."

However, she could not be successful due to highly polarizing political views on the atmosphere of the elections. She as an individual attempts to convince people but she does not believe that she can convince people who support AKP due to the fact that they refuse to be understanding. She tried to reach these people by sending direct messages but most of the time she did not receive answers and those who answered her, refused to contemplate on her messages.

She preferred to follow like-minded news accounts and people so there exists a homophily but contrary to the supporters of the established government, it is possible for her to interact with different political views. She indicated that on her timeline, she generally came across criticisms towards the established government and humor that ridicules the objections of AKP. She stated that she does not follow the accounts of AKP officials, AKP and its' candidates on Twitter.

The participant stated that she attempted to raise awareness by sharing news and street interviews with the general public on Twitter. She used Twitter actively during the election process. She gave her support to Imamoglu on Twitter and she generally retweeted news articles with simple comments and street interviews which criticize AKP. She mostly shared the news which criticized AKP and often she ridiculed some pro government news channel.

Her online interactions were not as aggressive as those whom are supporters of MHP and AKP. She retweeted a tweet from an anonymous opposition news account:

" There wasn't any transportation with municipal busses, ferryboats or niether did the tunnels, roads were closed. There was just a public meeting at Gaziosmanpaşa, Ekrem Imamoglu is coming ! "

In her interviews, the participant criticized Binali Yıldırım for his lack of communication with the masses. She emphasized her distrust towards AKP for their actions when they

falsely claimed victory in Istanbul. Concerning the 31st of March, she emphasized that AKP lost the elections and she further criticized the objections:

At least don't be impolite, dispicable and don't do any corruption this blessed night! FEAR FROM GOD, GOD!". "You did not loose Islam when you lost Istanbul, Ankara, Antalya. You LOST Islam when you reached the top of the ladder by stepping on everyones foot, by making a habit to lie and deviding this nation not to 2 but to 15 pieces."

She stated that the claims of irregularities in the election results irritates her and furthermore criticized the mainstream media for being pro-government, stating that the head of Anadolu Agency should be taken out of service due to their unethical handling of information.

Selective exposure is seen her online interactions. During the day of the election, she followed the news from Fox Tv. Her social interactions did not lead to change in her political views but she stated that, after she saw videos and information about İmamoglu on Twitter, her compassion and trust increased. According to the fifth participant, social media is useful for organizing people and protecting the validity of votes rather than deliberate with different opinions.

She mentioned that she feels frustration when people insult Atatürk and also she blames Erdogan for dividing the people through his proclamations that opposition parties are terrorist organizations. She made a comment towards a tweet that criticized İmamoglu's wrist watch, she replied to this this tweet by stating:

*" What do you care, you are f***king b***sh*t."*

She retweeted a comment about supporters of AKP:

" They asked me why aren't there any one who brain migrated from AKP, I can't stop laughing to write an answer, why do you thin there isn't anyone?"

According to the participants' online accounts during the election process social media platforms did not function as a public sphere. Although her desire to was to establish an atmosphere of dialogue it was not possible. In this respect, it can be clearly observed that the function of social media platforms could not be extracted independently from the political spectrum. If Turkey had not been highly polarized in its political views, participants could have a chance to establish dialogue on social media platforms and maybe these platforms could enhance democracy. However, with the present situation of Turkey it is difficult for such dialogue to appear. Her online interactions on the election process show that under a highly polarized atmosphere, different views could not reach each other on social media platforms.

On the online interactions of the sixth participant whom was the male supporter of CHP, firstly, selective exposure and homophily are highly observed because his online interactions during the elections were generally based on following the news from opponent channels and giving support CHP's mayoral candidates. He used Twitter actively during the election process and he generally retweeted the tweets of opponent journalists (mostly İsmail Saymaz) and deputies of CHP. The sixth participant also retweeted tweets of opposition news channels mainly to expose and ridicule. He indicated his opinions and predictions for the elections and he strongly criticized AKP. He published his predictions for the election results on the election day:

" Bakırköy 50% Kadıköy 55% Beşiktaş 60% can decrease to these numbers. In Şişli, because of Sarıgül's candidacy will take a big fall. In Izmir due to the candidacy of Tunç Soyer will raise votes." Istanbul Mayor candidate should have been one of these 3 people: İlhan Kesici, Cemal Canpolat, Akif Hamzaçebi. I think that these 3 candidates could have won. Imamoğlu's chance of winning is lower because AKP has the power to use governments power."

Also, the participant criticized a particular group which was dominant in the administration of CHP:

" I am very happy for Bolu and Adana" "Ekrem Imamoğlu has shown a successful graphic by his own success, Ankara Antalya Adana Izmir Bolu Kırşehir will hopefully continue like this and won't let the party to take advantage. This way we could unite CHP and return to the Party of Atatürk." " Istanbul and Ankara got rid of political Islamists."

He also has an anti-immigrant attitude and he is happy for this mayor who will take actions against immigrants:

" Bolu Mayor announced that they cut the money support and will not give lisançe anymore! It's enough what they had!"

