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Political Communication Strategies for Young Voters

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Abstract

This article examines political communication strategies for young voters from a sociological perspective, addressing the role of digital media, political consciousness-building programs, social inequalities, and participation in the social context. The article analyzes the impact of digital media on young individuals, the influence of political consciousness-building and education programs on societal dynamics, and the effect of digital media on social inequalities. It highlights the role of young voters in social mobility and explores forms of participation such as volunteerism and active citizenship. The paper discusses the use of sociological language and the role of cultural diversity in addressing young voters in political communication. It proposes effective communication strategies from a sociological perspective. The concluding section summarizes the contributions of the sociological approach to political communication strategies and provides recommendations for future societal participation and political communication.

Keywords: Young voters, political communication, sociology, digital media, political consciousness, social inequality, participation, social media, volunteerism, political communication strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, young people play a key role in shaping society. However, effective communication with young people and their participation in political processes are increasingly important for political actors. The political participation of young people is a cornerstone of democratic processes. Analyzing political communication strategies targeting young voters is crucial for understanding their participation in democratic processes and level of political consciousness.

PURPOSE

This article analyzes political communication strategies targeting young voters. It provides a sociological perspective on the factors affecting young voters, including the role of digital media, social mobility, and participation patterns. The article aims to identify effective communication strategies for young voters and understand how these strategies interact with social dynamics.

METHOD

At the beginning of the study, current literature was reviewed to understand political communication strategies for young voters. Through academic articles, books and reports, existing knowledge on young voter behavior, political communication trends and effective strategies is collected. The next step involved a detailed analysis of recent election campaigns to understand political communication strategies for young voters. During this analysis process, the use of digital media, youth-specific communication strategies and the way politicians address young voters were observed. Based on data from 2023, there are many studies on the number of young voters in Turkey and their political tendencies. In this study, data from various media outlets, survey companies and social media platforms were analyzed.

The data obtained were evaluated using analytical frameworks and theoretical approaches. An analytical framework was developed on how young voters respond to political communication strategies, whether these strategies are effective or not, and what could be more effective strategies.

FINDINGS

In general terms, the reactions of individuals and societies to the social events they encounter and the actions they take regarding such events are called behavior. In this context, people's attitudes towards political society, political institutions and political power processes, and their acts of political participation constitute political behavior (Öztekin, 2003: 217). Politics means the reconciliation of various segments of society and power centers on a common ground. Likewise, we can define communication as the process of creating common symbols and reaching an agreement by discussing these symbols. In other words, while actions are carried out by politics, politics is carried out through communication. Therefore, there is a close relationship between politics and communication processes (Oktay, 2002).

Communication refers to the exchange of information and ideas between people. This process aims to ensure similarity and unity within society. Politics, on the other hand, is the process of reconciling different segments of society, carried out through communication. There is a strong relationship between politics and communication. Mass communication tools have become more important with technological developments. Political parties convey their messages to the masses through communication channels and these tools also contribute to the control of the democratic system. Mass media plays a key role in increasing the level of political information and interest. The process of globalization goes hand in hand with democracy and affects political communication. There is a strong link between these processes. Political communication has played a key role in the establishment of modern democracies (Köker, 1998).

The history of political communication dates back to Ancient Greece and has co-existed with politics. Interaction between people and the exchange of ideas have formed the basis of political communication. Political advertising involves efforts to influence voters' political preferences and was born in the United States, especially in the 1950s, before spreading worldwide. For example, the election campaigns of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1936 and Jean Lecanuet in France in 1965 are recorded as the first successful examples of the effective introduction of the spirit of marketing into political campaigns. Political communication is closely related to the scientificization of politics. In the words of Max Weber, the development of the modern state appropriated political means and seized political power through "professional politicians" from the beginning of the 20th century. Professional politicians resorted to scientific expertise to gain legitimacy and this process laid the foundations of political communication with the scientificization of politics. Political communication has also emerged as an academic field of interest and has assumed important tasks by adopting an understanding that political society can be directed and regulated. Communication and politics have similar characteristics in terms of addressing the masses. Politics makes significant use of the phenomenon of communication in realizing its goals. Today, however, the diversification and differentiation of the electorate has made it more challenging to persuade voters. Multi-party democratic election processes have made political communication more complex by creating an intense competitive environment (McQuail, 1994: DeFleur-Everette, 2001).

