

**T.R.
YILDIZ TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES M.A. PROGRAMME**

M.A. THESIS

**DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP AND REDEFINING
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN TURKEY:
THE CASE OF CHANGE.ORG**

**ÖZNUR DEMİRKAYA
13735002**

**THESIS ADVISOR
Assist. Prof. SETENAY NİL DOĞAN**

**ISTANBUL
2018**

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Date of Submission: 18.07.2018
Date of Oral Examination: 09.07.2018
Thesis is approved Unanimously

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İSTANBUL
2018

ÖZ

DİJİTAL VATANDAŞLIK VE TÜRKİYE’DE POLİTİK KATILIMIN YENİDEN TANIMLANMASI: CHANGE.ORG ÖRNEĞİ

Öznur Demirkaya

Haziran, 2018

21. yüzyıl, politika dâhil olmak üzere, hayatın neredeyse her alanında izini bırakmış bilgi ve iletişim teknolojilerinin hızla geliştiği bir yüzyıl olarak nitelendirilmiştir. Çevrim içi ve dijital imkânların hayata dâhil edilmesi, özellikle demokratik ülkeler olmak üzere tüm dünyada, politik katılımın kapsamını ve klasik vatandaş-devlet ilişkisi anlayışını değiştirmiştir. Kitlelerin politikaya yabancılaşmasıyla birlikte geleneksel politik katılımın düşüş gösterdiği iddia edilirken politik katılım repertuarının geleneksel olmayan, hükümet dışı, çevrimiçi ve dijital pratiklerin tanıtılmasıyla genişlediği gözlemlenmiştir. Bununla birlikte vatandaşlık, yeni kuşakların değişen vatandaşlık algıları ve katılım eğilimleri sebebiyle “küresel”, “yeni-cumhuriyetçi”, “gerçekleştirici” ya da “demokratik” vatandaşlık gibi tanımlarla açıklanmıştır. Dahası, vatandaşlık işlemleri ve aktivizm için çevrimiçi imkânların sayısının artması sonucunda, vatandaşların çevrimiçi varlığını açıklamak için dijital vatandaşlık kavramı önerilmiştir. Bu noktada, change.org dijital vatandaşları cezbeden ve çevrimiçi katılım -özellikle toplu imza kampanyası- bakımından bürokratik bir boşluğu dolduran güçlü bir platform olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bundan hareketle Türkiye’de politik katılım ve vatandaşlık uygulamalarında çevrimiçi ve dijital araçların yaygınlaşmasından kaynaklanan bir değişim yaşanıp yaşanmadığını tespit etmek amacıyla bu tez yazılmıştır. Bu sebeple, Şubat 2017 ve Şubat 2018 arasında 20 Türk change.org kampanyacısıyla yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşmelerin analizi politika alanındaki güncel literatüre Türk change.org kampanyacılarının vatandaşlık ve politik katılım durumlarını açıklığa kavuşturmada katkı sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: vatandaşlık, dijital vatandaşlık, politik katılım, change.org, dilekçe, çevrim içi dilekçe kampanyaları

ABSTRACT

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP AND REDEFINING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN TURKEY: THE CASE OF CHANGE.ORG

Öznur Demirkaya

June, 2018

21st century has been characterized by the rapid developments in the information and communication technologies which have left their marks in almost every sphere of life, one of them being politics. The introduction of online and digital facilities has changed the classical understanding of citizen-state relationship as well as the scope of political participation worldwide, especially in the democratic countries. While participation has been claimed to show decline in the traditional sense with the masses being alienated from politics, the repertoire of political participation has been observed to enlarge with the introduction of unconventional, non-governmental, online and digital practices. Besides, citizenship has been redefined with such labels as “global”, “neo-republican”, “actualizing” or “democratic” citizenship due to the changing citizenship perceptions and participation tendencies of the new generations. Moreover, as a result of the increasing number of online facilities for civil procedures and activism, the digital citizenship concept has also been proposed to explain the online presence of citizens. At this point, change.org has arisen as a powerful platform that attracts digital citizens and fill a bureaucratic void for online participation -specifically mass petition campaign-. Therefore, this thesis was written to find out if there has been shift caused by the prevalence of online and digital tools in the practice of political participation and citizenship. Accordingly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 Turkish change.org campaigners between February 2017 and February 2018. The analysis of these interviews contributes to the current literature in the field of politics by shedding light into the current condition of citizenship and political participation of the Turkish change.org campaigners.

Keywords: citizenship, digital citizenship, political participation, change.org, petition, online petition campaigns

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my feeling of gratitude to my advisor, Assist Prof. Dr. Setenay Nil Dođan. Without her inspiring lectures and encouraging attitude, I would not have developed an interest in social and political movements and chosen to work on the topic of my thesis, which I greatly enjoyed working on. I will never forget her friendly support and valuable suggestions. It was always pleasure for me to be her student and prepare my thesis under her supervision.

I also wish to express my thanks to my high school teacher, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mesut Ayar, who never ceased to support me even after many years and provided his insightful comments to shape my thesis.

I would like to thank Aycan and Şükrü for supporting me in this process by helping me contact two of the change.org campaigners in this thesis. I am grateful to Şule, Neslihan, Nurcan and my sister Elif, whose comments on my drafts and our chats eased my hard times when I felt myself lost during the writing process. I also owe special thanks to Tuğçe for showing constant support as a dear friend and a helpful colleague.

My deepest thanks go to the change.org campaigners in this thesis, who were kind enough to spare their time for me and share the details of their campaigning process sincerely. They each patiently answered my additional questions even after the interview was conducted and encouraged me to ask for help anytime I wanted. They even offered me help to reach other campaigners, whom they know in person. Last but not the least, these campaigners all deserve special thanks for striving for the solution of the problems in our society and being brave enough to shoulder this responsibility alone.

İstanbul, June 2018

Öznur Demirkaya

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ABBREVIATIONS

BİMER: Prime Ministry Communication Center
CİMER: Communications Center of the Presidency
DNA: Digitally Networked Activism
E-DEMOCRACY: Electronic Democracy
E-GOVERNMENT: Electronic Government
E-PETITION: Electronic Petition
FtF: Face-to-face
GNAT: Grand National Assembly of Turkey
ICT: Information Communication Systems
ID: Identity Documentation
JDP: Justice and Development Party
NGO: Non-governmental Organization
NMP: Nationalist Movement Party
PDP: People's Democratic Party
RPP: Republican People's Party
SES: Socioeconomic Status
SNS: Social Networking Sites
TUIK: Turkish Statistical Institute

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Men are free – as distinguished from their possessing the gift for freedom – as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to be free and to act are the same.”¹

A few decades after the WWII and the termination of the Cold War era, 21st century started with novel dynamics and challenges to be considered in social and political sphere. There has occurred a boom in the technological innovations, social movements, terrorist attacks as well as ethnic and religious revival, which has affected not only domestic affairs of the states, but also the fate of the international politics. The world has become a digitalized and globalized sphere where the transformation of information, ideologies and conflicts have been observed as fast as the transaction of money and goods, thus bringing about decentralized, leaderless formations within and beyond societies. Hence, it would not be wrong to argue that we have come a long way from the iron cage of the bureaucracy depicted by Weber and are bending the bars of this cage with the help of communication facilitated by the current high-tech revolution and globalization.

Time Magazine’s selections for the person of the year for 2006 and 2011 portray the changing social atmosphere and citizen profile in the globalized and digitalized world. The cover of the magazine in 2006, which hosts the most effective person in the world once a year, had an image of a computer with a word “You” on it.² Under the image, it was added that “Yes, you. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world”. According to Grossman from Time, what left its mark on 2006 was not conflicts or great people, but the story about “community and collaboration on a scale never seen before” in solidarity and for change, as well as the mass use of Wikipedia, YouTube or MySpace.³ The new opportunities provided by the Web 2.0 technology of the new World Wide Web were pointed as the facilitating

¹ Hannah Arendt, “What is Freedom?”, **Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought**, (New York: The Viking Press. 1961), 153.

² “Person of the Year: You”, **TIME**, <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20061225,00.html> [07.02.2016].

³ Lev Grossman, “You — Yes, You — Are TIME's Person of the Year”, **TIME**, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html> [06.01.2016].

factors of this change, for its enabling millions of people to make contributions, by controlling the global media, as well as shaping the new digital democracy.⁴

Time, five years later, preferred to choose an anonymous “protester” as the person who mattered.⁵ The image of the protester was depicted as a person with a cover masking his/her face on the cover of the magazine. The image was named as “the protester from the Arab Spring, to Athens, from Occupy Wall Street to Moscow” and, likewise, it was not possible to exactly distinguish a specific gender, class, age, ethnicity or ideology by looking at the image. It was referring to the participants of the new wave of protests occurring worldwide and idealizing them as the heroes of change in the globalized world. Both posters somehow refer to the increasing power of an individual in voicing his/her sound on the way to their resurgence and emancipation in the modern world.

On the other side of the coin, while the increasing unconventional participation and empowerment of citizens in the political sphere is celebrated, the decreasing trend in conventional and traditional political participation is also on the agenda of the contemporary politics. Political participation in the traditional sense has been found to show decline in Western democracies, including Turkey in the final decades.⁶ Likewise, individuals have been observed to show less interest in politics and public life and have been depoliticized in America and Europe in the last decades.⁷

Secondly, some research has pointed out the low levels of political participation of youth.⁸ This particular group has been found to be unhappy with and

⁴ **ibid.**

⁵ “Person of the Year: The Protester”, **TIME**, <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20111226,00.html> [07.02.2016].

⁶ Artun Ünsal, “Yurttaşlık Anlayışının Gelişimi”, **75 Yılda Tebaa’dan Yurttaş’a Doğru**, Ed. Artun Ünsal (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998), 9; Pippa Norris, “Young People & Political Activism: From the Politics of Loyalties to the Politics of Choice?”, Council of Europe Symposium, 27-28th November 2003, Strasbourg, 1-2; Stephen Coleman, Jay G. Blumler, **The Internet and Democratic Citizenship. Theory, Practice and Policy** (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 157; Özlem C. Ontaş, Sema Buz, Burcu Hatiboğlu, “Youth and Political Participation: Case in Turkey”, **European Journal of Social Work**, vol.16. no.2 (2013): 249; Mitja H. Fink, Tanja O. Črnič, “Digital Citizenship as Multiple Political Participation? Predictors of Digital Political Participation in Slovenia”, **Teorija in Praksa**, vol.51. no.6 (2014): 1284.

⁷ Ünsal, **ibid.**, 9.

⁸ Caner Özdemir, “Youth Political Participation in South-eastern Anatolia Region of Turkey”, Social Policy Association Conference, 5-10 July 2010, Ankara, 22; Giovanna Mascheroni, “The practice of participation: Youth’s vocabularies around on- and offline civic and political engagement”, **MEDIA@LSE Working Paper Series**. (2015): 7, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/mediaWorkingPapers/pdf/WP35-FINAL.pdf> [27.08.2017]; Emre Erdoğan, “The Turkish Youth and Political Participation: 1999-2003”, 2003, 6,

alienated from conventional forms of political engagement as well as government in many Western democracies.⁹ Likewise, the “apathy” and “alienation” of the citizens, specifically the young, from the political participation in the traditional sense in the countries having adopted representative democracy is also reported.¹⁰ The young, who are to shape the future of politics, have become estranged from broad social identities, while favoring to manage their social, political and self-identities.¹¹ They have their own personalized demands from politics and regard current politics and political agents fake, aloof, and irrelevant.¹²

In addition to the changing participation behaviors and citizenship attitudes, the transformation in the relationship between state and citizen have also been observed in the post-Cold War era. To reflect the nature of the era and provide a road map for the issues to be taken into consideration, several political scientists came up with different definitions and explanations. Some of the basic assumptions to explain the acts of the Turkish change.org campaigners for practicing political participation and citizenship as well as their opinions on using digital and online facilities for these aims are discussed in the theoretical framework section that establishes a base for and shows the rationale behind the present thesis. The theoretical framework also gives a brief overview of the evolution of political participation and citizenship in the world. Then, the aims of the present thesis along with the research questions and hypotheses as well as the methodological design are presented within the present chapter.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

One of the factors claimed to change citizen-state relationship and the authority of the nation states on their citizens in the post-modern world is globalization.¹³ Some outstanding instances for the effects of globalization are listed as the weakening of the emotional bonds of citizens with nation-states, the decrease in the states’ political

https://www.academia.edu/346991/Turkish_Youth_and_Political_Participation_1999-2003
[12.02.2016]

⁹ W. Lance Bennett, “Changing Citizenship in the Digital Age”, **Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth**, Ed W. Lance Bennett (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 2008): 1.

¹⁰ Pippa Norris, 2003, 1-2.

¹¹ *ibid*, 13.

¹² *ibid*, 13.

¹³ Bryan S. Turner, “Postmodern Culture / Modern Citizens”, **The Condition of Citizenship**, Ed. Bart van Steenberg (London: Sage Publications. 1994): 156.

sovereignty, cultural domination and authority, as well as the emphasis on human rights and humanity notions against the nation state citizenship.¹⁴ The identity bond between citizens and states is claimed to have been negatively affected by the decline of the state autonomy and the emergence of new domains of power and decision outside state's authority, mostly in the Western societies during the last years.¹⁵ Therefore, nation states are claimed to be losing their function of providing political identity, while other sources of identity based on a variety of religions, ethnicities and civilizations in the globalized era have currently gained strength.¹⁶ So, the "decline of citizenship" thesis was put forward to explain the shifts in the function of states, identity politics, backlash politics, the concept of world order, citizen support for state policy and the international social forces in the second half of the 20th century.¹⁷

The changing citizen and state relationship due to economic globalization¹⁸ paved way for the devaluation of classical understanding of nation state identity and citizenship vis-a-vis ethnic or ethno-religious identities.¹⁹ It is because the presence of liberalism in the absence of social welfare has alienated citizens from the state and led them to form ethnic, religious or other communities.²⁰ As a result, the bonds between state and citizen were claimed to be harmed with the protests of a variety of groups with different ethnic and religious backgrounds asking for their identities and demands to be recognized in the second half of the 20th century.²¹

Mentioning neoliberal practices in addition to the economic globalization, Bennett puts forward the notion of "era of personalized politics" caused by "social fragmentation and the decline of group loyalties" to explain the condition of today's politics.²² In addition to the focus on the group identities; the movements on

¹⁴ Turner, **ibid**, 157.

¹⁵ Richard Falk, "The Decline of Citizenship in an Era of Globalization", **Citizenship Studies**, vol. 4. no. 1 (2000): 5.

¹⁶ **ibid**, 11.

¹⁷ **ibid**, 9.

¹⁸ Richard Falk, "The Decline of Citizenship in an Era of Globalization", **Citizenship Studies**, vol. 4. no. 1 (2000): 6; W. Lance Bennett, "The Personalization of Politics: Political Identity, Social Media, and Changing Patterns of Participation.", **ANNALS, AAPSS**, vol. 644. (2012): 20.

¹⁹ Rasim Ö. Dönmez, "Beyond State-Led Nationalism: Ideal Citizenship for Turkey", **Societal Peace and Ideal Citizenship for Turkey**, Ed. Rasim Özgür Dönmez, Pınar Enneli (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2011), 1.

²⁰ **ibid**, 2.

²¹ **ibid**, 2.

²² W. Lance Bennett, 2012, 20.

environment, human rights, the rights of workers, economic rights have been on the agenda in the last decades.²³ Likewise, Ünsal notes that individuals care more for their own interests than public interests in the contemporary era.²⁴ The states' function for securing public welfare and the material benefits of social organizations has been started to be more stressed with the last decades of 20th century.²⁵ The current practice of neoliberal policies in the world has brought along the "personalization of politics" with such as ideals as "personal freedom and growth through market regulation"²⁶. In parallel with neoliberal policies, people have been observed to be deeply involved in consumer cultures, become selective when it comes to their political and personal choices and estranged more from collective identifications like parties, ideologies or traditional movements.²⁷

In addition to the global economic and political forces, technological developments are considered to be critical for the shifts in the conditions of state-citizen relationship as well as the condition of nation states, political participation and citizenship. With the development of web 2.0 in the digital communication technologies, the interactivity facilitated in the digital sphere has altered the borders between creating and utilizing the content²⁸, and Internet users have gained new roles as content creating, broadcasting, and expressing their ideas in addition to available roles of reader and audience, thus blurring the lines between the givers and receivers of the message²⁹. These developments paved the way for a dialog between the parties and this dialog, as a revolutionary change, in turn, while devaluing physical borders and national identities, has supported globalization and cosmopolitization.³⁰

The communication concept itself has been experiencing a revolutionary and an irreversible change, by signaling the change for everything in the world.³¹ A variety of technical facilities have led to the emergence of new political actors and

²³ **ibid**, 20.

²⁴ Ünsal, **ibid**, 18.

²⁵ **ibid**, 18.

²⁶ W. Lance Bennett, 2012, 26.

²⁷ **ibid**, 26.

²⁸ Coleman, Blumler, **ibid**, 85.

²⁹ Coleman, Blumler, **ibid**, 168; Serdar Paktin, "Change.org: Katılımcı Demokrasi ve Aktivizm", Akademik Bilişim Konferansı, 23 January 2013, Antalya, 2-3.

³⁰ Serdar Paktin, "Change.org: Katılımcı Demokrasi ve Aktivizm", Akademik Bilişim Konferansı, 23 January 2013, Antalya, 4.

³¹ **ibid**, 2.

mobilization of civic society.³² Internet has turned out to be a space, especially for the young, to voice political opinions, to achieve information about politics, as well as to have an effect on some problems concerning public.³³ With the appearance of novel digital forms and more number of opportunities to have access to a wider population, political participation and activism have gained a broadened meaning, too.

The developments aforementioned have paved the way for a change in the domestic as well as international politics by altering the participation and citizenship perspectives and practices of the citizens. Therefore, there is a need to thoroughly examine the specific examples of this shift.

1.1.1. The Evolution of Political Participation and Citizenship

In the last decades, while the traditional ways of participation have been losing their popularity³⁴, “informal”, “non-governmental” or “sporadic” participation has showed an increase³⁵. Now, loosely tied organizations contribute to the formation of the social and occupational bonds in today’s “networked society”³⁶. For instance, non-governmental organizations started to play a more active role in getting the demands of the public to the political system in democracies as both rival and the assisting institution for political parties.³⁷ Moreover, unplanned and creative forms of collective expression online by the young are more favored than the youth engagement sites supported by government.³⁸

Secondly, while the classical participation tools in democracies were polls and political parties, political participation has expanded its boundaries by taking on new contents, forms, methods and tools, thus changing the state-society relationships in contemporary politics.³⁹ The traditional targets of citizen activities such as polls,

³² Fink, Črnič, **ibid**, 1285.

³³ Yunhwan Kim, Silvia Russo, Erik Amnå. “The longitudinal relation between online and offline political participation among youth at two different developmental stages”. **New Media & Society**. vol.19. no.6 (2016): 1-19.

³⁴ Ünsal, **ibid**, 18; Norris, 2003, 1-2; Coleman, Blumler, **ibid**, 157; Fink, Črnič, **ibid**, 1284; Ontaş, Buz, Hatiboğlu, **ibid**, 249.

³⁵ Coleman, Blumler, **ibid**, 157-158.

³⁶ Bennett, 2008, 13.

³⁷ Süheyl Batum, “Devlet Toplum İlişkileri Çerçevesinde Cumhuriyet Dönemi Anayasaları”, **75 Yılda Tebaa’dan Yurttaş’a Doğru**, Ed. Artun Ünsal (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998): 109.

³⁸ Bennett, 2008, 2.

³⁹ Süheyl Batum, **ibid**, 109.

governments or policy making fall short to meet the definition of the new “political”.⁴⁰ In addition to the administration of the representatives, the direct participation of the nation to politics via referendums, bills and vetoes is among the characteristics of modern democracies.⁴¹ Likewise, Bennett claims the emergence of an “era of personalized politics” where “collective action frames” yield to “individual expression” in the contemporary period.⁴²

Another change has occurred in the realm of citizenship. The developments in technological means have complicated the concept of citizenship, since being an active citizen involves active participation in the online sphere as well as traditional participation in the offline one in the 21st century. Likewise, several politicians and political institutions have online presence through such platforms as social media and websites now.⁴³ These developments have added a new dimension to the classical understanding of citizenship, introducing the concepts of digital citizenship and digital citizen.

Digital media has also eased the transformation of the status of “collective political activities” and the development of political practices realized horizontally.⁴⁴ In parallel with the changes in understanding of politics and, therefore, the political acts of individuals to participate, the world has witnessed several grassroots movements supported online in the first decades of the 21st century like Occupy, Arab Spring and Gezi events as well as international campaigns for causes ranging from universal issues to personal demands in the last two decades.

In the last decades, there have also arisen many instances of social enterprise which combine profit making with charity and social solidarity to support local and global causes. Though these companies each have their own special services, they generally function as an online fundraising or campaigning platforms. Some of the globally known platforms include change.org⁴⁵, Kiva.org⁴⁶, Causes⁴⁷ by Facebook,

⁴⁰ Norris, 2003, 5.

⁴¹ Batum, *ibid*, 109.

⁴² Bennett, 2012, 37.

⁴³ Fink, Črnič, *ibid*, 1285.

⁴⁴ *ibid*, 1288.

⁴⁵ Change.org, <https://www.change.org> [03.01.2016].

⁴⁶ Kiva, <https://www.kiva.org/> [03.01.2016].

⁴⁷ Causes, <https://apps.facebook.com/causes/> [03.01.2016].

care2⁴⁸ and Avaaz⁴⁹ . Similarly, MoveOn⁵⁰ and DonorsChoose⁵¹ in the USA, 38 Degrees⁵² in the UK and Get!Up!⁵³ in Australia stand as successful examples of local initiatives for fundraising and campaigning.

The presence and activities of citizens in the online sphere through the campaigning sites aforementioned have the potential to change the balance of powers in societies. Castells reminds the presumption that society is based on power relationships.⁵⁴ Bearing in mind that meaning is created in human mind through the interpretation of the message and affected by the communication environment, any alteration in this environment will influence the creation of meaning, and, consequently, the power relations.⁵⁵ One novelty in communication is what Castells calls is “mass self-communication”, which not only manages from-many-to-many messages by enabling the access of numerous receivers and linking infinite number of networks transferring digital content, but also leaves the creation or consumption of a message to the sender or receiver himself/herself.⁵⁶ Therefore, actors seeking for social change can utilize the means of power-making⁵⁷ and online petitioning platforms as a part of mass media would play an important role in changing the traditional power relations as well as the participation repertoire and the perception of citizenship of the citizens.

1.2. The Present Study

This thesis considers the developments in the information and communication technologies (ICT) as a critical factor that affects the political life of citizens. The boundaries of political activities has been enlarged with the introduction of novel digital facilities, while citizenship has started to be pronounced along with the word “digital” that led way to digital citizenship concept to help explain the current practice

⁴⁸ Care2, <https://www.care2.com/> [03.01.2016].

⁴⁹ Avaaz, <https://secure.avaaz.org/page/tr/> [03.01.2016].

⁵⁰ MoveOn.org, <https://front.moveon.org/> [03.01.2016].

⁵¹ DonorsChoose, <https://www.donorschoose.org/> [03.01.2016].

⁵² 38 Degrees. <https://home.38degrees.org.uk/> [03.01.2016].

⁵³ GetUp! <https://www.getup.org.au/> [03.01.2016].

⁵⁴ Manuel Castells, **Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age**. 2. Ed (Malden: Polity Press, 2015), 4.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, 5.

⁵⁶ *ibid*, 6.

⁵⁷ *ibid*, 9.

of citizenship. Now we live in an era in which the perspective of “good citizen” is evolving to a “good digital citizen”⁵⁸ in parallel with the developments in ICT.

Turkey is among the countries with intense use of digital media, which may indicate the decisive role of ICT on social and political life. According to the data of Information Society Statistics by Turkish Statistical Institute gathered between the years of 2004 and 2016 on the ICT usage by enterprises, households and individuals, the use of Internet and computer have showed a marked increase in thirteen years in Turkey.⁵⁹ Most notably, the households with access to Internet showed a marked increase from 7 percent to 76.3 percent within this period. Secondly, more than half of the participants stated to use computer in 2016, while in 2004 it was below 25 percent. As for the internet usage of the participants, the percentages increased to 61.2 from 18.8, showing that at least 6 out of 10 people in Turkey use Internet at present. Considering that the percentages for each item have shown an increase almost every year, it would be expected that in 2017 and onwards, this increase trend will persist and the influence of online sphere on politics will also increase.

Being intensely subject to digital technologies, Turkish citizens can be expected to have gained new political participation behaviors and preferences as well as citizenship practices and understanding, which would eventually lead to a shift in the conditions of political participation and citizenship. Therefore, it will be useful to study the extents of the shifts -if any has occurred-. Besides, the use of Internet for civic and political participation and the concept of digital citizenship have been gaining more importance and, therefore, emerge as topics that require detailed analysis. In the literature in social sciences and educational sciences in Turkey, the studies⁶⁰ are

⁵⁸ Ahmet Çubukçu, Şahin Bayzan, “Türkiye’de Dijital Vatandaşlık Algısı ve Bu Algıyı İnternetin Bilinçli, Güvenli ve Etkin Kullanımı ile Artırma Yöntemleri”, **Middle Eastern & African Journal of Educational Research**, No. 5 (2013): 148.

⁵⁹ “Bilgi Toplumu İstatistikleri 2004-2016”, Turkish Statistical Institute, 2016, <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/UstMenu.do?metod=temelist> [03.12.2016].

⁶⁰ Çubukçu, Bayzan, **ibid**, 148-174; Aytaç Kaya, Berna Kaya, “Öğretmen Adaylarının Dijital Vatandaşlık Algısı”, **International Journal of Human Sciences**, vol. 11. no.2 (2014): 346-361; Süleyman Aslan, “İlköğretim Sosyal Bilgiler Öğretmen Adaylarının Dijital Vatandaşlık Davranışlarının Bazı Değişkenler Açısından İncelenmesi (Fırat, Dicle, Siirt, Adıyaman Üniversiteleri Örneği)”, (Master Thesis, Fırat Üniversitesi Institute of Educational Sciences, 2016); Eda Bakır, “Sınıf Öğretmeni Adaylarının Dijital Vatandaşlık Seviyelerinin Dijital Vatandaşlık Alt Boyutlarına Göre İncelenmesi”, (Master Thesis, KTU Institute of Educational Sciences, 2016); Erhan Görmez, “Öğretmen Adaylarının Dijital Vatandaşlık ve Alt Boyutları Hakkındaki Görüşleri”, **Turkish Studies**, vol.11. no.21 (2016): 125-144; S. Seçil Vural, Adile A. Kurt, “Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Bakış Açısıyla Dijital Vatandaşlık Göstergelerinin İncelenmesi”, **Eğitim Teknolojisi Kuram ve Uygulama**, vol. 8. no. 1 (2018): 60-80.

generally based on the definition of digital citizenship as “as the norms of appropriate, responsible behavior with regard to technology use” and the pedagogical aspect of this concept defined by Ribble and Bailey⁶¹. However, there is a need in terms of examining the concept from a political point of view, namely, political participation and citizenship perspectives. Therefore, this study is based on the digital citizenship definition by Mossberger and colleagues, who take digital citizenship as “representing capacity, belonging, and the potential for political and economic engagement in society in the information age” and digital citizens as “those who use technology frequently, who use technology for political information to fulfill their civic duty, and who use technology at work for economic gain”.⁶²

The present thesis tries to find out if there have occurred any shifts in political participation and citizenship in Turkey with the development and mass use of digital and online facilities in the last decades. They are examined with specific to an online petitioning and campaigning platform, change.org.

The thesis specifically aims to reveal the attitudes of the change.org campaigners in Turkey toward the Internet as a medium for political participation and exercising citizenship; the influence of Internet on political participation and citizenship attitudes and behaviors of the participants; whether there is apathy towards political participation among participants or not; the effects of socioeconomic factors (SES) on the participation and citizenship attitudes and practices of the participants; and the opinions of the participants regarding online petition campaigns and change.org.

The current thesis specifically addresses the questions below:

1. What are the attitudes of the change.org campaigners toward the Internet as a medium for showing political participation and exercising citizenship?
2. How does the Internet affect political participation and citizenship attitudes and practices of the change.org campaigners?
3. Do the change.org campaigners show apathy towards political participation?

⁶¹ Mike Ribble, Gerald Bailey, **Digital Citizenship in Schools**, (Washington, DC: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007), 10.

⁶² Karen Mossberger, Caroline J. Tolbert, Ramona S. McNeal, **Digital Citizenship: The Internet, Society, and Participation**, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008).

4. What are the opinions of the change.org campaigners regarding online petition campaigns and Change.org?
5. Do the change.org campaigners who show high levels of participation already have high levels of SES (income, education level, occupation and place of residence)?”

Therefore, following hypotheses are tested:

1. The change.org campaigners have a positive attitude towards the Internet as a medium for showing political participation and exercising citizenship.
2. The Internet use has broadened the scope of political participation and citizenship practices of the change.org campaigners.
3. The change.org campaigners have not become apathetic to political participation but prefer unconventional ways of political participation in addition to conventional ones.
4. The change.org campaigners have positive attitudes toward online petition campaigns and change.org.
5. The change.org campaigners do not necessarily have high levels of socioeconomic status.

1.2.1. Methodological Framework

The present thesis has aimed to conduct a comprehensive study to understand the experiences and views of the change.org campaigners in Turkey regarding citizenship and participation acts. Therefore, a quantitative method would fall short of providing a satisfactory data to provide a clear picture. Since it is relatively easier to express oneself verbally without limited time or space given for writing or having to choose among readily-prepared options, a qualitative method and semi-structured interview technique was chosen. The Turkish campaigners on change.org represent the population and 12 male and 8 female, 20 people in total constitute the sample of the present thesis. 10 face-to-face (FtF) and 10 online interviews carried out with them produced the data of this research.

I contacted the participants of this study based on the personal details they shared on change.org, and basically utilized social media and my personal contacts to reach them. All the interviewees study or have an active working life, except one retired participant, the interview dates and venues were determined paying attention to

their schedules and where they reside. The interviewees with the participants who reside in İstanbul and Ankara were conducted face to face. When it was possible to conduct interviews face to face, the participants chose their offices or cafes nearby to meet. Since access to Internet service is ubiquitous nowadays, restrictions to due space were overcome through virtual interview. Virtual interview was preferred when it was difficult to meet with the campaigners in person. Therefore, the interviews were realized through 10 FtF and 10 virtual meetings on Skype and Facebook Messenger. They roughly took between 30 minutes to two hours, their durations mainly changing according to the number of petition campaigns the participants have initiated and the campaign process they experienced. The interviews were carried out between February 2017 and February 2018 with 12 male and 8 female campaign starters, all being the citizens of the Turkish Republic.

Before the interviews were conducted, permission was asked for recording the conversation via digital audio recorders and the interviewees were assured about the confidentiality of the interview. Considering the sensitiveness of the issues to be discussed, they were informed that their real names would not be revealed and asked if they had a preference for a pseudonym for themselves. The pseudonyms they offered were directly used in the present thesis, but I also chose some of the pseudonyms for the participants who did not provide one for themselves. After interviews, data was transcribed on computer and translated into English because all the interviews were conducted in Turkish, the mother tongue of the interviewees, in which they could express themselves best. Data analysis and decoding was made using MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software. Considering the purposes and questions of the present study, the statements by participants were coded and categorized into themes to better summarize and interpret the data. This helped mull over the primary findings to discuss results of the present thesis and make suggestions for further research that will be provided in the discussion and conclusion chapters.

1.2.2. The Significance of the Thesis

This thesis will contribute to the political science literature first by examining the online presence of Turkish citizens and how they exercise political participation and citizenship in the online environment as opposed to the offline, traditional practices.

Change.org has been chosen among numerous other local or international ones due to its reputation for being a platform that has millions of active users in 196 countries, bears its signature in thousands of victories and stands as the most popular petitioning site in Turkey at the time of the research. As an online platform enabling its users to exercise their petitioning right and, therefore, practice political participation as a citizen, change.org has proved to be a fruitful source for observing the effects of online opportunities on the related political participation. It has been active in almost all the countries worldwide, however, the changes it facilitates and its scope of effect show geographical varieties. Though there is a need for comprehensive studies on the influences of the platform on politics to see its scope of effect, there are few related studies in literature on Turkey and they examine change.org from activism perspective.⁶³ Hence, studying change.org as a platform with respect to what it offers for and how much it has contributed to political life with specific to political participation and citizenship within Turkey will be useful. In this regard, this thesis can also contribute to the existing data by focusing on the political acts of the Turkish petition campaign starters on change.org and their opinions about it.

Another contribution of the study is to reveal the profile of the Turkish campaigners on a digital petitioning platform change.org, which will help political scientists gain more insight into the new group of citizens who appeal to digital facilities to exercise participation or show opposition. This is rather valuable considering that while earlier generations of Boomers, X and Y are getting used to digital applications more and more; and generations of Z and Alpha, as the potential voters in the society and adults to be in the near future, have already been born into a digitalized world and are adept in using technological applications for all aspects of daily life. Therefore, examining the political behaviors and opinions of online petitioning campaigners can help us understand the profile of the digital citizens in the society as well as the new oppositional groups.

⁶³ Ceren Yeğen, “Bir Dijital Aktivizm Biçimi Olarak Slaktivizm: Change.org Örneği”, **Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi İletişim Araştırmaları Dergisi**, vol.5. no.8 (2015): 84-108; Berkant Yılmaz, Güher Dünder, Taala Oskay, “Dijital Ortamda Aktivizm: Online İmza Kampanyalarına Katılım Davranışlarının İncelenmesi (Kocaeli Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Öğrencileri Üzerine Bir Araştırma)”, **E-Journal of Intermedia**, vol.2. no.2 (2015): 481 – 504.

1.3. Organization of the Thesis

This dissertation aims to find out whether there is a shift in the political participation and citizenship attitudes and practices of Turkish citizens. The chapters that will provide the theoretical background of the study are given as follows:

Chapter 2 basically deals with two issues, namely political participation and citizenship. It starts with introducing citizenship perspectives in the political literature with specific to different citizenship dimensions and modes. The changing interpretation of such concepts as citizen and citizenship will be discussed with respect to their boundaries and effects within the scope of historical and political developments. It mentions the new concept digital citizenship in connection with the issues arising in the digital era. Secondly, this chapter elaborates on political participation from past to present. It provides different types and dimensions of participation acts as well as the taxonomy of participants in the related literature. Moreover, the process before participation is examined taking into account the dynamics behind political participation and the reasons for participation

Chapter 3, examines the condition of political participation and citizenship in Turkey including the progress made since the foundation of the republic, the state initiatives to increase the rate of participation and the problems waiting to be solved. Besides, it provides details about the progress of the right of petitioning in Turkey and the international online petitioning platform change.org.

Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the interviews and interprets them with regard to the research questions, hypotheses and earlier studies.

Chapter 5, building on the earlier chapters, provides a short summary of the thesis and presents the overview of the findings with their evaluation with respect to political and technological developments in both national and international context. It also offers suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2: CITIZENSHIP AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL POLITICS

The present thesis tries to find out if political participation and citizenship in Turkey have undergone a change in parallel with the digital and online facilities developed in the recent years. Therefore, this chapter starts with the brief outline of some well-known theses proposed to explain the developments in international and Turkish politics following the post-Cold War era in order to present a general framework. Secondly, citizen and citizenship concepts are examined by providing a short summary of their historical development. Thirdly, the condition of political participation is analyzed with respect to the process before and dynamics behind political participation. In addition, traditional and novel approaches presented for the classification of participation and individuals practicing participation are provided within the scope of the global political, social, economic and technological developments experienced. Finally, the roles of digital and online facilities in the participation and engagement of citizens as well as the collective political activities are discussed in this chapter to provide a better roadmap for this thesis.

2.1. The Views regarding the Future of Domestic and International Politics in the Modern Era

When Fukuyama⁶⁴ published his famous work “The End of the History?” in the post-WWI era, it created a tremendous impression all over the world. The article written just before the beginning of the 21st century questioned the social, economic and political condition of the nation states in the view of the global political developments of that period. Based on Hegel’s historicism, approaching historical development of mankind as a culmination of a progress towards an “absolute moment, a moment in which a natural form of society and state become victorious”⁶⁵, Fukuyama came up with his own end of the history thesis which suggested liberalism as the final phase to

⁶⁴ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?”, **The National Interest**, vol. 16 (1989): 1-18.

⁶⁵ **ibid**, 2.

be reached in the history of economic and political sphere, after examining prevalent forms of ideologies and governments. According to him, the liberal democracy as practiced in the Western world stands as the final form of the government that will be adopted by other regions since the other forms of governments or ideologies somehow fall short in meeting the requirements of democracy, freedom as basic human rights or economic life.⁶⁶

Not long after, Huntington⁶⁷ wrote his well-known essay “The Clash of Civilizations?” in 1993 as a response to Fukuyama’s end of world thesis. Instead of the ideologies as source of conflict between nations, Huntington pointed the cultural differences between civilizations. For him, the world would witness a shift from the Western-centered international politics towards the interplay between various civilizations since civilization identity would be recognized and gain more popularity with the increase in the communication opportunities between each civilization following the Cold War era.⁶⁸ Therefore, civilizations, which symbolize the the highest cultural classification of individuals and include such important elements as history, language, culture and religion; and the conflicts between the Western and non-Western civilizations are put in the center of politics. The statement “the paramount axis of world politics will be the relations between the West and the rest” by Huntington is worthy of consideration for showing the importance he attaches to this issue.⁶⁹

On the other hand, Arendt, though she criticizes the modern era for being the world of consumers and laborers where every activity has been levelled “to the common denominator of securing the necessities of life and providing for their abundance” in 1958⁷⁰, has a more positive point of view in terms of the possibilities for political life. She stresses the numerous possibilities for the life events on earth and considers human beings as “a beginning and a beginner” with the ability to work “miracles” since they are gifted with “freedom” and “action” to create their own reality.⁷¹ As a Jewish philosopher who experienced the dark side of totalitarianism,

⁶⁶ *ibid*, 1.

⁶⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72. no. 3 (1993): 22-49.

⁶⁸ *ibid*, 23-25.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, 48.

⁷⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd Ed (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1998), 126.

⁷¹ Arendt, 1961, 170-171.

Holocaust and the II. World War, Arendt adopts a view which stresses the capacity of human beings separating them from other beings and supports a more active life for individuals in politics. To do this, she chooses to look back to the teachings of the Western philosophical tradition to base her ideas and to redefine the nature of the political life. Reminding the devaluation of “*vita activa*” (the world of human activities) vis-à-vis “*vita contemplativa*” (the world of contemplation) and losing its political meaning after the disappearance of the ancient Greek city states, she reconsiders the place of the politics as a human activity and underlines the importance of man’s political responsibilities in the modern era. Arendt places a particular importance to action, as an activity transcending necessities and predictability of human life, and letting human beings interact with others in the public realm and disclose themselves since “in acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world”.⁷²

Associating action, as the most important activity of *vita activa*, with plurality and freedom which are the conditions of all political life⁷³, Arendt stresses the relationship between action, freedom and politics and concludes “the *raison d’être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action”⁷⁴. To envisage citizenship in the modern era, she takes her inspiration from the participatory democracy of ancient Greek city states where individuals freely display active participation in the collective, public life. Through contributing to politics with actions and speech as in the Greek society, she thinks human beings enjoy freedom, socialize, learn by sharing and work “miracles”.

A senior campaigner for the Turkish office of change.org, Paktin comments that participatory democracy of the ancient Greek and idealized by Arendt is coming back into our lives in its real sense thousands of years later in the modern era, maintaining that today’s individuals find novel ways to contribute to the change by themselves without NGOs by getting the support of others via a new change mechanism: digital communication technologies.⁷⁵ He comments that while a change in the past happened radically and required an uphill struggle, today an individuals

⁷² Arendt, 1998, 179.

⁷³ Arendt, 1961, 146; Arendt, 1998, 7.

⁷⁴ Arendt, 1961, 146.

⁷⁵ Paktin, *ibid*, 2.

have the power to voice and realize their demands by themselves by utilizing these technologies.⁷⁶

At this point, it would be helpful to examine the historical development of the citizen and citizenship concepts to better understand the progress they have made and analyze their current condition.

2.2. Citizen and Citizenship

Citizen, in modern sense, represents a member of a political society who has specific rights and shares the same responsibilities for each individual.⁷⁷ Referring to a bond to a political system, citizenship involves in the both the psychology and the legal status of the individuals.⁷⁸ It also bears “sociological, religious, political, cultural, economic and social” aspects.⁷⁹

There is a direct relation between citizen and democracy.⁸⁰ One’s possession of fundamental rights and liberties and the level of political participation are indicators of democracy.⁸¹ Although “citizen” was partly present in the city-states of ancient Greek and Rome civilizations, it is, in modern sense, the product of concepts introduced by the first nation state, England, as well as the American and French revolutions, which added “republic” concept to them.⁸² As a community of citizens, Athene is known to have a direct democracy and be ruled in accordance with defined laws, however, it also let “exclusivist inequality” in the society.⁸³ In the following eras, though it is possible to see some privileged groups in other societies, like landed gentry in Western Europe in the Middle Age, or local parliament, clergymen or corps intermediaries under monarchy regimes⁸⁴, none of the regimes can be accepted to provide equality or freedom for its members fairly.

⁷⁶ *ibid*, 2.

⁷⁷ Ünsal, *ibid*, 4.

⁷⁸ Ali Çarkoğlu, , Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, “Türkiye’de ve Dünya’da Vatandaşlık – 2014 ISSP Araştırma Raporu”, *İstanbul Politikalar Merkezi*, (2015): 2.

⁷⁹ Ünsal, *ibid*, 3.

⁸⁰ *ibid*, 4.

⁸¹ *ibid*, 13.

⁸² *ibid*, 4.

⁸³ *ibid*, 4.

⁸⁴ *ibid*, 14.