He stated that he got accurate news from deputies of CHP on Twitter during the election process. Furthermore, he criticizes all mainstream news channels for provoking people dishonorably in favor of AKP. He demonstrated on Twitter how AKP's supporters utilize false and manipulative information. The male participant has similar opinions to that of the female participant whom is a supporter of CHP on the election results. The participant views only the publications of CHP as a reliable source of information on social media. In essence, with selective exposure he follows only like-minded news and thus the participant attempts to explain his views and demonstrate the manipulation of information only to his peers and not to the supporters of AKP due to homophily. He retweeted:

" Mehmet Ađar has supported Cumhuriyet and in 1979 when he was the head of General Security of Istanbul, Municipal of CHP has tried to eliminate the people who have been pulling salary from the ATM's without any work. FACT: The first ATM in Turkey was built in 1982. Ađar was the head of General Security of Istanbul in 1980."

He often criticized the media for being pro-government and he retweeted:

" TRT and Anadolu agency should be privatized. Party propagandas made by the taxes taken from public should be banned." " So called State television TRT spokesmen are like AKP party members, they say that we should be cautious for the places that CHP is ahead, they call victory for the places AKP has won. Also they state that the party wanted these places... Note: Their Turkish is bad."

He also criticized the foreign policies of the established government by stating:

"... Shame to ones who support these political moves for Islam."

The participant mostly utilizes social media platforms for following news and he further emphasized that he does not trust mainstream media due to the fact that they create propaganda and manipulation in order to support the established government. The participant prefers to follow people that he personally knows and trusts in terms of political views. He replied to the claims of AKP concerning the irregularities in the election results and he strongly opposed these claims by blaming AKP for slander and misinformation. Furthermore, the participant sees on his timeline the criticisms of AKP for their hate speeches and their unlawful objections to election results.

He sees Twitter as useful in terms of organizing supporters of CHP to protect the validity of votes and he emphasized that everyone he follows on Twitter are happy concerning the results on the day of the election. The participant utilized Twitter to express his opinions and he stated that he tried to convince people by giving support to CHP's mayoral candidates. He mentioned his satisfaction concerning the election results. However, he indicated his frustration for the scene of AKP in Istanbul. He blamed AKP for damaging the law and democracy by polarizing people through hate speeches.

The participant is disturbed with the claims of cooperation between opposition parties and terrorists and he feels anger due to the fact that AKP's supporters view all opposition as terrorists. He evaluated these accusations as impudence and his online interactions do not cause any change in his political views because he came across only like-minded arguments.

He strongly demands from AKP and its supporters to accept the quote unquote triumphant victory of Imamoglu and he blames AKP for using polarizing language to cause distress

within the people. He blamed AKP and MHP for the death of people during the quarrel for the elections on the 31st of March:

"At the public meetings you called all the citizens zillet, terrorist, traitor, atheist, vindictive generation, you said get guns, you said beka problem, you said this election is war, come and bring these lives!! #elections2019."

He often tweeted about issues with the data entry of the election results on the election day with criticisms towards Anadolu Agency:

"The data entry has stopped again and B. Yildirim has announced that he has won, Classic Senario".

He criticized the triumphant claims of Binali Yıldırım and the objections of AKP concerning the results he retweeted:

"What a shame Yildirim saying that he has won! So typical AKP... Pro-government TV channels are manipulating and trying to threaten the announcement of the elections. Ekrem Imamoğlu however is continuing with his noble actions."

"Are you trying to bug the elections and win the elections of B. Yildirim and M. Ozhasaki by recounting the votes? You validated the votes without stamps at referendum elections. Your brain really "does work". We can not go without stating the support of AA and Ysk."

"AKP states that they found the invalid votes in Ankara and will use their rights and protect the people of Ankara's votes, how shameless..."

"AKP Ankara Provincial Head: There are irregularities that we have found. The most ballot personnel is from AKP. YSK is your backyard. You are using all the government facilities to your advantage. In spite of all these factors who can submit the valid votes as invalid and write it to reports?"

"Erdogan has lost, Binali Yildirim has lost, Mehmet Özhasaki has lost, Nihat Zeybekçi has lost, Süleyman Soylu has lost, Demirören Media has lost, A Haber/ Sabah has lost, Anadolu agency has lost (Losers club)"

"Pro-government TV Channels keep posting news about how the difference is closing. I agree %100. The difference between stupid and smart is decreasing.."

"Are you aware? In almost every election after elections are over AKP supporters would fill the streets of Istanbul and celebrate, however tonight is silent! Thank God for showing us these days..."

"As is they valued Anıtkabir, didn't call Atatürk drunk, were not buddies with the people who hated Atatürk and wore fes, now pro-government media and owners act as if they love Atatürk, respect Anıtkabir, our eyes tear up."

He implied the connection of AKP's supporters and FETO:

"How you realised, the strained atmosphere about elections, the statements leading to chaos is coming from the ones who in the past have shed tear for Fetö traitor, visited the homes of terrorists and made compliments to the traitor called Fetö AKP supporters."

He is aware of the existing highly polarized atmosphere but due to barriers that exist between other groups he cannot remedy the situation. In essence, due to the highly polarized atmosphere of society reverberating among social media platforms, he cannot reach a common ground for dialogue on these platforms. In this respect, his usage of online platforms during the election process cannot be effective at gathering different political views together and decreasing the degree of polarization.

Online interactions of the seventh participant whom was the female supporter of HDP are dominated by selective exposure and high homophily. Like the other participants, she preferred to follow like-minded accounts on social media platforms. Although she got involved in almost every debate, homophily prevented a ground for dialogue from forming between two different poles. She follows news only which abides by her political views and when she comes across words from people who have different political views, she feels frustration and vents her anger on Twitter. She is the most active user amongst all participants. She replied to almost all political tweets she viewed. The participant frequently got involved in discussions, however she refused to follow different political views on social media platforms. She followed the news through opposition channels such as: Duvar, BirGün, T24, Bianet, Evrensel and Sendika.org. She stated that she commented when she witnessed tweets from other news sources on her friends' accounts. The participant did not want to view the tweets of AKP's supporters therefore she wanted her followers to not share tweets from AKP sources:

"Shut up you sneaky!! Why does my timeline have people who have shared his tweet."