Political behavior is a form of behavior that is determined in line with the opportunities the individual has, the environment in which he/she lives, his/her future expectations, and the knowledge and judgments he/she acquires in the process of political socialization (Polat, 2010: 125). As Gülmen (1979) states, although there are different models of political behavior depending on the social and economic order of each country, basic behavior patterns such as working for political organizations, being a member of political organizations, supporting political organizations and having political opinions can be observed in general.

Political culture is the process by which individuals understand the political system and political formations, determine their approaches, and shape their attitudes and behaviors (Çam, 1995:

200-201). Almond and Verba's three types of political culture, namely local culture, nationality culture and participatory culture, exist in harmony with the political system. The closest to the modern society and state model is the participatory political culture type (Durdu, 2013: 20).

Political culture is a complex phenomenon that can be influenced by numerous factors such as the material conditions of a society, other dimensions of social culture, the preferences of those who govern the political system, and social events and experiences (Turan, 1977: 37).

Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba's "The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations" is an important study on political culture. Almond and Verba (1963), inspired by Harold D. Lasswell's description of democratic personality and the sociological concepts of Weber and Talcott Parsons, analyzed political culture in three orientations: cognitive, affective and evaluative.

Cognitive Orientation: It includes the knowledge and beliefs of the individual about the political system in which he/she lives. The roles, duties, inputs and outputs of the political system constitute the basis of this orientation.

Affective Orientation: Focuses on emotional feelings about the political system and its actors. This includes emotional reactions to the roles and performance of political actors.

Evaluational Orientation: Includes opinions and judgments that are a combination of value standards and criteria, emotions and information. It includes evaluations about political objects.

According to Almond and Verba's classification, political culture is defined through three basic types:

-Parochial Culture: A type of culture in which individuals show limited interest in political processes and often focus on local level issues.

-Subject Culture (Subject Culture): A type of culture in which individuals take an interest in political processes but generally adopt a passive attitude.

-Participant Political Culture (Participant Culture): The type of culture in which individuals actively participate in political processes and are actively involved in these processes (Almond and Verba, 1989: 13-14).

Political socialization refers to the process of adopting political values, attitudes and behaviors through interaction with the political system (Alkan, 1979: 1). Political socialization aims for the individual to become an actor who can play a role in the system and to grow up as a 'political person'. Transferring and adopting political culture to new generations and raising individuals who are compatible with the system are important goals of this process (Kalaycıoğlu, 1984: 143-145).

Political participation is a concept that generally emerges in democratic systems in connection with democratic political behavior (Yatkın, 2001: 40). Political participation means that citizens create pressure on the government and political powers through political activities and try to create an impact by directly participating in political processes (Özer & Meder, 2008).

Voting is an important example of active political participation, but political participation can manifest itself in various levels and forms (Kapani, 2004: 131).

In this context, further research is needed to further analyze the relationships between political behavior, political culture, political socialization and political participation. These factors can form the basis for developing effective political communication strategies for young voters.

Visser's (1996) and Jost et al.'s (2009) theories are valuable guides for those developing strategies to understand and influence voters' decision processes.

The political preferences of young voters are influenced by numerous factors such as social dynamics, economic factors and partisan attitudes (Akgün, 2000). These factors reveal the complexity of young voter behavior.

The impact of social media on young voters is of immense importance. As Akıncı and Bat (2009) point out, social media plays an active role in the political preferences of young people and these platforms become one of the main components of political communication strategies.

Surveys are a powerful tool for understanding the preferences of young voters. Based on data from Gezici and ORC research companies (2023), identifying young voters' tendencies towards political parties is an important starting point for strategists.