With the developments in trade and industry, “individual rights” came to the fore with the increasing demands of bourgeoisie in the 17th century.⁸⁵ When it came to the 20th century, “social state” was added on the agenda of United Nations and concrete steps were taken for the social rights related to “education”, “work”, “health”, “social security” and “housing”.⁸⁶

Citizenship is taken “as both the opportunity and the responsibility for political participation in modern democratic societies”, and related to trusting the political representatives and citizens in the same society in addition to feeling the privilege to individually participate.⁸⁷ However, citizenship cannot be restricted to the opportunities and responsibilities gained on being a member of a political community since there has been a shift in the paradigm as a result of the global transformations.

Taking into account citizenship is “dynamic”, “reproducible” and “definable” and have been affected by “historical”, “discursive” and “institutional” factors, the concept has gone through major changes throughout history.⁸⁸ Hence, there are several citizenship models proposed by political scientists and sociologists to offer an insight into the condition of citizenship in the last centuries.

One of the earlier definitions comes from Falk, who came up with global citizenship concept.⁸⁹ Falk states that citizenship has cut across the classical borders of nation and state by reaching a global domain.⁹⁰ He mentions five perceptions for “global citizenship” of modern life, each of which stresses different topics such as political centralization, environmental issues, political economy in the world, regional politics or transnational activism.⁹¹

The global citizenship perception on transnational activism is especially worthy of consideration for this thesis since it points out the presence of the actions taken internationally for environment, human rights, women since 1980s.⁹² According to this perspective, the realm of politics has widened to stimulate political

⁸⁵ *ibid*, 6.

⁸⁶ *ibid*, 17.

⁸⁷ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2015, 2.

⁸⁸ Dönmez, *ibid*, 1.

⁸⁹ Richard Falk, “The Making of Global Citizenship.”, *The Condition of Citizenship*, Ed. Bart van Steenbergen (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 127-140.

⁹⁰ *ibid*, 131.

⁹¹ *ibid*, 131-140.

⁹² *ibid*, 138.

consciousness worldwide beyond just a particular state, region or nation.⁹³ Such organizations as Greenpeace or Amnesty International have realized transnational activities with a sensitivity transcending national or regional boundaries, thus orienting the conventional understandings of political identity and community to “global civil society” and confronting traditional citizenship.⁹⁴

Falk’s definition was followed by Gunsteren⁹⁵ who deals with the citizenship issue from neoliberalism perspective. He mentions three understandings of citizenship, which he deems ineffective to respond to the demands of modern world.⁹⁶ The first conception of citizenship, based on “liberal-individualistic” understanding of citizenship, takes citizen as one who analyses their rights and determines the best action options for his/her own benefits without encroaching others’ rights⁹⁷, while the second one, communitarian conception of citizenship, considers citizen as a part of a community, in which his/her actions are realized upon being approved by that particular community⁹⁸. Finally, in the third one, the republican conception of citizenship, having republican virtues such as “devotion” or “military discipline” and acting for the benefit of the public community are valued.⁹⁹

Gunsteren is of the idea that these perspectives of citizenship have lost their validity in the modern life, arguing that large organizations and capital determine the political affairs in the modern society, while citizens are individuals working within organizations for both their and the organizations’ benefits.¹⁰⁰ According to him, now, society comprises of various communities with unconventional bonds, while government and nation-state have lost their power in the past. These developments paved the way for increased number of identities in a society, thus making it more complex, the dissolution of homogenous middle class and individual profiles that comply with the profiles idealized in the conceptions of citizenship discussed above.¹⁰¹

⁹³ *ibid*, 138.

⁹⁴ *ibid*, 138.

⁹⁵ Herman van Gunsteren, “Four Conceptions of Citizenship”, *The Condition of Citizenship*, Ed. Bart van Steenberg (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 36-48.

⁹⁶ *ibid*, 38-44.

⁹⁷ *ibid*, 38.

⁹⁸ *ibid*, 41.

⁹⁹ *ibid*, 42.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*, 43.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, 43-44.

Due to the inefficiency of earlier citizenship perspectives aforementioned, Gunsteren suggests the “neo-republican citizenship” model.¹⁰² In this type of citizenship, citizen is considered to be “autonomous”, “loyal” and “capable of sound judgment”, and is expected to adopt a critical approach and have the competence to both govern and be governed.¹⁰³ On the other hand, government is expected to secure one’s autonomy, enable pluralism and raise individuals to acquire the citizenship traits idealized.¹⁰⁴ Citizenship is based on political equality, not necessarily social equality. It is taken as an “office” in the republic, which specifies some qualifications and duties for being admitted and practicing citizenship. Though having some common points with republican version of citizenship, neo-republican citizenship emphasizes different kinds of virtues such as “debating, reasonableness, democracy, choice, plurality and carefully limited use of violence”.

A few years later, Coleman and Blumler described current citizenship experience with democratic citizenship model.¹⁰⁵ They argue that citizenship can be conceived from three different perspectives.¹⁰⁶ The first one, “legal-judicial citizenship” represents an official bond in a particular political community, which requires the possession of legal documents for membership as well as residency and brings about some binding sanctions to its members. The second one, named as “political citizenship”, adds on legal-judicial citizenship but also stresses on active participation in politics, which is mainly grouped into three activities as “information gathering” from a variety of resources, “deliberation” with other members of the community on political issues and “active efforts” to somehow affect political policies and decisions. On the other hand, the third type “affective citizenship” is more related to activating such feelings of “belonging, loyalty and solidarity”.¹⁰⁷ Considering the classification they provided, citizens, according to the first type, are viewed as members of a society who are obliged to act upon the requirements of a “state centered community”; according to the second type, they are supported to show participation

¹⁰² *ibid*, 45.

¹⁰³ *ibid*, 47-48.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, 47.

¹⁰⁵ Coleman, Blumler, *ibid*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*, 4-5.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, 5.

within the legal framework; while in the third type they are exposed to some factors to boost their “civic pride” in their community and in its history.

In addition to the three citizenship models described, Coleman and Blumler mention democratic citizenship, which as opposed to state-dominant citizenship types, rejects the traditional compulsory responsibility to the state arguing that the “space of governance” derives from the “demos” instead of creating it.¹⁰⁸ Democratic citizens, on the other hand, are considered to be inclined to question and restructure the legal-judicial, political and affective elements of citizenship. Likewise, in addition to the introduction of “pluralistic” as well as “reflexive” citizenship practices, this century has experienced the confrontation of legal-judicial traditions with “supranational, cosmopolitan and ethnic civic identities”, while political citizenship has been observed to gain modern forms to avoid the official demands made by the state.

Another citizenship model has been put forward by Bennett.¹⁰⁹ The researcher mentions a shift in political behaviors and citizenship preferences with the development of the digital age in the post-industrial democracies.¹¹⁰ The young are observed to show different tendencies in terms of citizenship than their predecessors and to turn to the actualizing citizenship (preferring the loosely networked activism to deal more with issues on personal values) from the dutiful citizenship (sided on more traditional ways of politics).¹¹¹

Bennett et al. claim the young move to actualizing citizenship.¹¹² In spite of the dutiful citizens who were made to know current affairs, participate in social activities, cast vote and so forth; new generations subject to and take an interest in instructions less than the older generations.¹¹³ Bennett and colleagues also mention the civic engagement present in virtual settings created especially for civic engagement such as political campaign and government sites, youth branches of interest, community youth organizations and civic engagement organizations.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Bennett, 2008, 1-24.

¹¹⁰ *ibid*, 14.

¹¹¹ *ibid*, 14.

¹¹² W. Lance Bennett, Chris Wells, Deen Freelon, “Communicating Civic Engagement: Contrasting Models of Citizenship in the Youth Web Sphere”, *Journal of Communication*, Vol.61. (2011): 835.

¹¹³ Bennett, 2012, 30.

¹¹⁴ Bennett, Wells, Freelon, *ibid*, 836.

To be able to understand this “cross-national generational shift” from dutiful citizenship to actualizing citizenship it is necessary to examine the boundaries of both types.¹¹⁵ Within the scope of dutiful citizenship, citizens participate in formal politics, utilize mass media organs, vote, join civil society organizations and contact political parties.¹¹⁶ Bennett and colleagues list the basic principles of dutiful citizenship as participating in society by joining organizations, civic clubs, and political parties as well as following media and acting according with the sense of responsibility.¹¹⁷ Actualizing citizenship, on the other hand, is identified by increased sense of individual resolution rather than government pressure, decreased faith in media and politicians, individual acts like “consumerism, community volunteering, or transnational activism”, as well as preferences for “loose networks of community action” and “thin social ties” via information technologies facilitating dual conversation.¹¹⁸

Bennett and colleagues also examine dutiful and actualizing citizenship types in terms of knowledge and skills expected from a citizen, forms of public address, types of interaction with others via groups or networks, and typical forms of participation.¹¹⁹ This structure is proposed to study the synthesis of a variety of civic skills exchanged in diverse environments as well as these environments themselves with regard to actualizing and dutiful citizenship.¹²⁰

Secondly, a civic learning classification was developed by Bennett et al. by adding on the reports about the civic learning goals and outcomes in the studies by CIRCLE and the Carnegie Corporation in 2003, and the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools (CCMS) in 2008.¹²¹ The four categories (knowledge, expression, join publics, take action) had been created beforehand by considering 40 “civic competencies” of a “good citizen” identified during research in these early studies and were enlarged by Bennett et al. to include dutiful citizenship and actualizing

¹¹⁵ Bennett, 2008, 14.

¹¹⁶ *ibid*, 14.

¹¹⁷ Bennett, Wells, Freelon, *ibid*, 838.

¹¹⁸ Bennett, 2008, 14.

¹¹⁹ Bennett, Wells, Freelon, *ibid*, 839-840.

¹²⁰ For the classification of Dutiful and Actualizing Styles of Civic Action and Communication by Bennett et al., see Appendix A.

¹²¹ *ibid*, 842.

citizenship civic practices exchanged in different settings like school or Internet in order to display a more inclusive list of preferences for civic styles citizens adopt.¹²²

Mascheroni places the interrelation between communication, media and participation to the center of both dutiful and actualizing citizenship.¹²³ In the dutiful citizenship, unidirectional information filtered by media and political authorities and transmitted from top to down is regarded as constituent of being considered a “good citizen”, while citizens assumes the role of receivers of the news and communicate with institutional actors as expected.¹²⁴

According to a research by Mascheroni realized with the citizens of the UK, Germany and Italy, youth participatory habitus exhibit activities and civic modes of both dutiful and actualizing citizenship forms, instead of a smooth shift from one to another.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, referring to the contradicting research results on the interrelation between social media use and political engagement, Mascheroni argues that it would be wrong to assume that the whole young generation exhibit the practices of actualizing model of citizenship.¹²⁶

Though various models of citizenship both in practice and in theory have been observed to operate in the majority of post-industrial democratic societies, Bennett and colleagues claim that they have been neither incorporated in education, organizations or Internet settings, nor properly defined in literature.¹²⁷ Besides, there have been various theories proposed to explain the current condition of citizenship in the last centuries shaped by globalization forces, yet a single definition would fall short in describing such a complex concept and fitting all the societies considering the different levels of technology use and democracy they have reached. Furthermore, it would be too early to mention a fundamental transformation embraced by all the generations and segments within societies, yet.

Another concept proposed to explain the condition of citizenship is digital citizenship which has emerged as a result of the prevalent use of Internet and increasing amount of time spent in this virtual platform. The concept has been

¹²² *ibid*, 840.

¹²³ Mascheroni, *ibid*, 3,

¹²⁴ *ibid*, 3.

¹²⁵ *ibid*, 22.

¹²⁶ *ibid*, 4.

¹²⁷ Bennett, Wells, Freelon, 2011, 838.

considered from different angles in several fields which has added different dimensions to it.

One of the most cited definitions of this concept has been provided by Ribble and Bailey who explain digital citizenship as “the norms of appropriate, responsible behavior with regard to technology use”.¹²⁸ The concept is examined from nine different aspects. The first one, *digital access*¹²⁹ is related to the electronic participation of the individuals in a society and basically deals with the opportunities to participate and the share of these opportunities among different groups in terms of their socioeconomic status, condition of health and location; while *digital commerce*¹³⁰ is about buying and selling online. Third, *digital communication*¹³¹ examines the information sharing online via e-mails, mobile phones, video conferencing, instant messaging, text messaging, blogs and wikis. *Digital literacy*¹³² puts emphasis on the ability to take advantage of the technological facilities best by also being aware of the issues like trustworthiness and security. On the other hand, *digital etiquette*¹³³ is concerned about standard rules of digital behaviors and appropriate use of online tools. Besides, *digital law*¹³⁴ puts emphasis on appropriate and legal behaviors as well as respective legal sanctions when sharing and reaching information. In addition, *digital rights and responsibilities*¹³⁵ consider both the privileges and obligations the members of a digital society have. Moreover, *digital health and wellness*¹³⁶ emphasizes the physical and mental effects of the digital technology on its users and is concerned about how to avoid its negative influences. Finally, *digital security*¹³⁷ is about the measures to be taken by every user on the Internet to protect themselves from all kinds of threat in the virtual environment like identity theft, stalking, hacking, terrorist attacks, viruses etc.

¹²⁸ Mike Ribble, Gerald Bailey, **Digital Citizenship in Schools**, (Washington, DC: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007), 10.

¹²⁹ *ibid*, 14-15.

¹³⁰ *ibid*, 16-17.

¹³¹ *ibid*, 19-20.

¹³² *ibid*, 21-22.

¹³³ *ibid*, 24-25.

¹³⁴ *ibid*, 26-27.

¹³⁵ *ibid*, 29.

¹³⁶ *ibid*, 30-31.

¹³⁷ *ibid*, 33-34.

Considering the nine elements of digital citizenship proposed by Ribble and Bailey, it can be argued that they basically focus on the pedagogical aspect of digital citizenship. They put more emphasis on how to teach citizens the new issues recently having emerged with prevalent use of Internet in daily life, show them appropriate behaviors, and warn against potential problems and threats. Similarly, several researchers consider digital citizen as the one who can utilize technology without harming others and evaluate the information and communication resources as well as using them, and is aware of the ethical results of online actions, use his/her right to communicate online, display proper attitude when sharing and cooperating and encourage others in this direction.¹³⁸ In the same line, digital citizenship is taken as the behavior norms within the rights and responsibilities regarding the use of technology.¹³⁹

Mossberger and colleagues, on the other hand, examine the concept from a broader perspective by defining digital citizenship as “the ability to participate in society online”, “representing capacity, belonging, and the potential for political and economic engagement in society in the information age” and digital citizens as those who use “the Internet regularly and effectively – that is, on a daily basis” and “technology for political information to fulfil their civic duty, and who use technology at work for economic gain”.¹⁴⁰ Their definitions of digital citizen and citizenship include not only the abilities necessary in the online sphere, but also the online facilities’ areas of use. The present study considers the digital citizenship as defined by Mossberger and colleagues because they have improved it to convey a political meaning as well by incorporating political and civic engagement aspects within the concept, which has added another dimension to citizenship concept itself as well as digital citizenship.

Whether proposed by Ribble and Bailey¹⁴¹ or Mossberger and colleagues¹⁴², digital citizenship definitions share an important point that a citizen needs to have the competence to manage online information in addition to having Internet connection

¹³⁸ Çubukçu, Bayzan, *ibid*, 148.

¹³⁹ *ibid*, 148.

¹⁴⁰ Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal, *ibid*, 1-2.

¹⁴¹ Ribble, Bailey, *ibid*.

¹⁴² Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal, *ibid*.

and digital literacy skills are seen critical. For instance, Paktin¹⁴³ explains how critical it is to gain digital literacy with a striking example from Turkey, in which a fake news in a hoax news site was taken seriously by government officials.¹⁴⁴

Second issue to be taken into account is accuracy of information. While being much appreciated for their contribution to public recognition and the organization of the political activities, social media has not managed to elude itself from being criticized for their potential to carry disinformation and lead to undesired results. An interesting example of the success of social media in moving masses from distant lands of the world through an online content would be the fake case of “Kony 2012”.¹⁴⁵ It constitutes one of the best examples of the success and failure of an online campaigning at the same time since it became viral and one of the main topics of conversation throughout the world in weeks, but at the same time lost its popularity and credibility with the refutation of important names such as the president of Uganda, Amama Mbabazi, and journalists.¹⁴⁶

Third point to be paid attention is the need for educating all to use online platforms consciously and according to their intended use. Arguing that “every sphere has its own philosophy and the experience you have there can be meaningful as long as you act in accordance with that philosophy”, Paktin¹⁴⁷ contends that digital activism

¹⁴³ Paktin, *ibid*, 5.

¹⁴⁴ A popular Turkish hoax news site, Zaytung, prepared an article for Seyfullah Çalışkan, a so-called imam (Muslim religious leader in mosque) from a village named Ortaca of Milas, who declared being an atheist but not quitting his job since he does his job professionally. Though it is quite clear that the all the news and articles on Zaytung are for humor and the motto of the site is “Honest, Objective and Immoral News”, diyanethaber.com.tr, an official site of Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs, took the news seriously and made a written statement to refute the news with an explanation of their searching for Çalışkan, contacting with Milas Office of District Mufti and learning that there is no village in Milas called Ortaca or officer named Seyfullah Çalışkan there.

¹⁴⁵ As a video uploaded on YouTube in March 2010, Kony 2012 achieved an extremely difficult mission and reached millions in a rather short time with the hashtag #stopkony. This video was basically about the deeds of a Ugandan warlord, Joseph Kony, who was the leader of the illegal Lords Resistance Army according to Curtis and McCarty from The Guardian. This guerrilla group consisted of kidnapped children, who were then trained to rebel against Uganda and the neighbour countries. Prepared by an USA based charity named “Invisible Children”, the video showed the bad condition the children are in and asked for donation and military intervention. But soon afterwards, media provided some criticisms made against “Kony 2012” with its “Hollywood style campaigning” by some journalists, critics and readers, knowledgeable about the situation in Uganda, most of whom denied such danger in the country assuring that Kony had been neither in the country nor a big concern for the citizens of that country at that time (Curtis and McCarty, 2012).

¹⁴⁶ Mustafa Karakuş, “Petrol Bulununca Menzile Giren Katliamcı”, *NTV*, 20 March 2012. http://www.ntv.com.tr/dunya/petrol-bulununca-menzile-giren-katliamci,1Ld771f2vEqdYyHna5hLAg?_ref=infinite [18.07.2015].

¹⁴⁷ Paktin, *ibid*, 12.

gains meaning when it operates in harmony with the principles, philosophy and dynamics of a particular platform it occurs within. Therefore, it can be inferred that for an action to be meaningful and successful, it should be realized considering these factors aforementioned within the scope and boundaries of that specific sphere.

There is a need to examine the condition of digital citizenship as well as the factors behind technology use and digital citizenship. On the other hand, the studies from Turkey have mostly focused on the digital citizenship levels of individuals or pedagogical aspect of digital citizenship.¹⁴⁸ For instance, Çubukçu and Bayzan¹⁴⁹ studied the perception of digital citizenship in Turkey and the methods of increasing this perception by using the internet in conscious, safe and effective ways. They also focused on the aspects of digital citizenship, the online risks and the education facets of the digital citizenship and suggest to act in a conscious, safe and effective way when utilizing the technological tools in the virtual life.¹⁵⁰

Another research from Turkey by Kaya and Kaya¹⁵¹ was conducted with the aim of revealing the perceptions of teacher candidates' on digital citizenship. The researchers carried out semi-structured interviews¹⁵² and asked participants basically about how they define “digital citizenship”, what they think about adding a course on digital citizenship in curriculum in schools, the reasons they use digital access, and why they prefer online shopping as well as the criteria to choose the site they will do online shopping.¹⁵³ The data gathered was interpreted considering the dimensions of digital citizenship determined by Ribble and Bailey¹⁵⁴. The findings showed that digital citizenship was perceived as digital technology easifying the life¹⁵⁵. The most highlighted dimensions by the teacher candidates were digital access and digital rights and responsibilities. They all were positive about providing digital citizenship

¹⁴⁸ Çubukçu, Bayzan, *ibid*, 148-174; Kaya, Kaya, *ibid*, 346-361; Aslan, *ibid*; Bakır, *ibid*; Görmez, *ibid*; Vural, Kurt, *ibid*, 60-80.

¹⁴⁹ Çubukçu, Bayzan, *ibid*, 148.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*, 148.

¹⁵¹ Kaya, Kaya, *ibid*, 346-361.

¹⁵² *ibid*, 346.

¹⁵³ *ibid*, 351.

¹⁵⁴ Ribble, Bailey, *ibid*.

¹⁵⁵ Kaya, Kaya, *ibid*, 361.

education. Moreover, they were found to use digital technology mostly for social networking, online shopping and searching for assignments.¹⁵⁶

Aslan examined the digital citizenship levels of teacher candidates at some universities in Eastern and South-Eastern regions of Turkey.¹⁵⁷ He utilized the digital citizenship classification by Ribble and Bailey¹⁵⁸ for data gathering and interpreting. The study revealed that digital citizenship concept is perceived together with ‘etiquette, right, law and e-government and e-signature’, while digital citizen is considered as reformist people who can keep up with and use technology adeptly¹⁵⁹. Besides, the ones who belong to the top income group among others were found to have the highest level of digital citizenship behavior.¹⁶⁰ There was also discovered a significant relationship between digital citizenship and having a personal computer, increase in the time spent online, having a social media account.

The findings of the research aforementioned indicate that online and digital activities necessitate gaining new skills regarding the conscious, safe and effective use of Internet as much as they provide conveniences for daily life. Besides, the findings show that the increasing use of Internet as well as the online presence of citizens also call for new arrangements in political and educational sciences. All in all, it would be inferred that digital citizenship has turned out to be an indispensable topic which brings along new issues necessitating extensive work in the field of politics.

2.2.1. Digital Citizenship and Activism in the Online Sphere

When examining digital citizenship, another point worthy of consideration is activism in the online sphere which has taken names such as “*digital activism*”, “*digitally networked activism*”, or sometimes notorious terms like “*clicktivism*” or “*slacktivism*”.

Internet enables individuals to autonomously follow politics by providing a platform for communication and the distribution of information.¹⁶¹ Benefitted as a communication and organization practice for social, reactional and supportive

¹⁵⁶ *ibid*, 361.

¹⁵⁷ Aslan, *ibid*, 46-47.

¹⁵⁸ Ribble, Bailey, *ibid*.

¹⁵⁹ Aslan, *ibid*, 59.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid*, 69.

¹⁶¹ Halupka Max, “Clicktivism: A Systematic Heuristic”, *Policy and Internet*, vol.6. no.2 (2014): 115.

activities, digital activism has a polyphonic nature and is able to reach to masses rapidly and easily without any cost.¹⁶² Digital activism is considered as the use of digital platforms with the aim of realizing people's feelings and opinions regarding a variety of social and political issues through ICTs.¹⁶³ It is regarded to have a broader meaning than "cyber-activism", "online organization" and "online activism", considering that digital activism includes offline tools in addition to online ones.¹⁶⁴ Some popular practices of the digital activism include "crypto-anarchism", "cyberpunk", "hacktivism", "slacktivism" and "clicktivism".¹⁶⁵ Moreover, Yılmaz and colleagues makes a differentiation between direct and indirect digital activism, while the first one comprises websites, hacktivism, chain e-mail, the second one includes social media and signature campaigns; civil disobedience, protests and demonstrations, strikes and boycotts are considered as the tools of traditional activism¹⁶⁶.

Digital activism is considered as a kind of "method to gather people around an idea and a belief, and mobilize them to fight".¹⁶⁷ After this point, every act realized within this, is already a part of the digital activism, from commenting on a page, or communicating with a decision maker to take part in a protest on the street.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, digital activism implies an ongoing process, intention and tendency because when one likes or starts to follow a page on any social issue, it is clear that they will be a part of this communication, be updated, internalize the ideas and messages in the process or become a potential part of the movement in the end.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, digital activism is not a one-time act, but, contrariwise, a beginning of the process.¹⁷⁰ It is not a specific act or a fighting style against something, nor has a specific type, but it is a point of view and an arrangement of digital communication for a particular purpose.¹⁷¹ Therefore, it cannot directly change anything literally, but meets the people to create

¹⁶² Yeğen, *ibid*, 89.

¹⁶³ *ibid*, 89.

¹⁶⁴ Yılmaz, Dündar, Oskay, *ibid*, 488.

¹⁶⁵ Yeğen, *ibid*, 89.

¹⁶⁶ Yılmaz, Dündar, Oskay, *ibid*, 489.

¹⁶⁷ Paktin, *ibid*, 13.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid*, 13.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid*, 14.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid*, 14.

¹⁷¹ *ibid*, 12.

a “collective experience” and leaves this job to “the collective thought” of this particular group.¹⁷²

At this point, it is important to consider some concerns over the upcoming results of digital activism. Although the developments in the ICT have simplified communication and participation, there is also an anxiety that they would change the perception of participation and even decrease its value in the eyes of citizens. Hence, some forms of online political participation have been criticized recently by some scholars who assume a negative attitude toward it and go on to call it with such names as “clicktivism” or “slacktivism” arguing that no real effort is put on for the solution of the cause.

Being the practices of digital activism, clicktivism and slacktivism are differentiated from each other. Clicktivists (the combination of “click” and “activist”) act online in a more methodic fashion by exercising their activities regularly, and repeatedly in a systematic way like contributing to some civic society initiatives, starting campaigns, creating websites/pages for a cause, or organizing people by guiding them.¹⁷³ Coined by Fred Clark during seminars organized together with Dwight Ozard in 1995, slacktivism stands as an acronym for the expression “slacker activism” that is generally used to address grassroots activities of youth aiming to influence society¹⁷⁴, and slacktivists (the combination of “slacker” and “activist”) prefer to support an action on the computer instead of displaying a physical activity¹⁷⁵. Some common slacktivism activities include carrying badges, political messages on body or on a belonging; becoming a part of boycotts or Facebook groups; or using a social media profile.¹⁷⁶

There are various arguments on the scope of clicktivist and slacktivist activities in the literature where their boundaries overlap with one another’s. For instance, while slacktivist activities, as “digital satisfaction practice(s)”, are maintained to include some low risk actions online such as signing an e-petition campaigns online, donating

¹⁷² *ibid*, 13.

¹⁷³ Yeğen, *ibid*, 84.

¹⁷⁴ Henrik S. Christensen, “Political activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or political participation by other means?”, *First Monday*, vol.6. no.2 (2011). <http://firstmonday.org/article/view/3336/2767> [02.10.2016].

¹⁷⁵ Yeğen, *ibid*, 90.

¹⁷⁶ Christensen, *ibid*.

money to some non-profit/non-governmental organizations, liking or sharing announcements of some activities, demonstrations or call to action on social media¹⁷⁷; clicktivism is considered to stand for the simplification of such online actions as online petitions, content sharing, using social buttons, creating memes and changing profile pictures and “as an extension of the minimum skill set required to engage in the digital environment”¹⁷⁸. Between them, slacktivism has attracted less attention in literature and clicktivism has been explained more deeply.

Yeğen states that slacktivists satisfy themselves by assuming that they have done their citizenship task and become a part of activism through such activities as signing some petitions, donating to some organizations.¹⁷⁹ However, this situation may prevent them from giving a “real support” to the society, which lead us to question the boundaries of activism and slacktivism. Nevertheless, the actions of slacktivists can be more effective than the ones of “active” activists considering the power of communication within social media since sharing the link of the campaigns in social media let others know those cases and may turn them into the agenda of the society.¹⁸⁰

Clicktivism is associated with participating, organizing or supporting some social protests by clicking rather than physical involvement.¹⁸¹ It does not indicate a persistent political action or a multi-layered actions, but a “reactive and impromptu form of political participation”.¹⁸² It can constitute “a part of an activist’s larger participatory repertoire” and expose “a general interest or support”, and is spontaneously realized, by not devoting a long period of consideration.¹⁸³

Halupka, on the matter of clicktivism, argues that the recent pejorative consideration of the term underrates the development of technology and new participation styles.¹⁸⁴ According to him, clicktivism is an “ill-defined” notion, since it has not got any attention among online action forms as a specific one, but “rather as

¹⁷⁷ Yeğen, *ibid*, 91.

¹⁷⁸ Halupka, *ibid*, 118.

¹⁷⁹ Yeğen, *ibid*, 104.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid*, 104.

¹⁸¹ Yılmaz, Dündar, Oskay, *ibid*, 490.

¹⁸² Halupka, *ibid*, 119.

¹⁸³ *ibid*, 119.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid*, 116.

a limited and unimportant mode of online engagement”.¹⁸⁵ Therefore, Halupka¹⁸⁶ redefines clicktivism within the scope of online activism, to show it as a “legitimate political act” as well as to utilize a more systematic approach for the identification of the term¹⁸⁷.

Halupka notes that clicktivist acts can be considered as “thin forms”, when compared to more conventional ways of political participation, including “thick forms” such as casting a vote and political party membership.¹⁸⁸ Agreeing that the risks and costs can be handled more easily in the virtual environment, he is displeased with the fact that the political actions considered in the scope of clicktivism are somewhat “marginalized” and their value is ignored. However, Halupka draws attention to the simplification and universalization of many other complex actions just as the clicktivist-like actions thanks to technology and estimates they will gain more popularity and come into prominence in time.¹⁸⁹

As a matter of fact, it is rather difficult to determine the boundaries of what is called political act. According to Halupka, a political act, no matter how limited effort it requires from an individual, bears a significance and have a worth.¹⁹⁰ While the act itself may seem to function as a reaction to a political Object (online content) established online, it is impossible to understand whether the intention of the response is political as well.¹⁹¹ Therefore it is suggested to thoroughly examine the scene, where the act and the Object take place and ignore the original intent when the act itself is political. Though social buttons such as “like”, “share” on Facebook, “Pin It” on Pinterest, “stumble” on StumbleUpons, and positive and negative karma buttons on Reddit do not bear an inherent political function, the way they are interpreted and used by individuals on the Internet can endow them with a political role.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁵ *ibid*, 116.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid*, 124.

¹⁸⁷ For more details of how clicktivism is explained and the features of clicktivism by Halupka see Appendix A.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid*, 117.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid*, 117.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid*, 117.

¹⁹¹ *ibid*, 122.

¹⁹² *ibid*, 126.

Like Halupka, Paktin contends that it can be hard to decide to determine what a political or activist act is or their boundaries from an external perspective.¹⁹³ However, it is essential to evaluate each and every act in the scope of the perspective of the user and conditions it happens in because digital communication is realized in a multilayered and endless space. For instance, liking a page may be underestimated or taken as just “a few clicks”, but can also mean someone’s stand on that particular issue, sharing one’s grief or giving staying power to a person in another country. Moreover, this may go “viral” starting with someone’s sharing and gaining support from the others of the same opinion and with similar feelings by coming together as well as inviting and encouraging others to participate.¹⁹⁴ It also enables people to see that they are not alone and provides them with a feeling of a community.¹⁹⁵

For the reasons stated above, activism in the online sphere deserves comprehensive examination on its scope of practice and effect in the digitalized world. It would show what an ordinary citizen, who is now evolving into a digital citizen, would act and achieve online to political scientists.

2.3. The Condition of Political Participation

Along with the technological developments in the last centuries, recent research as discovered that the political participation perspectives and behaviors of individuals have undergone some changes in addition to the changing understanding of citizenship. Therefore, political participation is another topic that is paid particular interest in this thesis. The following part examines the how the political participation concept has evolved by also providing the definitions proposed for participation, the details about the factors behind participation process and the classifications of participation and participants.

Political participation was traditionally defined as “those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take.”¹⁹⁶ Though Verba and Nie take

¹⁹³ Paktin, *ibid*, 12.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid*, 12.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid*, 12.

¹⁹⁶ Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie, **Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality**, (New York: Harper & Row, 1972): 2; Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie, Jae-on Kim,

participation as an “instrumental act” to have an influence on government, they are also of the opinion that it enables citizen to understand his/her share of responsibility as well as to maintain his/her self-worth as a member in the system and for this reason, it carries more than “instrumental value”.¹⁹⁷ On the other hand, their definition focuses mainly on the actions directly targeting governmental decisions and ignores the psychological orientations regarding participation as well as “ceremonial” or “support” participation which involves showing support for the existing government and the other “spheres” of participation out of government such as family or voluntary associations.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, the activities handled in this definition are the ones regarded as “regular”, “legal” and “legitimate”, which exclude some components of political “protests, extralegal violence or rebellions”.¹⁹⁹

Although the definition of political participation provided by Verba and Nie is one of the highly accepted ones in the related literature, the new developments in the political sphere requires a more comprehensive approach to the concept. Demirhan and Çakır maintain that what democracy and political participation mean for people is beyond mere voting or influencing the discourses of politicians and “all the actions which are related to the life of social actors are seen as political”.²⁰⁰ Likewise, Mascheroni, drawing on the “theory of practice” by Pierre Bourdieu, considers participation as an online or offline action affected by society and the interaction between habitus, capital and fields.²⁰¹ Therefore, political participation can be argued to need a broader definition and boundaries to fully explain the participation condition of citizens of this era. For this reason, it is important to study the process before political participation, factors behind it, the classification of political participation acts and participants and the findings of recent research.

Participation and Political Equality: A Seven-Nation Comparison, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987): 1.

¹⁹⁷ Verba, Nie, 1972, 5.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid*, 2.

¹⁹⁹ Verba, Nie, *ibid*, 2-3; Verba, Nie, Kim, *ibid*, 1.

²⁰⁰ Kamil Demirhan, Derya Çakır. “Adoption of Political Parties in Turkish Parliament to the Use of Information and Communication Technologies in Politics”. Political Studies Association Annual International Conference, 2013, Cardiff, UK, 3.

²⁰¹ Mascheroni, *ibid*, 2.

2.3.1. Before Practicing Political Participation

Verba and Nie²⁰² stress the importance of participation as a process facilitating the formation of “goals” and “means” for political and social matters, thus playing a decisive role in democracy and politics on the whole. However, it is noted that participation is by no means directly associated with a particular “social goal”, but can be considered as a “technique” to establish goals, determine main concerns as well as the sources to be utilized for goals.

For a political participation to occur, three factors are needed namely “political motives”, “political resources”, and the “opportunity structure” of a particular state.²⁰³ Political motives are shaped by feeling of political efficacy, being updated about political issues, and people’s feelings, beliefs, values, attitudes, interest in politics, while political resources are related with one’s physical, mental and financial well-being, education level, family background, familiarity with the legal system and social bonds.²⁰⁴ On the other hand, the opportunity structure increases or decreases the inclination of one to take an action depending on the cultural setting, traditions, authority types and regime.²⁰⁵

When it comes to the reasons for participation, they show variety. For citizens, participation is more related to looking for the “strategies of autonomous empowerment, self-representation and, sometimes, cultural subversion” than approving state authority or yielding government’s plans.²⁰⁶ Coleman and Blumler mention three interrelated motives for participation.²⁰⁷ The first one is “instrumental” to gain a political goal through affecting governments, while the second one is more related to the society and bear the feelings of “duty” or “belonging”. On the other hand, the third one, “expressive or symbolic participation”, is characterized with a motivation to become a part of a “cause” or get satisfaction from such an event.²⁰⁸

²⁰² Verba, Nie, *ibid*, 4.

²⁰³ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, 86.

²⁰⁴ *ibid*, 86-87.

²⁰⁵ *ibid*, 88.

²⁰⁶ Coleman, Blumler, *ibid*, 157.

²⁰⁷ *ibid*, 157.

²⁰⁸ *ibid*, 157.

To explain the process before prior action, Milbrath developed “a model for analysis of individual behavior”.²⁰⁹ Deciding for a political act to be realized is affected by the “stimuli” in the environment and some “predispositions” an individual has.²¹⁰ For Milbrath, predispositions can be grouped into three categories as physiological and psychological needs, beliefs and attitudes. To explain how predispositions function, he mentions threshold and selective perception concepts. The power of a certain predisposition depends on “the needs of the organism and of the amount of the reinforcement that predisposition has received”.²¹¹

Considering that there are a lot of predispositions of an individual competing to perform different acts, Milbrath argues that for one to come front among others is related to the power of the stimulus received.²¹² Some rewarding political participation experiences lead to strengthened predisposition and a lowered stimulus threshold for a similar activity in future.²¹³ Milbrath also stresses “the selective effect of predispositions upon perceptions” since organisms have “a perceptual screen” to let or block a stimulus coming from the environment. When it comes to according to which criteria this selection is realized, there are given some reasons.²¹⁴ The stimuli which are very intense, secondarily reinforced and considered credible, are among the ones to pass the conceptual screen. Besides, a strong predisposition related to a particular stimulus also works for lowering the threshold level.

2.3.2. The Dynamics behind Political Participation Preferences

To better understand the process before participation, examining the factors behind the political participation attitudes and behaviors is also critical for the present thesis. There have been numerous dynamics which complicate the issue by encouraging some groups of citizens for while discouraging the others from participation. These determinants mainly include social, economic, demographic or personality factors among many others.

²⁰⁹ Lester W. Milbrath, **Political Participation: How and Why People Get Involved in Politics?** (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1965), 27.

²¹⁰ *ibid*, 30.

²¹¹ *ibid*, 30.

²¹² *ibid*, 32.

²¹³ *ibid*, 33.

²¹⁴ *ibid*, 34.

The progress in democracy has occurred by both the increase in the number of political rights and the people bestowed with these rights.²¹⁵ Nonetheless, the political rights are yet the “opportunities” given, the lack of enough motivation or resources to utilize them still exists. This leads to either “individual-based inequalities” or “group-based inequalities” in participation.²¹⁶ In this part, the factors affecting political participation of individuals and groups will be examined.

Socio-economic factors are the first ones to be examined in this section. Although political participation is idealized to remove the barriers before participation for all the segments in the society and allow them to have their voice in politics, some studies have revealed that citizens who are in a more advantaged position in terms of income, education and occupation have higher participation rates and, thus, have more impact on politics than the less advantaged ones.²¹⁷

According to Verba and colleagues while the majority of democratic political systems are, in principle, considered to be “equalitarian”, they are in fact not when it comes to socioeconomic issues.²¹⁸ There is undeniably a gap between citizens in terms of financial, educational and employment status, which is an indication that individuals have unequal amount of resources to invest in political participation and therefore have unequal impact on politics.²¹⁹ Verba and colleagues explain the interrelation between participation and SES as follows:²²⁰

“In general, the political and socioeconomic stratification hierarchies are likely to be closely aligned. This is because one’s position on one hierarchy affects positions on other hierarchies. Wealth is not the same as political power, but it can (usually) purchase political power as it can (usually with enough time) purchase social respect. Conversely, political power can be converted into wealth. Where political and nonpolitical stratification hierarchies are closely congruent, they mutually support each other. Those citizens who are wealthier, better educated, or who come from more prestigious ethnic or racial or linguistic groups will hold a disproportionate share of political influence. The political stratification system in turn reinforces the socioeconomic one: The economically and socially better-off dominate politics. Government policy, in turn, maintains and reinforces the position of those who are better off.”

²¹⁵ Verba, Nie, Kim, *ibid*, 5.

²¹⁶ *ibid*, 10.

²¹⁷ Verba, Nie, *ibid*, 5-12; Verba, Nie, Kim, *ibid*, 1.

²¹⁸ Verba, Nie, Kim, *ibid*, 1.

²¹⁹ *ibid*, 1.

²²⁰ *ibid*, 2.

Therefore it can be concluded that high participation level is somewhat connected to higher social and economic status. Verba and Nie explain it by reasoning.²²¹

“There are many explanations for this relationship – the higher status individual has a greater stake in politics, he has greater skills, more resources, greater awareness of political matter, he is exposed to more communications about politics, he interacts with others who participate.”. Besides, the authors report that this relationship is commonly explained by many according to socioeconomic model which holds that participation is facilitated as a result of some civic orientations developed by citizens of high social and economic status including “concern for politics, information and feelings of efficacy”.

Although not rejecting the explanation of the socioeconomic model and accepting it as a “base line” for understanding the process of participation, the authors are of the opinion that there are other factors such as social, psychological and structural characteristics.

Verba and Nie reasons that it may be partly because this group of people already have more facilities, skills, and psychological devotion, and they continue to comment that “... but for whatever reason they participate more, the result is that those who may need governmental assistance the least participate the most – i.e. those already at the top of the stratification hierarchy are likely to be the most effective”.²²²

For the mid-twentieth century, Milbrath reports that SES was considered to have three dimensions as education, income and occupation in the Western society.²²³ However, such factors as place of residence, working status among others have also been taken into account recently.

Studies in the field of politics have found the decisive effect of SES on participation. According to the findings of a research by Erdoğan, education, working status and sex are the factors affecting political participation of Turkish youth.²²⁴ Besides, young women, unemployed with low education, do not exhibit enough participation. In addition, unconventional political participation is favored more by college students and well educated employed males, whereas conventional practices are chosen by the other groups in Turkish youth. In another study, the individuals from

²²¹ Verba, Nie, **ibid**, 126.

²²² Verba, Nie, Kim, **ibid**, 12.

²²³ Milbrath, **ibid**, 115.

²²⁴ Erdoğan, **ibid**, 2.

higher socioeconomic or education levels stated to show more levels of citizen participation.²²⁵

People with higher SES were discovered to be more inclined to exhibit participation both online and offline, thus, indicating the continuation of the education and income gap in online participation whereas, they, after all, were not found to have an effect on the medium of participation preferences of the participants.²²⁶ On the other hand, in a study conducted in Turkey, an increase in the education level, being a student, living in urban areas, having higher economic status were found to have a positive impact on unconventional political participation.²²⁷ As for the conventional participation, having more education, being retired, working full-time as worker or living in rural areas were discovered to yield higher scores.²²⁸

Gender is considered another factor affecting participation. While gender did not come out as a factor to affect the preferences of these participants in terms of online or offline participation in the study by Oser and colleagues²²⁹, in some studies, male participants stated to participate online more than females²³⁰. Males were found to have more tendency to online political engagement²³¹ and to be more sensitive about citizenship values than female participants²³². Another interesting finding is that in both computer and Internet use, higher scores were received from males, thus proving the advantaged position of males over their female counterparts in the field of ICT.²³³

Secondly, there are some studies finding different results in terms of conventional and unconventional political participation between genders. For instance,

²²⁵ “Citizens’ Digital Participation Research Report”, Ofcom, 20 March 2009, 3, https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/19291/main.pdf [13.02.2016]

²²⁶ Jennifer Oser, Marc Hooghe, Sofie Marien, “Is Online Participation Distinct from Offline Participation? A Latent Class Analysis of Participation Types and Their Stratification”, **Political Research Quarterly**, vol. 66, no. 1 (2013): 98.