The female participant was convinced that when she encountered strong arguments on Twitter in accordance to her political views she felt more vehement about her political stance and beliefs. The participant obtained information from both Fox TV and Twitter on the day of the elections and she strongly highlighted that her Twitter timeline is clear due to the fact that she follows only likeminded people. In this respect, it can be clearly observed

that her online interactions create a ground for dialogue only between like-minded opinions and therefore her efforts for explaining her political views, cannot reach people whom have divergent political views. From what she observed on Twitter, she stated that everyone she follows on Twitter demanded the certificate of election for Imamoglu and that everyone complained that AKP and MHP withheld this transfer. She stated that she avoids following the accounts of AKP, MHP and its supporters on Twitter.

The female participant strongly criticized the mainstream media because of their pro-government propaganda during the election process. She made comments such as:

"The sentence on the title isn't even on the news, let me love your lie. Provacator stupids."

And she further criticized everyone who used foul language towards HDP and Kurds on Twitter.

The participant has a highly politicized identity but she gives support to another party due to the commands of her leader. In her interviews, she strongly emphasized that she had suffered with the problem of belonging during election process. She voted for CHP involuntary and the participant further stated that after requests of her imprisoned leader Selahattin Demirtaş, she decided to vote for Imamoglu. She indicated the necessity of being together with people whom harbor hatred towards political Islam. The participant had difficulty restraining herself on social media platforms from using foul language towards CHP. She believes that her decision on the election influenced many HDP supporters in the online sphere. Although she voted for the CHP candidate she complained frequently about CHP's supporters, for instance she tweeted about CHP's mayoral candidate of Ankara:

" And I think you are a waste who cannot be recycled. You immoral man!" "I am suffering becuae our roads had to come across with people like you who I wouldn't even spit on."

She felt anger towards CHP supporters whom ignored HDP's role on this election and she further thinks that because of their silence, many supporters of HDP were imprisoned.

The participant further blamed AKP and MHP for trying to manipulate the elections and she shared the hashtag:

" #TheyareROBBERS What happend, wasn't the elections the national wil?"

She retweeted news articles from opposition media with comments such as for the speech of Bahçeli, she made commented:

"It's your dad, you fascist."

She attempted to incite spamming to prevent false and manipulative tweets:

" Friends please spam the accounts who make fake news and point to fingers to targets."

After the day of the election, she tweeted:

*"I want to play flute so loudly to the known parties who cries thief cehape. The melody of Yılan Story" " The fact that we have one has nothing to do with the sh**y doctrine of Kılıçdaroğlu"*

For the objections of AKP against the election results she commented:

"You repeat this elections and see who doesn't create caos in Istanbul" " Now invite us to where ever you want and let's put them in their place! Should we only watch those who doesn't respect our rights? @ekrem_imamoglu @herkesicinCHP @barisyarkadas @ccanannnnnnn"

The participant further emphasized that she avoided using social media as an offensive tool during election process for the sake of convincing people to stand together against the establishment. She believes that Twitter was effective at protecting the validity of their votes on the day of the election and she added that Twitter has a great role in the elections and how it resulted in the favor of CHP.

Under the polarizing atmosphere of the elections and because of homophily, her online interactions show the presence of the echo chamber environment in online platforms. In this respect, her usage of social media did not present the characteristics of a public sphere.

The purpose of last participant's whom was a male supporter of HDP online interactions during the election process have been to strengthen the opposition towards the ruling government. He does not believe that Twitter can provide a ground for dialogue because of the presence of echo chambers and the participant appears to take interest in different views yet he follows solely the pro government journalists and government officials for refuting their claims rather than for assuring a ground for dialogue with them.

He, like the other participant who supports HDP, used Twitter actively by getting involve in debates and discussions. However, these debates are between the supporters of CHP rather than AKP or MHP. This participant does not follow any of the ordinary voters whom vote for the established government. Like all the other participants, due to selective exposure, he obtains information from channels which have similar political views to him. He stated that he is highly disturbed by the hate speeches of the ruling parties' structures and he blames pro-government journalists, MHP and AKP officials for dividing people between two factions as a nationalists and terrorists. The participant had used social media platforms to inform people rather than convincing them during the election process and he further stated that he avoids following mainstream media and that he obtained information on the elections from opposition media channels. The subversion of the news channels

support AKP made the participant feel frustration. He stated that he is content when he sees ground for dialog on social media between CHP and HDP. However, he emphasized that it is impossible to create a ground for dialogue between the government and opposition on social media because he believes that social media constructs walls between people and his voice cannot reach the other side.

The participant thinks that Twitter is useful for spreading propaganda of Imamoglu and yet he blames AKP for manipulating the elections thus he strongly opposes the demands of AKP for the cancellation of the elections. He is bothered by all statements made by the ruling government concerning the election results and the participant also mentions that the ruling government attempts to dehumanize all proponents of the opposition.

He criticized Binali Yıldırım's statement on the election day:

"Yuh Yuh Yuh!! The TV shows same point but he says we won."