Understanding the political preferences of Generations Z and Y is critical for the effective design of strategies targeting young voters. As Milan (2005) notes, understanding the differences and similarities between these generations is important for developing more effective communication strategies.

The impact of party performance on young voters is a decisive factor for the success of political strategies. Focusing on recent elections, we assess changes in young voters' party preferences (www.cumhuriyet.com.tr; www.diken.com.tr 2023)."

Undecided young voters are a central focus of electoral strategies. ORC's 2023 study is an important source for understanding and influencing the swing voters.

Assessing the Justice and Development Party's performance among young voters is important for developing the parties' strategies for engaging with young voters. This is a critical step in understanding the sensitivities and expectations of the young electorate (www.cumhuriyet.com.tr; www.diken.com.tr 2023).

Survey results are a fundamental source for determining political communication strategies for young voters. Aydın's (2011) study analyzes in detail the effects of political communication strategies on the preferences of young voters.

Based on 2023 data, the number of voters between the ages of 18-23 who will vote for the first time in Turkey is approximately 6.5 million. There are many studies on young voters in Turkey. In this study, data from various media outlets, survey companies and social media platforms were analyzed. In the preliminary analysis phase, it was observed that young voters show a strong interest in economic issues, environmental policies and education. Social media was found to be a popular source of political information among young people and interactive communication strategies were found to be effective in engaging young voters. It was also found

that language and communication style play a critical role in creating an understandable and sincere impression among young people.

YOUNG VOTER PROFILE

Elections, which shape the dynamics of democratic systems, become more complex and richer with the participation of young voters. This young generation plays a key role in the political arena, offering a unique perspective and form of participation in democratic processes.

Elections are one of the cornerstones of democracy for young voters and this process represents the ability of young people to influence their communities and shape the political future. As Akgün notes, elections are a valuable tool for peaceful power exchange in a democratic society (2007: 15-16).

Through elections, young people have the opportunity to contribute to democracy and make their voices heard. This process encourages young people to become politically aware and take an active role in social change (Uysal, 1984: 174-175).

As individuals living in a democratic society, young voters express their political opinions and preferences through voting. In Say's definition, young voters are individuals who have the authority to determine their rulers in a democratic regime.

This young electorate assumes social responsibilities by exercising their democratic rights. The power to vote gives young voters the responsibility to lead their country and to actively participate in the democratic process (Yavaşgel, 2004: 37).

Based on Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba's classification, the profile of young voters may represent a combination of local culture, nationality culture and participatory political culture. These young people contribute to democratic processes by balancing sensitivity to local issues, awareness of national identity and political participation (Almond and Verba, 1989: 13-14).

This profile emphasizes that young voter's approach democratic processes with the awareness that they have not only rights but also responsibilities. This new generation consciously assumes its role in sustaining and strengthening democratic values. Young voters stand out as an effective force in shaping the future of democracy (Gülmen, 1979: 30-31).

Political Communication Strategies for Young Voters:

The influence of young voters on today's political scene is related to the communication strategies adopted by political actors towards this segment. In this context, when political communication strategies for young voters are analyzed from a universal perspective, it is observed that similar trends are observed across the world and basic principles are common.

The Role of Technology and the Impact of social media

With the rapid evolution of digital technology, today's young voters are characterized by the effective use of social media platforms. Political leaders tend to use platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok effectively to reach and influence young voters. For example, in the US elections, the contestation between candidates was characterized by campaign strategies conducted through social media.

Multiculturalism and Global Diversity

The young electorate is growing in tandem with factors that increase cultural diversity, such as globalization and migration. This requires political leaders to focus on a multicultural perspective in their communication strategies. In Canada, for example, politicians who appeal to diverse ethnic and cultural groups have been successful in influencing young voters.

Social Justice and Environmental Activism

Young voters are sensitive to social justice and environmental issues. The attitudes of political leaders on these issues can influence the political preferences of young voters. For example, the global climate movement led by the young climate activist Greta Thunberg in Sweden has increased youth political participation and environmental awareness.