²²⁷ Emre Erdoğan, Pınar Uyan-Semerçi, “Understanding Young Citizens’ Political Participation in Turkey: Does ‘Being Young’ Matter?”, **Southeast European and Black Sea Studies**, vol.17, no.1 (2017): 61.

²²⁸ **ibid**, 61-62.

²²⁹ Oser, Hooghe, Marien, **ibid**, 98.

²³⁰ Solmaz F. Karabağ, Bezen Balamir Coşkun, “I Click, Therefore I am: The Internet and the Political Participation of Young People in Turkey”, **Turkish Journal of Politics**, vol. 4, no. 1 (2013): 118; Fink, Črnič, **ibid**, 1300.

²³¹ Ellen Quintelier, Yannis Theocharis, “Online Political Engagement, Facebook, and Personality Traits”. **Social Science Computer Review**, vol. 31, no.3 (2012): 286.

²³² Cengiz Özmen, Harun Er. “Sanal Ortamda Vatandaşlık”. **Bartın Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi**, vol. 1, no. 1 (2012): 209.

²³³ **Bilgi Toplumu İstatistikleri**.

while there was not found a significant difference between males and females in terms of unconventional political participation tendencies²³⁴, a difference was found in terms of conventional political participation since males were found to be more likely to exhibit conventional political participation than women²³⁵.

Age is deemed as another factor in participation, since particular age groups are believed to have particular participation preferences. Thus, a lot of research has dealt with the issue focusing on the age factor and the participation preferences among different generations.²³⁶

There are generational factors to be taken into account when understanding the participation preferences. Based on the international political, economic, social and technological developments experienced in the world, researchers came up with several classifications of generations. Among them, the classification by McCrindle²³⁷ who provides a comprehensive insight into the generations considering all these aspects is worthy of consideration to better understand the profile of the citizens especially the young generations. The generations are called Builders (1930-1944), Boomers (1945-1964), Generation X (1965-1979), Generation Y (1980-1994), Generation Z (1995-2010) and, finally, Generation Alpha (2010-2024)²³⁸. Though citizens from each generation, except Generation Alpha, can actively show participation in the society, the young generations of Xers, Yers, Zeds and Alpha are especially important for this study to provide a better view of new participation tendencies.

As opposed to the earlier generations, Gen Yers and Zeds have technology-based, always online network which is much wider in terms of the geographical boundaries it reaches and the number of people to communicate.²³⁹ Especially, Generation Z, also known as Millennials, has been accustomed to using technology for nearly all parts of their daily life from childhood.²⁴⁰ They were born into a world where spheres such as music, cinema, “fashions, foods, online entertainment, social

²³⁴ Erdoğan, Uyan-Semerçi, **ibid**, 61.

²³⁵ Erdoğan, **ibid**, 12; Erdoğan, Uyan-Semerçi, **ibid**, 61.

²³⁶ Norris, 2003; Kim, Russo, Amnå, **ibid**, 1-19.

²³⁷ Mark McCrindle, **Beyond Z: Meet Generation Alpha. The ABC of XYZ**, 3rd Ed (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009).

²³⁸ **ibid**, 6.

²³⁹ **ibid**, 17.

²⁴⁰ **ibid**, 15.

trends, communications and even the ‘must watch YouTube videos and memes’” have been globalized thanks to technology, globalization and culturally diverse time period experienced.²⁴¹ Besides, the life of the youth has been shaped by technology, mass marketing, politics and pop culture.²⁴²

When it comes to the moral concerns citizens have, they are found to show alteration according to the generations. While the Generation X was sensitive about gay rights, cultural diversity, poverty, AIDS, ozone layer and pollution, Generations Y and Z care the issues such as climate change, same-sex marriage, refugees and moral issues related to online/digital technologies.²⁴³

As successors of Generation Z, the individuals who were or will be born between the years 2010 and 2024 are named as Generation Alpha.²⁴⁴ This is the only generation all of whose members are born in the 21st century. This period is predicted to be characterized by “unprecedented ageing, rising costs, emerging global challenges and the biggest intergenerational transfer of wealth and leadership succession ever seen” as well as massive use of technology.²⁴⁵ They are also called as “the largest generation our world has ever seen, the most technologically aware, the most globally connected and the most influential”.²⁴⁶

While the old generations, who met new technological facilities after a certain age, and therefore, do not have full command of the digital language of such tools, are regarded as “digital immigrants”; the young citizens, current school and university-age group, are called “digital natives” as individuals who have been born into the digital world and grow up by using the new technological facilities.²⁴⁷ In this respect, while Generations X, Y or earlier ones can be regarded digital immigrants, Generations of Z and Alpha can be considered digital natives since they grow up surrounded by novel hi-tech devices. Bearing in mind that the members of these generations have already gained or will gain several legal rights and responsibilities for participation in

²⁴¹ *ibid*, 16.

²⁴² *ibid*, 4.

²⁴³ *ibid*, 74.

²⁴⁴ *ibid*, 222.

²⁴⁵ *ibid*, 223.

²⁴⁶ *ibid*, 225-226.

²⁴⁷ Marc Prensky, “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part 1”, *On the Horizon*, Vol. 9. No. 5 (2001): 2.

a few years, it will not be surprising that their expectations will include more number of facilities for digitalized and online participation.

It is considered that there is a correlation between age and feeling civic duty to participate since adults older than 60 feel such a duty and show participation, when compared to citizens younger than 25 year old, who are not expected to have such a motivation.²⁴⁸ In a study conducted in Turkey, middle aged people were discovered to have more tendency to show citizen participation.²⁴⁹ However, upon controlling the demographic and economic variables involved in a research, there was not found a statistical difference between the participation tendencies of different age groups in another study, implying the greater effect of other factors on conventional and unconventional political participation in Turkey.²⁵⁰

Bennett states that there are two differing views about civic engagement and citizenship conditions of young individuals.²⁵¹ The first perspective, “engaged youth” paradigm, explains the different social identity understanding of the young from the generational perspective and stresses their capacity for fairly active engagement and the importance of supporting them to have their own voice.²⁵² On the contrary, the “disengaged youth” paradigm is claims increasing popularization of “autonomous forms of public expression as well as the excessive “personalization” or privatization of the political sphere” and therefore, seeks the ways for the promotion of public actions of this groups of citizens.²⁵³

According to Fink and Črnič, younger people practice online political participation forms more than their older counterparts.²⁵⁴ Similarly, in a study comparing the participation preferences of different age groups (18-35, 36-50), the younger age group was found to be more likely to be online activists, while the older one was discovered to be more likely to be offline activists and contactors.²⁵⁵ Moreover, young citizens from Europe were discovered to take part in cause-oriented activities instead of favoring limited number of citizen-oriented activities or showing

²⁴⁸ Coleman, Blumler, **ibid**, 159.

²⁴⁹ Ofcom, **ibid**.

²⁵⁰ Erdoğan, Uyan-Semerçi, **ibid**, 64.

²⁵¹ Bennett, 2008, 2.

²⁵² **ibid**, 2-3.

²⁵³ **ibid**, 3.

²⁵⁴ Fink, Črnič, **ibid**, 1300.

²⁵⁵ Oser, Hooghe, Marien, **ibid**, 98.

total indifference in politics.²⁵⁶ These findings also revealed a generational shift from citizen-oriented activities to cause-oriented ones in terms of individuals' political activism repertoires.²⁵⁷

Norris conducted a study to find age related preferences for the modes of political activism by considering three different models explaining these differences.²⁵⁸ The first model, 'generational effect', argues that one's political behavioral habits are formed during their youth and take a fixed form in time, therefore it is possible to find different trends of political activism among different generations.²⁵⁹ On the other hand, 'life-cycle' model focuses on people's being subject to a variety of political networks and contexts during their lifetime and supposes some changes in their political behaviors according to the life stages they are in. When it comes to the model of "period effects", it is characterized by the influences of the significant historical events on the individuals in a society.²⁶⁰

Norris examined the data from European Social Survey, 2002, with the sample chosen from 15 nations within Europe, which are accepted completely free in terms of political rights and civil liberties with the aims of finding out the patterns of political activism according to age, as well as learning if there occurs a generational shift towards modern "politics of choice" from the conventional "politics of loyalties" by considering the applied repertoires and the agencies of the political activism.²⁶¹

It was discovered that age was still among the most powerful factors behind the political activism preferences.²⁶² While citizen-oriented activism was more likely to be performed by "male, well educated, more affluent, and urban residents, displaying greater than average interest in public affairs, with a partisan attachment, a strong sense of internal efficacy and civic duty", cause-oriented activities were preferred more by the ones who are younger, female, well-educated, better-off, left-oriented, who spent less time in that particular society, or who had a "strong sense of internal efficacy" or "higher social trust".²⁶³ The participation rate in the citizen

²⁵⁶ Norris, 2003, 16.

²⁵⁷ *ibid*, 16-17.

²⁵⁸ *ibid*.

²⁵⁹ *ibid*, 8.

²⁶⁰ *ibid*, 9.

²⁶¹ *ibid*.

²⁶² *ibid*, 12-13.

²⁶³ *ibid*, 12-13.

oriented activities was found to be the least among the young citizens and the most in the middle age ones, and after that age period a decrease was detected.²⁶⁴ These findings indicated that this type of activism showed curvilinear (life-cycle) patterns with a gradual increase in participation starting from youth and a decrease after Middle Ages.

Although the effects of Internet on young people have been examined, Kim and colleagues draw attention to the lack of consideration on the age differences in this particular developmental stage. They studied two different groups as young adults (from 22 to 24 years old) and late adolescents (from 16 to 18 years old) as two distinct groups as sample within a longitudinal survey.²⁶⁵ Considering that there are a variety of opinions about the relation between online and offline participation, Kim and colleagues tested four different hypotheses regarding the relation between online and offline political participation in a study with a group of young adults and late adolescents in Sweden for two years.

Among the hypotheses tested in the study, gateway hypothesis, suggesting online political participation initiates offline political participation, was discovered to be consistent with the findings from late adolescents; while spillover hypothesis, arguing online political sphere is used by offline political actors in order to expand their power, was found consistent with the data from young adults.²⁶⁶ The researchers found that while online participation functions as a “gateway” to online participation in late adolescent group, offline participation “spills over into” the online participation in the young adults group. The results also proved that while online political participation was more popular in the late adolescent group, offline political participation was more prevalent in the young adult group.

Interestingly, young adults and late adolescents were discovered to show similarity in Internet use and being politically active online. Therefore, Kim and colleagues assert that adolescents are not disadvantaged in terms of political participation, even the constraints in front of their participation like “lack of skills” or “resources” can be “loosened” thanks to online platforms.²⁶⁷ Hence, Internet can be

²⁶⁴ *ibid*, 13.

²⁶⁵ Kim, Russo, Amnå, *ibid*, 1-19.

²⁶⁶ *ibid*, 12.

²⁶⁷ *ibid*, 13.

regarded as a valuable sphere which shows potential for the political improvement of adolescents. Besides, young adults displayed more consistency with regard to their political participation ways, when compared to adolescents, proving that adults are more stable in their orientations while their younger counterparts welcome novelties more easily.

The fourth dynamic behind participation is environmental factors. Several studies discuss how the environmental forces affect the political participation of citizens.²⁶⁸ Firstly, Milbrath points to the central-peripheral dimensions in physical and psychological sense, depending on the factors like SES, “length of time at a given time”, “amount of group activity”, “urban-rural residence”, and “integration into the community”²⁶⁹. He explains the effects of the position of an individual as follows:²⁷⁰

“Persons close to the center occupy an environmental position which naturally links them into the communications network involved in policy decisions for the society. They become identified with the body politic. They receive from and send more communications to other persons near the center. They have a higher rate of social interaction, and they are active in more groups than persons on the periphery. This central position increases the likelihood that they will develop personality traits, beliefs, and many more political stimuli in their environment, and this increases the number of opportunities for them to participate.”

Secondly, Verba and Nie²⁷¹ propose two models to describe the urban-rural dichotomy participation as “the mobilization model” and “the decline of community model”. While the mobilization model assumes more participation from the urban environment compared to suburbs, the decline of the community model expects a decrease in participation in parallel with a move from small town or village to a city. According to the second view, politics is more manageable in small, intimate environment where individuals have more knowledge and contacts. On the other hand, dealing with politics is “more complicated, impersonal and distant” in cities. Besides, “modernization” is considered to have a demolishing effect on political units since the “independent communities” start to lose their boundaries as well as importance and become more reliant on the larger governmental units.

Another factor that is considered to have an impact on participation is personality. For Milbrath, there are personality factors affecting social and political

²⁶⁸ Milbrath, *ibid*, 113-114; Verba, Nie, *ibid*, 229; Verba, Nie, Kim, *ibid*, 269.

²⁶⁹ Milbrath, *ibid*, 111.

²⁷⁰ *ibid*, 113.

²⁷¹ Verba, Nie, *ibid*, 231.

acts.²⁷² While personality factors comprise of “heredity, personality needs and drives, physiological and psychological needs, beliefs and attitudes”, personality needs are “a product of heredity, need learning or socialization coming from the environment, and rewards and punishments following from the various decisions of the organism”. Personality, however does not play a fully decisive role on the formation of a political behavior, it chooses the stimuli coming from the environment by utilizing the information again presented by the environment regarding the “boundaries, barriers, norms and costs” of a certain stimuli.

Personality traits stands as another significant factor to be taken into account. Quintelier and Theocharis²⁷³ studied the impact of personality traits on different forms of online and offline political participation, based on the five basic personality traits, namely “openness to experience”, “extraversion”, “consciousness”, “agreeableness” and “emotional stability”, known as “Big Five”. Three political participation scales were developed regarding the “Facebook engagement”, “pre-social media forms of online engagement” and “traditional “offline engagement” and applied on Belgian freshman university students, 83.6% of whom owned a Facebook account.

There was found a positive relationship between political interest and online political engagement.²⁷⁴ People, who have higher intellectual curiosity and are more open to new alternatives, were found to have more tendency to show online participation. However there was not observed a significant association between political knowledge and online Facebook engagement or offline political engagement. The findings of the study revealed similarity between the effects of the personality traits on both online and offline participation, since “openness to experience” and “extraversion” were found to have a positive impact while “consciousness”, “agreeableness” and “emotional stability” showed small impacts on political participation.²⁷⁵ There was found significant relation between being extravert and being willing to start participation.²⁷⁶

In addition to the factors aforementioned, there are numerous other dynamics affecting the volume and density of political participation. For instance, it is claimed

²⁷² Milbrath, *ibid*, 36.

²⁷³ Quintelier, Theocharis, *ibid*.

²⁷⁴ *ibid*, 286.

²⁷⁵ *ibid*, 286-287.

²⁷⁶ *ibid*, 243.

that in addition to SES factors, “the extent of interpersonal networks”, “sense of efficacy”, “beliefs about civic duty” and “patterns of media use” constitute the most determining factors for the participation of an individual.²⁷⁷ Besides, the sense of duty; to be more talkative; and to have higher-sense of efficacy and wider social network are considered to increase the probability of participation. In addition, “feeling strongly about the issue or cause” was found to be the most interesting motivation behind citizen participation.²⁷⁸

It is maintained that individuals are more likely to show active participation when they are subject to more political stimuli.²⁷⁹ The findings of earlier studies also have showed that participation is affected by social capital and mass media²⁸⁰ or one’s stance in politics and access to sources²⁸¹. Besides, having a family with at least one member active in formal politics, being a member of a political party or a non-profit organizations, and being subscribed to a political website were found to display more participation in online active and passive politics than others.²⁸² Moreover, Zhang and colleagues²⁸³ offered four variables, namely “political interest”, “political efficacy”, “political trust” and “political identification” as individual political variables to affect individual’s trust and confidence in government as well as political and civic participation.

Some studies especially examined the correlations of factors behind conventional participation with each other and revealed noteworthy results. For conventional politics, the level of interest in politics, rightist ideological position, and religiosity were discovered to have a positive effect on the participation.²⁸⁴ Besides, trust in political institutions and the political participation activities related to them were found to have a positive relationship. Especially males, who are conservative in political terms, more interested in politics or put more trust in political institutions were found to exhibit conventional political participation more than the other

²⁷⁷ Coleman, Blumler, *ibid*, 158.

²⁷⁸ **Citizens’ Digital Participation.**

²⁷⁹ Milbrath, *ibid*, 22.

²⁸⁰ Weiwu Zhang, et al, “The Revolution Will be Networked. The Influence of Social Networking Sites on Political Attitudes and Behaviour”, **Social Science Computer Review**, vol.28. no.1 (2010): 77.

²⁸¹ Mascheroni, *ibid*, 22.

²⁸² Karabağ, Coşkun, *ibid*, 120-122.

²⁸³ Zhang, et al, *ibid*, 75-92.

²⁸⁴ Erdoğan, *ibid*, 11.

respondents, namely women, students and Kurdish speaking people, implying that some segments of the society are not involved in the conventional political participation and “systematically” excluded.²⁸⁵ In addition, when collective identities included in the study, the participants who stated to belong to modern/secular or minorities/excluded groups were discovered to have displayed unconventional participation more than the ones with religious/conservative identity.²⁸⁶

All the theories and research findings presented above indicate that political participation is a multidimensional issue and needs to be examined in depth by considering numerous underlying factors to reach a clear picture. While these factors among others are key to the information that provides comprehensive data for the participation condition of one, they also stand as the very limitation of such an endeavor since it is quite tough to examine all the factors at once.

2.3.3. Classifications of Participation and Participants

As indicated in the earlier part, there is needed the presence of some personal and environmental factors for participation to occur. However, when individuals show participation, the dimensions, modes as well as the scope of effects of their participation acts differ from each other because participation is a multidimensional concept with a variety of components within. With the rapid change in technological, social and political life, the meanings of participant acts have started to change as well as the means to be utilized, thus necessitating a reconsideration of what participation is or who the participants are.

For Milbrath, citizens have two positions at the same time, one as participants demanding government to answer their wishes and second as “obedient subjects of the regime under which they live”.²⁸⁷ While there can be found some people inclining more to one role than the other, it is argued that the majority of the citizens adopt a “balance between two roles”. Depending on one’s political behavior, Milbrath classifies individuals as active or passive.²⁸⁸ According to abstract map of and individual’s political behavior by Milbrath²⁸⁹, the political repertoire of a passive

²⁸⁵ *ibid*, 12.

²⁸⁶ *ibid*, 67.

²⁸⁷ Milbrath, *ibid*, 145.

²⁸⁸ *ibid*, 14.

²⁸⁹ See Table 7 in Appendix A.

individual includes indifference, paying taxes, conscription and obedience and individual receives security and public order in return from the system. On the other hand, the acts by an active person range from political argument (the most passive) to leader selection (the most active), while this person gains a variety of instrumental and expressive outtakes from the system.

Milbrath, accepts the idea that political participation is “cumulative” since political activities follow a hierarchical order, which starts with the political activity, requiring the least amount of engagement, time or energy, and continues with the ones necessitating increasing level of them.²⁹⁰ Therefore, it is considered that the individuals realizing the activities with higher ranking have most probably exhibited the activities preceding that particular activity, but vice versa is not anticipated. Nevertheless, it is noted that this order may show some differences depending on political setting, election context, time or nation.

Milbrath²⁹¹ also created a list for presenting the hierarchy of political involvement²⁹². The bottom of the list exhibits the group of people by no means showing active participation in any kind of politics, who are referred as “apathetics”. It is followed by another group, showing very little participation through limited activities named “spectator activities”. “Transitional activities”, on the other hand, involves a broader range of political acts such as contacting or participating in political meetings. However, it is the “gladiatorial activities” that comprise the activities which require the most engagement, time, or energy to affect politics, as its name already suggests.²⁹³ Like change in the order of the political behaviors, there can be observed a change in the activities individuals display and, therefore, the group these people are considered to be in when they are supported by environmental and motivational factors to help them pass the required threshold.

Verba and Nie, on the other hand, are against the classification of citizenry as more or less active citizens, but assume the presence of several types of activists involved in dissimilar acts for a variety of reasons, and thereby with a variety of results.²⁹⁴ They claim that “political acts differ in what they can get the citizen: Some

²⁹⁰ *ibid*, 17.

²⁹¹ *ibid*, 18.

²⁹² See Table 8 in Appendix A.

²⁹³ *ibid*, 18-20.

²⁹⁴ Verba, Nie, *ibid*, 5-12.

types of activity supply little more than the gratification from taking part; other political acts can lead to more specific and concrete payoffs. Political acts differ in what they *get the citizen into*: Some activity is likely to bring him into open conflict with others; some is not. And political acts differ in what it takes to *get into them*: Some activity calls for initiative, time, resources, skill; some does not.”

Participation is “unidimensional” phenomenon from apathetics to gladiators according to the effort they put on the political participation in Milbrath’s classification.²⁹⁵ However, Verba and colleagues argue that participation is not just unidimensional and determined with regard to effort to participate, but also “multidimensional” considering the differences observed among the activists according to “the modes of activity” they realize. The acts in a particular mode of activity show some similarities and people have a tendency to show one act along with the others in the same mode. Citizens also show variance in terms of their reasons to participate, the situations for which to participate, their readiness as well as what and how to invest in politics.²⁹⁶ It is possible to determine the modes of acts according to some dimensions, which are:

“(1) the type of influence that was exerted by the act (whether it conveyed information about the actor’s preferences and/or applied pressure for compliance); (2) the scope of the outcome (whether the act was aimed at affecting a broad social outcome or a narrower particularized outcome); (3) the degree of conflict with others involved in the activity; (4) the amount of effort and initiative required for the act; and (5) the amount of cooperation with others entailed by the act”²⁹⁷. The four modes classified according to these dimensions are “voting”, “campaign activity”, “communal activity” and “particularized contacts”.²⁹⁸

As the most performed collective political activity, voting does not require much initiative or cooperation to act and show much about the inclinations of the participants. However, it has the high level of power of sanction and capacity to control and create pressure on politicians and governments.²⁹⁹ Voters are blamed not to meet the “standards of rationality” by Verba and Nie³⁰⁰ since they are considered to know much neither about the candidates nor the parties they vote, but also their wants or positions. It is argued that the image of the candidate or party affiliation affect voting more than the other criteria. Similarly, campaign activity has the potential to cause

²⁹⁵ Verba, Nie, Kim, *ibid*, 52.

²⁹⁶ Verba, Nie, *ibid*, 45.

²⁹⁷ Verba, Nie, Kim, *ibid*, 53.

²⁹⁸ See Table 9 in Appendix A.

²⁹⁹ *ibid*, 53.

³⁰⁰ Verba, Nie, *ibid*, 103.

pressure and has a collective and conflictual nature as voting. However, it may require a bit more of an initiative and cooperation to be performed when compared to voting. Besides, it carries much more information about the participant demands.³⁰¹ When it comes to communal activity, it embraces both contacts with governmental agencies and “cooperative, non-partisan activities” for the issues concerning society. The concern is the benefit of the society and a collective outcome in any case. Depending on the activity, the level of conflict, influence, initiative or cooperation shows variation. Finally, particularized contact is generally performed individually regarding a specific demand from a governmental official. Since there is a personal problem, the activity is not conflictual, it carries high level of information about the participant and the scope outcome is limited to that particular problem in question. To take an act to report that problem, the individual takes a great deal of initiative to contact, however, the pressure exerted is relatively low compared to other modes of acts.³⁰² As Verba and Nie³⁰³ point out, participation to achieve personal interests was assumed to bring about some destructive results by former theorists, however contemporary approach to such kind of participation, even if it is “selfish”, deems it as a means for more improved public policy set properly for responding to needs of the citizens.

Participation variables provided by Verba and Nie have long been utilized for the political participation typology in the literature.³⁰⁴ Verba and Nie³⁰⁵ determined twelve basic activities of political participation which are:

1. Report regularly voting in Presidential elections
2. Report always voting in local elections
3. Active in at least one organization involved in community problems
4. Have worked with others in trying to solve some community problems
5. Have attempted to persuade others to vote as they were
6. Have ever actively worked for a party or candidates during an election
7. Have ever contracted a local government official about some issue
8. Have attended at least one political meeting or rally in the last three years
9. Have ever contracted a state or national government official about some issue or problem
10. Have ever formed a group or organization to attempt to solve some local community problem
11. Have ever given money to a party or candidate during an election campaign
12. Presently a member of a political club or organization

³⁰¹ Verba, Nie, Kim, *ibid*, 54.

³⁰² *ibid*, 54.

³⁰³ *ibid*, 11.

³⁰⁴ Verba, Nie, *ibid*, 47.

³⁰⁵ *ibid*, 31.

The modes of participation acts are determined as voting, taking part in campaign activities, communal activities and particularized contacts. For these four modes of acts, Verba and colleagues³⁰⁶ prepared 21 common items³⁰⁷.

Verba and Nie³⁰⁸ also focused on the differences in political engagement of individuals and formed six types of participants accordingly as given below:

1. *The totally inactive.* The individuals who show no or almost hardly any of the actions related to political activity.
2. *The totally active.* The individuals who exhibit active participation for three modes of participation out of four (voting, campaigning, and communal activity), and may also involve in particularized contacts.
3. *The voting specialists.* The individuals who generally show voting act, but not the acts associated with other three modes of participation.
4. *The parochial activists.* The individuals who show participation only through particularized contact with government authorities specifically for the issues affecting their own lives.
5. *The communalists.* The individuals who actively participate in communal activities but are not into campaign activities that much. Besides, they may also be observed to contact local, state or national officials.
6. *The campaigners.* The individuals who show high degree of voting and campaign activities, but are inactive in communal activity and not expected to exhibit contacting act.

Verba and Nie³⁰⁹ argue that the political orientations of these six types of participants can be predicted as well, which are their “general psychological involvement in politics, skill and competence (efficacy and information), involvement in conflict and cleavage (partisan affiliation, taking sides in community conflict, issue extremity), and civic mindedness”³¹⁰. According to them, since the inactives show no political activity in practice, they are not expected to have much psychological involvement, skill and competence, or nor be interested in conflict and cleavage or the welfare of the community.³¹¹ As for voting specialists, considering that voting act does not require much initiative, resources or effort to realize and voting specialists are recognized as merely exhibiting this participation mode, their level of psychological involvement, skill and competence and civic mindedness is predicted to be low. Only partisanship level would be high and that is expected considering that voting includes

³⁰⁶ Verba, Nie, Kim, **ibid**, 58.

³⁰⁷ See Table 10 in Appendix A.

³⁰⁸ Verba, Nie, **ibid**, 73-77.

³⁰⁹ **ibid**, 82-83.

³¹⁰ See Table 11 in Appendix A.

³¹¹ **ibid**, 85.

taking sides in nature, however involving in community conflict or adopting an extreme standing are still excluded, anyway. On the other hand, parochial participants are anticipated to have a fairly high level of initiative for taking action and confidence in their effect in politics. This anticipation for high skill and competence, however, cannot be made for psychological involvement, involvement in conflict and cleavage or civil mindedness. The communalists can be differentiated from the parochial participants only with their high level of psychological involvement. When it comes to the campaigners (partisan activists), their activity pattern shows high degree of psychological engagement and connection to conflict and cleavage. While their skills and competence can be moderately high, their sense of contribution to community can be a little less than that. Finally, since complete activists – as their name already suggests – show involvement in all modes of participation, they are believed to exhibit high level of association in all activity patterns.

The classifications by Milbrath³¹², Verba and Nie³¹³ and Verba and colleagues³¹⁴ have long been accepted in the field of political participation. However, novel approaches to political participation and citizen practices have been introduced alternatively. For instance, Norris³¹⁵ describes a shift from citizen-oriented repertoires realized through traditional political agencies to cause-oriented repertoires through new social movements and advocacy networks with the younger generation³¹⁶. As opposed to the concerns and organizational styles of traditional agencies of the political activism and political parties, the political agencies in the world after the first half of the twentieth century are more into “women’s movement, the anti-globalization movement, anti-war coalitions, and the environmental movement, as well as diverse non-governmental organizations and multinational policy advocacy networks” and distinguished by having blurred boundaries, loose networking and organization without a center.³¹⁷

The “citizen-oriented actions” are basically about voting, contacting political agents, donating money to political organizations, being a member of a party or

³¹² Milbrath, **ibid.**

³¹³ Verba, Nie, **ibid.**

³¹⁴ Verba, Nie, Kim, **ibid.**

³¹⁵ Norris, 2003.

³¹⁶ See Table 12 in Appendix A.

³¹⁷ **ibid.**, 7.

working for a party, while “cause-oriented repertoires” that cover particular cases and interests like “consumer politics, petitioning, demonstrations, and protests”.³¹⁸ Cause-oriented repertoires, on the other hand, include “consumer” and “life-style” politics, some activities of which may barely be considered even “political” though they have the potential to make significant social and economic impacts.³¹⁹ For Norris, such activities intend to reconstruct the laws, affect the policy making or change the norms of social behavior. These activities target public, non-profit as well as private sectors in addition to parliaments or governments.³²⁰

Another participation classification was mentioned by Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu.³²¹ Kalaycıoğlu and Çarkoğlu point out three types of political participation as conventional, unconventional and repressive participation. Though voting or not voting are the most popular conventional participation behaviors in general, “membership and taking part in political party activities” “selection of candidates or sponsoring them to campaign activities or donations”, “raising public awareness”, “involving in public debates and deliberations”, “seeking solutions for communal or national problems and issues”, or “writing letters and petitions to legislators, cabinet ministers, prime ministers, or presidents” are among the lawful and allowed conventional participation activities.³²²

In the classification by Kalaycıoğlu and Çarkoğlu, unconventional participation constitutes the second group of participation. Some people do not select the conventional ways of action to affect political decisions, but resort to unconventional participation in order to protest a policy; condemn a decision, government, political elites or social, economic or political structures; take exception to a system, establishment or a regime; or to support a system, government, group, or a practice in some cases.³²³ What unites them is acting through illegitimate ways such as “stoppage of traffic on the main roads, occupation of government or corporate buildings, wildcat strikes, non-peaceful demonstrations, throwing stones or cakes at political authorities, hanging members of pressure groups from buildings, and chaining

³¹⁸ *ibid*, 4-18.

³¹⁹ *ibid*, 5.

³²⁰ *ibid*, 5.

³²¹ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2007.

³²² *ibid*, 58.

³²³ *ibid*, 59-60.

oneself to the gates of nuclear power stations”.³²⁴ Some of them may even be “bizarre, bloody or violent”, or “shocking” like suicide bombing with the aim of drawing people’s attention to an issue, agitating, making a problem a current issue, or putting pressure on agents to stop a practice or give up a decision.³²⁵ The unconventional forms of political actions were also examined by Barnes and Kaase.³²⁶ The unconventional modes of participation determined by them include “petitions”, “lawful demonstrations”, “boycotts”, “strikes”, “occupying buildings”, “blocking traffic”, “painting slogans”, “damaging property”, and “personal violence”.

According to Kalaycıoğlu and Çarkoğlu, political participation has a third form in addition to conventional and unconventional participation, which is “repressive participation” that is “intended to suppress criticisms and protests of the established political order, government, or the authorities”.³²⁷

Another classification for participation for contemporary politics is mentioned by Fink and Črnič.³²⁸ They emphasize, an incomplete picture of political participation will be achieved, if political activities of an active citizen are restricted to merely traditional offline sphere since the ones in the online political sphere should also be considered.³²⁹ Besides, it is noteworthy to consider the distribution and practice of different political activities within these spheres. Therefore, they point the boundaries of “conventional”, “unconventional” political action forms within “general/traditional” and “digital/online” spheres of participation.³³⁰

What strikes our attention in the classification mentioned by Fink and Črnič is that online/digital forms of political activities are also considered as a distinctive type of political participation. Taking into account that Web 2.0 technology simplified some participation practices, states have initiated online platforms to increase participation and ease civic activities and success stories of online political activities like campaigning have started to be heard, participation in the digital or online spheres has

³²⁴ *ibid*, 59.

³²⁵ *ibid*, 58.

³²⁶ Samuel H. Barnes, Max Kaase, **Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies**, (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1979), 552.

³²⁷ *ibid*, 85.

³²⁸ Fink, Črnič, *ibid*.

³²⁹ *ibid*, 1291.

³³⁰ See Table 13 in Appendix A.

turned out to be an important element of political participation. Similarly, Theocharis³³¹ argues:

“Digital media have added inexhaustive creative and non-political ways to engage in social and political life that not only often appear to form the basis of political participation but also, in a plethora of everyday contexts, seem to become embedded into what eventually evolves to become a politically meaningful act.”

To position the participation in the digital sphere, there have been suggested various definitions such as “digital participation”³³² and “digitally networked participation”³³³. The definition of digitally networked participation is made as:

“a networked media-based personalized action that is carried out by individual citizens with the intent to display their own mobilization and activate their social networks in order to raise awareness about, or exert social and political pressures for the solution of, a social or political problem”³³⁴.

Digital participation is considered to include various activities such as “expressing political views on the Internet”, “commenting on an article on a web portal”, “following politics on FB, Twitter etc.”, “sending a message with political content via FB, Twitter etc.”, “visiting the webpage of a political party”, “inclusion in an interest group through online networks”.³³⁵

Theocharis³³⁶ regards digitally networked participation with its expression as a type of political participation and therefore considers it should be studied as the other forms. Moreover, the author claims that there may be some cases where some digitally networked participation forms, though being non-political, create impacts greater than the usually applied traditional ones.

Recent research has put forward varying participation preferences of citizens in the last centuries. For instance, Fink & Črnič³³⁷ studied the relation between the traditional and digital forms of participation and the profile of the people participating in the digital environment. There were found many citizens, who participate in political activities only through digital sphere.³³⁸ Besides, youngest citizens and the most educated students were discovered to prefer mainly online political activities. A

³³¹ Yannis Theocharis, “The Conceptualization of Digitally Networked Participation”, **Social Media + Society**, Vol 1. No.2 (2015): 1.

³³² Fink, Črnič, **ibid**, 1299.

³³³ Theocharis, **ibid**, 6.

³³⁴ **ibid**, 6.

³³⁵ Fink, Črnič, **ibid**, 1299.

³³⁶ Theocharis, **ibid**, 1.

³³⁷ Fink, Črnič, **ibid**.

³³⁸ **ibid**, 1299.

positive relation between online and individual political participation was observed. Moreover, most of the politically active people were found to utilize not only traditional but also online forms of political participation.³³⁹ Similarly, in another research, young participants (18 to 35) were discovered to prefer online participation more than the offline one, showing that they utilize technological advances for political purposes more than their older counterparts.³⁴⁰

It brings about the concerns over the possibility that the online participation would replace offline participation. In one study, it was revealed that Turkish participants have higher levels of interest in politics and passive political participation in their daily life than in online sphere.³⁴¹ On the other hand, they were found to more actively participate in online politics compared to its offline counterpart, thus indicating that despite having higher interest rates in offline politics, they choose online political participation more.³⁴² The research by Oser et al.³⁴³ acknowledge online activism as one type of political participation. Nevertheless, there was not found any evidence that online participation is substituting offline participation.³⁴⁴ However, whether online participation would replace offline participation or not, it is an undeniable fact that it has become an important medium to enable citizens to voice their opinions, organize mass protests or campaigns, realize some civic duties and even vote in some societies. Therefore it deserves a comprehensive study to find out its contribution and position in political participation.

2.4. The Roles of Digital and Online Facilities for Exercising Participation and Citizenship

Though the use of Internet for the political sphere was ignored until recently, online facilities have started to be utilized by governments, institutions, politicians and candidates for the creation of web sites, blogs, online content or opening social media accounts, thus leading way to disputes over the condition of “the balance of communicative power” within liberal democracies, the function of the digital facilities

³³⁹ **ibid**, 1300.

³⁴⁰ Oser, Hooghe, Marien, **ibid**, 98.

³⁴¹ Karabağ, Coşkun, **ibid**, 124-125.

³⁴² **ibid**, 124-125.

³⁴³ Oser, Hooghe, Marien, **ibid**.

³⁴⁴ **ibid**, 98.

on democracy, as well as the gains of citizens to mull over and affect politics more.³⁴⁵ Internet is considered as “an empty space of power which is both vulnerable to state-centric (and, for that matter, corporate) strategies and open to occupation by citizens who have few other spaces available for them to express themselves in constructive democratic ways”, which is also able to bring a new dimension to the relationship between the citizens and their representatives.³⁴⁶ Internet has also been accepted as a “powerful alternative venue for political activities which are beyond the classical political channels”.³⁴⁷

Bennett remarks on some advantages of digital media such as facilitating larger and lasting political networks, adapting to the traditional politics, going beyond the older boundaries between political organizations, enabling check on the parties and applying political pressure on particular issues.³⁴⁸ Similarly Coleman and Blumler argue that the Internet enables citizens to communicate and public discussion to occur beyond the bounds of “institutionally-controlled communication channels”.³⁴⁹ Moreover, Bennett mentions that digital media offers the young some tools to shape their social and personal identity.³⁵⁰

The prevalence of Internet use affects political participation of individuals, by broadening the scope of political participation and increasing the number of people participating.³⁵¹ There are numerous studies indicating the positive contribution of the Internet on political participation activities of citizens. It has been proven that individuals, who are able to use Internet, have a variety of novel sources for political information³⁵², which makes it possible for them to be exposed to political arguments more³⁵³, to reach information³⁵⁴, to share information³⁵⁵, to be involved in political

³⁴⁵ Coleman, Blumler, *ibid*, 8.

³⁴⁶ *ibid*, 9-10.

³⁴⁷ Karabağ, Coşkun, *ibid*, 113.

³⁴⁸ W. Lance Bennett, 2008, 9-10.

³⁴⁹ Coleman, Blumler, *ibid*, 8.

³⁵⁰ Bennett, 2008, 8.

³⁵¹ Fink, Črnič, *ibid*, 1285.

³⁵² Masahiro Yamamoto, Matthew J. Kushin, Francis Dalisay. “Social media and mobiles as political mobilization forces for young adults: examining the moderating role of online political expression in political participation”, *New Media & Society*, vol.17. no.6 (2015): 884.

³⁵³ Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal, *ibid*, 52.

³⁵⁴ Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal, *ibid*, 65; Homero Gil de Zúñiga, Sebastián, Valenzuela, “The Mediating Path to a Stronger Citizenship: Online and Offline Networks, Weak Ties, and Civic Engagement”, *Communication Research*, vol.38. no.3 (2011): 414.

³⁵⁵ Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal, *ibid*, 68-69.

discussions³⁵⁶, and initiate or join organize collective action³⁵⁷. Moreover, the people with Internet connection at home were discovered to show more online and offline political participation.³⁵⁸

The development of digital and online facilities increased the opportunities to foster political participation and to enable the ones to participate more, who have not showed much participation until then. For instance, citizens, when being subject to online political information, were found to have a tendency to take part in offline politics³⁵⁹ or display more political participation³⁶⁰. Besides, Internet has the potential to contribute to one's political knowledge more than TV does.³⁶¹ Being subject to online news increases information sharing, political knowledge and political interest, reduces information costs and positively affects civic engagement.³⁶² Moreover, people using the internet for searching things, following e-newspapers, making friends, chatting and writing a blog on a regular basis were discovered to participate in online active and passive politics than ones who do not benefit from the Internet for such aims.³⁶³

Internet is regarded as a “catalyst” for the creation of civic communities and a means for civic participation.³⁶⁴ Providing information and facilitating its exchange, Internet is believed to enable civic recruitment as well as political participation.³⁶⁵ Internet has also been found to positively affect voting³⁶⁶, civic engagement³⁶⁷ and civic participation³⁶⁸. Online participation itself is also validated as a specific kind of political participation.³⁶⁹ Moreover, it was found that though individuals may exhibit

³⁵⁶ Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal, *ibid*, 56-64; Fink, Črnič, *ibid*, 1288; Castells, *ibid*, 10; Yamamoto, Kushin, Dalisay, *ibid*, 892.

³⁵⁷ Castells, *ibid*, 10; Homero Gil de Zúñiga, Eulàlia P. H. Rojas, “Weblogs, traditional sources online and political participation: an assessment of how the internet is changing the political environment”, *New Media & Society*, vol. 11. no. 4 (2009): 563; Yılmaz, Dündar, Oskay, *ibid*, 489.

³⁵⁸ **Citizens' Digital Participation.**

³⁵⁹ Yamamoto, Kushin, Dalisay, *ibid*, 892.

³⁶⁰ Fink, Črnič, *ibid*, 1285; Kim, Russo, Amnå, *ibid*, 13.

³⁶¹ Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal, *ibid*, 55.

³⁶² *ibid*, 65-69.

³⁶³ Karabağ, Coşkun, *ibid*, 123.

³⁶⁴ Zhang, et al, *ibid*, 78.

³⁶⁵ *ibid*, 78.

³⁶⁶ Caroline Tolbert, J., Ramona S. Mcneal, “Unraveling the Effects of the Internet on Political Participation?”, *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 56. No. 2 (2003): 179.

³⁶⁷ Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal, *ibid*, 2.

³⁶⁸ Zhang, et al, *ibid*, 75.