The participant also criticized the Anadolu Agency:

"Damage of the monism: you left no agency in the country. That's the result."

He tweets yet again evaluating the results and complaining about AKP:

"Father who has been euphoria of victory for 25 years just realized they have lost. He is trying to take Van results for a ride. Although he does not mention, his background is earthquake of Van. The mind of turkish islamists is extremely colonial like saying that " We are saving these people from PKK however look at the result".

He congratulated Imamoglu for his triumph in the elections and also he criticized the pro-government media channels and journalists by stating:

"They have lost all sense of shame."

In his interviews, the participant emphasized that the 8th of March Crisis and the request of his imprisoned leader were the determining factors in his vote for Imamoglu.

He emphasized the importance of HDP during these elections on Twitter:

" The ones who don't care of HDP voters and HDP alignments will loose the elections! Adana Ardahan Esenyurt Küçükçekmece and in many other points HDP makes Cehape win. Never forget this" . "İğdir is İğdir and will be İğdir, Meral can get worried about it."

This participant appears to be the most tolerant out of all the other participants of this research project yet his refusal to converse with voters of the ruling government further demonstrates an interior predisposition towards alienating any opposition. In essence, even though he performs efforts to contact the opposition he cannot under the highly polarized election atmosphere in Turkey because he constantly stated that people whom are AKP's supporters, blocked him on Twitter. In this respect, although his online interactions are

more open, Twitter cannot carry out the characteristics of a public sphere during the election crisis under his usage.

As a result, it can be clearly observed that all participants have polarized political views under the atmosphere of the local elections. Their online interactions did not differ from their interactions during their daily lives. Due to the participants' highly polarized positions, they utilized social media platforms with polarizing attitudes and any sphere of deliberation could not be observed on participants' online interactions. All the participants tended to spreading their own personal propaganda and agendas rather than searching for ground for deliberation. Although some of participants tried to reach people on Twitter who have different political views, they could not be successful because of highly polarized atmosphere under echo chamber environment on online platforms. In this respect, it is observed that, during election crisis, social media platforms raised the walls between people by reinforcing participants' polarized views. In essence, the role of Twitter and Facebook in this crisis, as can be seen through the actions of the subjects did not function as public sphere.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. CONCLUSION

Social media platforms are mirrors of Turkish society. In Turkey, the daily political actions of individuals can be boiled down to simply tweeting and browsing the web. What has pushed me to perform this study is my interest on the effectiveness of these online platforms. The curiosity on the role of these platforms in the face of Turkey's increasingly polarized atmosphere was the starting point of this study. These platforms represent not only the political behaviors of people but also they are sources of both information and news. In this respect, from the beginning of this study the aim has been to answer the questions of What is the function of social media usage on Turkish youth's political views? What are these individuals' main motivations and attitudes when they are partaking on these platforms? Can social media platforms enhance democracy by functioning as a public sphere?

In order to answer to these research questions, a netnographic research must be conducted. To evaluate of online interactions of Turkish youths, data was collected through the means of in-depth interviews which were performed with a subtotal of eight participants of whom are supporters of the four main different political parties: AKP, MHP, CHP and HDP. At the same time journals were kept on their online interactions through obtaining consent from each and every one of them. The methodology of this study is a question by itself due the fact that the function of social media in the frame of its contribution to democracy has not been qualitatively studied before. Scholars conducted research on selective exposure and political homophily with quantitative methods (Levendusky,2013; Garret,2009) and for Turkish society, social media platforms were also studied quantitatively (Yörük,2017). In other words, this study tries to perform a qualitative research on the online interactions of the Turkish people within the confines of politics.

In the theoretical chapter, the concept of a public sphere which is the main feature of democratic politics (Habermas,1991) is emphasized. Public sphere represents a confine where citizens come together for debating about collective issues, ideals and goals (Young,1996). The main idea behind a public sphere is, deliberation and a public sphere aims to create a deliberative space (Habermas,1996). In this respect, the function of social media platforms as a public sphere, is a necessity for their contribution to democracy. The literature on the relation between the Internet's platforms and the public sphere was presented broadly in the frames of its contribution to democracy in the theoretical chapter.

Moreover, the question of what individuals do on social media platforms when they encounter a limitless source of information, is crucial for analyzing online interactions. In this respect, the concepts of filtering, selective exposure and homophily were explained in this chapter. On the Internet's platforms, just as the public sphere is indicative of a democracy, the echo chamber environment and the presence of cascades are significant indicators of polarization. When people see and hear only echoes of their own voices, their political views become more polarized (Erdogan and Semerci,2018; Sunstein,2007) and the tendency towards believing in false information is increases (Kuran and Sunstein, 2007). The literature on the concept of echo chambers and cascades were presented in this chapter, in the frame of their risk towards creating polarization.

The analysis was made through two different crises in Turkey as Women Day's March and the local elections of 31st of March. The dispute of Women Day's is represented as a value-based polarizing crisis and the election crisis address a political polarization in society. Values are significant for polarization because in Turkey, the differences between values shift the distance between political parties and effect polarization (Erdogan and Semerci,2018). Furthermore, with the election crisis on the 31st of March, the party polarization turns into an affective polarization and this crisis is important to analyze individuals' interactions. In this respect, this study attempts to look at eight participants' online and offline interactions during these two crises. The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of social media platforms' on these crisis by looking at the subjects' online interactions on these crises in the frame of the question of Did these platforms encourage people towards making dialogue or did these platforms raise the walls between people in reinforce the pre-existing polarization?