Party Independence and the Will for Change

Young voters tend to focus on the stances of individual candidates rather than loyalty to traditional political parties. The emphasis on change and innovation in the communication strategies of political leaders is a critical element in attracting the attention of young voters. For example, Emmanuel Macron's campaign targeting young people in France can be considered as a successful example of this strategy.

Level of Education and Access to Information

Young people generally have higher levels of education and therefore the communication strategies of political leaders should focus on providing information to young voters and emphasizing education-related issues. For example, in Germany, higher levels of education and awareness among young people have encouraged more active participation in political processes.

Active Social Participation and Civil Disobedience

Young voters desire to create change, not only at election time, but also by actively participating in their communities. Communication strategies of political leaders should encourage young people not only to vote but also to participate in civil society movements and activism. For example, the anti-corporate protests prevalent among youth in India are a reflection of youth involvement in political processes.

In this context, from a universal perspective, political communication strategies for young voters should include an effort to understand the similar priorities and tendencies of young people in cultural, social, and political contexts. It is critical for political leaders to effectively reach out to young voters in line with these universal principles in order to increase participation in democratic processes and strengthen the political consciousness of young people.

The profile of young voters continues to be shaped by social, cultural and economic dynamics. However, the characteristics mentioned above provide a general framework for understanding the political behavior of young voters around the world.

FROM A POLITICAL COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE: May 14, 2023, Election
Analysis

Today, political campaigns have become more sophisticated and strategic, taking into account the heterogeneous nature of young voters. This has increased the potential to influence the formation of political preferences, especially as young voters are more open to digital channels. A study of the political communication atmosphere in Turkey ahead of the May 14, 2023, elections reveal a process of evolution and change those dates back to the past.

The tradition of political advertising in Turkey emerged in the 1950s with the transition to multiparty democratic life. The Democrat Party's "Enough! The Word is the Nation's!" poster of the Democrat Party demonstrated early on that political advertising could be an effective tool.

However, the evolution of political advertising over time has been shaped by the internal dynamics of parties and the relations between advertising agencies.

In the early days of political advertising, parties ran the campaigns of their leaders themselves, but in later periods they delegated this task to advertising agencies. This contributed to the professionalization of campaigns and the evolution of a strategic approach. However, the

question of whether it is more efficient for agencies to prepare political advertisements or for party insiders to produce their own propaganda remains an important one.

The 1983 general elections mark a period in which political advertising emerged as a field of specialization. Ahead of the May 14, 2023, elections, the experiences gained from previous election periods are of immense importance when determining the campaign strategies of political parties. Especially in a period when the impact of social media is increasing, it has become critical to use digital platforms effectively and to develop strategies specific to young voters.

Young voters constitute an important demographic group with the potential to influence political processes. Therefore, it is important for political leaders to effectively reach and mobilize young voters. Elections are important in terms of young people's perceptions and interest in the governance of their immediate neighborhood. According to the analysis, it is important to identify the political preferences of young voters, increase their level of participation and develop strategies for their effective involvement in political processes. Understanding young voters is the basis for developing effective communication strategies for them. In this context, research on the demographic characteristics, social media usage habits and education levels of young voters can play a key role in shaping the strategies of political campaigns.

Focusing on the May 14, 2023, elections, academic analyses on the profile of young voters show that this segment will play an influential role in the electoral process as they will be voting for the first time. The news consumption habits, social media preferences and political views of the young generation are crucial factors to be taken into account in determining political advertising strategies. The digitalization of political campaigns, especially with the increasing influence of social media, marks an era in which traditional methods are replaced by video and written messages. Political leaders' efforts to reach young voters with sincere and entertaining content on social media can be considered as examples of this strategy. However, the fact that each social media platform requires its own unique approach is a crucial factor in the success of political campaigns. Given that social media plays a decisive role in election campaigns, it is important for politicians to use these platforms effectively and reach out to young voters.