³⁶⁹ Oser, Hooghe, Marien, *ibid*, 98.

more civic behaviors, when communicating face to face more; conversing online results in a relatively stronger relationship with civic involvement.³⁷⁰

The information Internet presents enables political discussion and civic engagement similar to other media forms, however, it differs from the others by facilitating instant, useful, and reasonable communication between individuals; by being convenient for interactive participation which may lead to more advanced levels of political discussion.³⁷¹ Likewise, Karabağ and Coşkun maintain that Internet facilitates online political activity which is instant, more independent from conventional political institutions and founded on “decentralized networking”.³⁷²

Since Internet removes the constraints of time and space, it is believed to diminish the expected costs to have a broader social network.³⁷³ These social networks, in turn, may facilitate more number of opportunities for many aspects of daily life. Castells comments about social networking sites by stating:³⁷⁴

“... the most important activity on the Internet nowadays goes through social networking sites (SNS), and SNS have become platforms for all kinds of activities, not just for personal friendships or chatting but for marketing, e-commerce, education, cultural creativity, media and entertainment distribution, health applications, and, yes, socio-political activism.”

Among all the online sources, SNS have an exclusive position in terms of mobilizing masses taking into consideration their contribution to recent global movements. Digital social networks facilitate unrestricted discussion and organization of collective action.³⁷⁵ Castells emphasizes the importance of Internet and mobile phone networks by calling them “not (only) simply tools, but organizational forms, cultural expressions, and specific platforms for political autonomy”.³⁷⁶ In addition, digital media has eased the transformation of the status of “collective political activities” and the development of political practices realized horizontally.³⁷⁷ The leading social media including MySpace, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter give rise to an additional public sphere and enable activists to have a broader profile of followers

³⁷⁰ Gil de Zúñiga, Valenzuela, **ibid**, 413.

³⁷¹ Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal, **ibid**, 55.

³⁷² Karabağ, Coşkun, **ibid**, 113-114.

³⁷³ Gil de Zúñiga, Valenzuela, **ibid**, 403.

³⁷⁴ Castells, **ibid**, 260.

³⁷⁵ **ibid**, 10.

³⁷⁶ **ibid**, 105.

³⁷⁷ Fink, Črnič, **ibid**, 1288.

and get organized.³⁷⁸ Since press and journalists utilize what is on the agenda of social media, it is observed that the reactions expressed on digital sphere can be as influential as street protests.³⁷⁹ Therefore, it is also noteworthy to examine the studies on the effect of Internet, digital tools, and social media on participation.

Before social media became a common part of our lives a decade ago, blogs and chat rooms, as its earlier versions, were also appreciated for their contributions to participation. As a digital facility, a relationship was found between blog use and online political discussion, online political campaigning and other forms of online political participation since blogs increase the inclination level of the individuals receiving information from them.³⁸⁰ The study by Gil de Zúñiga and Rojas shows what blogs offer may have some “societal level consequences” such as increased political engagement, going beyond “self-expression” and effecting political behaviors, and they would gain greater popularity and complement the traditional media within the networked public sphere.³⁸¹ On the other hand, Mossberger and colleagues liken the chat rooms in the modern world to the imagined salons of the deliberative democracy theory in the earlier century.³⁸² This theory supports the idea that individuals voluntarily participate in political discussions, which shape political opinions and, eventually, pave the way for political participation. Likewise, chat rooms gather citizens together, facilitates discussion and creates opinions, and thus, prepares the ground for participation.³⁸³

Internet has also been found to increase effect of offline media tools for participation.³⁸⁴ A study conducted with young adults found that expressing political opinions online helps individuals carefully utilize political information sources such as news in order to write their blog posts, to share news stories or to have political conversations in online political forums.³⁸⁵ The results of the study revealed that when individuals expressed their political opinions online more frequently, the use of traditional offline media, traditional offline media, social media (blogs/social

³⁷⁸ Yılmaz, Dündar, Oskay, **ibid**, 489.

³⁷⁹ **ibid**, 490.

³⁸⁰ Gil de Zúñiga, Rojas, **ibid**, 564.

³⁸¹ **ibid**, 565.

³⁸² Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal, **ibid**, 70.

³⁸³ **ibid**, 70.

³⁸⁴ Yamamoto, Kushin, Dalisay, **ibid**.

³⁸⁵ **ibid**, 892.

news/forums) or mobile app each had a positive effect on the offline political participation.³⁸⁶ Therefore, it can be concluded from the study that political expression online has an activating influence on offline political participation by increasing the effect of traditional online and offline media tools.

The studies in the recent years would yield different results when it comes to the effects of the digital facilities and Internet on citizenship and participation since their role in our daily lives have greatly changed. For instance, as opposed to the positive findings regarding the effects of digital and online facilities aforementioned, a study conducted with American participants in 2002 revealed that the Internet's contribution to active and informed citizenship was limited and insignificant for then, whereas traditional mass media maintained its function of nurturing democratic citizenship.³⁸⁷ Similarly, it was not found that online participation necessarily reinforces offline participation forms or a light for individuals actively taking part in offline activities.³⁸⁸ Another study revealed that Internet has not fully managed to bridge the present gap in terms of participation between different genders and strata within societies, yet.³⁸⁹

The findings of the studies on social media effects revealed diverse results. Zhang and colleagues³⁹⁰, conducted a telephone survey with 998 American participants in 2008 with the aim of discovering the effects of social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace and YouTube) on the civic and political activities of citizens. The study revealed a positive impact of the social networking sites in question on the civic participation, but not a political participation or confidence in government³⁹¹. Additionally, Mascheroni provides data from a study which aimed to find out the civic and political engagement of 16 young citizens.³⁹² These results proved that the young citizens' social media use and participation have a complex relationship which does not exhibit a uniformity since while the individuals adopting dutiful citizenship mode make use of a 'hybrid social media space'; activists adopting actualizing citizenship

³⁸⁶ *ibid*, 889-891.

³⁸⁷ Dietram A. Scheufele, Matthew C. Nisbet. "Being a Citizen Online: New Opportunities and Dead Ends". *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2002): 69-70.

³⁸⁸ Oser, Hooghe, Marien, *ibid*, 99.

³⁸⁹ Fink, Črnič, *ibid*.

³⁹⁰ Zhang, et al, *ibid*.

³⁹¹ *ibid*, 85.

³⁹² Mascheroni, *ibid*, 7.

mode utilize social media for politics; and the ones alienated from politics make use of social media in diverse creative ways.³⁹³ Therefore, it is necessary to consider related theories on the issue.

There have been proposed various views regarding the contribution of digital and online facilities on online and offline participation. Kim and colleagues mention four arguments regarding the relationship between offline and online participation. The first one, the independence hypothesis argues that online and offline spheres are independent and therefore the political behaviors in these two spheres occur separately.³⁹⁴ Secondly, the spillover hypothesis prioritizing offline participation, proposes that online political tools are utilized by ones who already have political participation background and have actively engaged in offline politics. On the other hand, the gateway hypothesis claims that online participation initiates offline participation by providing some preliminary preparation for it through online activities.³⁹⁵ Finally, the reciprocity hypothesis considers both participation modes to be in a mutual interaction and show development together.

Secondly, Norris states that there are a variety of interpretations regarding the Internet's function in increasing social equality, two of them being mobilization and reinforcement theories.³⁹⁶ Firstly, mobilization theories claim "Net activism" to signify one type of political participation, which blurs the barriers before civic engagement, demolishes economic obstacles and increases the chances for political discussion, information circulation and group communication, thus lessening the present social inequalities.³⁹⁷ Norris notes that if what mobilization theories promise actualizes, then it would also pave the way for increased civic engagement to a great extent, novel ways of international mobilization via non-governmental organizations (NGOs) worldwide as well as economic development at the societal level.

Arguing that Internet overcomes the obstacles and facilitates more favorable conditions for civic engagement, communication, political discussion, information sharing; mobilization theories suggest that the number of the individuals engaged will

³⁹³ *ibid*, 22.

³⁹⁴ Kim, Russo, Amnå, *ibid*, 3.

³⁹⁵ *ibid*, 4.

³⁹⁶ PippaNorris, *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 121.

³⁹⁷ *ibid*, 121.

increase.³⁹⁸ Internet will enable more opportunities for both vertical and horizontal communication between citizens and novel forms of political activism will be introduced thanks to Internet.³⁹⁹ The decrease in the communication and information cost along with the chances for novel ways of participation will facilitate democratic participation, the rise of new groups, regardless of the elites.⁴⁰⁰ Furthermore, net activism stands as a different form of political participation from conventional ones.⁴⁰¹ According to it, the number of Internet users will surpass the number of the users of traditional media⁴⁰² and this new media will function to regain the interest of individuals, who are disengaged from conventional political participation, civic engagement or society somehow⁴⁰³.

Reinforcement theories adopt a more skeptical approach with regard to the outcomes of Internet use for political purposes, arguing that it would “reinforce” or, further to that, add to the present gap in the participation level.⁴⁰⁴ The claim of the reinforcement theories is that though Internet will boost the present forms of political participation, it will not necessarily give way to a complete transformation in them.⁴⁰⁵ ICTs will sustain the present share of political power, considering that the powerful individuals and groups will direct technologies for the existing political situation.⁴⁰⁶ As a matter of fact, they would even deepen the existing gap between different stratas of the society.⁴⁰⁷

Both of the hypotheses have some truth when it comes to different political situations.⁴⁰⁸ Stanley and Weare for instance tried to explain the relationship between the Internet use and political participation of individuals through the analysis of the findings gathered from online discussion forum for the period of an agency strategic

³⁹⁸ Pippa Norris, “Who surfs? New Technology, Old Voters and Virtual Democracy in US Elections 1992-2000”, 16 February 2004, 3, <https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrobat/WhoSurfs%20Revised%202001.pdf> [09.12.2015].

³⁹⁹ *ibid*, 2-3.

⁴⁰⁰ J. Woodie Stanley, Christopher Weare, “The Effects of Internet Use on Political Participation: Evidence from an Agency Online Discussion Forum”, **ADMINISTRATION & SOCIETY**, Vol. 36 No. 5 (2004): 506.

⁴⁰¹ Norris, 2004, 3.

⁴⁰² *ibid*, 5.

⁴⁰³ *ibid*, 13.

⁴⁰⁴ Norris, 2000, 121.

⁴⁰⁵ Pippa Norris, 2004, 3.

⁴⁰⁶ Stanley, Weare, *ibid*, 506.

⁴⁰⁷ Norris, 2004, 3.

⁴⁰⁸ Stanley, Weare, *ibid*, 506.

planning exercise. They discovered that while some mobilization effect on the inactive individuals were observed, the presence of participation opportunities can appeal to new voices from citizens and, in doing so, alter the decision maker's information environment.⁴⁰⁹

Last but not the least, the theory of weak ties by Granovetter is worthy of consideration to understand the contribution of online activities on participation and mobilization. One of the distinctive features of contemporary mass participation activities both in domestic and global scale is that they are initiated at a grassroots level and organized through online social media where individuals have connection with their acquaintances as well as millions from all over the world. This feature in question has made a significant contribution to their final success. Granovetter⁴¹⁰ argues that “whatever is to be diffused can reach a larger number of people, and traverse greater social distance (i.e., path length), when passed through weak ties rather than strong” and names it as the theory of weak ties.

Margetts and colleagues argue that a mobilization does not only need strong ties to the starter in order to achieve success, but also weak ties online.⁴¹¹ They give electronic petitions as an example, arguing that several petitions do end up succeeding thanks not to the presence of one leader, but adequate number of initiators with low thresholds and the existence of the social information about the other participants which can encourage individuals with higher thresholds to support.

Leadership for mobilizations in online settings is taken as the sum of several ‘low cost’ acts performed by individuals who are willing to start, instead of the actions by a small number of people as traditionally conceived.⁴¹² Though there can still be a leader to undertake the higher cost action at the outset like writing the petition and kicking off the campaign process, it is the presence of the others reached through weak ties that leads such a mobilization to success.

Coleman and Blumler maintain that online civic and political networks have an effect on the organization of central leadership, since they have a “negotiated

⁴⁰⁹ *ibid*, 521.

⁴¹⁰ Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties”, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol.78. no.6 (1973): 1366.

⁴¹¹ Helen Z. Margetts, et al., “Leadership without Leaders? Starters and Followers in Online Collective Action”, *Political Studies*, vol.63. no.2 (2015): 295.

⁴¹² *ibid*, 295.

approach” based on “group identity, strategy, and normative commitments”.⁴¹³ Discussion is realized in what they call as an “acephalous environment” via cooperative work of the participants. They also allow for amorphous practices that may show variety in terms of both content and inclination, such as protesting something or supporting a political campaign.⁴¹⁴ Giving e-petitions and mass email campaigns as examples, Coleman and Blumler explain how they functioned to organize support, introduce causes and affect authority thanks to the strategic improvements in the online sphere.

Based upon the Granovetter’s theory, Gil de Zúñiga and Valenzuela⁴¹⁵ tried to find out whether offline or online network size promises more with respect to civic engagement as well as to examine the notions of strong and weak ties frequency and participatory actions. “Tie strength” was defined as “the frequency of communication between an individual and people with whom he or she has varying degrees of intimacy (e.g. family members vs. unfamiliar persons)” and it was argued that online discussion networks (with weak ties) may bear a strong correlation with civic activities.⁴¹⁶ The study revealed that larger interpersonal, computer mediated discussion networks, weak tie discussion networks are positively related with civic engagement. Besides, the study confirmed that weak ties mediate the relationship between interpersonal/computer mediated networks and civic engagement and that the discussion realized in online networks has a stronger relationship with weak ties than the one between offline networks and weak ties. The results of the study suggest that individuals can reach information and resources that they generally do not encounter in their inner circle and these novel information and resources provides them with novel chances to take civic action.⁴¹⁷

2.4.1. The Evolution of Collective Political Activities

At a point where online activities also gain political meaning and function as a critical tool, it can be hard to determine what a political or activist act is or its boundaries from an external perspective. However, it is essential to evaluate each and

⁴¹³ Coleman, Blumler, *ibid*, 118.

⁴¹⁴ *ibid*, 119.

⁴¹⁵ Gil de Zúñiga, Valenzuela, *ibid*, 397-421.

⁴¹⁶ *ibid*, 402-404.

⁴¹⁷ *ibid*, 414.

every act in the scope of the perspective of the user and conditions it happens in because digital communication is realized in a multi-layered and endless space.⁴¹⁸ Considering the power of the Internet, once people voice their opinion on a subject it would produce critical results, since “if the complaint is public (in the form of comment), this may quickly evolve into a heated discussion involving multiple people from one’s network”.⁴¹⁹ In this sense, a rather passive behavior such as “liking” becomes important because for some “likers”—probably few—responding may become the “first step to engage into what may eventually lead to political” participation.”⁴²⁰

It was unforeseen by most in the first phase that small scaled, local protests such as Occupy, Arab Spring, Brazil protests and Gezi events starting in different parts of the world, would develop into such huge social movements that have made their mark not only on the regions they emerged but also on the fate of many other countries. They changed their shape and route in a short time with the participation of masses from all over the world, introducing themselves as global movements embracing different age groups, ideologies and classes. For this very reason, it is a matter of debate how they were realized. One of the factors behind their instant popularization and success is undoubtedly the developments in the ICTs, especially social media.

Castells lists the common points the current social movements share.⁴²¹ One of them is being networked in a variety of ways, such as online or offline, pre-established or established in the course of movement. They have a “decentered” organization and do not necessitate “a formal leadership, command, and control center, or a vertical organization” for the dissemination of messages or directions. Calling current social movements as “individualized collective actions”, Bennett gives Occupy protests as an example.⁴²² Though they utilized the practices of past like consensus or direct democracy practices, they have also avoided formal organization structure, determining a leader, group identity, separatist principles or a chain of command but let innovation at the individual level, communication through a variety of complex and individualized networks. In addition to readily prepared communication platforms like

⁴¹⁸ Paktin, *ibid*, 12.

⁴¹⁹ Theocharis, *ibid*, 9.

⁴²⁰ *ibid*.

⁴²¹ Castells, *ibid*, 249.

⁴²² Bennett, 2012, 30.

Facebook or Twitter, Bennett maintains that technology developers involved in the Occupy also worked on creating “idea generators, take-action platforms, and a ‘global square’ virtual commons”.

Castells considers the young’s existence on social networks as a lifestyle for most of them.⁴²³ Therefore, as they display many other activities on social networks, they do protest there as well. Though being initiated on the Internet, these activities evolve to involve the occupation of the urban space as well through the reciprocal influence of virtual and physical space, which creates a third space, what Castells calls “the space of autonomy” that characterizes the networked social movements.⁴²⁴ Besides, he argues that these movements have both local and global characteristics, considering that though they take their roots from narrow contexts, they gain a broader scope thanks to the formation of new networks and occupation of places. Moreover, the “horizontal” and “multimodal” network formation in these movements helps originating and strengthening the feeling of “togetherness”, “cooperation” and “solidarity”.⁴²⁵

Castells, points the digital social networks as:

“decisive tools for mobilizing, for organizing, for deliberating, for coordinating and for deciding. Yet, the role of the Internet goes beyond instrumentality: it creates the conditions for a form of shared practice that allows a leaderless movement to survive, deliberate, coordinate and expand.”⁴²⁶

Bennett mentions “digitally networked activism (DNA)” as a promising formation as opposed to conventional political institutions arguably deviating from serving for the good of different groups.⁴²⁷ He claims that when it is the political or economic regimes criticized, traditional organizations as well as formulas including applying to compel parties or create alternative parties may not be a solution; however DNA as a component of personalized politics has proved to surpass other kinds of protests in terms of the occupation of the present political discourse space. Hence, it would be critical to consider the contributions of digital communication technologies.

In summary, this chapter basically deals with the historical development of citizenship and political participation in parallel with the global and technological

⁴²³ Castells, *ibid*, 226.

⁴²⁴ *ibid*, 250.

⁴²⁵ *ibid*, 253.

⁴²⁶ *ibid*, 257.

⁴²⁷ Bennett, 2012, 29.

developments. First, it presented the discussion on the future of politics based on some famous theses. Besides, main arguments on the evolution of these concepts in the global scale along with the online and digital facilities are mentioned. The next chapter, on the other hand, focuses on the historical developments of these concepts in the Turkish context.



CHAPTER 3: TURKEY AND CHANGE.ORG

Since Turkish Republic was established in Anatolia following the fall of the Ottoman Empire and has a civilizational bond with it, although the position of individuals vis-à-vis state was changed before law with the foundation of the Turkish Republic, it took time for citizens to adopt the new order and become somehow integrated into the democratic system. During this period, the citizen identity and political participation repertoire have been shaped by a variety of social, economic and political factors such as the policies of Turkish governments, family structure as well as internal and external threats.

The right to petition is among the participation acts that are being transformed by the changes citizenship and political participation have been going through in Turkey. In addition to the social, economic and political elements affecting this process, technological factors have great impact on the way petitioning has been taken up and practiced by the Turkish citizens. Especially with the introduction of digital facilities for personal petitioning and mass petition campaigning, petitioning has started to regain its popularity among other political acts.

The present chapter provides further discussion on the current condition of political participation, citizenship and petitioning in Turkish context. It provides further discussion on the current condition of political participation, citizenship and petitioning in Turkish context. Firstly, the chapter studies the transformation of political participation and citizenship by examining the process starting from the Late Ottoman Empire and continuing up until the present with respect to the constitutions prepared and rights provided for the citizens. Secondly, the experienced obstacles before exercising participation or citizenship rights as well as the state initiatives to overcome these obstacles and better facilitate participation in the digitalized world are discussed. Then, the findings of the relevant research on citizenship and participation of Turkish citizens are reviewed and evaluated to get insight into the current condition. Finally, the progress of the right of petition from the Ottoman Empire to the present is provided and the role of change.org is analyzed for this particular participation act.

3.1. The Condition of Political Participation and Citizenship in Turkey

3.1.1. The Transformation from the Late Ottoman Empire to Present

Individuals in Anatolia have been named as “ahali, nuhıs, halk, kul, tebaa, vatandaş, uyruk, yurttaş” over the years to present.⁴²⁸ In the Ottoman Empire, Anatolian people were regarded as the property of Sultan⁴²⁹ and the majority of them were considered “ümme (community)” and “mümin (Muslim)” based on their religious identity⁴³⁰. The naming concept was only changed with the foundation of the Turkish Republic, when they were replaced with “millet (nation)” and “vatandaş (citizen)” respectively.⁴³¹ From then on, the Turkish identity was no more based on religion, but on the national pact of the state. Therefore, in the first 75 years of republic rule in Turkey, the countrymen turned into “nation” from “religious community”, socioeconomic and political developments occurred, and civil society gained strength thanks to Kemalism.⁴³² In addition, Turkey faced the necessity of integration with the world economy and democratic political culture due to the external factors such as globalization and European Union. All these dynamics call for leaving the “state first” understanding for the “individual and society first” understanding in the last quarter of the twentieth century.⁴³³

The citizenship concept was not included in the classical political structure of Ottoman Empire, but came to light in the first half of the 19th century, when the empire had to resort to some reforms to regain its power⁴³⁴ and the second half of this century signaled the start of the political participation of some groups in the society⁴³⁵. At that period, religious institutions lost their earlier authority and, following, secularization started to gain place in the society and integration between Muslim and non-Muslim groups increased. The position of the individuals within the society, who were regarded as the subjects vis-a-vis the Ottoman Sultan, underwent a transformation and

⁴²⁸ Ünsal, *ibid*, 13.

⁴²⁹ Dönmez, *ibid*, 3.

⁴³⁰ Ünsal, *ibid*, 22.

⁴³¹ *ibid*, 22.

⁴³² *ibid*, 11.

⁴³³ *ibid*, 11.

⁴³⁴ Yeşim Arat, “Türkiye’de Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Vatandaşlık”, **75 Yılda Tebaa’dan Yurttaş’a Doğru**, Ed. Artun Ünsal (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998), 67.

⁴³⁵ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, 20.

mass political participation was started to be observed with Tanzimat Reforms.⁴³⁶ Some segments of the society gained the rights to vote, contact with the state authorities and join associations. Specifically, the condition of petitioning changed. Though the citizens were always given the chance to plead help for communal problems from Sultan via petitions named “imdatname (pleas for help)”, they evolved into personal pleas for individual cases in time and were then renamed as “Arz-ı Hal (presentation of one’s state of affairs)” in that century.⁴³⁷

When it came to the last quarter of the century, all the conventional participation acts were suspended until 1908 with the command of the Sultan and precluded during the World War I and the War of Liberation. These developments prepared the ground for unconventional participation to flourish while conventional participation “went underground” until the formation of the single party government of the newly founded Turkish Republic.⁴³⁸ This period between 1925 and 1945, emphasized the importance of secular regime and conventional political participation and, thus, started the regular election era and increased the rights of women through participating in elections.⁴³⁹ The democratization process went on with the starting of the multi-party period in 1946, as of then citizens were provided with “a real and free choice” for elections as well as “campaigns, demonstrations, meetings by political parties, political party membership and work”, except the fact that it was disrupted by three undemocratic interventions of the coups in 1960, 1971 and 1980.⁴⁴⁰

The participation tendencies of the young in Turkey are examined within three periods by Enneli.⁴⁴¹ The years between the 1923 and 1980 constitute the first period and describe the time in which state supported this group to participate and gave them the mission to disseminate the ideals of the new regime.⁴⁴² The second period starts with the military coup of 1980 and has several adverse characteristics with the earlier period such as discouraging the young citizens from political activities, especially

⁴³⁶ *ibid*, 9-10.

⁴³⁷ *ibid*, 9-10.

⁴³⁸ *ibid*, 11-12.

⁴³⁹ *ibid*, 12-13.

⁴⁴⁰ *ibid*, 13-14.

⁴⁴¹ Pınar Enneli, “The Turkish Young People as Active Citizens: Equal Participation or Social Exclusion?”, **Societal Peace and Ideal Citizenship for Turkey**, Ed. Rasim Özgür Dönmez, Pınar Enneli (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2011), 257-270.

⁴⁴² *ibid*, 262.

unconventional ones. This situation is claimed to have caused the youth to challenge the present system and even have estranged them from the system.⁴⁴³ The third period, starting from 2000s and continuing to the present, on the other hand, has adopted a positive attitude towards the participation of the young citizens, encouraging them to show active participation and voice opinions.⁴⁴⁴

Though the condition of political participation and the activities practiced showed variance from the Ottoman Empire to the present, some conventional acts including “voting, campaigning, debating, discussing and deliberating political issues with the intent of finding solutions for them, contacting political authorities” have maintained their popularity.⁴⁴⁵ With reference to the Turkish political context in terms of opportunity structure for political participation, it is believed that almost the first two decades of the republic witnessed mostly conventional participation primarily based on election activity, which discouraged unconventional participation forms and political opposition.⁴⁴⁶ Among conventional participation acts, voting is considered as the simplest and most effective one.⁴⁴⁷ It can be claimed that conventional political participation in Turkey developed and consolidated together with election context⁴⁴⁸. However, the reasons behind the high rates of participation in elections are debated since it is also known that the election law in the constitution of 1982 regarded voting obligatory.⁴⁴⁹

Conventional political participation has been legal, legitimate, rather simple and well regarded in Turkey.⁴⁵⁰ While petitioning, making demands from the political authorities and casting votes were allowed during constitutional monarchy in the Ottoman Empire and the earlier periods of republic in Turkey, protests were taken as a revolt against the state.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴³ *ibid*, 265.

⁴⁴⁴ *ibid*, 270.

⁴⁴⁵ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, 125.

⁴⁴⁶ *ibid*, 88.

⁴⁴⁷ Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, “Türkiye’de Siyasal Katılma ve Değişim”, **75 Yılda Tebaa’dan Yurttaş’a Doğru**, Ed. Artun Ünsal (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998), 236.

⁴⁴⁸ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, 15.

⁴⁴⁹ *ibid*, 16.

⁴⁵⁰ Kalaycıoğlu, *ibid*, 236.

⁴⁵¹ *ibid*, 243.

Repressive political participation acts such as strikebreaking, dispersing the protestor or attacking the demonstrators have been observed in Turkey.⁴⁵² Repressive participation activities have showed fluctuation throughout Turkish political history and occurred generally as a result of the incentives of the patrons that encourage the “otherwise particularly uninformed and uninterested youth” for their own political aims especially in 1970s.⁴⁵³

From the foundation of the republic up to the coup of 1980, there arose more opportunities for conventional and unconventional participation activities. Turkey witnessed some unconventional political behaviors such as “university student activism”, “interest group activities” and “protest movements” by “less powerful groups and interests” which led way to some protesting strategies later on such as “traffic blockages, boycotts, building occupations, demonstrations and rallies”.⁴⁵⁴ Protesting behaviors were generally characterized by “social democratic, socialist and Marxist-Leninist ideas and ideals”.⁴⁵⁵ Contrarily, unconventional participation realized for religious reasons were witnessed in the early years of Turkey, the most notorious one being Şeyh Sait rebellion which also had ethnic motives. They were against the regime and the reforms newly adopted in the society. Such political participation was also on the rise during the period between 1997 and 1999 with the religious protests and repressive acts following the pressure of military on a pro-Islamist party.⁴⁵⁶ The pluralism in terms of political party choices, which, in time, intensified protest and repressive forms of action, reached uncontrollable mass political participation and some participation activities lost their rightfulness for Turkish political authorities.⁴⁵⁷ One reaction to this situation was the Constitution of 1982 that constrained the practices of political participation and political parties, thus, decreasing the opportunities for participation and limiting it to popularized election behaviors until 1990s.⁴⁵⁸ Although the amount and the frequency of the acts of protest have displayed a dynamic nature and varied in Turkish political history, such acts as

⁴⁵² *ibid*, 60.

⁴⁵³ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, 111.

⁴⁵⁴ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, 16.

⁴⁵⁵ *ibid*, 111.

⁴⁵⁶ *ibid*, 112.

⁴⁵⁷ *ibid*, 89.

⁴⁵⁸ *ibid*, 89-90.

“petitions, boycotts, legal demonstrations, and wildcat strikes” increased their popularity, whereas “potentially violent acts” have been observed to decrease.⁴⁵⁹

As a matter of fact, between 1982 and 1995, organized groups and non-governmental organizations were not allowed to deal with, affect or participate in politics by the Turkish Constitution, thus leaving only political parties as political actors.⁴⁶⁰ Nevertheless, with the beginning of 1996, Turkish society encountered the concept of non-governmental organizations through media.⁴⁶¹ In addition to increasing importance of human rights, the number of the nongovernmental organizations in Turkey has been on the rise.⁴⁶²

3.1.2. The Constitutions from the Ottoman Empire to Present

The proliferation of political participation and massification of political life are considered to occur following the Industrial Revolution and Enlightenment in the West, while political participation was observed to flourish in 1840s thanks to Tanzimat in Anatolia.⁴⁶³ In 1850s, personal demands of people were observed to be included in “arz-ı hal” petitions.⁴⁶⁴ However, the constitutions by Ottoman Empire in 1876 and 1909 are not accepted to be completely democratic due to being drafted under an undemocratic regime and during an undemocratic period.⁴⁶⁵ On the other hand, political participation of the citizens has been stressed and sovereignty has been stated to belong to the nation without any restriction or condition in all of the constitutions after the foundation of Turkish Republic.⁴⁶⁶

While the constitutions of 1921 and 1924 are accepted to represent an “absolute representative regime”, the constitutions of 1961 and 1982 are considered to be a

⁴⁵⁹ *ibid*, 215.

⁴⁶⁰ Batum, *ibid*, 109.

⁴⁶¹ Aydın Uğur, “Batı'da ve Türkiye'de Sivil Toplum: Kavram ve Olgunun Gelişim Serüveni”, **75 Yılda Tebaa'dan Yurttaş'a Doğru**, Ed. Artun Ünsal (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998), 213.

⁴⁶² Ünsal, *ibid*, 41-42.

⁴⁶³ Kalaycıoğlu, *ibid*, 233.

⁴⁶⁴ *ibid*, 242.

⁴⁶⁵ Batum, *ibid*, 104.

⁴⁶⁶ **Constitution of the Republic of Turkey**, 1921, Art. 1; **Constitution of the Republic of Turkey**, 1924, Art. 3., transl. Edward M.Earle, (1925), 89, <http://www.worldstatesmen.org/Turkeyconstitution1924.pdf> [10.06.2015]; **The 1961 Turkish Constitution as Amended**, Directorate General of Press and Information. transl. Mustafa Gerçekler, Erhan Yasar and Orhan Tung. Art. 4, (Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi. 1978), 8; **Constitution of the Republic of Turkey**. 1982. Art. 6, (Version including amendments of 1987, 1993, 1995, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010), https://global.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/constitution_en.pdf [10.06.2015].

product of military coups and regimes.⁴⁶⁷ The Constitution of 1921 (Teşkilat-ı Esasiye Kanunu) was drafted when Anatolian people were fighting for the freedom of their land after WWI and the Turkish Republic was not founded yet. Among all the others, the 1921 Constitution is regarded as the most or maybe the only democratic constitution considering its preparation and adoption process⁴⁶⁸, although it was far from focusing on human rights or citizenship due to the political conditions the country was in then⁴⁶⁹. On the other hand, the Constitution of 1924 provided the citizens with all the classical rights and freedoms, yet did not ensure one's freedom under the rule of majoritarian democracy.⁴⁷⁰

The introduction of reforms initiated by Atatürk such as the adoption of the Swiss Civil Code, granting women have the same rights as men and banning religious titles in society in the earlier years of the republic guaranteed a secular and lawful base for the use of rights and fulfilment of the responsibilities in society within Turkish Republic. The present rights of citizens were enhanced by the constitution of 1961. The Constitution of 1961 is regarded as the milestone of pluralist democracy in Turkey.⁴⁷¹ It enhanced the fundamental rights and liberties, guaranteed them with its principle of legality and brought concrete base for freedom.⁴⁷² Though the constitution of 1961 included “liberal essences” in it, the dominance of military and state elite was still observable.⁴⁷³

When it comes to the constitution of 1982, some individual and social rights were nullified.⁴⁷⁴ Though the Constitution of 1982 were prepared to include more number of rights for citizens regarding the ones such as “health services and protection of environment” as well as the “protection of historical, cultural and natural assets”, the articles about personal liberty and security, political parties as well as freedoms of press, association and assembly, unions and strikes were restricted with some provisions.⁴⁷⁵ The following years clearly displayed the domination and control of the

⁴⁶⁷ Batur, *ibid*, 104.

⁴⁶⁸ *ibid*, 113.

⁴⁶⁹ Fazıl Sağlam, “Cumhuriyet Döneminde İnsan Hakları”, *75 Yılda Tebaa’dan Yurttaş’a Doğru*, Ed. Artun Ünsal (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1998), 92.

⁴⁷⁰ *ibid*, 102.

⁴⁷¹ *ibid*, 103.

⁴⁷² *ibid*, 103-105.

⁴⁷³ Dönmez, *ibid*, 8.

⁴⁷⁴ *ibid*, 9.

⁴⁷⁵ Sağlam, *ibid*, 97.

state over its citizens and the period following the 1980 coup created an “apolitical youth”.⁴⁷⁶

3.1.3. Obstacles to Participation and Practice of Citizen Rights

According to Batum, there is no consistent society-state or citizen-state relationship in Turkey.⁴⁷⁷ For instance, the majority of Turkish citizens were not considered to reach a citizenship in real sense, and become an individual-citizen in modern understanding at the end of 20th century.⁴⁷⁸ Besides, the authoritarian ruling understanding of the Turkish state was considered to preserve its power until recently no matter how far it got in terms of social rights and political elections, bearing in mind the passive position of the citizen vis a vis the state and the gap between them.⁴⁷⁹

While “yurttaş (citizen)”, as an ideal, represents legal and political relationship to a country as nationality, is bound to recognized rights and responsibilities and include participatory, questioning, pluralist as well as active citizenship; in practice, it has not been powerful enough before state yet.⁴⁸⁰ For instance, citizenship was taken in terms of duties rather than rights in Turkey until the last century.⁴⁸¹

Calling citizenship “hard job” in Turkey, Ünsal mentions some problems experienced in its practice due to structural and cultural obstacles, “limited democracy”, and the hardships “a new citizenship understanding” requires.⁴⁸² Likewise, “‘singular power’ desire, authoritarian rule and connection of private and public space” as well as “increasing political, economic and cultural pressure” would impede pluralistic democracy and political citizenship.⁴⁸³ Furthermore, bureaucratic corruption, “authoritarian government-society relationship” and “patriarchal family structure and values” are claimed to have negatively affected the concept of citizenship.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷⁶ Enneli, *ibid*, 258.

⁴⁷⁷ Batum, *ibid*, 101.

⁴⁷⁸ Ünsal, *ibid*, 10.

⁴⁷⁹ *ibid*, 24.

⁴⁸⁰ *ibid*, 10.

⁴⁸¹ Enneli, *ibid*, 261-262.

⁴⁸² Ünsal, *ibid*, 11-12.

⁴⁸³ *ibid*, 12.

⁴⁸⁴ *ibid*.

The citizenship level is affected by the interaction of one's personal space and public space.⁴⁸⁵ As stated by Ünsal, the citizenship conscience in Turkish context with regard to political participation and moral has not matured yet owing to personal and environmental reasons.⁴⁸⁶ Ünsal is of the opinion that Turkey has not completely internalized "political citizenship" yet due to state's official ideology, insufficient political freedom, underrated position of human rights and distrust in state institutions.⁴⁸⁷ Other problems negatively affecting citizenship are listed as "communitarianism, vulgar nationalism, politico-religious, tribal structure and semi-feudal relationships, insufficient education level, socioeconomic weakness, the deepening gap in the income distribution, social and cultural maladjustment, inequality before law and injustice".⁴⁸⁸

According to Dönmez⁴⁸⁹ political participation and active citizenship could not find a way to flourish in Turkey due to nationalist attitude and political authority of the state. The citizenship practice adopted by the Turkish Republic created some dualities as "center-periphery", "Islam-secularism", and "Turk-non-Turk" as well as a gap between state and society.⁴⁹⁰ Following 1950s, multiparty system and integral migration in the country pluralized the public sphere, enabled various identities to spread, created "informal" working fields, and introduced a "new urban settler" profile and a "new hybrid culture" which changed the social structure, increased the gap between center and periphery and prevented the development of a citizenship identity in modern sense.⁴⁹¹ Especially, the suppression of the left-right ideologies, ineffective social welfare system and the state of emergency following the coup d'état of 1980 caused individuals in the periphery to turn to the bonds of history, fellowship, ethnicity and religion.⁴⁹² Though, it is observed that the voice of the "periphery" is heard more when compared to the past along with the powerful "center" in Turkey, it is also

⁴⁸⁵ *ibid*, 30.

⁴⁸⁶ *ibid*, 30.

⁴⁸⁷ *ibid*, 43.

⁴⁸⁸ *ibid*, 45.

⁴⁸⁹ Dönmez, *ibid*, 2.

⁴⁹⁰ *ibid*, 3.

⁴⁹¹ *ibid*, 7-20.

⁴⁹² *ibid*, 7-20.

claimed that the trust of some groups of citizens in the state has declined due to the inequalities in terms of financial, cultural and social issues.⁴⁹³

To determine with what motive individuals to show participation is a rather tough job. It is noted that it is uncertain what percentage of the voting acts can be considered “mobilized action” or “political action” since it is known that some participants do not vote with a political motivation.⁴⁹⁴ For instance, since voting is highly promoted and encouraged through some material incentives like getting a job by some political agents, this “voluntary” action has been also observed to turn into an “induced” one.⁴⁹⁵ Its examples can be observed also in the voting behavior of women who are poorly educated and without economic freedom or men who cannot make enough money, under the effect of powerful people in family, work or community.⁴⁹⁶ Therefore, Kalaycıoğlu and Çarkoğlu prefers to call such participation of citizens in the single party era as political mobilization rather than conventional participation.⁴⁹⁷

According to Ünsal, it is expected from an individual, who is strictly disciplined in patriarchal family form, to accept and obey an authoritarian political rule since this individual would associate the power of father vis-a-vis children in the family with the power of state vis-a-vis its citizens.⁴⁹⁸ The romanticized term for the state, “Devlet Baba” (Father State), is shown as the reflection of the fact that political life is taken as a relative bond in Turkey. Therefore, it is claimed that family still preserves its “socializing” and “politicizing” function.⁴⁹⁹ Likewise, Ünsal mentions the presence of the group of “güdümlü seçmenler (directed voters)” as a barrier to “rational and ethical citizenship” in Turkey as a result of “himayecilik (protectionism)” and “vesayetçilik (guardianship)” under the influence of feudal relationships, tribes, ethnic groups, religious sects and “clientelism” tradition.⁵⁰⁰

Another point, according to Ünsal, is that political parties themselves show antidemocratic nature considering the members’ and local organizations’ staying passive under the party head offices and leaders, thus weakening the relationship

⁴⁹³ Ünsal, *ibid*, 40.

⁴⁹⁴ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, 16.

⁴⁹⁵ Kalaycıoğlu, *ibid*, 236.

⁴⁹⁶ *ibid*, 246.

⁴⁹⁷ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, 16.

⁴⁹⁸ Ünsal, *ibid*, 21.

⁴⁹⁹ *ibid*, 23.

⁵⁰⁰ *ibid*, 24-25.

between the parties and citizens.⁵⁰¹ Another reason for this, he claims, is the presence of 10 percent election threshold.

According to Dönmez, the Turkish identity needs a redefinition and the current constitution needs a revision content wise.⁵⁰² Besides, state should adopt social democratic system, become more inclusive for all groups, and end its monopoly over social sphere.⁵⁰³ The inefficiency of the education system as well as low levels of membership to voluntary groups, non-governmental organizations or political parties also stand as critical obstacles to citizenship.⁵⁰⁴

Recently, Turkish society is considered to have matured in terms of political conscience, skills and knowledge to have political motives and resources necessary for participation, and its performance of political participation and protesting behaviors, with an enlarging participation profile, which is not much different from the consolidated democracies of the West.⁵⁰⁵ However, the legal restrictions present in the 1982 Constitution and politicians' acting slowly to improve the opportunity structure for citizens to show conventional and unconventional participation more still pose an obstacle that needs to be addressed.⁵⁰⁶

Another point that stands as an important issue to solve political participation is the utilization of the online and digital facilities. Accordingly, the next section touches upon the steps taken in the world and Turkey and discusses how effectively they are used.

3.1.4. State Initiatives for Digitalization in the World and Turkey

With the beginning of the 21st century, the communication with institutions has turned into a “two-way relationship”, and brought along the anticipation for accessibility and accountability of the representatives in an interactive exchange.⁵⁰⁷ Since technology has become “interactive, accessible and easy to use, together with its expanding use”, there have been more opportunities for participation and involvement

⁵⁰¹ *ibid*, 26.

⁵⁰² Dönmez, *ibid*, 10.

⁵⁰³ *ibid*, 20.

⁵⁰⁴ Ünsal, *ibid*, 25.

⁵⁰⁵ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, 111.

⁵⁰⁶ *ibid*, 111.

⁵⁰⁷ Coleman, Blumler, *ibid*, 90.

in the political practices within the province of parliament members.⁵⁰⁸ Thanks to digital technologies, “virtual co-presence” has been made possible, therefore, the restraints of space have been moved and “social space” and political distance have been reduced, which made it easier for people to follow and communicate with the political authorities in the virtual sphere.⁵⁰⁹ Governments from different parts of the world have started to show up in the online environment with the aim of giving the impression of communication with the represented and sounding out the public opinion.⁵¹⁰ This situation is named as “generational migration” to online political sphere.⁵¹¹

Coleman and Blumler⁵¹² point out the presence of a variety of attempts worldwide for grassroots e-democracy for different reasons such as reinforcing local ties or looking for alternatives to the present social structures. Though it is known that numerous political institutions and politicians in different countries have their web sites, Coleman and Blumler give some advanced practices such as Estonian government’s TOM website (acronym for ‘Today I Decide’), which enables citizens to offer new laws to be evaluated by the government when having reached even a few number of signatures; the e-petitioning officially encouraged by the United Kingdom; as well as the “online consultation mechanisms” including the Interactive Policy-Making Unit initiated by the European Union to be always informed about the views and experiences of their citizens, and the e-rulemaking attempt by the USA for enabling citizens to access regulatory documents and express their opinions regarding governing.⁵¹³ The majority of these e-democracy initiatives are lawful, impromptu, and creative and supported by global communications network.⁵¹⁴

Turkey has created online platforms and developed the present websites to provide better, interactive public services. Today, most of the public institutions have online presence and enable citizens to voice their suggestions, complaints and demands. For instance, a public relations application, BIMER⁵¹⁵ (Prime Ministry

⁵⁰⁸ Fink, Črnič, **ibid**, 1285.