When the data was collected and evaluated, could be understood that the issue is more complex than it appears. According to analyses, all participants use social media platforms with the purpose of consuming news and information from sources that are closest to their personal political views. None of them trust the information and news that supports their opponents' views. Alongside this, homophily and selective exposure can be observed in their online interactions. Due to high levels of homophily, they see and hear only like-minded arguments on social media platforms. In essence, for all of the subjects, their accounts represent echo chambers. Their online interactions spread only within these chambers rather than reaching outwards to different users. In both of the crises, their online interactions raised walls by reinforcing their pre-existed polarized views. Even the agenda of the nation which can be observed in supporters of the ruling government on social media,

is completely different from what is viewed by those on the opposition side. There is no common interaction between both sides on Twitter, moreover, on social media platforms, they all construct their own personal reality according to their political views. For all of the subjects, their preferences of political party has transformed into a group identity on social media platforms with these highly polarizing crises. The participants whom are supporters of AKP and MHP used common values to exclude opposing people from any form of discussion, alienating other through the usage of an exclusionist group identity. In essence, all of the subjects have polarized political views in both their online and daily lives.

If participants use the Internet's platforms to reinforce their existing opinions, how does it contribute to democracy? According to the online interactions of the eight participants, it is impossible to refer to social media platforms as a functioning public sphere. To begin with, one of the most significant conditions of public sphere is deliberation. In order to contribute towards democracy, these platforms have to provide suitable grounds for dialogue by gathering different political views together. However, none of the online accounts of the participants ensure grounds for dialog and deliberation. Due to the fact that they all ignore opposing arguments, they cannot encounter people from the opposing faction on social media platforms. Secondly, a public sphere should ensure the spread of information (Sunstein,2007) however in the participants' online interactions, information could not spread because of an existing echo chamber environment. In this respect, these eight social media accounts could not act as a public sphere in order to enhance democracy. On the contrary, all participant's online interactions reinforced their polarized views on both crises due to selective exposure and homophily. When the participants avoided viewing non-familiar information and peoples on these platforms, their arguments became more polarized.

In the frames of these research questions, according to these results and the participants' interactions, social media platforms function as a tool of polarization on Turkish youths' political views and thus these platforms cannot be considered as a democratic public sphere for the eight participants. It can be clearly observed in the participants' online interactions, that the individuals' main attitudes on these platforms are political homophily and selective exposure.

In essence this netnographic field study verifies the arguments of pessimists who claim that the usage of the Internet's platforms serve towards polarization rather than democracy. However, this study argues that the relationship between social media platforms and polarization is not single-sided. The role of social media platforms are dependent on the

degree of polarization in society. The participants of this study avoided viewing different political views and to coming together with those from different political views because the political atmosphere of Turkey is extremely polarized. However, in a nation where political polarization is minimal, these platforms may enhance democracy. In essence, I argue that the function of social media in a nation should be evaluated by considering the political conjuncture of that nation. For instance, after the fieldwork of this study was finished, on the 6th of May, the March 31st local elections were cancelled for Istanbul. This decision of YSK has created a huge breaking point on the social media platforms' usage of all participants and their online interactions have become more polarized. These incidents have closed the ranks. Those whom are supporters of CHP and HDP state that they have lost their faith for democracy in Turkey and those whom are supporters of AKP and MHP emphasized their rightfulness and legality for blaming opponents people with terrorism. This situation can cause significant damage by creating an irrevocable gap between two main political factions in Turkey in terms of polarization.

In this respect, for future studies on the online interactions and its effects, I lay emphasis on the necessity for analyzing the effects of political conjuncture and current political incidents on these platforms.

As a last word, unfortunately, In Turkey, the existing affective polarization and the polarizing role of Twitter breed each other without cease. To remove this vicious circle, it is a necessity to cling on to tolerant and democratic values rather than polarizing opinions.

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APPENDIX A

DERİNLEMESİNE GÖRÜŞMELER NO:1

1.DEMOGRAFİ

1.A. Genel olarak kendinizden bahseder misiniz ? Yaşınız kaç öğrenci misiniz ? Öğrenciyseniz nerede okuyorsunuz? Eğitim durumunuz nedir? Çalışıyor musunuz? Çalışıyorsanız nerede çalışıyorsunuz ? Tek başınıza mı yaşıyorsunuz yoksa ailenizle ya da arkadaşlarınızla mı?

2.GÜNLÜK HAYATTAKİ ETKİLEŞİMLER

2.A. Siyasetle ilgili misiniz? Siyaset ve siyasi tartışmalar sizin hayatınızda ne kadar önemli sizin için?

2.B. Kendi siyasal görüşünüz nasıl tanımlarsınız? Örneğin sağcı, solcu, muhafazakar vesaire...

2.C. Pekiyi, sizce bu görüş sizi ne kadar iyi tanımlıyor? Bu siyasal görüşe sahip olan diğer kişilerle ne kadar ortak yanınız var?

2.D. Ailenizin / ailenizdeki bireylerin siyasi görüşü sizinkinden farklı mıdır ? Ailenizle sık sık siyaset konuşur musunuz? (hayırsa neden ?) Bu tartışmalar nasıl sonuçlanır?

2.E. Arkadaşlarınızla, yakın çevrenizle genel olarak benzer siyasi düşüncelere mi sahiptirizdir? Yoksa sizin görüşünüzden çok farklı düşünen arkadaşlarınız da var mıdır?