However, the fact that social media strategies are unique to each platform and that young people's interactions on these platforms are constantly changing will be decisive in the future evolution of political campaigns. In this context, the May 14, 2023, elections provide an important opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of young voters' political preferences, digital media usage habits and social media interactions. The analysis can serve as a guide for developing political communication strategies and mobilizing young voters more effectively. (Source: BBC, Hürriyet, FOX TV, CNN, Reuters Institute's 2022 Digital News Report, Turkish Social Economic Political Research Foundation's report, Tuğçe Erçetin's opinions, Önder Abay's evaluations)

May 14, 2023, Election Analysis in the Context of Political Communication Theories

Our analysis of the May 14, 2023, Turkish elections focuses on the behaviors and preferences of young voters, drawing on a range of theoretical perspectives. This comprehensive analysis reveals important findings, with a particular focus on the participation of the younger generation of voters in democratic processes, their communication preferences and their relationship with technology. Below, we provide illustrative explanations of how our analysis aligns with some key theoretical approaches:

Media Interaction Theory: The impact of social media on young voters' preferences emphasized in the analysis is in line with the media interaction theory. This theory emphasizes the effects of media on interpersonal communication. The analysis shows that the majority of young voters prefer social media and political campaigns play a key role on these platforms. This supports the theoretical expectations on how media shapes the interaction between individuals.

Participation Theory: The analysis emphasizing the active participation of young voters in democratic processes offers a parallel perspective to the participation theory. This theory argues that the participation of individuals in political processes strengthens democracy. The voting power of young voters imposes on them the responsibility to be actively involved in democratic

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processes. This is a theoretical expectation that is in line with the potential of young voters to contribute to democracy as outlined in the analysis.

Multiculturalism and Global Perspective Theory: The academic analysis on the profile of young voters supports the multiculturalism and global perspective theory. The analysis emphasizes that young voters are more open-minded and sensitive to cultural diversity due to the effects of globalization and migration. This is in line with the theoretical expectations that young voters' political preferences are not only sensitive to local issues but also to global issues.

Social Justice and Environmental Consciousness Theory: Young voters' sensitivity to social justice and environmental issues supports an expectation based on social justice and environmental consciousness theory. This theory argues that individuals shape their political preferences based on their sensitivity to such issues. The findings in the analysis show that young voters are effective in determining their political preferences on these issues.

These examples show that our analysis is in line with the general theoretical framework. The findings explain the behavior and preferences of young voters in line with the theoretical expectations.

CONCLUSION:

By discussing effective communication strategies for young voters from a sociological perspective, the article highlights the potential contributions of a sociological perspective to political communication strategies. The presented findings should be translated into practical recommendations for the development of more effective and comprehensive communication strategies for young voters. Further research is necessary to explore future civic engagement and political communication, considering factors such as the dynamic profile of young voters and the impact of social media.

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RESTRICTION

The research is limited to scientific research that have been conducted worldwide and have been included in the literature. The field study was conducted on a specific group of partner students. Therefore, there may be limitations in generalizing the results to a general population. Future studies based on larger sample groups including student groups with different demographic characteristics may improve the generalizability of the results.

The nutritional habits and knowledge levels of the students participating in the study were based on self-reports. This may cause participants to provide incomplete or misleading information about their own eating habits. In future studies, comparing self-reports with data obtained using objective measurement tools may provide more reliable results.

The study focused on a group of students in a specific region. Therefore, a more comprehensive study including participants from different geographical regions may be more informative in understanding cross-regional differences in dietary habits.

The study was conducted during a specific period and the effects on students' dietary habits may reflect seasonal or specific periodic changes. This should be addressed in a follow-up study over a longer period of time.

In this study, the general socioeconomic status of the students was determined, but the effects of these factors on dietary habits were not examined in more detail. Future studies focusing on this topic may be recommended to better understand the effects of socioeconomic factors on dietary preferences.

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