⁵⁰⁹ Coleman, Blumler, **ibid**, 81.

⁵¹⁰ **ibid**, 86.

⁵¹¹ **ibid**, 86.

⁵¹² **ibid**, 120.

⁵¹³ **ibid**, 90-91.

⁵¹⁴ **ibid**, 120.

⁵¹⁵ “BİMER Hakkında”. BİMER. <https://www.bimer.gov.tr/bimer-hakkinda> [12.08.2015].

Communications Center) was started with the Prime Ministry Circular No.2006/3 in 2006. All the individuals entitled with the right of petition may access BİMER by phone, letter, or fax, via internet, or in person.⁵¹⁶ It is also possible to write directly to the president of the country via the online service called CİMER⁵¹⁷ (Communications Center of the Presidency). Besides, Turkey launched e-government platform which enables citizens, businesses and government agencies to benefit from all public services online⁵¹⁸ and the platform started to be used in 2006⁵¹⁹. Thanks to this platform, many bureaucratic procedures can be realized in a simpler and faster way.⁵²⁰ Following its establishment, the classical concepts of bureaucracy and government entered into a process of redefinition.⁵²¹ Moreover, according to United Nations E-Government Survey⁵²² in 2016, Turkey is among the countries with high EGDI (E-Government Development Index) and high OSI (Online Service Index), following the countries with very high EGDI and OSI (109). It comes 68st in the world, making progress form 71th in 2014.

Despite all the successful steps taken so far, research indicate that there are numerous areas that need to be digitalized in Turkey. Üste and Güzel⁵²³ touch upon an important point regarding the vitality of adopting electronic practices for political participation of the citizens, by giving the failure in the 2010 referendum in Turkey. The referendum was realized to amend the 26 of the acts in the Turkish Constitution prepared in 1982 and the participation rate of the citizens were around 73%. According to Üste and Güzel, many citizens could not vote in the referendum since its date was arranged when it was the holiday period for students and the date for starting school was extended to a later date since it coincided with the religious holiday celebrated nationwide. Therefore, some of the voters were still having their holiday in their summer houses or resorts which mean they were not near their election centers and

⁵¹⁶ “Sıkça Sorulan Sorular”. BİMER. <https://www.bimer.gov.tr/sorular> [12.08.2015].

⁵¹⁷ CİMER. <https://basvuru.tccb.gov.tr/Forms/pgDefault.aspx> [12.08.2015].

⁵¹⁸ “E-Government Gateway”. E-devlet Kapısı. <https://www.turkiye.gov.tr/non-citizens> [18.08.2017].

⁵¹⁹ “Hakkımızda”. E-devlet Kapısı. <https://www.turkiye.gov.tr/bilgilendirme?konu=siteHakkinda> [18.08.2017].

⁵²⁰ “E-Government Gateway”. E-devlet Kapısı. <https://www.turkiye.gov.tr/non-citizens> [18.08.2017].

⁵²¹ *ibid.*

⁵²² “United Nations E-Government Survey 2016: E-Government in Support of Sustainable Development”, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, <http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN97453.pdf> [21.06.2017].

⁵²³ Rabia B. Üste, Berrin Güzel, “Referandums and E-voting in Turkey”, **International Journal of eBusiness and eGovernment Studies**, vol. 3. no. 1 (2011): 147.

consequently missed their chance for participation.⁵²⁴ For the very reason, they suggest the political agents in Turkey to start the arrangements for e-voting and e-referendum that would save energy, money, time and decrease the problems of security, but, in return, increase the number of participation.⁵²⁵

Other researchers, Demirhan and Çakır⁵²⁶ examined the contents of the official web pages and social media pages of the Turkish parties in the parliament with the aim of understanding their skills to utilize ICTs in the field of politics. The parties in the course of their study were Justice and Development Party (JDP), Republican People's Party (RPP), Nationalist Movement Party (NMP) and Peace and Democracy Party (PDP), which still constitute the only parties in the parliament in 2018.

The findings showed that even though all the parties in question have social media accounts and actively use it, NMP and PDP are relatively more successful in terms of their number of supporters' online.⁵²⁷ Considering the number of messages sent for the 2011 general election, PDP was observed to be by far the best, while JDP were the most passive among all when it comes to using Facebook for its participative functions.⁵²⁸ Likewise, similar findings were obtained when examining the Facebook activities of these parties in terms of its participative functions during the preparation process of the new constitution, where the only difference was that JDP and RPP did not utilize Facebook at all then.⁵²⁹

When it comes to the presence of the ICT issues in the party programs, though the importance of ICTs were stressed in the programs of JDP, RPP and NMP, they did not find a place in the PDP party program no matter how more active social media use they showed then.⁵³⁰ JDP ignored the utilization of these technologies for political participation and attempts for e-government or e-participation. Among all, e-government was just emphasized in the program of RPP. Alternatively, NMP, adopting a nationalist standpoint, stressed the vitality of producing and using national networks.⁵³¹ As for the boundaries and the control of the use of ICTs, while JDP

⁵²⁴ *ibid*, 153-154.

⁵²⁵ *ibid*, 155-156.

⁵²⁶ Demirhan, Çakır, *ibid*.

⁵²⁷ *ibid*, 8.

⁵²⁸ *ibid*, 8-9.

⁵²⁹ *ibid*, 9.

⁵³⁰ *ibid*, 10.

⁵³¹ *ibid*, 19.

favoring the “institutional control”.⁵³² NMP is more concerned with the national interests and takes sides with the supporters of “limited control”. RPP likewise calls for the support of the government for the growth of this field, while PDP emphasizes freedom.⁵³³

With respect to the web pages of these parties, the website of the RPP was better at presenting the visitors relatively richer opportunities for communication and interaction with such tools providing the emails of the candidates, bulletin boards, comment section for the visitors and the e-box application, while the websites of the JDP, NMP and PDP fell short in going beyond the functioning as an informational tool⁵³⁴.

Taking all the findings into consideration, Turkish state and political parties have taken some steps to digitalize state services. However, it is seen that they need to be improved and used more effectively. Besides, the need for new online and digital services to be developed is also expressed. For these reasons, the state has a long way to go to successfully utilize ICTs and internalize participative practices on the Internet and, accordingly, should give more thought on how to integrate their political activities with online applications to provide better service and reach more people.

3.1.5. Current Research on Citizenship and Participation in the Turkish Context

One of the most comprehensible studies on social structure of Turkey was realized by Konda⁵³⁵ with the participation of 47.958 interviewees in 2006. The part on citizenship revealed noteworthy findings about how Turkish citizens view this concept. In one question, a few factors were provided to the participants to choose as a prerequisite for being a citizen in Turkey and, interestingly, the most chosen option (82%) was “loving Turkey”, while the least chosen one was “ethnic background”.⁵³⁶ It could be reasoned that the majority of the citizens accept emotional bonds with the state crucial prerequisite for citizenship more than regional, ethnic or religious bonds.

⁵³² *ibid*, 14.

⁵³³ *ibid*, 14-15.

⁵³⁴ *ibid*, 12.

⁵³⁵ “Biz Kimiz? Social Structure Survey 2006”, Konda, http://konda.com.tr/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2006_09_KONDA_Social_Structure-1.pdf [27.06.2016].

⁵³⁶ *ibid*, 42.

A recent study conducted with the large sample from 58 cities in Turkey has revealed that a “good citizen” is perceived as one who votes, obeys the rules, follows the actions of governments, supports social and political organizations, respects differences, shops responsibly, and helps the ones in a financially disadvantaged position.⁵³⁷ This finding may be an indication of that Turkish citizens have characteristics of dutiful citizenship mainly and still maintain their obedient position vis a vis state.

Another study examined the opinions on citizenship in the virtual environment with the sample consisting of 157 Turkish citizens who utilized the virtual facilities.⁵³⁸ The findings did not reveal a gap between genders or age groups on the opinions regarding the traditional and modern citizenship, neither was the kind of virtual facility utilized found to affect their opinions on the citizenship types.⁵³⁹ One interesting finding was that the Turkish participants have adopted modern citizenship in addition to the traditional citizenship and even welcomed the concepts related to the modern citizenship more, which indicates that while our society does not leave traditional citizenship values yet, is open to what modern citizenship offers.⁵⁴⁰ Another finding worthy of consideration was that females had higher rates when it comes to internalizing the values of the modern citizenship when compared to their male counterparts. It was interpreted as the reflection of the patriarchal family structure in Turkey in which females are inclined to embracing modern values while males tend to keep the conservative values.

A current research from Turkey conducted with university students found that though they stated to be dissatisfied with the economic and political systems in the country, their political participation levels were considerably low, thus indicating the youth’s reluctance to take the responsibility to change the present system for a better one they idealize.⁵⁴¹ Likewise, Erdoğan argues that young Turkish citizens exhibit high participation in politics via neither conventional nor unconventional ways, aside from casting a vote.⁵⁴² Besides, he comments that the young generation go to polls less than

⁵³⁷ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, *ibid*, 6-7.

⁵³⁸ Özmen, Er, *ibid*, 204-216.

⁵³⁹ *ibid*, 209-210.

⁵⁴⁰ *ibid*, 213-214.

⁵⁴¹ Ontaş, Buz, Hatiboğlu, *ibid*, 249.

⁵⁴² Erdoğan, *ibid*, 2.

the earlier generations considers it worthy of consideration for it may indicate a political attitude because “non-voting is the cheapest of all kinds of political protest”.⁵⁴³ Claiming the young citizens in Turkey has a participation problem, Erdoğan emphasizes the findings of his study that proved this situation still continues by comparing the results of two surveys in 1999 and 2003. However, one significant finding of the study is that in the second survey in 2003, participants were found to select the option “I did not have the chance” more than “I preferred not to” for the political actions provided in the questionnaire, indicating intention rather than a rejection to participate. On the other hand, actions related to political parties were among the most rejected ones, Erdoğan ascribes it to the lack of confidence to political parties or such actions. Another highly rejected activity was found to be ‘being a member of political NGOs’, thus exemplifying the negative point of view towards “unconventional political participation or elite challenging”.⁵⁴⁴ Moreover, the study revealed all types of political participation showed decline from 1999 to 2003 excluding the protest activities on the Internet.⁵⁴⁵

According to the data found in the research in the Turkish context, there is neither a significant difference between ethnic groups in Turkey (Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish, Zaza) in terms of active and passive political participation or nor a correlation between the time spent on the Internet and online and offline political participation.⁵⁴⁶

Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu conducted a comprehensive study with the sample of 1509 households from 58 provinces of the country with the aim of detecting the perception of good citizenship, their bonds with their state, attachment to social and political institutions, attitudes toward ethnic and religious identities and social trust in general.⁵⁴⁷ The majority of the citizens were found to object the permission of public meetings or demonstrations of such groups as radical religionists, opponents desiring to overthrow the government by force, radicals targeting any race or ethnic group.⁵⁴⁸ The participation rates of the Turkish citizens were discovered to be considerably low in comparison with several other democratic countries, especially in terms of

⁵⁴³ *ibid*, 6.

⁵⁴⁴ *ibid*, 6.

⁵⁴⁵ *ibid*, 5.

⁵⁴⁶ Karabağ, Coşkun, *ibid*, 119.

⁵⁴⁷ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2015, 4.

⁵⁴⁸ *ibid*, 17.

protesting acts.⁵⁴⁹ It can be inferred that Turkey has not achieved participation culture in full sense as in the states with long tradition of democracy. Moreover, in addition to the low levels of communication with other people in a regular day; being affiliated to an association, club, voluntary agency or a political party, which are important for civil society activities, were also rather low in comparison to the average numbers from ISSP countries.⁵⁵⁰ Another interesting finding was though Turkish participants had lower levels of political participation or interest, the trust in the politicians and political parties were higher than developed countries⁵⁵¹, the trust in the fairness of the 2011 election campaign and results were lower, indicating the relative weakness of Turkey in management of the election process⁵⁵². Moreover, nearly half of the participants do not believe that democracy functions well in Turkey or it will in the near future, half of them believe that it functioned worse in the near past.⁵⁵³ Finally, the findings indicated that TV still constitutes the main news resource for politics, while radio loses its importance and newspaper keeps its significance for news and comments.⁵⁵⁴ On the other hand, although the Internet is becoming popular, it has not got the power to replace TVs yet. Likewise, the Turkish participants were not found to have a tendency to express ideas on politics or have a political discussion via various media like the Internet at present.

Özdemir examined the reasons why the young citizens from the South-eastern Anatolia Region of Turkey show low level of participation in politics along with social life, education and labor market, starting from the definition of the participation by The United Nations as a concept with four dimensions, as social, cultural, economic and political.⁵⁵⁵ Özdemir stresses that earlier researches already proved that the young population in South-eastern Anatolia region of Turkey are neither much present in the social sphere except their immediate circle of family and acquaintances, nor in educational institutions especially after eight years of compulsory elementary school.⁵⁵⁶ These are followed by less number of opportunities for employment due to

⁵⁴⁹ *ibid*, 21-22.

⁵⁵⁰ *ibid*, 31-32.

⁵⁵¹ *ibid*, 56-65.

⁵⁵² *ibid*, 66.

⁵⁵³ *ibid*, 75.

⁵⁵⁴ *ibid*, 80.

⁵⁵⁵ Özdemir, *ibid*.

⁵⁵⁶ *ibid*, 4.

insufficient education and professional skills, and, consequently, by low level of participation. The quantitative data gathered from his research supported the earlier findings as well. While the daily life of young people mostly consists of helping family, roaming with friends, watching TV or listening to music⁵⁵⁷; entertainment activities do not even include spending time in outdoor spaces for almost half of them⁵⁵⁸. This can indicate the presence of a group of young citizens with a rather reserved lifestyle.

In addition to the cultural situation of the participants, the information resources the young in the Southern Eastern Anatolian Region utilized and the condition of their education were examined. Nine out of ten participants were found to spare minimum one hour a day for watching TV; whereas the rate of the participants resorting to newspaper, books or the Internet for information was below thirty percent.⁵⁵⁹ Though television viewing is regarded as among the traditional activities of older generations and not preferred by the younger ones that much, the research showed that it still stands as an important element of the daily life of youngsters. Seemingly, these individuals have not abandoned the conventional ways of receiving information and therefore keep their passive, receiver position as the older generations. As for education, most of them just completed elementary school and less than two percent was university graduate.⁵⁶⁰ When it comes to employment, just 13 percent of the participants stated to work, whereas most of them were non-qualified workers.⁵⁶¹ The findings indicate a rather poorly educated and unqualified group of young people who cannot make their participation felt enough in cultural, economic and therefore political life, thus proving the decisive role of SES on participation.

⁵⁵⁷ *ibid*, 5.

⁵⁵⁸ *ibid*, 6.

⁵⁵⁹ *ibid*, 7.

⁵⁶⁰ *ibid*, 9.

⁵⁶¹ *ibid*, 11-13.

The results of the “World Values Survey” (WVS) carried out with adult Turkish citizens between 1990-1994⁵⁶², 1995-1998⁵⁶³, 1999-2004⁵⁶⁴, 2005-2009⁵⁶⁵ and 2010-2014⁵⁶⁶ are valuable to provide a comprehensive picture of the condition of participation in our society over the years. According to the findings, perhaps the most important development over the years in the participation trend is, while all the participants without exception stated not to have a membership of any of the voluntary organizations or activities asked (religious organization; education, arts, music or cultural activities; labour unions; political parties; conservation, environmental groups; professional associations; sports, recreation; other groups) in the first survey, the percentage of the participants, who expressed to be a an active or inactive member of any of the organizations or activities given, increased in the interviews of the following years. Nevertheless, in all the surveys, the percentage of a positive answer for membership of an organization stayed under 5% of all respondents in most cases and the percentages of positive answers from female participants were less than the ones from males in all cases, revealing that females lead a more secluded life than men in the society and most of the participants from both sexes content themselves with familial or traditional bonds spontaneously occurring during one’s lifetime, thus decreasing the opportunity for communication and wider social relation networks in society and missing out the benefits of non-governmental organizations for a more democratic society.

Among all the political participation acts realized, signing a petition was found to be the most practiced one, whereas occupying buildings had the smallest rate. Though voting and petitioning were relatively popular among all participation acts, the numbers describing the rate of any participation act to be realized by an individual at least once in life were all below 10 -apart from petition- and more than half of the subjects chose the option “would never do” for these acts listed. Another interesting

⁵⁶² “World Values Survey Wave 2 (1990-1994) - Turkey 1990”, World Values Survey, 18 April 2014, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV2.jsp> [02.02.2016].

⁵⁶³ “World Values Survey Wave 3 (1995-1998) - Turkey 1996”, World Values Survey, 18 April 2015, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV3.jsp> [02.02.2016].

⁵⁶⁴ “World Values Survey Wave 4 (1999-2004) - Turkey 2001”, World Values Survey, 18 April 2015, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV4.jsp> [02.02.2016].

⁵⁶⁵ “World Values Survey Wave 5 (2005-2008) - Turkey 2007”, World Values Survey, 18 April 2015, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV5.jsp> [02.02.2016].

⁵⁶⁶ “World Values Survey Wave 6 (2010-2014) - Turkey 2011”, World Values Survey, 1 January 2016, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp> [02.02.2016].

finding was that female citizens were discovered to have less tendency to participate since their participation rates were lower than males and they also chose the option “would never do” for political participation acts more. Upon being asked the degree of interest in politics, the answers “somewhat interested”, “not very interested” and “not at all interested” were mostly selected by the participants in all the surveys, indicating that their interest rate is not very high. Likewise, they mostly stated that they did not find the politics very important in life. In the surveys that questioned whether men make better political leaders than women, both sexes mostly agreed with the statement, thus revealing the patriarchal viewpoint prevalent in public. Considering the results, it can be argued that the Turkish people do not integrate into politics or voice their opinions enough to affect politics. Moreover, a good part of them intentionally abstain from politics. Among them, women are in a rather disadvantaged position since they were somehow less willing to participate or did not have the chance to do so.

All in all, the current studies in Turkey have revealed a citizen profile who utilizes the traditional media more, maintains a reserved lifestyle and do not show enough political participation enough. These findings seem to be far from the findings of the research in terms of the level of participation and the perception of citizenship in the countries with long democratic culture. Among all the participation acts, petitioning is especially important for this thesis and, therefore, the condition of this particular act is worth examining.

3.2. Petitioning and Change.org

3.2.1. The Right to Petition in Turkish Republic

The right of petition is considered “among the political rights that enable acquisition of information through getting answers to questions, check through complaining and democratic participation through making wishes and suggestions” in Turkey.⁵⁶⁷ Several studies revealed that petitioning was among the earliest political

⁵⁶⁷ “Dilekçe ve Bilgi Edinme Hakkının Kullanılmasına İlişkin Genelge”, (No. B.02.0.PPG.0.12-320-1327, 23 January 2004): 2.

participation rights granted to citizens of the Ottoman Empire⁵⁶⁸ and later Turkey⁵⁶⁹ and one of the most practiced political participation acts of Turkish citizens⁵⁷⁰.

The first constitutional text recognizing the right to submit petitions of the Ottoman Empire citizens was Kanun-i Esasi (The Ottoman Constitution of 1876)⁵⁷¹, of which 14th article specifies the exercise of the right⁵⁷². The following constitution was established in 1921 by the Grand National Assembly under extraordinary conditions and therefore did not include fundamental rights and freedoms.⁵⁷³ Named Teşkilat-ı Esasiye Kanunu in Ottoman Turkish, the Constitution of 1921 preserved the right of petition despite not specifying legal provisions regarding the right because this constitution did not repeal the provisions of the earlier constitution of 1876.⁵⁷⁴

The Constitution of 1924, which was drafted to answer the needs of the newly founded state, specified the right of petition under the Public Law of Turks.⁵⁷⁵ Competent authorities and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey were specified as the addressees of the petitions that any Turk can write for their demands and complaints. Also, the responses to the petitions were obliged to be written. In terms of the exercise of the right and the responsibilities of the addressees of the petitions, the constitutions of 1924⁵⁷⁶ and 1961⁵⁷⁷ show similarity. However, while the right of petition is provided under the Public law of the Turk in the first constitution, it is placed

⁵⁶⁸ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, 10.

⁵⁶⁹ Kalaycıoğlu, *ibid*, 243.

⁵⁷⁰ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, 215.

⁵⁷¹ **The Ottoman Constitution.** 1876. <http://www.anayasa.gen.tr/1876constitution.htm> [10.06.2015].

⁵⁷² Article 14. “One or more persons of ottoman nationality have the right of presenting petitions in the proper quarter relating to the breaking of law and regulation, done either to their own or public detriment, and may likewise present in protest signed petitions to the General Ottoman Assembly, complaining of the conduct of state servants and functionaries.”

⁵⁷³ “Türkiye’de Dilekçe Hakkının Tarihsel Gelişimi”. Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi. <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/dilekce/tarihce.htm> [20.02.2016].

⁵⁷⁴ *ibid*.

⁵⁷⁵ **Constitution of the Republic of Turkey.** 1924. transl. Edward M. Earle. 1925. <http://www.worldstatesmen.org/Turkeyconstitution1924.pdf> [10.06.2015].

⁵⁷⁶ Article 82. “Any Turk, acting on his own behalf or on behalf of others, may address petitions and make complaints either to the competent authority or to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey concerning acts and circumstances which he considers contradictory to law. Complaints or petitions may be offered by separate individuals or by several persons at the same time. The reply to an individual complaint must be given in writing to the person concerned.”

⁵⁷⁷ Article 62 “Citizens are entitled to petition in writing singly or collectively to the competent authorities, and the Grand National Assembly concerning requests and complaints involving themselves or to the public.

The action taken as a result of petitioning involving the applicants in person shall be communicated to them in writing.”

under Political Rights and Duties in the second one. On the other hand, the right of petition is provided along with the right to information and appeal to the Ombudsperson, under Political Rights and Duties, within the part on Fundamental Rights and Duties of the Constitution of 1982.⁵⁷⁸

According to the current constitution, in addition to the citizens of Turkey, foreigner residents also have right to submit petitions by law upon the reciprocity principle on the condition that they are written in Turkish.⁵⁷⁹ The inclusion of foreign residents as a group entitled to submit petition and the emphasis on responding to the petitions “without delay” stand out as important distinctive features of the new arrangement of the right of petition. They can be taken as positive developments in the service provided by the state. Though it was not mentioned whether petitions could be written singly or collectively as in the previous constitution, citizens can still write petitions individually or as a group. The details about the exercise of the petition right by Turkish citizens and the foreigner residents in Turkey are provided in the law no. 3071 on the Use of Right to Petition.⁵⁸⁰

Guaranteed by law, the right of petition enables citizens to submit their petitions in written or online to relevant authorities and government officials. There

⁵⁷⁸ Article 74 “(As amended on October 3, 2001; Act No. 4709) Citizens and foreigners resident in Turkey, with the condition of observing the principle of reciprocity, have the right to apply in writing to the competent authorities and to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey with regard to the requests and complaints concerning themselves or the public.

(As amended on October 3, 2001; Act No. 4709) The result of the application concerning himself/herself shall be made known to the petitioner in writing without delay.

(Repealed on September 12, 2010; Act No. 5982)

(Paragraph added on September 12, 2010; Act No. 5982) Everyone has the right to obtain information and appeal to the Ombudsperson.

(Paragraph added on September 12, 2010; Act No. 5982) The Institution of the Ombudsperson established under the Grand National Assembly of Turkey examines complaints on the functioning of the administration.

(Paragraph added on September 12, 2010; Act No. 5982) The Chief Ombudsperson shall be elected by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey for a term of four years by secret ballot. In the first two ballots, a two-thirds majority of the total number of members, and in the third ballot an absolute majority of the total number of members shall be required. If an absolute majority cannot be obtained in the third ballot, a fourth ballot shall be held between the two candidates who have received the greatest number of votes in the third ballot; the candidate who receives the greatest number of votes in the fourth ballot shall be elected.

(Paragraph added on September 12, 2010; Act No. 5982) The way of exercising these rights referred to in this article, the establishment, duties, functioning of the Ombudsperson Institution and its proceedings after the examination and the procedures and principles regarding the qualifications, elections and personnel rights of the Chief Ombudsperson and ombudspersons shall be laid down in law.”

⁵⁷⁹ “Dilekçe ve Bilgi Edinme Hakkının Kullanılmasına İlişkin Genelge”, (No. B.02.0.PPG.0.12-320-1327, 23 January 2004): 2.

⁵⁸⁰ “Dilekçe Hakkının Kullanılmasına Dair Kanun. (Law No.3071)”, **Resmî Gazete**, 18571 (November 1984).

has been also a committee of petition within the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT) for individual petitions. The committee of petition was first established by the Chamber of Deputies (Meclis-i Mebusan) of Ottoman Empire under the names of “arzuhal encümeni” or “istida encümeni” (committee of petition)⁵⁸¹. Similarly, the Chamber of Committee of 1908 paid special attention to petitions. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the works of “arzuhal encümeni” became more systematic and intensive. The decisions of this committee also gained a binding force in this period. When it comes to the period following the 1960s after the new constitution, the decisions taken by the committee of petition lost their binding force in order to prevent them from intervening with the executive power. Besides, the law No. 140 was introduced to specify the rules and procedures regarding the application to the parliament via petition and the examination of and the decisions about the petitions. As for the period starting with the establishment of the Constitution of 1982, the commission functioned as a presidency council and did not exercised its authority until the last legislative year as in the previous period. The decisions of the committee are considered as an act of parliament, however, they do not have a binding force, yet⁵⁸².

According to the Bureau of the Committee on Petitions within GNAT, a petition will not be discussed when it necessitates “a new law or an amendment”; is about the issues in the area of responsibility of judicial authorities; is without a certain subject, the copy of the document authenticating “the final response” of “the authorized administrative bodies”, or the conditions a petition is expected to have in accordance with the law⁵⁸³. The petitions addressing the competent authorities and GNAT has to be replied within 30 and 60 days respectively.⁵⁸⁴ Now, the committee also has an internet page and “the citizens and the foreigner residents in Turkey –on

⁵⁸¹ “TBMM Dilekçe Komisyonu Hakkında”, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/dilekce/komisyon_hakkinda.htm [20.02.2016].

⁵⁸² **ibid.**

⁵⁸³ “Committee on Petitions”. Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi. <https://global.tbmm.gov.tr/index.php/EN/yc/icerik/988> [20.02.2016]

⁵⁸⁴ **Dilekçe Hakkının Kullanılmasına Dair Kanun.**

the basis of principle of reciprocity-” can write their petitions online.⁵⁸⁵ They may submit an e-petition on an individual basis or sign a collective petition.⁵⁸⁶

The increasing online presence of state institutions and prevalence of online activities such as contacting the state agents through official websites as aforementioned, created the need for establishing secure and legal platforms in the online sphere. In this way, citizens would realize some civic processes online such as writing petitions in a way that they would create the same legal effect as in the offline, handwritten signatures. Therefore, electronic Signature Law (no. 5070) was published in 2004 to recognize e-signature as a legal process before law as well as to determine its scope and boundaries⁵⁸⁷. With this law, it is accepted that secured e-signatures bear the same legal status with the classical handwritten signatures.⁵⁸⁸

All in all, despite the considerable progress made, state initiatives for digitalization and electronic applications to increase its administrative and technical capacities in such bureaucratic processes as petitioning are yet to be developed. It can be clearly seen from the popularity of non-governmental platforms for petitioning such as change.org. Therefore, it is critical to examine what the platform offers its users with and makes it an alternative to the legal state channels.

3.2.2. Change.org

Though there are a few Turkish petition sites providing active service such as imza.la⁵⁸⁹, imzakampanyası.com⁵⁹⁰, imzakampanyam.com⁵⁹¹ and they all function to enable citizens to voice their demands and gather signatures for their petitions in the online sphere, change.org, as an international platform, has stood out amongst others in Turkey and turned into the most popular one. Among the petition sites, it was found to be the most used one by the Turkish participants in a study by Yılmaz and

⁵⁸⁵ “Dilekçe Komisyonu”, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Başkanlığı, https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/dilekce/docs/faaliyet_raporlari/24_yd_faaliyet_rapor.pdf [20.02.2016].

⁵⁸⁶ **ibid.**

⁵⁸⁷ “Elektronik İmza Kanunu (No.5070)”, **Resmi Gazete**, 25355, (January 2004).

⁵⁸⁸ **ibid.**, Article No.5.

⁵⁸⁹ Imza.la. <http://imza.la/> [03.01.2016].

⁵⁹⁰ Imzakampanyası. <http://www.imzakampanyası.com> [03.01.2016].

⁵⁹¹ Imzakampanyam. <https://imzakampanyam.com/> [03.01.2016].

colleagues.⁵⁹² For that very reason, it is critical to know what makes the site preferential.

As a social enterprise, the company was based on “crowdfunding” and facilitate fund-raising, donation, volunteerism, and other modes of cause-related engagement in the online sphere when it was set up by Ben Rattray in 2007; however, creating petitions was not the main focus of the platform originally.⁵⁹³ Rattray conceptualized the site to function as a “global information utility” platform such social media as YouTube or Twitter to provide open content.⁵⁹⁴ In time, the site took on forming a blogging network of free bloggers, whose articles would be categorized under themes like “Homelessness” or “Global Warming” and provided on the site.⁵⁹⁵ Though being launched a few years ago, the milestone lighting the fuse on the success and public recognition of the site was 2010, when a campaign was started against “corrective rape”, commonly practiced in South Africa with an aim to “cure” individuals with such sexual preference, and supported by the signatures of thousands of people from all over the world, which ended up with the South African authorities’ introducing a new social regulation against this traditional practice in question.⁵⁹⁶ Following this event, the platform decided to focus more on petitions.⁵⁹⁷ The final step to transform the site into its well-known form was realized when Rattray made his mind to place the petitions to the center of the site and eliminate the staff-written content, while emphasizing user-driven content that reflects their stories with their own words.⁵⁹⁸ From then on, the action on the platform was started to be taken directly by the people involved in or influenced by the issue.⁵⁹⁹

The platform is still being developed to answer the demands of the users for a satisfactory use. In an interview realized by Kaplanseren, Jeniffer Dulsky, the president and the COO of change.org, revealed the intention of the company to release

⁵⁹² Yılmaz, Dündar, Oskay, **ibid**, 494.

⁵⁹³ Greg Beato, “From Petitions to Decisions”, **Stanford Social Innovation Review**, Vol.12 No.4 (2014): 20.

⁵⁹⁴ **ibid**.

⁵⁹⁵ **ibid**.

⁵⁹⁶ Tomio Geron, “The Business behind Change.org's Activist Petitions”, **Forbes**, 17 October 2012, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomiogeron/2012/10/17/activism-for-profit-change-org-makes-an-impact-and-makes-money/#893260c7ffa5> [23.07.2015].

⁵⁹⁷ “Haklılığına inanıyorsan, tüm dünyayı yanına al!”, **Fortune**, 14 July 2014, <http://www.fortuneturkey.com/hakliligina-inaniyorsan-tum-dunyayi-yanina-al--386> [17.09.2015].

⁵⁹⁸ Beato, **ibid**, 20-27.

⁵⁹⁹ Adam Bluestein, “You Sign, Companies Listen”. **Fast Company**. (September 2013): 36.

its mobile application and improve the current Decision Makers page in use.⁶⁰⁰ Further to that, the company pursue higher goals than technical improvements. Apparently, the platform does not plan to limit its boundaries with petitions as Rattray, the founder of the site, considers petitioning as the first step and puts that “it is the way of aggregating the largest audience of people who are potentially interested in an issue. But we are not building a petition site. We are building an empowerment company.”⁶⁰¹

Now, change.org is a huge open platform with more than 200 million users from 196 countries and the number is increasing day by day.⁶⁰² The dynamics behind what makes the platform unique and distinguished amongst tens of others in the world are worth elaborate consideration.

First of all, the former Eastern Europe and West Asia Director of change.org, Uygur Özesmi notes that thanks to change.org, which provides people with the chance to voice their demands without the restrictions of time and space as experienced in the case of traditional signature campaigns, individuals can reach masses, gain awareness and support others’ cases.⁶⁰³ He goes on to claim that this online process would lead to a total democratic participation in time. Likewise, Greg Beato reasons that “Change.org, in short, is positioning itself as a locus of policy making that is more accessible and more transparent than traditional venues of governance”.⁶⁰⁴ In this respect, the platform provides its users with an alternative means to make their voice heard and participate.

One of the outstanding features of the site is its allowing for articulating not only public but also individual demands. They may range from rather serious issues such as demanding freedom of a thought criminal⁶⁰⁵ or asking for financial help for a patient⁶⁰⁶, to rather personal requests such as petitioning the webmaster of the official site of a pop singer to redesign it⁶⁰⁷. Such freedom given also enabled interesting

⁶⁰⁰ Erdal Kaplanseren, “Change.org’a 25 Milyon Dolarlık Yatırım”, **Hürriyet**, 12 December 2014, 36.

⁶⁰¹ Beato, *ibid*, 20.

⁶⁰² Change.org, <https://www.change.org/about>

⁶⁰³ Fortune, *ibid*.

⁶⁰⁴ Beato, *ibid*, 21.

⁶⁰⁵ “Aslı Erdoğan derhal serbest bırakılsın - Free Asli Erdogan”, Change.org, <https://www.change.org/p/asli-erdogan-derhal-serbest-birakilsin-free-asli-erdogan>. [02.01.2017].

⁶⁰⁶ “3 Yaşındaki Çocuğumun Ölümüne İzin Vermeyin”, Change.org, <https://www.change.org/p/3-yasindaki-cocugumun-olumune-izin-vermeyin-rt-erdogan-ba-yildirim> [08.03.2017].

⁶⁰⁷ “Akrep Nalan’ın web sitesi tasarımını değiştirin!”, Change.org, <https://www.change.org/p/akrep-nalan-in-web-sitesi-tasarimini-degistirin> [01.02.2016].

campaigns such as the ones calling for the change.org to shut down itself.⁶⁰⁸ This inclusive policy of the platform has worked in favor of the company and increased the number of users.

The fact that the demands in the petitions require specific solutions is among the underlying secrets of the site's success.⁶⁰⁹ Therefore, it is not always the case that the number of petitioners and the number of victories are directly related. There are instances that petitions which do not gather many signatures have ended up with victory. The success of the petitions addressing local authorities would be a good example of this. According to the world statistics of change.org, even 40 percent of the petitions which has less number of signatures than 200 ends up with a victory⁶¹⁰, justifying what Rattray formulated as "simplicity sells, and specificity sells" and "small changes can lead to bigger impact"⁶¹¹.

With the increasing popularity and power achieved after cases ending in success, change.org has brought a new perspective to the common protest and critical activism perception.⁶¹² One of the things that it has achieved in digital activism is taking it from an aimless and futile communication chaos and framing it.⁶¹³ Beato comments "in signing petitions at sites like change.org, millions of people have shown that they seek forms of interactivity that go beyond adding a comment at the end of a news story".⁶¹⁴ The platform allows a campaign started to grow apace and spread around as well as the communication to become centralized in an assumed decentralized environment and therefore, differentiates digital activism from a disorganized crowd, vainly protesting and complaining.⁶¹⁵ Despite the fact that

⁶⁰⁸ "Change.org kapatılsın", Change.org, <https://www.change.org/p/change-org-change-org-kapatılsın-c3a734d0-e881-40fe-8399-3191bdbc034b> [01.05.2017].

⁶⁰⁹ Bluestein, *ibid*, 36.

⁶¹⁰ Alice Truong, "What Makes For A Winning Change.org Petition?", **Fastcompany**, 21 November 2013, <https://www.fastcompany.com/3022086/what-makes-for-a-winning-changeorg-petition> [28.07.2015].

⁶¹¹ Phuong Ly, "Petition Power", **Stanford Social Innovation Review**, Spring 2012, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/petition_power [05.09.2015].

⁶¹² Paktin, *ibid*, 15.

⁶¹³ *ibid*, 15.

⁶¹⁴ Beato, *ibid*, 27.

⁶¹⁵ Paktin, *ibid*, 15.

signature campaigns on the platform do not have a political or legal sanctions⁶¹⁶, they play a critical role in some social transformations, too⁶¹⁷.

Even though the platform has been accredited with numerous victories all over the world, it is also critical to note that considering there are many other factors behind the progress of the events related to the topics brought up on the platform, it is a matter of debate how much the platform contributed to the process or whether it made any contribution in any way. For instance, another milestone of the platform was when the petition started by Molly Katchpole in 2011, who was unhappy with the Bank of America's intention to charge a monthly fee of \$5 for debit card use.⁶¹⁸ The campaign gathered more than 300,000 signatures in a few weeks, resulting in Bank of America's giving up its plans along with other banks. This was followed by Katchpole's second victory through initiating a campaign against Verizon, a telecom company, for requiring \$2 fee for some online payments.⁶¹⁹ On the other hand, John Bussey, calling the situation a "squishy territory", questioned the effectiveness of these campaigns by digging deeper to find out the hidden side of these success stories.⁶²⁰ According to Bussey, the companies in question were already tired of the complaints they had received through traditional customer channels like phone calls, visits or letters, which forced them to take their final decisions more than the e-petitions. Likewise, Beato stresses that it would be wrong to attribute the victories only to the presence of change.org itself for the companies or elected officials, a petition campaign started against, are reached also through other channels for complaints or protests anyway.⁶²¹

The popularity of the platform stems partly from its simplicity and user friendly design. Any person can sign up the site with an email or via Facebook account, create a profile and can start or support whatever petition he/she wants for free. The content of each petition campaign is prepared by its users.⁶²² To sign up, it was enough to be 13 until 4th May 2018, however, the users are now required to be 16 or older with the

⁶¹⁶ Yonca P. Doğan, "Değişim istiyoruz, TBMM duyuyor mu", **P24**, 2 Nisan 2016, <http://platform24.org/guncel/1429/degisim-istiyoruz--tbmm-duyuyor-mu> [09.10.2016].

⁶¹⁷ Yeğen, *ibid*, 85.

⁶¹⁸ Bobby Ghosh, Elizabeth Dias, "Change Agent", **Time**, Vol. 179. No. 14 (2012): 140-143.

⁶¹⁹ *ibid*.

⁶²⁰ John Bussey, "The Business: Change.org Tests the Line between Activism, Profits", **Wall Street Journal, Eastern Ed**, 8 June 2012.

⁶²¹ Beato, *ibid*, 22.

⁶²² "Hakkımızda", Change.org, <https://www.change.org/about> [17.12.2015].

new terms of use introduced.⁶²³ Besides, the users are warned against acts or contents that can be related to hate speech, violence, bullying, impersonation of others, or violation of others' privacy.⁶²⁴

On the condition that a user wants to start a petition campaign, he/she would realize it after clicking the start a campaign button, deciding the topic, finding the correct addressee, writing the campaign letter and sharing it. By the time, the platform directs the user to successfully realize all the steps and, in some cases, provides strategies for the campaign and support for media coverage. Nonetheless, the responsibility belongs to the user for all kinds of actions of his/her account.⁶²⁵

On the platform, users take the responsibility of writing their own petitions and run their campaign on their own.⁶²⁶ Özesmi explains this by noting that the company does not follow or interfere with the campaigns, yet, on the condition that a campaign receives a complaint for having a racist, discriminatory, hateful or pornographic content, then it is checked and intervened.⁶²⁷ Nevertheless, it is claimed that on detecting a petition campaign “winnable”, the staff of the platform support it through sending press releases to journalists, advertising it on social media and providing media support.⁶²⁸ They also fine tune the wording of the content, and help choose the appropriate decision makers to target, add other media to the content, and utilize other media along with social media to increase the chance.⁶²⁹ Change.org does not just provide an online sphere to its users to take action. As Özesmi stated, it already started to hold regular meetings with the campaign starters and signers, and also volunteers make a radio program on Açık Radyo on daily basis, thus creating a bond between the campaigners and signers and enabling them to share their ideas and experiences.⁶³⁰

⁶²³ “Hizmet Şartları”, Change.org, <https://www.change.org/policies/terms-of-service#1> [01.06.2018].

⁶²⁴ “Topluluk ilkeleri”, Change.org, <https://www.change.org/policies/community> [17.12.2015].

⁶²⁵ **Hizmet Şartları.**

⁶²⁶ Bluestein, *ibid*, 36.

⁶²⁷ Kardelen Uysal, “Change.org Doğu Avrupa ve Batı Asya Direktörü Dr. Uygur Özesmi ile röportaj: Paylaş, paylaş ve tekrar paylaş!” **Görünmeyenler.** 8 November 2013. <https://gorunmeyenler.com/2013/11/08/change-org-dogu-avrupa-ve-bati-asya-direktoru-dr-uygar-ozesmi-ile-roportaj-oturdugun-yerden-dunyayi-degistirmek-mumkun/> [23.02.2016].

⁶²⁸ Beato, *ibid*, 23.

⁶²⁹ Ben Comer, “The Active Patient: Faces of Change”, **Pharmaceutical Executive**, 1 February 2014. <http://www.pharmexec.com/active-patient-faces-change> [18.12.2015].

⁶³⁰ Uysal, *ibid*.

Another critical point is the company attaches great importance to keeping in communication with the users of the website by sending email notifications from the very moment they register. For instance, after users sign a petition, an email is sent to their address, encouraging them to share it on Facebook, tweet it on Tweeter, and send the petition letter to friends or family via email. When the campaign starter writes a letter to share campaign update or there is a development in the campaign, the users also get an email notification for it. On the condition that the users share a campaign on social media, they get another mail when a friend on their list signs the same petition as well. Besides, when a new petition campaign has been started on a similar topic, petition signers are informed about that. The users may even get notifications for the petitions they have viewed on the platform, but have not signed, yet. Apart from the weekly updates, the site sends emails asking the users what they want to change. Moreover, if the users are registered for the supporter program, they receive supporter bulletin, too. It is possible to infer that communication plays a key role in the success stories in the platform.