2.F. Bu farklı görüşten olan arkadaşlarınızla siyaset konuşur musunuz? En fazla hangi konularda görüş ayrılığına düşersiniz? Onların görüşlerinde eksik veya yanlış bulduğunuz fikirleri düzeltmeye çalışır mısınız?

2.G. Farklı görüşe sahip arkadaşlarınıza karşı ne hissediyorsunuz ? onlarla siyaset konuşurken ne hissediyorsunuz?

2.H. Sizden farklı düşünen insanların sizi anlayabileceğine inanıyor musunuz ? Bunun için çaba gösteriyor musunuz ?

3.AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION

3.A. Sizin siyasi görüşünüzden farklı görüşe sahip olan, kendinize uzak hissettiğiniz bir siyasi görüş grubu var mı?

(Yoksa) Şöyle düşünün, ülkede sevmediğiniz / asla güvenmediğiniz / beraber yaşamak istemediğiniz her hangi bir siyasi görüş sahibi grup var mı?

HERKESE:

3.B. Neden ? Onlara karşı ne hissediyorsunuz ? Size böyle hissettiren ne biraz açıklar mısınız?

3.C. Sizin görüşünüzden çok farklı olan, sizin asla kabul etmeyeceğiniz görüşlerle karşılaştığınızda ne tepki veriyorsunuz / nasıl karşı çıkıyorsunuz ?

3.D. Sizden daha farklı siyasi görüşe sahip insanları anlamaya çalışıyor musunuz? Anlamak için ne yapıyorsunuz ? Kendinizi onların yerine koyuyor musunuz ? Mesela bana onların haklı olduğu bir konu örneği verebilir misiniz?

4.SİYASAL KATILIM

4.A. Kendinizi herhangi bir siyasi partiye ait, bu partiye bağlı hissediyor musunuz ? Bu bağın sebebi nedir ?

4.B. Geçtiğimiz seçimlerde oy kullandınız mı ? Önümüzdeki Mart yerel seçimlerinde oy kullanacak mısınız? Daha önce oy kullanmadığınız bir seçim oldu mu ? neden kullanmadınız?

4.C. Her hangi bir partinin siyasi faaliyetine katılımda buldunuz mu? Propaganda çalışmalarına katılmak, ev ev dolaşıp oy istemek gibi?

4.D. Her hangi bir yürüyüşe / gösteriye / protestoya veya greve katıldınız mı? Bunlara katılmaktaki amacınız neydi? Sizce bu tür eylemler işe yarıyor mu?

5.MEDYA KULLANIMI

5.A. Siyasi konularda en çok hangi iletişim kanallarını kullanıyorsunuz? Bunların arasında en fazla güvendiğiniz kanal hangisi? Neden?

5.B. Hangi televiyon kanalları / gazeteleri / internet sitelerini tercih ediyorsunuz? Neden? Özellikle tercih etmediğiniz haber kanalları/siteleri/ gazeteleri var mıdır? Neden özellikle tercih etmiyorsunuz?

5.C. Sosyal medya platformlarından en çok hangilerini kullanıyorsunuz ? Facebook, Twitter, Instagram gibi... Ne sıklıkta bu iletişim kanallarını kullanıyorsunuz?

5.D. Sosyal medya platformlarını ne amaçla kullanıyorsunuz ? Bilgi almak, bilgi vermek vs...

5.E. Bu platformlarda takip edeceğimiz kişileri nasıl seçiyorsunuz? Genel olarak tanıdığınız , sizin çevrenizden olanları mı takip ediyorsunuz yoksa hiç tanımadığınız insanları da takip ediyor musunuz? Tanımadığınız insanları neye göre takip ediyorsunuz ?

5.F. Peki, sosyal medya hesaplarınızda takipleştığınız, arkadaş olduğunuz kişilerin siyasi görüşleri nasıl, sizin siyasi görüşünüze benzer mi?

5.G. Siyasal görüşleri size benzemeyen insanlarla takipleştığınız, arkadaş olduğunuz oldu mu?

5.H. Bu platformlarda her hangi bir tartışmaya katılıyor musunuz ? Mesela en son hangi konuda böyle bir tartışmaya girdiniz? Ne oldu, anlatır mısınız?

6. SELECTIVE EXPOSURE

6.A. Sizinle aynı siyasi görüşü paylaşan insanlardan aldığınız haberi araştırmaya gerek duyuyor musunuz ?

6.B. Sosyal medyada bir haber gördüğünüzde doğruluğunu kontrol ediyor musunuz ?

6.C. İnternetteki bilgi bolluğuyla baş edebilmeyi kolaylaştırmak için algoritmalar sizin daha önceki seçimlerinizi izleyerek sizin karşınıza daha çok ilgilenebileceğiniz kişileri, haberleri çıkarıyor yani sizin ilgi alanlarınıza göre filtreleme yapıyor. Bu konu hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz ? internet kullanımınızın sizin ilgi alanlarınıza göre kişiselleştirilmesi avantajlı bir durum mu sizce ?

7.YEREL SEÇİMLER

Önümüzdeki 31 Mart'ta yerel seçimler var, onunla ilgili bazı sorular sormak istiyorum.

7.A. Büyükşehir belediye başkanlığı seçiminde oy kullanacak mısınız? Oy kullanacaksanız kime oy vereceksiniz? Neden bu adaya oy vereceksiniz?

7.B. Adaylar arasında asla oy vermeyeceğiniz adaylar var mı? Neden bu adaya asla oy vermeyeceğinizi düşünüyorsunuz?

7.C. Yerel seçimleri nasıl takip ediyorsunuz? Hangi bilgi kaynaklarından adaylar hakkında bilgi alıyorsunuz? Hangi kaynağa daha fazla güveniyorsunuz?

7.D. Adaylar hakkında [SÖZCÜ/SABAH] gazetesinde yazanlara baktınız mı? Orada neler yazıyor? Ne düşünüyorsunuz? Haklı oldukları yerler var mı?

7.E. Yerel seçimlerle ilgili yakın arkadaşlarınızla tartışıyor musunuz? Aynı adaya mı oy vereceksiniz? Karşı çıkan arkadaşınız var mı? Neden?

7.F. Peki, sosyal medyada yerel seçimlerle ilgili ne yapıyorsunuz? Bilgi paylaştığınız, tartışmalara girdiğiniz, adayları ya da partileri desteklediğiniz oldu mu? Neler yapıyorsunuz?

APPENDIX B

DERİNLEMESİNE GÖRÜŞMELER NO:2

1- Yerel seçim sürecini geride bıraktık. Seçim öncesi süreci nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz? Sonuçlardan memnun musunuz?

a. Sonuçlarla ilgili olumlu gördüğünüz noktalar neler? b. Sonuçlarla ilgili olumsuz gördüğünüz noktalar neler?

2- Peki , nasıl bir süreç yaşadınız ? Seçim sürecine nasıl dahil oldunuz, neler yaptınız ? Seçim öncesi atmosfer nasıl değerlendirdiniz ?

3- Seçim sürecinde ne tür etkinlikler yaptınız?

1. Offline: Sahada çalıştınız mı? Kampanyalarda aktif çalıştınız mı ?Her hangi bir mitinge veya parti organizasyonlarına katıldınız mı?

2. Online: Sosyal medya hesaplarınızı seçim sürecinde aktif olarak kullandınız mı ? Hesaplarınızda adaylara destek verdiniz mi ? Bu platformlarda insanları ikna etmeye çalıştınız mı ?

4- Seçimlerden önce, ailenizle, yakın çevrenizle ve arkadaşlarınızla siyaset konuştunuz mu, neler konuştunuz ? Onları ikna etmeye çalıştınız mı ?

5- Seçim öncesi süreçle ilgili haberleri hangi kaynaktan aldınız? Hangi kaynağı en çok kullandınız?

a. Sosyal medyayı kullandınız mı? Sosyal medyada hangi platformları haber almak için kullandınız ?

6- Peki online platformda her hangi bir tartışmaya girdiğiniz veya tartışmaya yorum yaptığınız oldu mu ? Olduysa, anlatır mısınız ?

a. Bu tartışmalarda hangi paylaşımlar sizi sevindirdi, umutlandırdı veya hangileri sizi öfkelenirdi ya da rahatsız etti?

Eğer herhangi bir tartışmaya dahil olmadıysanız, sosyal medya hesaplarınızda sizi sevindiren ya da öfkeliendiren paylaşımlarla karşılaştınız mı? Bu paylaşımlar nelerdi, anlatır mısınız ?

b. Seçim sürecinde sosyal medyada da gündem olan olaylar yaşandı; 8 Mart yürüyüşü ile ilgili tartışma yaşandı, Yeni Zelanda saldırısı ile ilgili bir çok paylaşım yapıldı. Siz bu olaylarla ilgili sosyal medyada her hangi bir tartışmaya girdiniz mi veya herhangi bir paylaşımında bulundunuz mu ?

c. Seçim sürecinde, sosyal medyada girdiğiniz tartışmalarla görüşlerinizde bir değişiklik oldu mu ? Yoksa hala aynı düşüncelere mi sahipsiniz ?

7- Girdiğiniz tartışmalarla, yaptığınız paylaşımlarla kimseyi ikna ettiğiniz oldu mu?

8- Yerel seçim sonuçlarını nereden takip ettiniz? Hangi kanalları kullandınız? Hangi kanallar güvenilirli? Sosyal medya, televizyon vs.

9- Seçim günü bilgi veren haber kaynaklarından memnun kaldınız mı ? Yoksa eleştirdiğiniz, kızdığınız haber kanalları oldu mu ?

10- Peki, Sizce sosyal medya seçim sonuçları açıklanırken doğru bir işlev gördü mü? Sosyal medya araçlarının bu konuda faydalı olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz ?

11- Seçim sonuçları açıklanırken herhangi bir tartışmaya girdiniz mi? Dahil olduğunuz tartışmaları anlatır mısınız?

12- Tartışmaya dahil olmadıysanız da, seçim sonuçları açıklanırken, sosyal medya platformlarında sizi öfkeliendiren veya rahatsız eden bir tartışmaya rastladınız mı? Veya yapılan paylaşımlar arasında sizi rahatsız eden veya öfkeliendirenler oldu mu? Hangi tartışmalar veya paylaşımlar sizi rahatsız etti ?

Seçim Sonrası

13- Geçmişe dönük baktığımızda, seçim sürecini nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?

14- Peki, Twitter veya Facebook hesabınıza göz attığımızda, seçim sonrası ile ilgili takip ettiğiniz hesapların değerlendirmeleri nasıl oldu? En çok önünüze gelen paylaşımlarda ne anlatılıyordu ? Neyden şikayet ediliyordu ?