One of the innovations change.org has introduced to the online petitioning sites is meeting the authorities with public by creating a special page for them on the platform under the title, “Decision Makers”. This page on the platform encourages “decision makers” in the society to create pages of theirs on the site, where petitions started addressing to them, the quantity of the signatures, their statues as well as the public responses and statements of the decision makers can be seen.⁶³¹ On the other hand, these pages enable citizens to have a contact with elected officials, corporations and a variety of entities, and directly put their questions⁶³², while they also notify the decision makers when a petition geared towards them has been started⁶³³ and help them respond to the campaigns addressing them and save their reputation⁶³⁴. Besides, non-governmental organizations are enabled to access, inform and mobilize their target groups.⁶³⁵

⁶³¹ Bluestein, *ibid*, 34.

⁶³² Beato, *ibid*, 27.

⁶³³ Emily Canal, “Two Top Politicians Join Change.org's New Platform For Decision Makers”, *Forbes*, 23 October 2013. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/emilycanal/2013/10/23/two-top-politicians-join-change-orgs-new-platform-for-decision-makers/#7818dd9e5856> [03.08.2015].

⁶³⁴ Doğan, *ibid*.

⁶³⁵ *ibid*.

It can be considered that decision makers pages function as a kind of modern agora for citizens from different walks of life. However, it is important to remind that the decision makers volunteer for the creation of their pages on this platform and free not to respond to every comment or question addressed. Besides, the other users bear the responsibility to use this opportunity within the boundaries of the rules and courtesy. For now, change.org currently has many decision makers pages in Turkey users may contact with such as IKEA, Kadıköy Municipality, Casper and İstanbul University.⁶³⁶ However, it will undeniably take time to habituate people to this kind of communication online. On this very matter, Rattray likens the Decision Makers pages to a sort of “megaphone” to have a louder voice, but not to shout at decision makers”.⁶³⁷

According to Özesmi, for a campaign to be successful, it needs to be realistic, right and clear.⁶³⁸ Additionally, choosing the correct addressee for the solution of the problem, utilizing the tools of social media, communicating with press members, meeting with the signers, reaching the addressee by phone and press the issue are among the successful means to the victory.⁶³⁹ In order to widen the campaign’s sphere of influence, it is vital that petition starters use their digital literacy skills by uploading audio-visual materials on the campaign page in addition to the campaign letter, send mails to update and motivate the petition signers, contact other media organs to make the campaign publicized, share it on social media, and create or give links to a relevant website, blog or account on social media. Besides, online tools also help the organization of offline actions for a campaign such as protests or boycotts, by informing and gathering people with similar demands. Studying victorious petitions, change.org found out some common points between them.⁶⁴⁰ For instance, if a petition includes a photo or a video, or if it is shared at least 50 times, it increases the chance of a petition to be successful sevenfold. Moreover, when having media coverage, a petition is two times more likely to win.

⁶³⁶ Uygur Özesmi, email message to the author, [09.07.2016].

⁶³⁷ Beato, *ibid*, 21.

⁶³⁸ Uysal, *ibid*.

⁶³⁹ *ibid*.

⁶⁴⁰ Truong, *ibid*.

While Internet has a crucial place in collective action, a good number of the mobilizations end up with failure.⁶⁴¹ The same can be considered in the case of online petitions as well. While many online petitions written reached their goals, more number of campaigns end unnoticed. Hence, it is important to pay attention to some critical factors to succeed. For instance, such factor as the presence of a good number of people with low threshold who have knowledge about the issue, give importance to it and participate at the beginning of the process can determinate the future of a campaign.⁶⁴² Margetts and colleagues argue that:⁶⁴³

“Analysis of large-scale transactional data from electronic petitions suggests that the early days of a mobilisation are crucial; success is reliant on a significant number of people being willing to act at this early point, when there is no social information to indicate viability. Those who participate in the early moments set off a chain of reactions – giving an indication of support to others with harder criteria for joining, who in turn, by joining, give a similar indication to those with harder criteria and so on – which results in some mobilisations reaching a critical mass or tipping point. The mechanism that sets off this chain reaction is based on differential thresholds among potential participants; some people are willing to go early, which satisfies the criteria of those whose threshold is a little higher, and so on, as in Schelling’s model.”

Contrary to popular belief in public that change.org is a non-profit group, its business model is described as a certified B-corporation, and the platform is actually supported by subscribers, promoted petitions, sponsored campaigns and investors.⁶⁴⁴ Further to that, the communications manager of Turkey office of change.org, Sırma Süren announced that the platform will adopt a new business model that is based on the financial support of its users late in 2016.⁶⁴⁵ Following, the platform started to send its users an email announcing that the company office in Turkey needs their financial support for its work.

As Bussey states, though the main purpose of the site is fostering social change, it is for profit and “is testing the boundary between profit-making and social activism” to realize good works.⁶⁴⁶ Bussey explains how the sponsoring on change.org works. As soon as people sign a petition after registering the site, their emails are associated with the subjects they have signed for, then a few more, related causes are automatically shown to them, sponsored by some political groups, activists and non-

⁶⁴¹ Margetts, et al., *ibid*, 295.

⁶⁴² *ibid*, 294-295.

⁶⁴³ *ibid*, 294-295.

⁶⁴⁴ “İş Modeli”, Change.org, <https://www.change.org/about/business-model> [17.08.2016].

⁶⁴⁵ Timur Tarlıg, “İnternetteki kampanyalarla hayatlar değişiyor”, **Doğan Haber Ajansı**, 25 December 2016, http://arsiv.dha.com.tr/internetteki-kampanyalarla-hayatlar-degisiyor-_1360314.html [18.02.2017].

⁶⁴⁶ Bussey, *ibid*.

profit organizations. If they want to discover about these campaign starting groups as well as their cause through the site, their email address is delivered to those sponsors.⁶⁴⁷ On the condition that they also sign the sponsored petition and accept to be updated about the progress of the petition, the companies send notifications to the user's email, for which they pay the change.org.⁶⁴⁸

The Turkish office of the company was opened in September 2012 after seeing the density of social change and active citizens in Turkey.⁶⁴⁹ Sırma Süren from change.org noted that Turkey is the 6th country in the world with the most number of active users and the cities with the most number of petition starters are İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir and Bursa.⁶⁵⁰

Change.org started to prepare annual reports for Turkey in 2015. So far, they have published two national reports for 2015 and 2016. Named "Change Report", these documents are of value to reveal its place and sphere of influence in the Turkish society. The data from the last two years of change.org campaigns in Turkey are of great importance to help us analyze the current problems, demands and developments with the steps taken for their solutions.

Numerical data from Turkey in the years of 2014, 2015 and 2016 are provided in the annual reports of Change.org as follows:⁶⁵¹

Table 1: Change.org in Numbers

	2014	2015	2016
The number of the campaigns started	13.594	23.263	34.805
The number of the users who signed a petition	2.777.000	5.746.000	7.503.567
The number of the signatures	5.845.000	15.811.872	16.157.892
The number of victories	* ⁶⁵²	297	168

Adapted from "Change.org 2015 Değişim Raporu: Türkiye 2015'te Neleri Değiştirmek İstedi?", 2015; "Change.org 2016 Değişim Raporu: Türkiye 2016'da Neleri Değiştirmek İstedi?", 2016.

⁶⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁴⁸ Beato, *ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁴⁹ Fortune, *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁰ Tarlıg, *ibid.*

⁶⁵¹ "Change.org 2015 Değişim Raporu: Türkiye 2015'te Neleri Değiştirmek İstedi?", Change.org, 2015, https://s3.amazonaws.com/change-production/cms_uploads/Change_org_2015_raporu.pdf [28.10.2016]; "Change.org 2016 Değişim Raporu: Türkiye 2016'da Neleri Değiştirmek İstedi?", Change.org, 2016, https://s3.amazonaws.com/change-production/cms_uploads/Change_org_2016_Raporu.pdf [28.10.2016]

⁶⁵² Numbers are not provided

As it is clearly seen in the table, the popularity the petition campaigns on Change.org has increased incrementally in Turkey. Almost one tenth of the Turkish society has an account on the site and has already supported at least one petition. Tens of thousands campaigns have been initiated on almost every aspect of life in just a few years. Besides, the hundreds of victories have been achieved, leading to the desired changes in the last years. It can be deduced that the company has gained the trust and sympathy of a great part of the society, who can use their digital skills to affect social or political life.

The top five campaigns, signatures and victories according to their fields in Turkey in the years of 2015 and 2016 can be seen below from the most popular to the least.⁶⁵³

Table 2: Change.org Campaigns in 2015 and 2016

	2015	2016
Campaigns started	Human rights (25%) Education (20%) Environment (15%) Animal rights (12%) Economic justice (8%)	Education (23%) Economic justice (16%) Human rights (15%) Criminal justice (13%) Animal rights (11%)
Campaigns signed	Animal rights (13%) Health (12%) Women rights (10%) Human rights (8%) Criminal justice (5%)	Animal rights (22%) Criminal justice (20%) Human rights (19%) Health (19%) Women rights (14%)
Victorious campaigns	Human rights ⁶⁵⁴ Environment Education Animal rights Health	Education (17%) Environment (17%) Human rights (16%) Economic justice (14%) Health (11%)

Adapted from “Change.org 2015 Değişim Raporu: Türkiye 2015’te Neleri Değiştirmek İstedi?”, 2015; “Change.org 2016 Değişim Raporu: Türkiye 2016’da Neleri Değiştirmek İstedi?”, 2016.

When we compare these two years, it is seen that the most popular fields of campaigns initiated were almost the same since education, economic justice, human rights and animal rights occupied the top respectively in 2015 and 2016. Besides, environment and criminal justice were among the fields of campaign that people wanted to change in. When it comes to the distribution of the number of signatures

⁶⁵³ *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁴ Rates are not provided

during these two years, animal rights, criminal justice, health, human rights and women rights were the top five fields without exception, indicating that petition signers mostly supported the demands of change in these fields. Animal rights was the most supported one among all others in each year and it increased the rate of signature in the second year. Obviously, the rights of animals have an important place for the people registered on the site and the awareness the need to improve the life conditions of animals showed an increase in the society. So far, the number of campaign victories has been below expectation, the victorious campaigns were almost all from the same fields of struggle. Mostly, the demands in the areas of education, environment, human rights and health were positively answered by the addressees of the petitions in both of the years in question. At least, one tenth of each campaign in each of these areas was solved in 2016. Additionally, the campaigns targeting animal rights in 2015 and economic justice in 2016 were among the top successful campaigns. It shows that the problems or deficiencies within these areas drew the reaction of both petition signers and the authorities they were addressed to. Paktin notes that the campaigns started are generally welcomed by the Turkish society because they mostly come out within the reasonable bounds of social circumstances.⁶⁵⁵ Besides, the successful campaigns are - by and large- the ones on which all parts of society are in agreement.⁶⁵⁶ The high rates of victories may be partly because the demands of successful petitions were more likely to be met. The organization of the petitioners, public recognition of the campaign, media depiction, popularity on social media are also behind the solution process.

In Turkey, the most supported petition campaign of 2015 was the campaign by Gözde Salur which demanded a new legislation called “Özgecan Law” targeting violence against women following the murder of Özgecan Aslan, who was brutally murdered while resisting the rape attempt of a bus driver on her way home. The campaign, named “Özgecan Yasası çıksın, yasalar kadınları korusun (Let the Özgecan Law be Enacted and Let the Laws Protect Women)”, gained the support of politicians, media and the public in a short time and gathered over 1 million 200 thousand signatures.⁶⁵⁷ While the political parties of RPP and PDP promised to take action for

⁶⁵⁵ Paktin, *ibid*, 15.

⁶⁵⁶ *ibid*, 15.

⁶⁵⁷ “#ÖzgecanYasası çıksın, yasalar kadınları korusun!”. Change.org.
<https://www.change.org/p/özgecanyasası-çıksın-yasalar-kadınları-korusun-ba-yildirir> [01.02.2016].

this issue, Aylin Nazlıkaya, RPP Ankara deputy, brought in Özgecan Bill.⁶⁵⁸ Though the bill has not passed yet, the campaign became an important tool for reaching masses and increase their awareness as well as creating pressure on the parliament to take action.

Interestingly, the most popular petition campaign of 2016 was by Fırat Yılmaz who initiated the campaign against a motion put forward by JDP deputies that would overturn the prosecution of the perpetrators, who sexually have abused a girl under 18, if they marry their victim.⁶⁵⁹ In the society, the motion created fear and anger that it would lead the legitimization of child sexual assault in Turkey. The campaign made a tremendous impact in social media, received signatures over 820 thousand, and, finally, the parliamentary commission cancelled the motion.⁶⁶⁰

One of the campaigns that were not mentioned in the report but moved Turkish society most and increased the popularity of change.org was for a yardman, İbrahim Çivici, who stated to walk for 15 kilometres for ensuring the safety of trains and never had a holiday by the sea for 20 years in an interview for Al Jazeera Türk. Rukiye Demirkan addressed her petition to the head of Turkish State Railways as well as tourism companies and hotels and asked for a holiday by the sea with his family as a motivation gift for Çivici with the slogan “Yüzünden iyilik akan bir insanı bir imzanla mutlu et #biriylilyap (Make a person happy whose kindness is written on his face with your signature #doafavour)”.⁶⁶¹ After getting thousands of signatures and heavy media coverage, the campaign succeeded with the support of Fatih and Didim municipalities.

Besides, some other popular campaigns are “Devlet ilacımızı versin çocuklarımız da yaşasın! (State should give our medicine and let our children live!)”⁶⁶² by Şahin Yıldız for the cover of the medical expenses of the illness MPS 4A by SGK (Social Security Institution) in 2015, “Adil Yargılanma Hakkı (Right to a Fair Trial)”

⁶⁵⁸ **Change.org 2015 Değişim Raporu.**

⁶⁵⁹ “Cinsel istismara uğrayan mağdur tecavüzcüsüyle evlendirilsin önergesi iptal edilsin”. Change.org, <https://www.change.org/p/cinsel-istismar-mağduru-tecavüzcüsüyle-evlendirilemez-tecavüzmeşrulaştırılmaz> [03.02.2016].

⁶⁶⁰ **Change.org 2016 Değişim Raporu.**

⁶⁶¹ “Günde 15 km yürüyen, 20 yıllık TCDD çalışanı İbrahim Çivici’ye motivasyon hediyesi verilsin (Mümkünse ailesiyle tatile gönderilsin)”, Change.org, <https://www.change.org/p/yüzünden-iyilik-akan-bir-insanı-bir-imzanla-mutlu-et-biriylilyap> [02.02.2016].

⁶⁶² “Devlet ilacımızı versin çocuklarımız da yaşasın!”, Change.org, <https://www.change.org/p/devletilacımıziversin-çocuklarımız-yaşasın-ekin-artık-yürüyemiyor-ekineilaçlazım> [01.02.2016].

by Adalet Fener Yak⁶⁶³ against the process of match-fixing probe for Fenerbahçe in 2014, “#SomaErmenekSonOlsun Madenlerde Güvenlik ve Sağlık Sözleşmesi'ni ACİLEN imzalayın @csgbfarukcelik (#LetSomaErmenekBeTheLast Sign the Safety and Health in Mines Convention IMMEDIATELY @csgbfarukcelik)”⁶⁶⁴ by Hilal Atici for the working conditions of miners in 2014, “Ağaoğlu #Maslak1453: İstanbul uyan, kabusun gerçek oluyor! (Ağaoğlu #Maslak1453: Wake up İstanbul, your nightmare is coming true!)”⁶⁶⁵ by Yeşilist against the Maslak 1543 Project planned near Fatih Forest in 2012 and “Türkiye'nin zeytinliklerinin ölüm fermanına hayır! #ZeytinHayattır (No to the Death warrant of the Olive Groves of Turkey! #OliveisLife)”⁶⁶⁶ by Aydın Şensal for the preservation of olive groves which are planned to be zoned for industrial construction.

So far, limited number of studies have been conducted on change.org in the Turkish context. While one study handled the issue from the perspective of user behaviors on the platform and digital activism⁶⁶⁷, another one took it from the perspective of clicktivism and slacktivism in addition to user behaviors on the platform⁶⁶⁸.

The first study by Yeğen is significant in shedding light on how social cooperation and solidarity are enabled online through change.org. As a part of the descriptive study, change.org platform was followed regularly every day between 22.05.2014 and 04.06.2014 and the most signed e-petitions and succeeding e-petitions were examined through content analysis method focusing on their contents, topics, starter profiles, supporter rates, and the dates they were initiated.⁶⁶⁹ Within the particular time period examined, there existed a variety of campaigns with different themes on the petition site, most signed ones being on “civilian resistance”,

⁶⁶³ “Adil Yargılanma Hakkı”, Change.org, <https://www.change.org/p/adaletefeneryak-demek-için-imzani-at-http-change-org-adaletefeneryak> [02.02.2016].

⁶⁶⁴ “#SomaErmenekSonOlsun Madenlerde Güvenlik ve Sağlık Sözleşmesi'ni ACİLEN imzalayın @csgbfarukcelik”, Change.org, <https://www.change.org/p/bugün-dünyamadencilergünü-bugün-madencilerimizi-onurlandıracağımız-gündü-yas-tutacağımız-değil> [01.02.2016].

⁶⁶⁵ “Ağaoğlu #Maslak1453: İstanbul uyan, kabusun gerçek oluyor!”, Change.org, <https://www.change.org/p/ağaoğlu-maslak1453-istanbul-uyan-kabusun-gerçek-oluyor> [01.02.2016].

⁶⁶⁶ “Türkiye'nin zeytinliklerinin ölüm fermanına hayır! #ZeytinHayattır.” Change.org, https://www.change.org/p/türkiye-nin-zeytinliklerinin-ölüm-fermanına-hayır-zeytinhayattır?source_location=minibar [03.02.2016].

⁶⁶⁷ Yılmaz, Dündar, Oskay, *ibid*.

⁶⁶⁸ Yeğen, *ibid*.

⁶⁶⁹ *ibid*, 94.

“environment”, “transportation” and “political call”.⁶⁷⁰ As for the topic with the highest number of victories gained was discovered to be “environment”.⁶⁷¹ The most signed campaigns were found to address to the president, the prime minister and ministers and the campaigns with the highest number of victories were addressed to individuals.⁶⁷² The most signed and the most victorious campaigns were initiated by citizens, not organizations.

Yılmaz and colleagues conducted a study to find out the participation behavior of Turkish university students with regard to online signature campaigns.⁶⁷³ It was found that most of the participants prefer Internet to get informed more than other sources.⁶⁷⁴ More than the half of the participants prefer digital activism tools to support activist movements.⁶⁷⁵ A great number of participants believe that online activist activities serve the purpose and achieve success. Most of them share activist activities through their social media accounts, when there occur some events against social interests and many define themselves as “activists” to support such activities online. More than half of the participants stated to have information about online signature campaigns and signed for at least one signature campaign. Interestingly, approximately one third of them reported to participate in traditional activist activities for an issue, for which they signed a petition online. When asked for the reasons for participating in the signature campaigns, the respondents expressed to do so to contribute to the solution of an issue, stay updated, get informed about that particular issue, follow the campaigns, have a broader communication network, lobby and socialize.⁶⁷⁶

A positive relationship was discovered between using the internet and participating digital activism activities; as well as participating in online signature campaigns and defining himself/herself as “activist”.⁶⁷⁷ Moreover, a meaningful relationship was found between sharing activist activities online and the levels of awareness and sensitivity; supporting and sharing information about activist activities

⁶⁷⁰ *ibid*, 95.

⁶⁷¹ *ibid*, 96.

⁶⁷² *ibid*, 97-98.

⁶⁷³ Yılmaz, Dündar, Oskay, *ibid*, 481.

⁶⁷⁴ *ibid*, 495.

⁶⁷⁵ *ibid*, 494.

⁶⁷⁶ *ibid*, 494, 495.

⁶⁷⁷ *ibid*, 497-501.

online; participating in online signature campaigns and the number of people who believes that online activist activities achieve their objectives.⁶⁷⁸

All in all, has provided brief information on the condition of political participation and citizenship in Turkey as well as the petitioning act and change.org in Turkish context. The next chapter focuses on the findings of the thesis in detail regarding the points on political participation and citizenship mentioned in the present and previous chapters.



⁶⁷⁸ **ibid**, 502-503.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The present chapter reflects on the main findings of the thesis in terms of its contributions to understanding the current condition of citizenship and participation in Turkey with specific to the experiences of change.org campaigners and reflects upon the degree to which the questions of the thesis are answered and whether the hypotheses expected to find are met.

The first section of the chapter starts with the evaluation of the data gathering process from the selection of the participants among change.org campaigners and the interview process.

After providing necessary details about the participant profile, the second section of the chapter focuses on the limitations of the present study, by reflecting on the challenges encountered while selecting among the campaigners for interviews, making sure of the authenticity of the online data about the campaigners, contacting the participants-to-be, establishing rapport with the interviewees, convincing them of the confidentiality of the data they would provide during the interview, and gathering relevant data preventing the distractions in the interview venues chosen.

Thirdly, this section revisits the discussion of socio-economic status and participation relationship in Chapter 2 and considers the extent to which the relevant hypothesis on SES factors of the thesis match with the profile of the participants.

The fourth section recounts the campaigning experiences of the participants interviewed and returns to the change.org and online petitioning issues discussed in the previous chapter, by paying attention specifically to the campaigners' petitioning process on change.org as well as their knowledge and views about this online petitioning platform; preferences to initiate or sign a petition; perception of a successful petition and campaigning; and the reactions they received from the society. Accordingly, the chapter reflect upon the opinions of the change.org campaigners regarding online petition campaigns and change.org; the current condition of online and offline petitioning based on the experiences and preferences of the participants;

the new issues arising with regard to petitioning and campaigning, which is run along with the petition to promote it.

Another issue, which is of great importance for this study, is the online presence of the participants as citizens. While one question of this thesis targets attitudes of the change.org campaigners toward the Internet to show participation and exercising citizenship, another one seeks to find out the impact of the Internet on political participation and citizenship attitudes and practices of the change.org campaigners. Therefore, the third section of this chapter discusses the conditions of political participation and citizenship of the change.org campaigners; their level of satisfaction from the facilities provided for exercising participation and citizenship as well as the concerns they share as Turkish citizens. To provide a better view of the place of the Internet in social and political life of the citizens, the Internet use habits of the participants are discussed with the safety problems in the digital and online sphere, and the new challenges to achieve digital literacy.

The last section presents the findings on the condition of political participation of the participants with regard to the question if the change.org campaigners show apathy towards political participation or not. It revisits the discussion on the decline of political participation activities mentioned in the Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 and considers whether the findings of this study are compatible with the arguments put forward in the related literature, considering the political participation and petitioning preferences and repertoire of the participants, as well as the new issues to be considered such as clicktivism and slacktivism.

4.1. Selection of the Participants and the Interview Process

While choosing the sample of the thesis, I paid attention to include the campaigners with different backgrounds, ages, genders and petition causes to achieve a broader picture of the Turkish change.org campaigners as well as to enrich the study with various perspectives and petitioning stories.

To have an account on Change.org, people are expected to provide an email or sign up with a Facebook account. They may also upload their picture or add contact information that other users can use if they want to have a contact. Besides, when a petition campaign is started, other users can see the name of the campaigner on the

campaign page, sometimes along with his/her picture. Moreover, by clicking the name provided, the users can also reach other details such as social media accounts, blogs or websites of the campaigner, or his/her place of residence, if provided. This information makes it easier to contact with the campaigners, on the condition that the information given is right. The platform does not check the profile of the users while registering, thus also enabling people to use the site for their own benefits even when their identity data is totally fake.

The effects of this aspect of the platform on contacting process with the campaigners were twofold. If the name and the picture provided on the campaign page are real and some extra details about the campaigner are also written, it is pretty easy to find the campaigner on the Internet in a short time. On the other hand, when little or no tangible information is given about the campaigner on the page - since the platform does not assume responsibility for its user identities - , it requires a painstaking effort to contact with them.

Upon deciding to hold interviews with the campaign starters, I utilized a few strategies ranging from getting help from my acquaintances to weaker ties on the Internet to communicate with them. As the first step, I contacted with the Turkey office of change.org. Nevertheless, my request for an email to be sent to a few campaigners about participating in the interview was responded negatively. Secondly, I notified the people in my inner circle to help me if they know somebody who wrote a petition on the platform. They were of great help to me and I found two of my interviewees thanks to them. At the same time, I tried to communicate with the campaigners via their blogs or websites if they provided this information on the campaign page and it was a quite useful since mostly they wrote me back and wanted to cooperate. In addition, by searching for the names of the campaigners online, I reached some emails or office telephone numbers. This enabled me to reach a few of the respondents, too. However, the last strategy was rather painful compared to the earlier ones since it necessitated to check social media and match the numerous user profiles there with the limited information about the campaigner provided on change.org. It was necessary to be perfectly sure that a profile belongs to the campaigner. I felt lucky when a campaigner publicly shared the details of the petition on his/her page or he/she set his/her account in a way that it can be viewed even by the ones who are not on the friends list. Social media was the tool that helped me to contact most of my interviewees (17).

After definitely making sure that I reached the correct contact details of the campaigner, I called the campaigner or sent a message or e-mail briefly introducing myself and explaining why I want to conduct an interview with him/her. In most of the cases, my messages were left unanswered or, sometimes –although rare–, rejected due to the reasons that I will touch upon later. In positive cases, this process generally involved a message traffic including additional questions by the campaigners and my efforts to provide assuring answers, and ended upon arranging a time and a meeting place for the interview.

The next step was conducting interviews with the 20 participants contacted.⁶⁷⁹ I preferred to realize the interviews in person as much as possible by meeting them in the cities they were in. Nevertheless, as the participants resided in different regions in Turkey and even two of them were abroad at that time, half of the interviews (10) were made in the online sphere via Skype or Facebook messenger.

FtF interview was realized through synchronous communication in both time and space, which was advantageous to meet the interviewee in person and make him/her feel more comfortable while communicating because a closer rapport was established between the parties. On the other hand, virtual interview realized via video conferencing tools enabled to reach remote campaigners. This helped save time and conduct the interviews in comfortable and quiet spots. Both interview types conducted were useful to enable synchronous communication in time, provide non-verbal clues in addition to verbal data and make sure that interview was conducted with the intended person.

For some, virtual interview was going to be a new experience, but they were willing to try and help anyway. Most of the participants have already taken many steps to reach a solution for the case they initiated their campaign. Therefore, they were rather attached to their cause when being interviewed. It constituted a factor that increased their willingness to participate and answer the questions during the interview. Though they sometimes got off the topic and dwell on an answer for a long time, it helped examine their case thoroughly.

While semi-structured interview is a great opportunity for deeper understanding of the background of each campaign, it was also challenging for me to

⁶⁷⁹ See Appendix B for the interview questions.

get detailed accounts of the campaign process of interviews. Though I tried to clarify the interview process and the aim of the study, and develop trust and rapport with the interviewees so that their hesitations decrease, a few were observed to feel uncomfortable at some parts of the interview. They were uncomfortable or nervous while responding some questions. It would be partly because they are experiencing a difficult campaigning process, or they feel it risky to reveal the details of their campaign and participation experiences while the country is going through an emergency of state period. For instance, one participant noted that he accepted the interview unbeknown to his wife since she wants him to give up fighting for the cause he started the campaign for and is worried about their safety.

Moreover, to help the interviewees feel more comfortable, I let them choose the interview venue. However, their selections were not suitable for conducting an interview sometimes. The interviews conducted in public places such as cafes or restaurants were often distracted by the noise of music, traffic or other people chatting in the environment. For instance, during one interview, live music was started to be performed in the restaurant, which necessitated the interviewer to find a quieter spot somewhere near. Besides, one interviewee chose to meet in his office and the interview was often interrupted with the intervention of the other staff there, who were not informed beforehand about what was being done.

When all the meetings were done, I transcribed each interview to have a written form of them that would help me better analyze the data. Following the transcription step, I utilized MAXQDA, qualitative data analysis software, to group the interview data into codes and, finally, organize the topics of discussion of this present thesis.

4.1.1. The Participant Profile

The sample in this thesis comprises 20 change.org campaigners, 12 being male and 8 being female. All of them constitute young or middle aged individuals.⁶⁸⁰ Further details of their demographic and background characteristics will be discussed in the following pages.

The participants in this thesis started at least one petition campaign on the topics associated with their careers, areas of interest, values, public issues or personal problems. The causes of their petitions include sexual abuse, immigrants, media,

⁶⁸⁰ See Table 3.

national and moral values, martyrs, health, economic justice, sports, transportation, education, environment, right to city as well as the rights of animals and human specifically, women, criminals, LGBT individuals and workers.

13 out of 20 participants started only one petition campaign, while four participants initiated two campaigns, two of them had three initiations and one had four initiations at the time when the interviews were realized. Following the interviews, one campaigner created his third petition on the platform and another one started his fourth campaign. The campaigns by eight of the participants have received a great deal of attention in the society and had a wide media coverage. Within all the 31 campaigns started 13 of them achieved victory, while the others still continue or have been closed by the campaigner or the staff of the platform.

In the present study, twenty participants are represented with pseudonyms in order to protect confidentiality. Some of the names were chosen by the participants themselves, when being asked at the beginning of the interview if they wanted to do so, while the rest was determined by the interviewer.⁶⁸¹

4.2. Limitations of the Study

While selecting the campaigners, I paid attention to make sure the campaign has a strong case, right claim, well-written letter and sound demand. Therefore, though Change.org is a quite popular platform with thousands of campaigns, the issues aforementioned led me to limit the number of campaigners to be contacted for the interview. Besides, the number of sample was restricted with twenty campaigners when the answers by the participants started to yield similar arguments, which constituted the second limitation.

One difficulty experienced appeared when contacting the campaigners. Some already deleted their social media account they used to login their change.org or already used a fake account to initiate their campaign. Some campaigners rejected to interview or talk in person coming up with excuses such as being short on time, disliking video conferencing or ongoing lawsuit process.

After having contacted a campaigner online, there was always the possibility that all the information on his/her online account would be fake. Until the moment I

⁶⁸¹ For details about each participant, see Appendix C.

had the chance to meet a campaigner face to face or via Skype, I was not a hundred percent sure about who was really behind the campaign. Moreover, it was impossible to check whether they would really cooperate with me or tell the truth about their petitioning process. For instance, I had to cancel one of the interviews, though a date was agreed to realize it, after I observed inconsistency in the campaigner's expressions about some basic details about his life, which can be easily found on his social media account. Such a situation would absolutely cast doubt on the interview and, hence, his case was eliminated.

In another case, a campaigner turned out to have a completely different identity than the one he provided on the campaign page. He thoroughly explained the situation by listing the unpleasant experiences he had related to the petition issue prior to the online petitioning process and stated that he preferred to stay anonymous since he already knew that his petition would get a negative reaction from society. However, I preferred to conduct an interview with him anyway because his campaigning process, as a case itself, also gives a realistic idea on the security holes on the platform and how the platform can be utilized by people with the aims such as fraud, political manipulation or populism.

Another problem was fake user data or profile on the Internet. When I reached the campaigners via social media, I received some rejection messages even if I added my other contact details including my work email and telephone number to my message in order to assure the campaigners about my identity and purpose. These messages were all from female campaigners who stated that they hesitated to accept an interview or had to reject cooperation with me. Even one female campaigner responded to my message stating that my profile on social media itself looked unreliable because my profile picture was not a photo of mine but the picture of a famous movie character, V, which is also commonly used to represent hackers online. Though this was partly due to the feeling of insecurity online, it was partly because they did not want to talk about a matter that was currently a topical issue or under judicial process. Considering that their hesitations would prevent them from giving exact information during the interview, these campaigners were also excluded from the study.

Another important limitation of the study arose during the interview process. A few respondents were observed to feel uneasy during the interview. It could be

ascribed to the unpleasant experiences they have had in the campaign process, which make them anxious about taking a kind of risk by revealing themselves. It could partly be due to trust issues considering that the campaigners are talking to a complete stranger and not quite sure whether they can really trust the person they are addressing to. They may also have had concerns over their statements can be misinterpreted and eventually harm them or their families. Taking into account that the country has been going through a state of emergency process, their feeling tense and having some hesitations for misunderstanding are understandable. Even though the interviewer explained the process to the participants in a clear way and tried to ensure them about the confidentiality of the interview, their concerns and hesitations may have prevented them from sharing more in detail.

All in all, taking into account the limitations aforementioned, the conditions that might have somehow affected the data gathering process of the present thesis could be better understood and the findings can be interpreted accordingly.

4.3. Socio-Economic Status of the Participants

Despite the fact that participation is idealized as an opportunity to enable all the stratas of a society to participate, citizens from more advantaged groups have been observed to show more participation.⁶⁸² However, with the increasing number of online opportunities and state initiatives for participation, citizens may encounter a considerably cheaper, faster and more practical means for exercising participation and citizenship in the modern era. This, in turn, would pave the way for a rise in the variety and number of participating groups in the society, and decrease the present gap in terms of participation between different stratas of society. Although most of the Turkish change.org campaigners in this study have showed somehow active political participation and realized a critical political act as a mass petition campaign that necessitates high level of engagement, considerable amount of time, energy as well as sources and, therefore, would be expected to be realized by citizens with high level of SES; the present study hypothesized that the change.org campaigners do not necessarily have high levels of SES bearing in mind that Internet may have changed

⁶⁸² Verba, Nie, *ibid*, 5-12; Verba, Nie, Kim, *ibid*, 1; Erdoğan, *ibid*; Coleman, Blumler, *ibid*, 158; *Citizens' Digital Participation*, 3; Erdoğan, Uyan-Semerçi, *ibid*, 61.

the earlier participation balances between different SES groups by erasing the barriers before participation in the society with its online facilities.

20 of the participants are from 8 different cities of Turkey, and two of them live in the metropolises of two developed countries in Europe. 6 of the 8 cities the participants dwell in are considered metropolis and the other two cities have been announced to gain this status in 2018. Though these two provinces have not metropolitan status yet, all the campaigners in this study can be accepted as residents of urban areas.

As for the educational status of the participants, most of the interviewees (16) have at least one bachelor's degree, while three noted to have graduated from high school and continue their university education. Only one participant expressed to study at high school. It is worthy of consideration that, among the university graduates, one participant studies for his second university degree and another for the third. In addition, one participant has completed two degrees and another three degrees so far. Moreover, one of the participants have done Master's, three participants have doctorate degree and one has been entitled to the Associate Professor degree. Taken into the high levels of education of the participants, it can be argued that the change.org campaigners are well educated and have a strong intellectual background.

Table 3: Demographic Information about the Participants

<i>Factors</i>		<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Gender</i>	Male	12	60
	Female	8	40
<i>Place of residence</i>	Urban	20	100
	Rural	0	0
<i>Age</i>	18-24	3	15
	25-34	7	35
	35-44	4	20
	45-54	5	25
	55-64	1	5
	65 and over	0	0
<i>Education (graduated level)</i>	Secondary	1	5
	High school	3	15
	Bachelor	12	60
	Master	1	5
	Doctorate	3	15
<i>Monthly income</i> ⁶⁸³	*1.20%	0	0
	2.20%	0	0
	3.20%	3	15
	4.20%	8	40
	5.20%	9	45

When examining the occupation status of the participants, it was found that three fourth of interviewees had an active work life, whereas one participant was retired and four participants were still students when the interviews were realized. Two of the students stated to work in addition to studying; while one has worked part time jobs to gain her pocket money, and the other has a full-time job and has initiated his own start-up. Among the working participants, while six of them work two jobs, nine have one job. When it comes to what they did for living, all the participants have high-valued jobs in the society such as academician, IT manager, teacher, veterinarian, author, business manager, doctor, social entrepreneur, product business developer, blogger, vlogger, public officer, activist/campaigner, politician, graphic designer,

⁶⁸³ “When the individuals are sorted in ascending order by equalized household disposable income and divided into 5 parts, the bottom income group is defined as “the first quintile” and the top income group is defined as “the last quintile”. “TURKSTAT, Income and Living Conditions Survey 2006-2016”, Turkish Statistical Institute, 2016, <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/UstMenu.do?metod=temelist> [03.12.2016].

software developer, public accountant and interpreter. Aside from having prestigious jobs, almost all of these participants have jobs that can potentially enable them to earn above average when compared Turkish standards.

As for the economic status of the sample, the total household income for a year and the number of the people living in the same house were asked to the interviewees. The household income provided was divided to the number of the people in the house, which revealed the equalized yearly income of each interviewee. To find out which income quintile each interviewee belongs to, the 2016 data of the “TURKSTAT, Income and Living Conditions Survey 2006-2016” report by Turkey Statistical Institute was utilized.⁶⁸⁴ The income groups are divided into five quintiles, going from the first quintile of the bottom income group to the fifth quintile of the top income group in the society. The findings of the interviews have shown that while none of the interviewees belongs to the first and second quintiles, the number of the interviewees showed increase up to the fifth quintile. Three participants belong to the third quintile, while eight people to the fourth and nine to the fifth, the top income group. At this point, it is important to point out that four of the participants are students and do not have a regular salary and depend on the pocket money from their family, part-time jobs or state grants, except one. Despite this, the findings show that the majority of the participants belong to the financially most advantaged groups in the society.

The findings of this study revealed that the participants constitute a rather advantaged group in terms of levels of education, occupation, income and place of residence. Therefore, they did not support the hypothesis with regard to SES factors, while supporting the views associating increased participation with high level of SES⁶⁸⁵ and paralleling earlier research findings in literature⁶⁸⁶. Considering the results, it is seen that citizens with high SES levels are more active in terms of petitioning on online platforms, than the ones in a less advantaged position. Besides, it can be inferred that this group has maintained its visibility and dominance in practicing participation and citizenship in the online sphere in addition to the traditional, offline channels. Though the advantages and conveniences Internet has brought cannot be denied, it is

⁶⁸⁴ TURKSTAT, *ibid*.

⁶⁸⁵ Verba, Nie, *ibid*, 5-12; Verba, Nie, Kim, *ibid*, 1.

⁶⁸⁶ Erdoğan, *ibid*; *Citizens' Digital Participation*; Erdoğan, Uyan-Semerci, *ibid*, 61.

understood that more number of state initiatives as well as citizens that put more effort to gain better digital citizenship skills are needed for closing the gap.

4.4. Change.org Experiences

4.4.1. Different Name as a Campaigner

Some of the participants in this thesis preferred to start the campaigns with institution names or pseudonyms instead of their real identities. For instance, Ediz preferred to use his own website as his user name on change.org which he found more appropriate because the website had already been dealing with and voicing similar issues since he had established it. For this reason, he thought, while his website could become the face of the campaign and add on its reliability by gaining an institutional identity, the campaign would serve to promote the website on the other hand.

Another reason behind preferring a fake name for identification on the platform was the issue of security. The feeling of anonymity provided by Internet, according to Yamamoto and colleagues⁶⁸⁷, may enable individuals to express their opinions online more easily. Besides, they may not feel the need of monitoring their messages as much as they do in offline settings⁶⁸⁸. Kayser, the only participant who used a pseudonym on change.org, likens what people write on the Internet to the writings done with sprays on the walls in the 1970s and 1980s. It is easily seen that for him the Internet is like a street wall he sees no harm in writing on as long as he is not discovered. He said that he uses pseudonyms when it comes to expressing ideas on the Internet due to safety concerns and it makes him feel like he lives with a mask on his face. He explained that he has a problem of image making on the Internet when it comes to expressing opinions or asserting a claim since, according to him, people find an argument reasonable while chatting, yet twist the matter when it turns into a criticism argument of one. While talking, he expressed his anxiety asking what people would do to him if they learned that he was the user that started the campaign. He argued that the idea presented in the petition itself is more important than his real identity, by stating:

“What matters was the signatures. I mean, no matter I wrote it with my real name or not, it (the issue in the petition) exists as an idea in Turkey. It exists in reality... I am considered as the one who signed the petition first, but, after that, real people come. Even if I withdraw my signature,

⁶⁸⁷ Yamamoto, Kushin, Dalisay, *ibid*, 885.

⁶⁸⁸ *ibid*, 885.

it starts to proceed by gaining momentum. By the way, let alone the validity of these campaigns, there is also its ideational validity.”

4.4.2. Campaigners’ Knowledge and Views about Change.org

As the most popular electronic petition platform, change.org has millions of registered users whose number is increasing day by day with its growing recognition worldwide. Likewise, this study revealed that change.org was somehow familiar to the participants before they initiated their campaigns.

Almost all of the participants (18) had known about the platform via the posts on social media or the links sent to them through messages or emails, or already had an account on the platform before they started a petition there. The site was a completely new experience only for Derin and Barış who learned about it after either searching for a site for petitions on the internet or being suggested by an acquaintance as a suitable platform for voicing the subjects they were concerned about and, then, deemed it worth trying.

Although nearly half of the participants initiated the campaigns which have made tremendous effect in Turkey, a few questions addressed to the interviewees about their background knowledge on change.org revealed that a good part of them were originally unaware of the way it functions, its history or business model. They basically call it as an international, powerful platform that people utilize to make their voice heard for their ideas, demands, complaints or suggestions. A relatively accurate approach came from a few of the interviewees. Among them, Eylem, who is a professional campaigner and an activist, is the most knowledgeable one since she almost has the full knowledge of the site including but not limited to its mission, history, working style and business model. She defines the platform as a service provider for people that desire to create a change. Secondly, Ediz (23), as a young entrepreneur, views it among successful start-ups. Besides, İlkin, Yener and Uygur pointed out the financial aspect behind the company. On the other hand, most of the participants have more naive attitude towards the platform. For instance, Özgür (33) believes that the platform has the mission of defending freedom of individuals in their name. Similarly, Toprak (50) supposes that the site functioned merely with the contributions of volunteers until recently when they have begun to ask for donations following the increase of the costs of the site. In addition, Tuna (26) takes the platform’s appearance on the news as a sign of its reliability.