15- Seçim sürecinde kırılma noktaları sizce nelerdi, bu sonuçlara neler yol açtı?

16- Sizce adaylar ya da partiler sosyal medyayı etkin kullandılar mı?

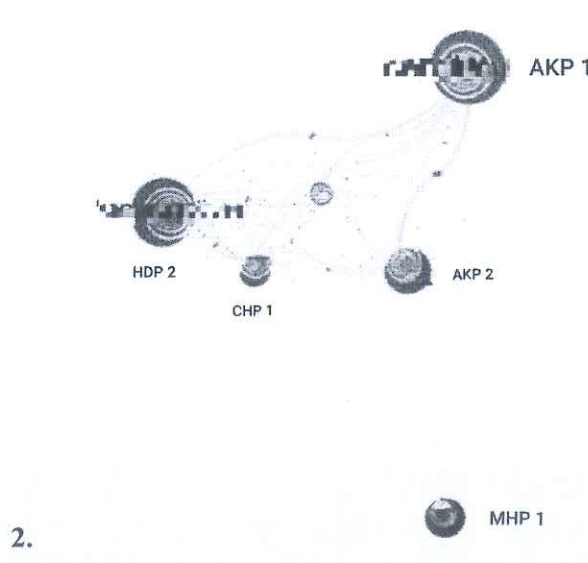
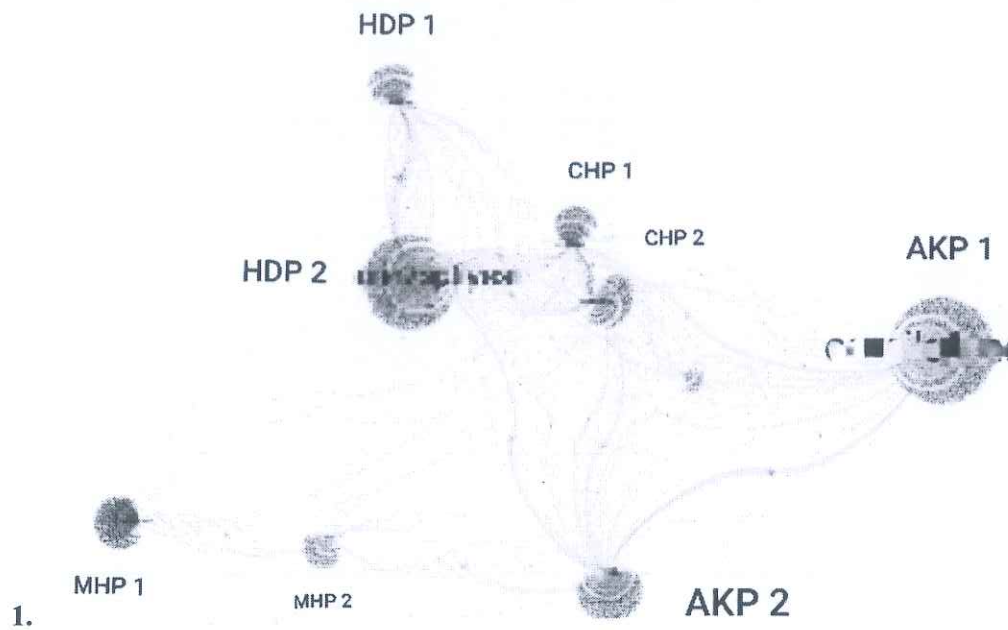
a. Sizce en iyi kullanan kim oldu? b. En kötü kullanan kim oldu?

17- Peki, siz sosyal medyayı etkin kullandığınızı düşünüyor musunuz? Bundan sonra da sosyal medyayı aktif kullanmaya devam edecek misiniz?

18- Sizce geride bıraktığımız yerel seçimlerin sonuçları ülkemizi nasıl etkileyecek ? Normal şartlarda önümüzdeki en yakın seçim 4 yıl sonra. Bir sonraki seçimlere kadar sizin beklentileriniz ve tahminleriniz neler ? Ülkemizin geleceği hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?

APPENDIX C

The Network of Participants on Twitter between 2012-2019



**ETİK KURUL DEĞERLENDİRME SONUCU/RESULT OF EVALUATION BY
THE ETHICS COMMITTEE**

(Bu bölüm İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurul tarafından doldurulacaktır /This section to be completed by the Committee on Ethics in research on Humans)


Başvuru Sahibi / Applicant: Dilale Öz

Proje Başlığı / Project Title: Sosyal Medyanın Türkiye'deki Gençlerin Siyasal Davranışına Etkisi

Proje No. / Project Number: 2019-20013-43

1.	Herhangi bir değişikliğe gerek yoktur / There is no need for revision	XX
2.	Ret/ Application Rejected Reddin gerekçesi / Reason for Rejection	

Değerlendirme Tarihi / Date of Evaluation: 7 Mart 2019


Kurul Başkanı / Committee Chair

Doç. Dr. İtir Erhart

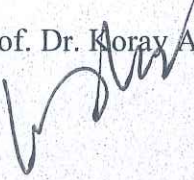


Üye / Committee Member

Prof. Dr. Turgut Tarhanlı

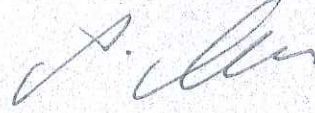
Üye / Committee Member

Prof. Dr. Koray Akay



Üye / Committee Member

Prof. Dr. Aslı Tunç



Üye / Committee Member

Prof. Dr. Hale Bolak Boratav