Many of the interviewees are ill-informed about what kind of a contribution the signatures would make to their campaign, what their legal value is, how to document these signatures when contacting the relevant authority or how to finalize the campaign. Although a few of them are unsure about the future of their campaigns, some participants are quite hopeful about the contribution of the platform for their causes. For instance, Derin (45) aimed to reach the president of the Turkish Republic via the platform, while Bahar (47) wanted to create a change in the world before her death, hoping that the platform would help to do so, and claimed that the site itself would follow the campaign even if she has initiated it since she has observed that the platform shares some updates about the petition causes, which are actually written by the campaigners themselves.

In contrast, some other participants (Özgür, Derin, Kayser, Işık, Uygur) neither have any expectations from their campaigns nor believe that the campaigns will get somewhere. They, nonetheless, aim to show reaction, reach masses, enlighten people, meet with people of the same opinion or support each other. İlkim (38), for instance, does not think that the signatures will have any effects in the lawsuit process, but does not neglect printing them out to show before the judicial office that thousands of people are interested in the case.

As for the knowledge of the campaigners on the mission of the site, the answers showed the positive opinions of most of the participants such as the platform provides people a sphere to express their opinions, share them with masses, come together, create awareness in the society, defend their rights and create a change. It is evident that they find the platform well-intentioned and user-friendly. Though the missions they assume the platform has mostly fit into the aims mentioned on the platform, there is one interesting point that catches our attention. While the assumptions of the participants are correct, some of them confuse the business model of the platform with its missions because they are also inclined to think that the platform was established as a non-profit organization merely based on helping people and even sometimes solving people's problems on behalf of them.

Bluestein⁶⁸⁹ touches on the reality concerns behind a campaign and argues that the site may be used by some customers to force companies, political authorities to

⁶⁸⁹ Bluestein, *ibid*, 36.

take action with half-baked arguments. Similarly, Kayser (27) mentioned his concerns over the use of change.org in future based on his experiences on online platforms like social media where disinformation can be quickly spread to deceive others. He noted that “But all good things may have a doom like Twitter. You can point some people as targets with a group of trolls, or bring a campaign you want on change.org and officialize it with a group of trolls, too.”

Secondly, such platforms as change.org have critical function in changing the power balances. Since being created on “horizontal networks of interactive communication”, mass self-communication cannot be easily controlled by state or corporations and offers social actors independence in a platform.⁶⁹⁰ Castells comments on this situation by noting that “this is why governments are afraid of the Internet, and this is why corporations have a love–hate relationship with it and are trying to extract profits while limiting its potential for freedom”.⁶⁹¹ No matter how difficult it is, networks of mass communication are critical for networks of power and used to affect how individuals think and to create power.⁶⁹²

In parallel with the opinions about the platform in literature, some participants expressed their concerns. İlkim, as a software development specialist, mentioned the mass of emails users provide the platform with by signing up and the possibility that they can be sold to third parties to make more money. In addition, Erdem (49) accepts that personal information can be benefited for both good and bad intentions. For him, the site’s being founded for survey to detect which segments of the society support what, is among the potential goals. Since he is involved in politics, he tries to take advantage of the data provided online via social media and share political content to reach masses. Considering that people willingly share what they do or who they have connection with, Erdem said that:

“Perhaps, change.org says ... ‘Different societies react these. There is one million (people) here, there is one million (people) there.’ It can be a system that was created to develop policy accordingly. I mean, if I were a politician, I would get support from change.org. If I wanted to become a prime minister, I would get support from such sites as change.org, ask for a report on what the society reacts and use the report in politics, in elections. I would talk accordingly.”

⁶⁹⁰ Castells, *ibid*, 7.

⁶⁹¹ *ibid*, 7.

⁶⁹² *ibid*, 7.

The statement by Erdem resonates what Coleman and Blumler warn us about: the use of signatures of popular cases for populist reasons.⁶⁹³ The authors give the well-known Number Ten e-petitions website as an example of an e-democracy attempt made to enable citizens to offer policies to Prime Minister with their online signatures and, giving unconscious e-petitions on the site, they point out one of the defects of the modern democracy, which is utilizing technology for “unreflective populism”.

In addition to the use of the platform for populism aforementioned, Hladky argues that one of the common concerns shared by political scientists and activists is that the e-petitions may turn into a kind of database of usernames to be used as a “political weapon”.⁶⁹⁴ Though remarking some prevalent criticism underestimating e-petitions for promoting slacktivism or clicktivism and being without a solid impact, Hladky touches on a noteworthy point regarding the use of e-petitions: the political activists’ taking advantage of these e-petitions along with the e-mails the citizens provide while signing a petition for their own benefits. Likewise, Çelik⁶⁹⁵ comments that change.org is turning into a memory which saves political data of everybody together with their names. It is also harshly criticized as a blackmailing organization which gathers and sells information and tendencies of people and puts politicians, companies, lobbies, and dissidents in difficult positions.⁶⁹⁶

4.4.3. Campaigners’ Views about the Power of the Platform

Change.org owes its success partly to its high publicity level. Despite having limited information about the site, the majority of the participants think highly of it. Repeated definitions regarding change.org include being “useful”, “reliable”, “free”, “practical”, “objective”, “fast” and “powerful”. Called goal-oriented, it is deemed as platform to achieve both political participation and communitarian goals individually.

For Yener, whose campaigns have not attracted much public support, attributes his not receiving many signatures to that the change.org company is not good enough to advertise the platform and its name is not comprehensible enough for a Turkish user.

⁶⁹³ Coleman, Blumler, *ibid*, 152.

⁶⁹⁴ Gregory B. Hladky, “What Can E-Petitions Really Accomplish?”, **Hartford Advocate**, 29 July 2011.

⁶⁹⁵ Ferit Çelik, “Change.org: Dünyayı değiştirirken fişleniyor muyuz?”, **btnet**, 30 January 2014. <http://www.btnet.com.tr/change-org-dunyayi-degistirirken-fisleniyor-muyuz/> [25.07.2015].

⁶⁹⁶ Banu Avar, “Nedir Bu Change.org?!” **Banu Avar**. <http://banuavar.com.tr/banu-avar-nedir-bu-change-org/> [18.07.2015].

On the other hand, it is a rather familiar platform to people according to the majority of the participants. Özgür (33) stated to witness the faith people have in the platform as a result of being knowledgeable with it for a long time which lessened their hesitations and questioning before signing a petition there. In Erdem's eyes, who actively uses change.org and has achieved a few victories, it is a credible organization without forged signatures or fake followers. In addition, the opinions of Ekin reflect what campaigners generally feel about the site:

"I think Change.org can stay objective. Perhaps I am mistaken. I think it is objective, non-commercial, or does not serve a government or a state. I think it does not direct people. It allows you to start a campaign freely on an issue you want, as if you were getting an email address. You start a campaign as you get a webmail, Gmail. It allows you this freedom. I mean, it does not say it is prohibited in your country to start this or make you focus on the conditions or boundaries of a country."

As opposed to state platforms that allow citizens to write their petitions but does not enable them to initiate a mass petition campaign or contact the others of the same opinion, change.org brings campaigners together not only with petition signers but also with some decision makers. That this facility increases the visibility of the case and helps establish a bond between the parties is one of the points which increase the popularity of the platform. Eylem (39), as an activist with at least online and offline 50 campaign initiatives before the one on change.org, considers the platform as the best among all others to start and control individual campaigns. She has managed a campaign on the platform for the rights of workers and received much attention from the media. During her campaign on the platform, she reported to experience a deeper involvement with her petition and cause as well as stronger bonds with other petitioners which led her strive more for a positive result.

One of the reasons behind the success of the platform lies in the current political conditions of the country and the state of emergency. Yağmur (35), who is experienced in conventional and unconventional political activities such as working for an NGO or issuing press releases on behalf of various groups, associates the types of political behavior preferences of the citizens with the political conjuncture of the country. She notes that why change.org is considered useful and convenient is partly due to the period the domestic politics has been currently going through in Turkey. She states that she is not sure whether people would appeal to the platform if the agenda of the country changed. So, from her point of view, change.org compensates for the periodic difficulties experienced related to participation.

Some participants accept that the petitions signed do not have legal binding force; however, they noted that their aim is already to increase the public recognition of the issue and make an impact in the society rather than getting an official response to the petition. Yağmur's petition was about an LGBT individual who is somehow marginalized and deprived of some of her basic needs in Turkey. Therefore, for Yağmur, change.org is a means dissidents utilize more, who can neither make their voice heard nor find a place for themselves in the present power mechanism. Yağmur says that "it has a compensatory function when one can no more exercise some actions related to civil rights. When you cannot find your way into that mechanism, change.org compensates for it."

Two questions sought to find out how effective or appropriate the participants think change.org is for showing political participation and exercising civil rights. Most of the interviewees were of the opinion that the platform is very effective for various reasons such as helping people voice problems or opinions, reaching masses, providing moral support for other petitioners, giving people hope about the issue, increasing the confidence of people for sticking by their causes, creating public opinion, initiating useful things for society, creating pressure on politicians, contacting relevant organizations and, ultimately, receiving a reply from the addresses of the petitions more easily and faster thanks to the signatures collected online. However, when it comes to suitability of the platform for showing political participation and exercising civil rights, a few participants consider it so. While Yener (32) finds the site effective for voicing the rights instead of exercising the rights themselves, Bilge (63) considers that she exercises her citizenship rights on the platform. Similarly, Bahar (47) reasons that since politics include all the issues concerning people and government, what is done on the platform amounts to the same thing. On the other hand, Tuna (26) accepts it to be appropriate because there are some instances when some state authorities have paid attention to the successful campaigns and several campaigns ended up with victory after being initiated on the platform.

Among the participants who deem the platform appropriate, Ekin (45) thinks highly of the impact of such a platform, as the initiator of one of the most supported campaigns on change.org in Turkey. As a person who majored in international relations and is well-informed about domestic and international politics, Ekin commented that, many people in the society is far from contacting state institutions,

realizing themselves, showing participation, taking part in political system or using their citizenship rights online. He believes that there is a polarization in the society and people have become somehow alienated, ignorant about one another's problems. Therefore, such platforms or activities that bring people together or take them to streets are helpful. Nevertheless, he adds, their effectiveness and appropriateness partly depend on the population who will utilize them as well as the democracy culture and development in the country. Unfortunately, the way they are used can also make them very inappropriate for the future of the country since masses can be manipulated wrongly by various groups, people or organizations for a variety of reasons.

Another approach mostly adopted by the participants was the instrumentality of the platform as a tool among others to reach their goals since the platform is not a public institution, but a mere website for campaigning. It is clear to see that Eylem finds it wrong to attribute the platform an official mission:

“First of all, it is a platform, not a thing for education. It is just a tool that ones who want to use, can use. I do not expect more. In fact, it is our responsibility, the responsibility of other non-governmental organizations, too. It is the responsibility of the state as well.”

4.4.4. Petitions Signed

Upon being asked what type of campaigns they generally support, the participants stated to choose the campaigns to sign by paying attention whether the campaign is rational (8), beneficial for the society (5), about their interests (4), realistic (2), for a good cause (2), related to defenseless groups (1), or whether it has a good strategy (1) or will bring about a good result (1). Seven of the participants said that they do not discriminate among the topics, but pay attention to all of them. However, a few of the petition topics were mentioned more than the others. These topics were women rights (10 participants), animals (9), health (7), human rights (7) and environment/nature (7). They were followed by children (5), sexual abuse (5) and politics (4), injustice (3), education (2), freedom of press (1), science (1), criminal rights (1), worker rights (1) and religion (1). It shows that the preferences of the participants for the topics to be signed show similarities with the last two years' statistical results of change.org reports for Turkey since animal rights, human rights, health and women rights were among the five most popular topics signed. In addition to signing petitions on change.org, all the campaigners have shared at least one campaign on social media or other online groups, which shows that they make extra

effort to inform and encourage other people for taking action for the causes of other users, instead of just contributing to the petitions with a single signature.

While listing the themes the put signature for, some petitioners noted that they consider certain topics closely related to each other. For instance, instead of naming violence or abuse against women, children or animals as separate topics, they expressed that these issues should be considered under human and animal rights. One participant, Cihan said that he considers all the themes somehow related to education. As educational problems are one of most complained topics of Turkey in the last years, he openly expressed his willingness to take a step or contribute to the solution regarding the national education system by commenting:

“I do not know it (the petition theme he signs especially for) is especially education. As a person, who has been victimized in education, I, honestly, would not care a petition if they asked me to sign so that they (Turkish troops) would invade a land... On the other hand, if you said education in Turkey would jump to 50 or 100 years forward, let alone signing, I would go out with my pen in my hand asking where I will sign. For me, if there were a serious petition campaign, believe me, I would go out for it. I would go out and gather signatures in cold weather.”

4.4.5. Do Signature Numbers Matter?

There is not a direct relationship between the number of signatures gathered and achieving success since it basically depends on the scope of the cause of the petition. However, the platform has a system for determining the target number of signatures for a campaign initiated to achieve victory. Once it is started, the platform places a predetermined number of signatures on the campaign page needed to be reached. When this petition goal is about to be reached, it is automatically increased to the next default signature number. Though this is a standard procedure for every campaign and reaching the goal does not necessarily guarantee the success of the campaign or the realization of the demand, it helps motivate the other users to support the petition. Nevertheless, this situation could create some pressure on some campaigners to reach the goal and even change their perception of the value of a single petition. In time, it may even turn into measuring the importance of a petition according to the number of signatures.

While a few campaigners do not care about the number of the signatures collected, some of them attach greater importance to the numbers for succeeding. 11 of the campaigners gathered between 1.000 and 100.000 signatures, whereas the signatures of the rest 9 campaigns exceeded it. Ufuk, Kayser and Uygar stated that they do not care about the numbers, maintaining that what matters is not the numbers

but the idea behind the campaign and the single signature of a citizen of the country, respectively. While a few of the campaigners expressed their excitement when they saw the numbers reached even though they did not put much effort, some of them noted that they consciously managed a strict campaigning process for maximizing the supporter signatures which will be examined in this chapter. Some campaigners whose campaigns were continuing at that time, were worried about not being able to gather more number of signatures or why their campaign suddenly came to a halt.

One participant, İlkim (38) started a campaign on the preservation of a national value to reach masses and managed a meticulous work to get support and even filed a suit for the cause he is fighting for. He complained about never being supported by the related government or non-government organizations or politicians despite his efforts. Similarly, Erdem (49) initiated a petition on urban planning for a metropolitan city in Turkey and expressed his disappointment by calculating the number of the people living in the city the campaign is associated with and the present number achieved since he expected to reach larger masses. He questioned whether it is his failure or the apathy of the society.

While big petition signature numbers may seem vital to reach victory, in fact, campaign victory partly depends on the scope of the demand and the consequences it would create. The magnitude of the influence of the citizen and the effects of the participation shows difference depending on the scope of the situations, in which the political activity takes place.⁶⁹⁷ While an individual may have a little control on the major decisions concerning all citizens, s/he can relatively have a more significant role when it comes to narrow decisions and specific interests.⁶⁹⁸ Therefore, while campaigns with thousands of signatures may fall short in creating a change since relevant authorities do not consider the demand achievable, a campaign with a rather small scale and comparatively less number of signatures may end up with victory thanks to petition's being practical and supported by the relevant authority and the small community and the it interests.

⁶⁹⁷ Verba, Nie, *ibid*, 49.

⁶⁹⁸ *ibid*, 49.

4.4.6. Networked Campaigning

Considering that 12 of the 31 petitions the participants initiated on the platform ended in victory, it is worth finding out the dynamics behind a successful campaigning process. It is surely beyond doubt that one of the strongest factors lying behind the success stories on the platform is networked campaigning. There are several ways to increase the popularity of a campaign such as translating the text into different languages, using other media or contacting key people like public figures, politicians, journalists that can promote it.

When asked what else the participants did for their cause in addition to the petition on the platform, all of them stated that they shared it on their Facebook account or on related Facebook groups. 9 participants utilized Twitter as a medium to promote the petition. Though not being much preferred as Twitter or Facebook, other online tools such as email (3 participants), WhatsApp (3), YouTube (2), and Instagram (3) were also utilized by a few campaigners for sharing. In addition to social media, printed media (5) and visual media (9) also gave publicity to the causes, by either supporting or criticizing. By using all the printed, visual or social media in question, campaigns were presented through another website (1), documentary (1), Facebook groups created for the petitions (2), interviews (3), videos (4), and by contacting celebrities to support the cases on their pages (3). What's more, some participants tried to organize people on the issue (4), filed a suit (2), started or signed an offline petition on the issue (2), and contacted with a lawyer (3), the target authorities (4), local authorities (2), national authorities (5), and relevant NGOs (8).

With respect to networking, the petition campaign experiences of Barış is worthy of consideration. As a person concerned about the rights of the patients, he conducted an intensive campaign to achieve his aim. He looked for any legal ways to promote his campaign from organizing people, getting support from NGOs, contacting several key people such as members of parliament and a ministry, to utilizing traditional and online media. His statement shows that campaigning needs to be well organized and kept alive:

“What their (his acquaintances) prediction was partly that it is a balloon, it swells, but collapses in time. However, we were mentioned in four or five prime-time news bulletins after about one and a half or two months. I mean we did not deflate anything, but always kept it alive. It had an effect, too. It is not a process that happens by itself... I mean I think, as I said before, how much you want something is proportional to what you have done (for it). There are a lot of things that come to our attention, but we need to focus on solving them when we set to work. Otherwise,

we witness a lot of problems in our environment. We already (voice them) on social media through sharing so that people become sensitive, aware, but it requires endeavor for solution. Otherwise, we should not just say ‘Let’s start a petition campaign and see what happens.’... I mean there is a cost of this action, too. When you do things, you do them by taking the risk of some things... I mean the cost can be material, moral. You have to renounce some things. I mean it took three months, but we worked day and night during three months.”

4.4.7. Reactions Received

Campaigns are open to debate and the platform allows the users to share their opinions via the comment sections on the page and contact the campaigners in person if the campaigners have provided details about themselves. It is a practical and useful way for enabling the petition signers and the campaigners to interact with each other, share ideas, make further suggestions on the issue in question, while it can also turn into a weapon to harshly criticize, threat, harass or put pressure on the campaigners to end the petition.

All the campaigners said to receive positive reactions from their immediate circle and the users on the Internet. They stated to be praised for initiating such a useful campaign, articulating the feelings of the people in the society, having a right demand, bringing a solution to an important problem, taking a step for the society, coming up with unusual tactics and acting courageously. Some supporters went a step forward and made suggestions to a few campaigners for the direction of the campaign, tried to give moral support to other petition signers or even gave monetary help in the judicial process one campaigner was going through. These factors definitely contributed to the campaign process in a positive way and motivated the campaigners to put their weight behind the cause.

When asked whether they would initiate another petition, more than half of the of the campaigners responded they would do it, explaining it with reasons such as their experience in petitioning, the simplicity of the campaign starting process, the emergence of a crucial idea, presence of a “specific” problem, a problem concerning the society. However, a few of them noted that although they would start a petition, they do not want to draw attention in the present political context.

Hesitating to initiate another petition even if there is a need for it shows us the other side of the coin. This freedom in the online sphere has opened the way for also immoderate criticism and safety problems for the campaign starters. While most of the campaigners in this study noted to receive some discouraging comments from even their supporters about the campaign’s weak potential to achieve any victories in the

end, six of the participants admitted to receive negative reactions online ranging from soft to harsh, friendly to seriously hostile ones. Özgür (33) initiated a campaign about moral values of the society. She reported to receive numerous negative comments on her own page on social media, including “Who are you to consider yourself as a community engineer?” or “How can you intervene with us (Turkish nation)?” Similarly, Derin (45) started a campaign demanding some privileges to honour the memories of a martyr and was accused of discriminating between martyrs and asking for the rights the government has already bestowed the society with. Another campaigner, Kayser (28), stated that since he did not provide his real identity on the platform page, it was misrepresented by the online users who speculated about his real identity and pictured him wrongly by drawing some false conclusions from his petition letter. Besides, Yener (32) initiated a campaign for a local issue and said that his campaign was underestimated and criticized by some people for focusing on such an issue though there are more crucial ones. He also received a threat-like warning from an acquaintance who wanted him not to get into the issue targeted in his campaign. Further to it, he received a comment with foul language when he shared the campaign on Facebook, which targeted his family. In similar vein, Ekin (45) observed the hate speech of many users on the campaign platform.

Generally speaking, campaigns about politics or ideologies seems to have a potential to receive negative comments or threats considering the statements of the participants showing their hesitations about politics or ideologies. İlkim’s case, though he considered it non-political, was considered political by some groups. İlkim has resorted to jurisdiction for the issue he collected the petitions for and, for this reason, his case is more serious than most of the other campaigns. During the judicial process, he was allusively accused of an act of an assault on the Internet, and threatened online which made him and his family anxious. He told this process as following:

“There were some who threatened. They tried to lay the blame on me for the things that can be considered as crime or counted as crime. I have been chased. I do not know which group, thing or community. As I said, I am not interested... I do not use Twitter much anymore because of this cyberstalking. I have even changed my name, used the nickname there. It is not my real name or something. Silly harassment! It is not that (just negative criticism), I mean there are some harassment like a man abuses a woman, strange relationship proposals. There is some harassment like this. That’s why I deleted it (real Twitter account).”

Last but not the least, the attitude of politicians towards voicing ideas online plays a significant role in shaping the public opinion. In addition to the reactions by

public, Bahar (47) wants them to be more flexible so that people would openly and freely write down their opinions online and would not be accused for what they think.

Since online sphere is open to all kinds of users with different ideologies and tendencies, it is not surprising that the reactions received regarding a petition written for a cause and published online vary as well. Though it is natural to see opposing ideas as well as supporting ones, what can be problematic is finding the right degree of intervention and tone of the language to be used. While hoping that online facilities liberate individuals to easily put forward their opinions as in the idealized participatory democracy of ancient Greek cities, the campaigning experiences of the participants aforementioned make us question whether this notion of online freedom is slowly creating its antithesis which can be defined by hate crimes, threats, trolls and so on.

4.5. Internet Use Habits

Current research findings have revealed the prevalent use of Internet in the daily life of Turkish citizens. For instance, it was found that the percentage of the individuals using the Internet increased to 58 in 2016⁶⁹⁹ and at least 7 out of 10 people in Turkey have Internet connection at home⁷⁰⁰. Moreover, the research company Dubit Limited showed that the age of using smartphones has dropped to nine in Turkey.⁷⁰¹ They can be considered among many other signs of frequent use of online facilities by Turkish citizens. Therefore, it was anticipated that the majority of the participants often benefit from online facilities during day. Moreover, since using Internet on daily basis is an indication of adequate “technical competence” and “information literacy skills”⁷⁰², which are also the building blocks of digital citizenship, the participants were expected to bear these digital citizenship features.

It was found that all the interviewees have Internet connection and go online every day. While most of them spend at least two hours on the Internet on daily basis, a few stated to stay online nearly half a day. In order to have a clearer picture of their internet use habits, I asked them to explain reasons to go online and let them articulate

⁶⁹⁹ “Individuals using the Internet (% of population)”, The World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=TR> [02.01.2018].

⁷⁰⁰ “Bilgi Toplumu İstatistikleri 2004-2016”. Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu. 2016. <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/UstMenu.do?metod=temelist> [03.12.2016].

⁷⁰¹ Efsun Yılmaz, “Akıllı telefon kullanım yaşı 9'a indi”, *Anadolu Ajansı*, 1 May 2017, <http://aa.com.tr/tr/bilim-teknoloji/akilli-telefon-kullanim-yasi-9a-indi/808787> [09.07.2017].

⁷⁰² Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal, *ibid*, 1.

the ones that came to their minds at that moment of speech. The specific reasons they provided were to “follow local/international news” (16 participants), “make research or learn new things” (13), “work” (12), “follow political sites” (6), “use Internet banking” (6), “chat” (5), “watch films/series” (4), “follow online articles” (5), “learn different views” (4), “reach/inform masses” (4), “send/check emails” (3), “listen to music” (3), “read cultural topics” (2), “follow the sites of non-governmental organizations” (2), “watch videos” (2), “share content via blogs or vlogs (2), “follow sports news” (1), “discuss/make comments” (1), “follow groups” (1) “shop” (1) and “play games” (1). As for civic or political uses of the Internet, the most commonly expressed uses were for “visiting e-government site” (16), “contacting local/national agencies” (7), “paying taxes” (4), “writing petitions” (2), central doctor appointment system (2), and “e-school” (1). It is obvious that the interviewees utilize the Internet for a variety of daily life activities. When compared to other uses, it is seen that the civic and political uses of the Internet have been rather limited so far. However, with the increase in online opportunities for participation especially with the growing number of state initiatives, their share is expected to show increase as well.

Among the mostly visited on daily basis, social media was often mentioned by the interviewees and Facebook was the most popular one as all of them have an account there. It was followed by Twitter with 16 out of 20 participants. Besides, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube or Vimeo were among commonly used sites. Since it was found that social media use constitutes one of the main reasons to go online, it is also critical to find out what function it plays. One of the reasons behind the popularity of social media was its being alternative to national and mainstream media. Some participants explained their preference for social media as a news source because the news on these platforms are uncensored, richer in terms of topics and viewpoints, and provided faster. Since they think that these media do not give chance to opposing ideas, social media is deemed advantageous for hearing alternative voices. To exemplify, Kayser mainly uses his Twitter account to follow some news sources and justified his preference stating “Because I know I will not get real news via TV”. However, Özgür considers the matter from a different angle and maintains that reaching rich sources of news or viewpoints depends on how small or enlarged our vision is. She is of the opinion:

“It (Internet) does not provide much. I mean if you use the social media actively, you become involved in certain circle structures in the society, too. You can be informed about what is going

to happen, be able to see the background of things, I mean, to reach some opinions, different opinions, too. I do not think it provides anything except this... Media organs are divided into parties like us, too. Everybody knows as much as they follow.”

Erdem, as a politician at the local level, attaches great importance to utilizing the online facilities such as social media for opinion sharing or voicing complaints. He also achieved some of his goals thanks to online networking. For this reason, he takes a rather positive approach to what Internet and social media provide us with arguing:

“I am one of the people who know the power of social media. At present, social media is ahead of visual media in terms of sensitivity. There is no censor, no re-dictation. Everything is free. Of course, there are negative and positive sides, but people need to express their opinions and look after where they live.”

Furthermore, he recounted that one acquaintance of his complained about not being able to reach an authority despite having written several times. Then, Erdem voiced this on social media and that authority contacted that person 10 minutes later. He commented that “Social media has such a power. Unfortunately, sometimes it is necessary to sell the fear to people a little.” He mentions that he actively uses the Internet and explains:

“I have my tweets, my shares on Facebook, my photos on Instagram. I write. For example, I have my videos now. I share videos because they are (easier) than reading, because we are not a society that reads. For example, when compared to the ones that read (the shares), videos have a bigger audience. I give my message better there... There is humor, there is sincerity. I add this to politics.”

That citizenship is interrelated with communication and information channels was mentioned in Chapter 2. Therefore, when studying the profile of the citizens, the sources individuals use for receiving information, following news as well as exercising civic and political participation are of quite importance. The interviews conducted for this thesis have revealed a group of Turkish change.org campaigners who have rather different preferences for media consumption from the earlier studies.⁷⁰³ For instance, Internet use has become an important part of the daily routine of this campaigner group. They also differ from the profile of Turkish citizens in those studies in that some of them do not trust the mainstream media and most of them prefer online sources to get updated. Moreover, some emphasized their utilizing various news channels, social media especially Twitter or platforms of opinion groups to reach exact information on an issue. All these findings regarding media consumption may be considered as an indication of an increase in the digital natives and a shift in the media preferences and, therefore, the profile of Turkish citizens.

⁷⁰³ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2015, 80; Özdemir, *ibid*, 5.

4.5.1. A New Challenge to Achieve: Digital Literacy

Paktin⁷⁰⁴ notes on the importance of digital literacy since digital communication may not go beyond chatting with friends, playing games or reading sports news online or false consciousness may harm individuals and institutions. Some segments of society would be disenfranchised from political participation if they are not given proper education on how to utilize online sources.

The old citizens, who are less familiar with online facilities compared to the younger generation, would have more difficulty in using online tools and, therefore, may not show online presence much, let alone political participation. On the other hand, no matter which generation they belong to, all the age groups need to acquire digital literacy skills to effectively use online facilities or save themselves from online perils. According to Kayser (27), a good part of the population in the online environment is composed of young people the majority of whom do not know or care about creating useful, serious information. Similarly, Ekin (45) stressed the importance of public awareness, stating:

“You know there must be education in the first place. People should have information before having opinion. It is not much possible for people to make sound judgments. First of all, a political culture, civil rights, responsibilities, environmental awareness to some extent should be established; (one) should be global citizen; a citizen should learn where we are in the world, where we are going, what are our principles, aims, duties from sources in some way. Now, when a citizen goes online, he/she looks for magazine, sports at most or, if there is someone he/she is interested in, the news about that person. I mean our media consumption is rather unhealthy. Therefore, people should use the online sources with the aim of getting information in some way, in the first place. I think, after this, they should reflect it somehow.”

Since the present study focuses on the use of online facilities as much as offline ones for participation and the interviewees include online mass petition campaigners, it is especially important to examine the digital literacy of the online petitions written. As much as the causes people fight for online, the way they present these causes also matters. Kayser (27) noted that everybody complains about things, but they do not have an idea how to voice them. However, another problem would be that even when they somehow voice their demands online, they may not appropriately do so. Yener (32) claimed that people have difficulty in understanding the different functions, purposes or rules of the online platforms or applications. Similarly, Bilge (63) complained about the misuse of the online services provided by the citizens. She

⁷⁰⁴ Paktin, *ibid*, 5.

reported that some citizens used the official websites for demands or complaints so inately that several official pages created by some organizations had to be shut down.

Another critical point to be considered is that since it is easy for every user to start a campaign, the large quantity of petitions being started, may result in decreasing the power of petitions as voiced.⁷⁰⁵ Ufuk (27) mentioned how arbitrarily people can sign the petitions. His example is from his own campaign process and says:

“You share it (the campaign) with many people, they sign it but most of them do not know the campaign... He says: ‘I signed but I did not have time, I directly signed it.’ I initiated a petition there, but you should not (sign it) just because you like me, but you need to reflect your opinion... The person whom one likes may also do a mistake. They do not consider this, but directly sign it.”

When it comes to the content of the petitions written on the platform, there are some points to pay attention such as the topics selected, writing style and addressing the relevant authorities. Considering that change.org does not specify the issues that can be written, the language to be used, how to address the state officials and relevant authorities or how to air grievances or demands, it is possible that a user on the platform sometimes would initiate a petition which is poorly written, meaningless, insoluble or inappropriate to be voiced there. Therefore, most of the participants are picky when choosing the campaigns to support.

The participants noted that they prefer to sign a petition when it is rational, reasonable or offers a solution. Deniz (28), who started campaigns for the rights of animals, mentioned some petitions which fail to comply with the style of petition writing or to present enough evidence for the cause. Secondly, Ufuk (27) touched upon the ethical aspect of the campaigns. He complained about a group of campaigners who contact with the initiators of the successful petitions to use the petition update tool to mention their own campaign. What makes this request unlikeable for Ufuk is that the platform does not function as these groups assume and their petition demands a new job opportunity for a group of graduates. He considers that every job requires a certain amount of work and a specific department to be studied, and, thus starting a campaign online, asking other people making an effort, cutting corners and trying to achieve something with “easy signatures” are not ethical. Similarly Uygar (21), who ascribes

⁷⁰⁵ Linda Butcher, “Big petition numbers do not always bring success”, **Third Sector**, 6 July 2015, <https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/linda-butcher-big-petition-numbers-not-always-bring-success/communications/article/1352259> [20.07.2016].

the success of his petition to its appropriate wording and being detailed, criticized some campaigns for being poor content-wise or too silly. He explained his points by stating:

“Sometimes people may start too silly campaigns. For example, there should be 11 seat on the minibuses. I mean I have encountered such campaigns. I do not know, I think it must be an important subject. I mean it should interest everybody or, I do not know, it should solve a big problem. I mean it should not be such unnecessary details, such ordinary problems we encounter in daily life. There is no point in presenting the problems to the public of Turkey. I assume such campaigns would emerge later on, for example a man breaks up with his girlfriend and initiates a campaign saying Ayşe should forgive me. But I do not know whether change.org permits this. I mean the importance of the Internet is understood in time. And there are some problems it brings with. There may be some who try to use it maliciously, and there will.”

Another problem is, according to Erdem (49), exaggerating the issues and rights especially when it comes to sensitive subjects like women, animals, religion and Atatürk. He comments:

“Sometimes they exaggerate some things... The society does not know what it reacts. More than it. Its core is education. They do not provide this. We do not know the right for example... It should to be a little rational, reasonable. They exaggerate. Sometimes it is too much. They exaggerate Atatürk, exaggerate religion. They use Atatürk always in the wrong place, they do not see the right place. They use him as an object of defense. However, he is not an object of defense, he is a model. Or they use religion as such. It creates two things...”

That freedom that everybody can launch a petition on the site may sound emancipatory but it may – and also should – lead its users to question the credibility of the petition starters and their stories. Ghosh and Dias in their article in Time Magazine called change.org “agnostic” about what the platform serves to because one can simply start a campaign regardless of whether the cause is reasonable or unreasonable.⁷⁰⁶ Moreover, the instances of “astroturf” causes supported by some big companies⁷⁰⁷ as well as the presence of teenagers, at the age of even 10, launching a campaign on change.org have been reported⁷⁰⁸.

To be able to correctly interpret online data requires some background knowledge to help analyze input encountered. Yener (32) claimed that though people accept what he argues, they did not support his campaign because they cannot even understand the platform or its name. When he posted the campaign page on social media or sent its link to his acquaintances, some of them misinterpreted it as if someone else stole his account or his computer was infected with viruses. Though he mainly attributes it to failure of change.org to publicize itself on the Internet, he stated

⁷⁰⁶ Ghosh, Dias, *ibid*, 140-143.

⁷⁰⁷ Tomio Geron, “Activism for Profit”. *Forbes*. 5 November 2012.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomiogeron/2012/10/17/activism-for-profit-change-org-makes-an-impact-and-makes-money/#1474c7c27ffa> [23.07.2015].

⁷⁰⁸ Bluestein, *ibid*, 34.

that this may sometimes result from technical problems people experience on the Internet.

One of the campaigns Yener initiated was for a local issue that interests the residents of a village of city in the Central Anatolian Region and the petition signers were generally from that area. Considering the group that would be the potential supporters of the petition generally comprise villagers whose average age is high, it can be speculated that they are not as digitally literate as the ones in metropolises or have full command of such a foreign language as English. These points can be accepted as among the reasons behind difficulty experienced in using such an international online platform and the failure of Yener's campaigns. However, as a white collar residing and working in İstanbul for many years, Yener also admitted that he forgets how to spell the name of the platform himself and finds the name of the platform somehow ambiguous. It could be considered as a proof that whether one is young, well-educated or lives in urban area does not guarantee that he/she can easily accept such an international platform or understand it thoroughly.

Without ability to judge the online content wisely, the Internet users are open to manipulation in this sphere. Therefore, it makes us question whether being able to voice all kinds of opinions or demands online leads to the participatory democracy idealized by Arendt or also to information pollution, or, even more dangerously, to controlling masses more easily to achieve some political and social aims like suppressing opposition or mobilizing for internal conflict. These points make us question whether we really return to the participatory or face with a novel mechanism of pressure. Daubney from The Telegraph expresses his concern over the shift in the function of change.org in time.⁷⁰⁹ From his point of view, the site has moved beyond serving as a “tool of change” to turn into a “weapon of outright censorship” and he mentions some popular current examples of the petition campaigns targeting individuals and harming their career. For him, change.org is overwhelmed by the numerous petitions of First World protests. Criticizing this situation, he comments that “... what I find deeply concerning about all of this is that the moment the largely liberal, privileged world gets angry about something, they go running to change.org to

⁷⁰⁹ Martin Daubney, “Is Change.org just a weapon of censorship?”, **The Telegraph**, 14 December 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/11229136/Is-Change.org-just-a-weapon-of-censorship.html> [20.10.2016].

call for whatever it is they dislike to be banned”. Likewise, Ekin (45) pointed out the perils of forging public opinion by certain groups, explaining:

“In fact, it is a dangerous issue. In fact, it is a rather dangerous thing that an ignorant person, a fundamentalist person, a person with bad intentions, a person hostile to his/her country forges public opinion through such participation. One day, when you ask whether you want fascism should come back or not, the parties who are familiar with violence, like bullying may respond yes to it. It was experienced in history, in Germany, in Italy with Mussolini... When you are backed by an ignorant mass in either classical meaning or by using online facilities, it can go to a dangerous direction. Therefore, the decisions of an uneducated society can be risky in a dangerous way. I mean we should not boost, arguing we ask public opinion and enable participation. It can generate an adverse effect or advance (the country).”

Another debated issue was the validity and the sanction power of the online petitions. Toprak (50) reported that she had already tried to initiate the campaign offline but nobody supported her. She argued that people sign online campaigns more easily, reasoning that it may be because when they put their signatures on a paper, they consider them more binding; however, they are not aware that their electronic signatures may have the same binding force as offline signatures. It may be also because they think their online signatures will not affect them anyway in future or because they are lazy to sign offline petitions. While İlkim claimed that offline signatures have more binding force in the eye of law, Yener maintained online contacts with government bodies are taken more seriously.

4.5.2. Safety Problems in the Online Sphere

The lack of internet connection is a significant obstruction to participation, so is the distrust in the Internet.⁷¹⁰ Change.org’s being online platform brings about some safety problems due to online threats along with the advantages it presents.

First and foremost, Change.org allows people with fake accounts to register and use the platform, which definitely casts doubt upon the authenticity of the signatures there. This fact was also uttered by a few participants when they commented about the effectiveness of the number of signatures they have collected. One clear example of this is the campaign of Kayser, who admitted to use the platform via a fake Facebook account which does not reflect his real identity, at all. Besides, İlkim reported that even if he deactivated his Facebook account, with which he registered the platform and initiated his campaign, his campaign continued to exist with his name. The third security hole of change.org Kayser mentioned, is being able to change the

⁷¹⁰ Citizens’ Digital Participation.

petition letter outside petitioners' knowledge without any update for the petition signers. Though he claimed to have changed the petition text a couple of times after creating his campaign page, he did not lose any signatures. He maintained:

“This security flaw still exists in most of the websites that have been newly established. I mean you can change your username on Twitter now. After reaching a certain number of users on change.org, – I do not know whether change.org is aware of it or not – you can change your campaign, saying ‘I changed my mind about my campaign’s being like this, I want it to be like that’, which is what I did”.

What Kayser argued is a rather serious claim that implies that, in fact, users on the platform sign a text that does not have contract rigidity. This point needs thorough examination because such a situation can endanger the signatures and bring the platform into disrepute.

Change.org provides some personal information about the petition starters on the petition campaign page. If the campaigners want, they can open an account with their real name, reveal in which city they dwell, add links of their social media accounts or personal websites and so on. However, the amount of the personal details provided show variety depending on the campaign starter's will and, in some cases, it can be even impossible for an ordinary petition signer to find the campaigner based on the information provided online, when the campaigner deliberately avoids disclosing his/her identity. For instance Kayser complained about this situation. He criticized change.org for not letting petition supporters to see the some personal details of the campaigners since people cannot easily contact the campaigners and ask for the progress of the campaign.

Whether the number of signatures controlled by a third company or not is another issue to be considered. Ekin expressed his astonishment several times during the interview about the number of the signatures he collected until the time interview was conducted. His campaign on immigrants is among the most popular campaigns of all time, in Turkey. He says that while his campaign gathered tens of thousands of signatures in the first two weeks, but could not get even a thousand signatures in the following six months. He believes that there must have been a technological problem like software or something else like the pressure of some groups.

Another point worthy of consideration is how much the petition signers know about or involved in the cause for which they sign a petition. According to Verba and colleagues, psychological involvement in politics is defined considering some

measures including “awareness of politics, interest in politics, information, and attention to the media”.⁷¹¹ They also make a differentiation between psychological involvement in politics and actual political activity. Hence, as interest in political issues does not guarantee to be politically active, being politically active may not show political concerns either.⁷¹² The same argument can be valid for the case of petition signing on change.org since it is not known with what motive or awareness the users support a petition. While discussing the reality and sincerity, Ekin (45) expressed his concerns over the digital literacy of the petition signers and their level of awareness about the issue mentioned in the petition, stating that in the digital environment it is not possible to check whether petition signers share the same opinions or attitudes with the campaigners. For instance, Cihan believes that 100.000 petition signers out of the 150.000 experience some sort of a confusion with why they signed the petition or what the effect of the online signature they created on real life would be. Therefore, he concludes that this group does not share the same ideas with the rest of the petition signers.

These issues aforementioned cast doubts upon the reliability of campaigning on change.org as much as online campaigning. Apart from the common problems experienced in the online sphere in general, the specific problems experienced in the campaigning process on change.org show the points that the platform should pay attention for a more reliable service. First, the platform does not have electronic signature certificate to ensure the integrity and authenticity of the petition online. For instance, that one campaigner claimed to change his petition a few times, but not to lose any signers indicate the presence of an important problem that destroys its credibility. Secondly, it is open to serve as an element of pressure with false accounts, campaigns or signatures when used by groups with bad purposes unless they are somehow detected. Moreover, the findings show that it may also function to disseminate disinformation, manipulate naive groups, gain bigger groups of audiences through populism as well as change the world positively. Hence, digital literacy skills are needed to be gained by all the citizens when online to make sure about the reliability of a petition, campaigner as well as the online petitioning platforms resorted.

⁷¹¹ Verba, Nie, Kim, *ibid*, 71.

⁷¹² *ibid*, 71.

4.6. Political Participation

4.6.1. Political Participation Repertoires of the Participants

Political participation experiences and preferences of the participants were obtained through the interview where they recounted their campaigning experiences. Considering that political participation discussions were mostly centered around conventional and unconventional dichotomy until very recently, these participation activities were determined to be used in the present study to detect how much the participation behaviors of the participants match up with the common participation acts long accepted. Conventional and unconventional participation acts determined to find out participation conditions of the campaigners were adopted from the long accepted classifications by Verba and colleagues⁷¹³ and Barnes and Kaase⁷¹⁴ respectively.

In order to find out other common practices preferred by the participants, when asking what kind of political participation acts they generally do, I did not provide them with a predetermined list, but let them share what came to their mind at that very moment of answering. The participation acts realized by the interviewees are provided in the Table 4. It can be observed in the table that except a few interviewees who have realized few political participation activities, most of them have already done various acts to participate. Therefore, the majority of the interviewees can be considered quite active in terms of participation.

⁷¹³ Verba, Nie, Kim, *ibid*, 58-59.

⁷¹⁴ Barnes, Kaase, *ibid*, 552.

Since the sample of this thesis includes mass petition campaigners, they all have experienced petitioning. Therefore, this particular group will not be representative of the participation preferences of Turkish citizens. Other most popular activities include casting vote in elections (19) and membership of community problem solving organizations like NGOs (15). Since voting in elections does not necessitate much initiative, cooperation with others, resources or effort⁷¹⁵ to act, and is considered as the most popular conventional act in Turkey⁷¹⁶, it is not surprising that voting came out as the most popular second political participation after petitioning among others. In addition, working with others on local/extralocal problem (12), working for a non-governmental organization (12), and contacting local (11) or state/national officials (11) were among the participation acts commonly practiced by the change.org campaigners. Besides, considering that the sample of this study constitutes campaigners most of whom took the initiation for petitions on the causes that interest public, it is understandable that a great number of them have also been a member of a community problem solving organization, contacted local or national officials or supported an NGO. Such a tendency in the Turkish context also supports the theory by Norris⁷¹⁷, which claims the presence of a shift from citizen-oriented repertoires to cause-oriented ones, characterized by new social movements and advocacy networks with the younger generations.

When examining the type of activities practiced, it attracts our attention that they mostly prefer conventional activities, while naming just a few unconventional ones such as signing/organizing petitions (20) or attending demonstrations (8). One reason that they did not name unconventional acts much would be the fact that some of the unconventional acts such as damaging property listed by Barnes and Kaase⁷¹⁸ are considered as crime according to Turkish laws. It is understandable that they have avoided these acts or -even if they have practiced these acts- they might not have wanted to share such an experience with the interviewer as a stranger, especially when the discussion was being recorded.

In addition to the conventional and unconventional participation items listed in the table, some other political activities were mentioned by the interviewees as a part

⁷¹⁵ Verba, Nie, *ibid*, 85.

⁷¹⁶ Çarkoğlu, Kalaycıoğlu, 2007, 58.

⁷¹⁷ Norris, 2003, 22.

⁷¹⁸ Barnes, Kaase, *ibid*, 552.

of their participation repertoire. They were sticking posters at streets (2), wearing the badge of a political party (2), sharing opinions on online platforms (7), and donating money to non-governmental organizations (10). Besides, following the websites of political parties or other political groups, joining related social media groups as well as liking or sharing political content were among the mentioned activities realized online. Though sticking posters and wearing badges of a political party have already been a part of political participation activities of citizens for a long time, it is seen that new political behaviors are being added into their participation repertoire. As Uğur⁷¹⁹ noted that NGOs have started to become a part of social life in Turkey in the late 20th century, and Ünsal⁷²⁰ claimed that the number of such organizations has been increasing, the responses gathered from the participants proved that membership to NGOs has taken its place among political participation activities of Turkish citizens. What's more, the Internet has arisen as an alternative platform to practice political participation and exercise citizen rights. Though sharing opinions or political content or showing reaction to them have not been accepted as political participation behaviors that directly have legal sanctions yet, their power to create public opinion and exert pressure on political authorities is undeniable taking into account numerous successful examples. Therefore, the participation through NGOs and on the online sphere deserve attention when considering political participation of citizens in the globalized 21st century.

4.6.2. Political Participation Preferences

Just a few decades ago, users were merely allowed to watch and read the online sources without getting involved in the content creation. Therefore, most of the Internet contents were not much different from other mass media tools in this regard. The users, when not being the provider of the source, had to keep their passive and receiver position. Nevertheless, the recent development of web 2.0 technology along with social media, wikis, blogs, collaborative hypertext dictionaries or other interactive platforms has enabled users to comment about, make contribution to, give feedback on or somehow interfere with the content to make their voice heard. This, in turn, could be regarded as providing users with the chance to participate more on a silver platter. However, whether it is always advantageous -as idealized- or not is open

⁷¹⁹ Uğur, *ibid*, 213.

⁷²⁰ Ünsal, *ibid*, 31-32.

to debate. Similarly, the opinions of the participants of this thesis show variety on the topic in question depending on such factors as age, socioeconomic conditions and gender.

When being asked whether they choose offline or online ways to participate more, almost half of the interviewees had a preference for the online version, which is similar to the results of the study by Fink and Črnič in 2014, where quite a number of participants were discovered to practice merely online political participation forms.⁷²¹ Though four change.org campaigners interviewed in the study favored both online and offline participation considering their relative advantages in contributing to their participation, three of them prioritized offline participation. However, there was a group of interviewees who preferred neither of them noting that they are suspicious or hopeless about their ultimate effects concerning solution, which will be further discussed in the following parts. Therefore, the participants can be classified into three groups as pro-online, pro-offline and the pessimist according to their political participation preferences.

The first group to be mentioned is pro-online participants, who are very optimistic about the contributions of online activities to participation. Upon being asked, online participation was mostly described as “simple”, “fast”, “safe”, “free”, “effective” and “powerful” by the participants. The majority of the participants complained about not having enough time for offline participation, so they consider online facilities as a solution for the time problem. Besides, for them, it has proved to be a useful tool to receive further information, practice participation more and exercise influence over political agents.

One of the main reasons mentioned by the participants for preferring online participation was confidentiality. When presenting identity isn't obligatory, it is certainly easier for one to manifest opinions or reveal his/her side. Therefore, some practices based on secrecy such as secret ballot have been in operation to make sure a citizen decides with his/her free will in democracies. However, the requirement of revealing identity when realizing bureaucratic procedures makes some citizens feel uneasy. On the other hand, one is able to meet masses and speak his/her piece freely in the online sphere. Thus, some online platforms where one does not have to reveal

⁷²¹ Fink, Črnič, *ibid*, 1300.

his/her identity are favored by many citizens when voicing opinions. For instance, Deniz (28) reported that he had negative reactions for the petitions he wrote to demand the punishment of some individuals who killed animals. Therefore, he thinks that “A man feels himself freer on social media because he is not seen. He behaves in a more relaxed manner. He can lay bare his thoughts in a more relaxed manner, but it is not like this in the outside world.” Similarly, a few of them noted it is relatively easier to voice opinions on the keyboard.

Yener regards online participation “more proper” citing the problems he has experienced due to bureaucratic procedures such as waiting for a long time for the document to reach the target authority; however, Yener (32) complained that online facilities have not been smartly used for participation yet, since Turkish citizens have not acquired the online competency or learned how to behave in accordance with the rules to be paid attention. Likewise, Cihan emphasized that there should be a result of an action that he would ever take. The effect he aimed to create when he initiated his petition campaign was to reach masses, get their feedback and be quick. That’s why, he said, change.org served the purpose for his aim and he always opts for online sphere for such kind of participation. In addition, Bilge mentioned online actions’ wider scope of influence and practicality, stating:

“In fact, the visibility of the participation, which is not online, will be highly stunted if there are not any media or communication network. It is an event that will have no effect. But my belief is the Internet environment is rather prevalent. Can you believe this? I received signature from Azerbaijan. How could I have accessed there?”

The opinions of the participants reflect the shift in the participation preferences of some segments of society, who are accustomed to using online facilities and have experienced some concrete advantages of online activities in their life. Considering that online facilities are becoming more common and developed day by day, it should not be wrong to expect that the number of citizens who favor these activities will show an increase as well. The prediction by Derin (45) for a similar future, when commenting about participation types, is worthy of consideration as well. Although Derin does not deem online participation real, she accepts its potential to replace its offline version, stating that “Maybe all of these will change in time. Maybe concepts will change. Maybe nobody will protest on the street. Everybody will protest in this way, we do not know. Time will show”.

Despite the dominance of the responses favoring participation in the virtual sphere, it is also clearly seen that traditional activities realized offline still maintain their importance for many participants who constitute the second group: the pro-offline. It is partly because most of the actions online, despite realized with political purposes, do not have any legal presence. Therefore, it would be too early to mention the support or tendency of all the participants for exercising only online participation.

Even though the power of online platforms in connecting and mobilizing others is appreciated by the participants, when it comes to creating concrete results, online activities are generally considered somehow insufficient. According to Tuna, although he works in the IT sector and he considers that the Internet has the power to publicize issues, offline acts are more sensible for taking concrete steps. Similarly, Derin, who is experienced in several social, political voluntary activities and initiatives, is of the opinion that while it is considerably simpler to express ideas on social media, standing by these ideas requires more.

In addition, according to Yağmur (35), who fights for the rights of some disadvantaged groups like workers and LGBT individuals, offline participation makes more sense since fighting for something is much bigger than clicking at a desk. A meaningful and valuable political action is going out of the walls, one is in, to fight. Likewise, though being very young and born into a digitally highly developed world, Işık (20) makes a differentiation between the two political participation types in question by calling the offline form “direct” and online “indirect” since what is done online has a rather limited function without a substantial result. She continued to comment:

“Both of them are participation in a sense. I mean, okay, even if you cannot participate (actively) in a sense, it must somehow motivate people. There is one person, there are 10 people, there are 100.000 people or 1 million, 2 million people. I mean, okay, you do not have an actual thing, but I think, as an opinion or there is something that motivates people who have taken action. I think the presence of a thought that there are people who join us is a thought that supports people.”

One of the other motives of participants for offline participation was the face-to-face communication advantage with other citizens, which may better help the transfer of emotions and creation of empathy. Toprak (50) is one of the participants who strongly supports offline participation as she feels at ease when communicating face-to-face than on social media where it is difficult for her to understand what opinion the people on social media really are of. Besides, Uygur (21) names offline participation as “more attractive”, “more exciting” and feels “more peaceful” when

practicing it. According to him, people start to trust the rightfulness of one's cause after seeing him/her striving at streets at night. When realized outside, such activities attract people's attention and enable them get informed about the cause. He expressed:

"We say Internet is rather effective, but what is done outside is more, how can I say, people think like this 'If these people went out at 3, at 4 at night and did this, then they believe this thing is right.' I mean, what is done on the street is much more effective. Or I do not know, you cannot take part in a march on the Internet, but when you do it on the street, you can attract far too many people's attention. They come and ask 'What are you doing?', 'What is your purpose?' and so on. You spray (on the wall), when you put your signature under it, I mean, when you put the signature of the non-governmental organization you are in under it, they definitely find you, I mean the ones who share the same idea with you. Or the ones with opposing views become curious, I mean, about 'Who are you?', 'What are you trying to do?' Therefore, it is more effective that social media in that sense."

There is a third party among the participants: the pessimist, who believe that the effect of what citizens do via online or offline media is strongly related to the reaction of the related authorities no matter how much they strive. For instance, there are not major differences between online and offline versions of participation in the current situation for Özgür and Kayser since the effect of the participation, anyways, depends on the reaction of the state agents or key authorities to respond the demand. Besides, Ekin considers both types of participation can be manipulated by some powerful groups with different ideologies or motives, which would affect citizens' tendencies and, eventually, upset exercising the right of participation with their free will. On the other hand, Bahar believes that though each type can be effective depending on the communication of people, both ways may lead to a conflict in time.

For some, Internet basically functions as a medium to reach other people of the same idea when a political act does not yield the intended results. Though Özgür (33) believes that there is no difference between participating online and offline, she stressed that she resorts to the Internet to give the message:

"I have been working for something. I have still been working for humanity, freedom, the country, republic... The aim is to show we have still been striving, we exist, we are still one, we are here, we are one. In fact, the Internet is a more suitable medium. We are not dead yet. The Internet is more important to show that."

Likewise, with specific to online campaigning for a cause, Ekin maintains that even if people cannot estimate where the campaign would go or whether it will achieve its objective, they at least have a chance to show their solidarity with the people, online platforms and organizations in the same camp. Özgür and Uygur share similar ideas with him as well. Uygur put his aim as such:

"What I aimed to do when initiating a campaign was to make people who think like me feel that they are not alone. I mean, (it was) to give them moral support. I do not think that (the relevant

authority) would see it on the website and say that Uygur has started a petition and I shall pay attention to Uygur... As I said before, it was to gather them under an umbrella.”

It can be seen that online environment is not regarded as a substitutive channel for showing active participation that directly create a legal result, but a medium to promote solidarity with the ones of the same opinion. Therefore, these arguments by participants indicate the presence of some segments of the society that are suspicious or completely hopeless about being able to participate or seeing the concrete effects of their participation acts whether in an online or offline sphere.

4.6.3. Participation under the Shadow of Slacktivism and Clicktivism

Campaigns on change.org have been regarded effective in creating social movement and transformation, organizing people, inviting them to create positive effects for Turkey, as well as letting clicktivists and slacktivists express their reactions and wishes and practice activism to some degree.⁷²² However, Paktin also draws attention to an important point: to adopt the same manner after leaving the computer in the real life.⁷²³

Some of the frequently realized participation activities mentioned by some of the interviewees are considered within the scope of slacktivism or clicktivism in the literature. For instance, some activities in the participation repertoire of the interviewees such as becoming a member of Facebook groups⁷²⁴; signing e-petitions, donating money to NGOs, liking or sharing announcements of activities or demonstrations, or encouraging others on social media to act⁷²⁵; participating, organizing or supporting social protests in the online environment⁷²⁶; creating memes and changing profile pictures⁷²⁷ are named either clicktivist or slacktivist activities whose value and scope of effect are rather disputable. The arguments defending or opposing online activities for participation can also be examined from the clicktivism and slacktivism perspectives, which have currently been among the hotly debated topics in the literature. Though simplification of participation activities and decrease in the amount of time needed to realize these activities are facilitated by online tools,

⁷²² Yeğen, *ibid*, 105.

⁷²³ Paktin, *ibid*, 15.

⁷²⁴ Christensen, *ibid*.

⁷²⁵ Halupka, *ibid*, 90-92.

⁷²⁶ Yılmaz, Dündar, Oskay, *ibid*, 490.

⁷²⁷ Halupka, *ibid*, 125.

these modern conveniences themselves may constitute the very barrier against participation as well.

The views of the campaigners regarding the function of online participation show variety. One argument by a few interviewees was that it was a natural result of the era we live in and should be welcomed as its offline counterpart rather than being despised as clicktivism. Özgür (33) advocates online participation by stating “We are in the consumption age. Of course, it (participation) is from your couch. Now, everything is from your couch. From now on, activism can also be from your couch.” Eylem, as an activist who has tried a variety of means for the causes she has supported so far, noted:

“I am not a person who believes that. I am not a person who says the online is an easy issue, people do it from their couch, it is clicktivism. I (think) that people have started to access much more information thanks to online, digital environment. I mean (the information that) they have not seen on the media, television and so on. They have started to get involved in online... and it (online activism) has become the factor that has increased the offline activism. I mean it is not that it (online) is different, the ones do it (online) do not do that (offline). On the contrary, I consider them as things that feed into each other“.

Undoubtedly, realizing participation without much effort on the Internet is among the factors that makes online participation favorable. However, whether clicking online provides a real contribution to a case or leads to the achievement of an intended goal is open to discussion. When asked why he preferred change.org for his petition, Ekin (45), who spends about 16 hours online, explained that since there is anonymity and people are able to do it from where they are with a single click. While Toprak (50), who initiated an online campaign on environment and accomplished a result, argues that people can write something or express opinions which lets them pour their feelings, Yağmur (35) adopts a different view and notes that, in fact, it can cause a backlash. According to her, using online platforms such as change.org also pacifies energy, but this is generally ignored when mentioning its benefits. Initiating a protest or supporting one another with one click creates a sense of contribution which eventually leads to shortcuts and absorption of energy. She calls it as a kind of passive action, which takes place in the literature as slacktivism.

All in all, considering the perspectives of the participants on online and offline participation, there are both positive and negative points to take into account when evaluating the contributions as well as the sanction power of online political activities since a variety of factors have an impact on the issue. It not only depends on the responses of the target authorities and governments to the online participation acts, but

also how well individuals can utilize online sources and to what degree online activities can contribute to a case.

4.6.4. The Condition of Petitioning – Standing Problems, Changing Preferences

Petitioning was not a new experience for the campaigners, who had already written individual petitions or initiated mass petition campaigns before. Six interviewees previously had offline mass petition campaigning experience and three of them utilized similar online petition campaign platforms prior to increasing reputation of change.org.

Though their preferences regarding online or offline petitions may show variety, campaigners were, in general, happy about the power of petitions and signatures. Undoubtedly, among all the participants, Erdem (49) has the most positive attitude towards writing online and offline petitions since he is experienced in both of them. He has both written individual petitions and initiated online and offline mass petition campaigns several times, most of which ended up with victory. He discussed:

“I consider the signatures of the public as the best way to display the reaction of the public since it is the people from whom politics feed on, and petition is the point where people show their reactions. You cannot do anything when you are alone, but when you are backed by the power of signatures, you can become a mass... If the issue is signature, I am among the ones who have realized the power of collecting signatures.”

As one of the earliest recognized legal participation rights of Turkish citizens both in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic, the right of petition still retains its power of legal sanction and appreciated by citizens. Nonetheless, while there have been made some arrangements by the state regarding the use of right to petition, it is known that there still exists some problems in its exercise due to not being able to actively use the right, authorities’ not appropriately answering the petitions.⁷²⁸ Likewise, many participants recounted their earlier offline petitioning experiences which gave them a hard time and somehow alienated them from using their right. For instance, Bilge (63), who strived for the rights of the disabled for many years, mentioned one of her petitions being rejected several times since it was considered improper by notary even though she documented the relevant court decision. Similarly, Yener complained about bureaucratic process when submitting a petition, commenting: “If you wrote a petition, submitted it to the post office and sent it, (you would not know) what happened, whom it arrived or whether it arrived or not, whether

⁷²⁸ Dilekçe ve Bilgi Edinme Hakkının Kullanılmasına İlişkin Genelge.

it arrived at the address or not”. Thus, such unpleasant experiences, encountered especially while using the traditional channels for petitions, can be considered among the reasons that made the participants turn to online petitioning, which saves them from the classical bureaucratic burdens.

Secondly, some participants mentioned other reasons behind the decreasing popularity of offline petitions in the contemporary era. Ufuk (20), as a young petitioner, is of the opinion that people are not accustomed to writing petitions and do not even know when to use it since they have not been educated enough about exercising the right to petition. In addition to not knowing how to write a petition, Deniz (28) claimed that people have already forgotten petitions. It shows that the citizens have been going through a process in which the concept of petition experiences a transformation.

When asked their petition preferences, though utilizing online petitions for their case, a few participants interviewed (Eylem, Erdem, Işık, Uygur) stated to prefer offline mass petition campaigns more for they enable people to have face-to-face interaction, make eye contacts with other people, have a little chat and discuss their arguments. They also help break down the prejudices, reach people that are not accustomed to digital life and meet celebrities, who are considered to play key roles in the promotion of the campaigns. Among them, Eylem and Erdem stated to have offline mass petition campaign experiences, while Işık and Uygur said they would also like to initiate offline mass petition campaigns which satisfy them more. As a matter of fact, Erdem, who is involved in local politics, is more hopeful about offline campaigns, claiming:

“(The number of signatures on) street is more (than the online one). If I took a pen in my hand, prepared a text now and went to ... square tomorrow, I would make 1000 people sign it every day. I mean, I could create that thing (effect). Actually, it is a cheerleading, marketing, in fact. I would go out and tell people: ‘Put your signatures. Look, we are here for this reason. We are this, that.’ We would tell (them). They would jump on it, join the queue. I did it. For example, I did it... They joined the queue. I took (the petition) and wandered as people put their signatures. I entered coffeehouses, said thus and so, ‘We are going to put our signatures’. Who can do so? They said, ‘Of course’. Pat, pat, pat, pat.”

On the other hand, most of the interviewees mentioned the superiority of online petition on offline one by calling it comparatively “active”, “confidential”, “efficient”, “familiar”, “practical”, “fast”, “easy”, “cheap”, “simple”, and “safe”. Besides, the online version was considered helpful to organize subsidiary actions such as organizing meetings for the cause of their petition.

Writing a petition with a few clicks in seconds is undoubtedly one of the important factors that makes online petitions seem rather practical and come one step ahead of the offline versions. Eylem, who works as an activist, having utilized each petition types, noted that when realizing offline mass petition campaign, one needs to organize it more seriously planning every element from financing to logistics, which is not needed when online. Cihan (32), who is very interested in technological innovations and works in the information sector, commented that since everybody sees everything online, there should be an extreme case like saving the world for him to go out and gather offline signatures. He maintained that countries are ruled online like in Turkey where election campaigns are mostly realized on social media. All the campaigns, whatever the case they are initiated for, should be online and especially on social media; otherwise, according to him, people end up just tiring each other since an offline petition hardly achieves its goal.

It is a fact that online facilities have been improved to better answer our daily life needs with practical solutions and are being adopted by more and more people. As these facilities have become a part of our lives, they may also change the petition paradigm that have long been accepted. Yener (32) commented that Internet has penetrated into our daily life so much that pen and paper are no more necessary for petitions. He supported his ideas with an example from his immediate environment, stating that:

“My father is 58 and has a Facebook (account). He signs if there is something that attracts his attention and shares it. If you can reach somebody at the age of 58, you cannot see people on the street like that anymore. If you build a stand (at the street), people will not see it with their phones in their hands. They look at their phones, they do not look around.”

Another reason to favor online petitioning over the other is its wider sphere of influence. Cihan reasons that since the aim of a petition is to reach people, a convenient way to do is appealing to online means as a requirement of the era we are in. Indeed, Ufuk summarized a few common concerns in the modern era some petitioners mentioned and why online processes are favored:

“We are all people who wake up at 5 o’clock at the earliest, at 9 o’clock at the latest. I mean we are people who go to work in one way or the other. When all of us do not go to work for one day, the workload is hindered, some of them lose their jobs. Now, this person does not even have time to write the petition and post it to any government organization. There is still such as system as fax in this country! ... There has started a system as email. Even if you send it, the duration for examining the mail is not certain. Is it really checked? It is a mystery. Will you receive a responding message? So on and so forth. I think we have already forgotten them. I will send a petition, someone will read it – maybe one person or two people will look at it–, if it is suitable, he/she will send it to a higher authority, I do not know.”

Though Ufuk favors online petitions, from the second half of his speech it can be inferred that there is still lack of confidence in receiving satisfactory responses from the authorities in charge no matter the petition is online or offline. In fact, this point, which was voiced by many interviewees as well, reveals a third view regarding petitioning and the common problem experienced by citizens in Turkey. In addition to being hesitant about related authorities would pay attention and really respond to their petitions, some interviewees have also despaired of the both online and offline versions of petitions since they were not well informed about the process after submitting their petitions. Therefore, it can be concluded from the findings of the present study and complaints to the relevant authorities that there is still much progress to be made for a better service and enjoyment of the right to petition –no matter online or offline– in Turkey.

4.6.5. On the Relationship between Citizen and State in Turkey

Ünsal likens the citizen-state relationship in Turkey to the father-child relationship within a family that turns political life of the citizens into a kind of familial bond, which results in citizens' obeying the political authority as they do so in the family.⁷²⁹ Since family stands for an important determinant of citizen and state relationship, and maintains its “socializing” and “politicizing” role⁷³⁰, some segments of the society may, likewise, maintain their passive position before the authorities and still have the fear of being punished by them. Likewise, the statement by Cihan, who initiated a campaign on some legal regulation on transportation, also indicates the presence of such a feeling:

“You cannot reveal yourself to state like a child cannot do either to his mother or father fearing whether they would get angry or beat. Maybe we have unfortunately become like this before our state on several topics”.

Some interviewees claimed that citizens avoid voicing their complaints via even legal channels due to their hesitations and intensive workload. The fears caused by police intervention, losing job, being attacked or jailed are among the commonly articulated sources of the participants' hesitations. It is partly because, as stated by Ufuk, Uygur and Ekin, though the right to hold meetings and demonstration marches is recognized by law as a legal act, it may still be conceived or treated as a terrorist

⁷²⁹ Ünsal, *ibid*, 21.

⁷³⁰ *ibid*, 23.

action by public. Obviously, there is a need to educate citizens more about such rights and their boundaries. For instance, Uygur stated that:

“Now, we can come together and protest things according to the constitution, right? For example, we can realize a mass march. This is our God-given right. Even, we do not need to inform beforehand. We do not need to submit a petition in order to protest. However, only we know the interventions we encounter and maybe a few media channels as well.”

It is argued that citizens in representative democracies, especially the young ones, have become apathetic and alienated from traditional political participation and broad social identities recently.⁷³¹ However, whether their reasons be hesitations, illiteracy or lack of time available, when some segments of society constantly avoid participation, they may end up finding themselves completely passivized. For instance, Ekin commented that citizens are getting more and more ignorant about and alienated from the worries of one another, while focusing on the ones which directly affect their lives. Likewise, Kayser (27), as a person who puts special effort to contribute to solving the community problems, complained that there are still passive, ignorant people in Turkey who somehow cannot use the sources to express their opinions about neither local nor national issues. However, he maintained, when they change their mentality somehow and become capable of writing their opinions online, the country will indispensably adopt democracy in its full sense. He went on to say that “Internet, in some way, means democracy because Internet is comprised of the multiple connections of computers, democracy is created thanks to the communication of more than one individual.”

Erdem (49), as a rather active citizen in local politics, commented on the passive situation of some segments of society noting that citizens themselves are responsible from the current citizen-state relationship since they do not take steps to change the present order. According to him, citizens leave no choice for themselves other than being ruled by some people who see politics as a job, which indicates a crisis of citizenship based on representative democracy adopted in Turkey. However, once they become a little more conscious and react when necessary, the direction of the politics will shift. Unfortunately, he claimed that we (Turkish citizens) love to be ruled, expect others take a step for the wrongs, problems as well as needs; and there arises a need for a person who will be the machinist in the locomotive. He said that he acts as the mechanist and pushes the button with the campaigns he has initiated. He

⁷³¹ Norris, 2003, 13.

thinks that some politicians turn the citizens into a society that is in love with them, yet each petition means and shows that “I am not in love with you”.

4.6.6. The Plight of Citizenship – Concerns

One of the remarkable things interviews revealed is they have a variety of concerns which may negatively affect their participation level. It is possible to categorize these concerns according to the space participation occurs and the concerns related to the effects of the action into four categories as political, petitioning, online and offline concerns. The spaces where citizens can show participation were discussed under the labels of online and offline, whereas petitioning and political actions were considered as the sources of concerns due to the effects they create.

The first concern this part deals with is petitioning concerns. One of the issues pointed out by the participants was that Turkish citizens have fear of signing a petition and worry about if they would get into trouble by signing it. They stated that people do not want to get involved in a petition campaign fearing that they would be charged with an accusation in future. Though they are right in that individuals are responsible from what they sign for, total avoidance of supporting causes would undermine mass petition campaign process, which is an undeniable element of democratic regimes.

İlkim stated that on learning that the petitions in his campaign on change.org was submitted to the court, approximately 10.000 the petition signers out of 300.000 signatures in İlkin’s campaign wanted to withdraw their signatures. It may show that when the action changes dimension, from online to offline, people somehow become more hesitant and withdraw themselves. It may be partly because people do not want to take responsibility for the particular case they supported online. On the other hand, it is partly because of distrust in the campaigner himself/herself. Even an important part of the participants themselves, who showed courage to initiate a mass petition campaign on the international scale, admitted that they would hesitate to sign an offline petition offered to support at the street since their signature would be used for a malicious intention. It seems offline petitions is taken more seriously by the participants, while online version is regarded non-binding and weaker.

Another concern several participants share is political concerns. Though writing a petition is a political participation activity itself, a few participants argued that they do not exclusively define their activity political. Why they do not deem their

action political is one issue; however, why they do not want to do so is another issue, which is more worthy of consideration for this thesis.

One of the observations made during the interviews is that campaigns falling into the field of politics were believed to be risky for many interviewees. These interviewees avoided revealing their political opinions during interview or mentioning any activity done online that would be considered political for they did not want to draw negative reactions from particular segments of the society because of their political preferences. Indeed, the statement of Ufuk reveals how many participants actually feel: “Since the campaign is not a political one, there is not a situation that would create trouble”. Secondly, one of the most interesting cases in this issue was that İlkim, who initiated a petition campaign on national values, felt the need to repeatedly stress that neither he was a political person nor was his campaign about politics. He also emphasized several times that he was not a member of a party, group or an organization and what he did was not political, even if I did not claim it to be so. According to him, people should not deal with politics on the Internet since there is information pollution. Moreover, when asked what kind of petition campaigns which they generally support, two participants, Bilge, Tuna, especially noted that they do not even examine the petitions with political causes. Whether this anxiety about politics be for their career or safety, it is worth examination.

The third concern some of participant have is the one about participation in the online sphere. The freedom to stay anonymous online may bring about adverse outcomes, and therefore, new concerns in addition to providing great conveniences for voicing opinions. The unanticipated consequences mentioned by the participants include hacking, trolling, disinformation among many others that are discussed in detail below.

Kayser (27) pointed out the presence of Internet trolls that disseminate fake news, start discussions on false information and, therefore, function to damage the trustworthiness of the content provided in the online sphere. As also mentioned by Barış (40) Internet, as a sphere accessible by all groups of people with their different intentions of use, remains susceptible to fraud via agitation as well as emotional exploitation. Moreover, Kayser emphasized the danger that a particular content provided by a user in the online sphere can be easily modified and shared on other websites, which makes starting an online campaign or sharing opinions risky.

Though web 2.0 technology has provided users with the opportunity to contribute to the online content by modifying, commenting, tagging, liking or sharing; the boundaries of this freedom is open to debate. As opposed to how free, Erdem (49) considers, the online atmosphere where there is no censor or redaction at all, the youngest participants Işık (20) and Uygar (21) take it as a rather censored sphere. While Işık and Kayser (27) maintained that some media sources camouflage what really happens, Uygar argued that Internet has slowed in terms of dissemination of ideas and mobilizing people when compared to a few years ago, when it was relatively easier to mobilize people.

The last concern the participants expressed was due to the problems experienced via traditional, offline ways. Some of the interviewees consider some offline participation activities including mass petition campaigning, protest, carrying banners, demonstrations, slogans or sit-ins somehow unsafe to exercise due to the perils waiting them outside in Turkey

Almost half of the interviewees pointed out reluctance in the society to sign a petition for a mass petition campaign when collected at the street since people deem it somehow fishy and risky because they cannot check the authenticity of the campaign as they are able to do so online. When they imagine themselves as collecting offline signatures, they expect other people around to ask such questions as “Who are you?”, “Why?”, “What are you going to do with the petition?”, “Where are you going to send the signatures?” It is not clear for the public whether the campaigners gather the signatures really for the cause that they claim to struggle for. They are also worried about if something happens to them after signing a petition even if they trust the campaigner. Yener mentioned that signature papers without petition text are not welcomed since confidentiality and trust issue discourage people. Ufuk gave an example from his campaign in respect thereof, stating that:

“I am sure if I went to the same people, the people who signed my petition and asked for signatures from each of them, I think 50 percent would not sign the campaign, if not 60. It is because his/her would be there, maybe he/she would have to write his/her ID number, name and surname. He/she would not show the same courage.”

Another point is the potential dangers when collecting signatures outside. For Ediz and Bahar, such an activity necessitates bravery and skills to do so. Ediz went on to say that from the way you walk to what you have on you or utter, all the details are determinants. There is always a possibility to meet people rebuking, ignoring, showing

displeasure or emotional response, or attempting to attack. Taking potential dangers into account, gathering signatures outside seems as a rather laborious task.

4.6.7. Satisfaction and Expectations from State Applications

Castells mentions two ways of using power; one is through coercion, while the other is the creation of meaning in people's minds through symbolic manipulation.⁷³² While the first one is exercised for enforcing the wishes of those with power, the second one is considered more influential and a longstanding basis for power since it is people's mentality -not coercion or intimidation- which shapes the future of the institutions, norms and values a society is based on. Power relations and their boundaries can be seen in every institutional system and depend on the ongoing interconnection between the power and its counter power. Hence, on the realization that system contradicts with the norms and values of the society, counter power will step in and people will resort to altering the system.⁷³³ Today, citizens can create independent communication networks, novel programs, projects and messages through mass media. Created via independent communication, social movements apply to counter power.⁷³⁴ Hence, the independence of communication is seen as the core of social movements, as a means to create a movement and to connect it with society.⁷³⁵

According to Eylem, Internet has improved to enable reciprocal dialogue, which signals return to verbal culture after a century-long interval experienced due to the television and radio period that passivized individuals and managed broadcasting. In addition, some participants were somehow hopeless about traditional or offline channels to find a response to their calls. Therefore, it would not be astonishing to have change.org as a strong alternative adopted by Turkish citizens. While 7 of the 20 participants took some steps beforehand to reach a solution on the petition subject, the others noted to start the work directly with the campaign on the platform. It shows that the platform was the first address for most of the participants to voice their demands instead of resorting to public servants or relevant authorities.

⁷³² Castells, *ibid*, 5.

⁷³³ *ibid*, 5.

⁷³⁴ *ibid*, 9.

⁷³⁵ *ibid*, 11.

Cihan (32) claimed that he chose change.org for Turkish state lacks such a platform he can express himself and feel comfortable with. He complained of not being able to contact with related authorities or receive a satisfactory answer for the cases he wrote petitions for. He went on to say that where states are weak in, there arise such sites. As long as state cannot make sure that its citizens easily reach political agents, they will prefer alternative channels. It will be change.org today or another tomorrow. For Kayser, change.org has no alternative to itself when it comes to mass petitioning. He wished that such an online petitioning were provided on e-government platform and people saw the campaigns on one side. Then, according to him, people would like this and check the campaigns there. Likewise, Bahar, 47 year old officer, asked why the government has not established such a platform as change.org as an area where people can easily voice the problems of the country and claim their rights. In this regard, change.org seems to fill a bureaucratic void and constitute a kind of subsidiary address for voicing demands, complaints and suggestions for now.

Stanley and Weare discovered that the presence of participation opportunities can bring new voices and, in doing so, alter the decision maker's information environment.⁷³⁶ Therefore, it can be argued that governments' adaptation to technology will play a key role in the development of electronic applications for participation and, therefore, of the democracy. Hence, the e-democracy from below needs to be backed by the authorities above to blossom. Ekin thinks that politicians do not take social media or change.org seriously enough for now. Nevertheless, he believes that even if they are not attached importance for now, their role will significantly increase in future. Besides, he maintains that online public opinion polls, campaigns as well as the role of social media will increase as well.

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, Turkish governments have initiated several online platforms as a part of the global attempts for grassroots e-democracy to increase the opportunity for citizens to participate by raising their demands, complaints and suggestions at the regional and national scale. Nowadays, citizens can send online e-mails or create e-petitions to several relevant authorities without making much effort as before. Since these steps have been taken in recent years, to learn whether they

⁷³⁶ Stanley, Weare, *ibid*, 503.

satisfactorily serve the purpose or what kind of new arrangements are needed, the feedback by the citizens as target beneficiaries is of great importance.

Thanks to the online state platforms, citizens can reach e-petition portals, e-services, updates or information services; receive personal documents, realize several official payments and so on. Among the most popular ones recently initiated and welcomed by the participants come e-government, BİMER and CİMER. A few participants, especially the ones who have a positive attitude toward the services provided by the current government in general, stated their satisfaction with BİMER, appreciating it for being fast and transparent since the petitioner is allowed to follow the process the petition going through and the target authorities are required to answer the petition in a standard time period determined. Yener (32) expressed his satisfaction from the service, noting:

“Writing to BİMER, the websites of the institutions is much more effective than change.org. Why is it so? It is because there is a legal period. It responds, you can follow it. Let’s assume you write a petition right now, send it by post. What happened? Who did it reach? Did not it reach? Did it reach the address or not? ... But you write it to BİMER or CİMER, you enter e-government, (you see) who it reached, who it was directed. Finally, the answer is sent to you.”

Some areas of need were also mentioned. For instance, BİMER was denounced for falling short in reaching masses since petitions there cannot be shared online with others. Moreover, Kayser criticized some state services provided to gain sympathy of people without being thoroughly calculated and noted that they should be both rational and transparent to function better. On the other hand, Ufuk (27) emphasized the discrepancies within the services of state institutions, commenting:

“Fortunately, we can get our criminal record (from e-government) very easily. You are going to give something to the Directorate of Security, they want your criminal record from e-government... I mean, you give your criminal report to the Directorate of Security. It is an institution that can document everything with your ID if it wants, you give this (to this institution).”

Cihan regards online facilities invaluable for civil procedures. He suggested that online civil procedures should be simplified for the old and they should be taught how to use such facilities so that state officials can be employed more effectively. There must be online/digital payment opportunities for daily life practices. State services such education and health should be modernized. Besides, realizing elections in the online sphere is one of the hotly debated topics worldwide. Likewise, it is one of the demands of the participants voiced during interviews. For instance, Kayser mentioned his idea for digital elections in detail as follows:

“I have always this idea such this. We are in the Internet age, which is very important. What I mean is not the Internet which personal computers are connected to, how can I say, think is as gadgets ATMs are connected to, kiosks. Why do I say it? You go there, put your finger on and your name appears. Choose the party you want to vote for. You say that. If you want it, you can hold election on monthly or yearly basis. I mean you can do the activity as fast as possible. Why do I say it? There is 10% election threshold in the national assembly at present. Since there is 10% election threshold, there is not an assembly 100% of the society can participate in. I mean if you want, you can clear the assembly from traditional politicians by holding elections yearly, voting for general elections thanks to the Internet... Then, people (politicians) would refrain. I mean there is election in the coming period, ‘Oh, be careful there is election in September, there is another election in one more September.’ Politicians would do politics without factionalizing, polarizing some people.”

Yener expects government applications to be more understandable, practical and faster. He has a few suggestions for the problems he has experienced:

“For example, today, we have to get not some but most of the documents in the form of hardcopy. Today, we can get the criminal record (from e-government), but we have to go and get the residence document from the office of the mukhtar... The Internet must be limitless for the things that can be done (online) at least. All the documents must be given with the electronic document verification code. Or now there appeared things with chip. I think we do not need them anymore, too. People should give a code. For example, they should tell it and everything shall happen thanks to this code or I wish it happened with fingerprint. I mean, if only I did not carry my ID for bureaucratic issues, but my fingerprint. If only it realized my employment procedures. If only it did something with the retina. For example, there is no point in distributing ID cards to people again by spending millions of Turkish Liras. It totally should be digital now. At least for the ones that can be done. The document such as criminal record is more important but why do not you give the residence document?”

Last but not the least, confidentiality stands as one of the critical issues to be considered. Özgür, Ediz, Kayser, Bahar, Toprak, Yener, Uygar expressed their concerns over such reactions as threatening, abuse, blacklisting, dismissal, notoriety due to collection, misuse or disclosure of their identity after writing complaints or petitions online whether it be on the applications of state organs or such platforms as change.org. Therefore, the establishing of environment of trust in the online sphere was among the main expectations of the Turkish change.org campaigners.

All in all, all the concerns aforementioned show us the other side of the coin, when the advantages of globalization, online facilities and state initiatives for participation and active citizenship are discussed in the 21st century. To summarize, these concerns no matter which category they belong, indicate not only the existence of persisting fears related to the results of traditional offline participation acts but also the emergence of new ones with the utilization of new means for participation. Though new concerns are partly due to the perils in the online sphere itself, a number of concerns mentioned reveal the lack of distrust between citizens and the state which somehow prevent citizens participate more and therefore have their expectations met.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Within the present thesis, I have explored the practices of political participation and citizenship of the change.org campaigners and Chapter 4 has provided the findings of this study in detail. The first section of the conclusion chapter presents a short summary of the thesis, discusses the main findings along with their contribution to the related literature. The second section of the chapter concludes with some suggestions for further research on the political participation and citizenship studies in Turkey.

This thesis basically deals with the question of whether digital technologies have created a shift in the perspectives and repertoire of Turkish citizens in terms of political participation and citizenship in a globalized world. Considering that the developments in the information and communication technologies have contributed to shape the conditions and the practices of political participation and citizenship in Turkey, I intended to find out how and to what degree such a shift occurred, by examining it within the scope of an online mass petitioning tool, namely change.org.

Based on the earlier literature that shows the determining role of SES factors on political participation, the research question examining to how extent these factors maintain their traditional position in participation was investigated. Bearing in mind the contributions of technological innovations especially the Internet on political participation as discussed in the earlier chapters, this thesis hypothesized that thanks to digital and online facilities making participation easier, feasible and practical for people from all walks of life, the change.org campaigners do not necessarily have high levels of SES. However, the findings have come out at odds with my hypothesis, revealing a group of campaigners almost all of whom have rather high levels of income and education, and reside in urban areas. They all have prestigious jobs such as doctor, author, or translator and remunerative careers, except the students and a retired participant.

Traditionally, the nature of campaigning activity requires active participation and psychological engagement and, therefore, the individuals practicing it are expected to show high level of association in all political participation activity patterns.

Likewise, the findings of this study suggest that the citizens at an advantageous position in socioeconomic status is dominating among the campaigners. Examining some socio-economic status factors of those interviewed, it was discovered that the majority of them are well-educated, have prestigious jobs, live in urban areas and belong to the highest income groups in Turkey. Since the study include mostly high SES groups, it lacks the representatives of the blue-collar community, rural area residents, low income groups, or poorly educated ones. Besides, all the participants were young or middle-aged individuals and there were no participants 65 years old or above to represent and reveal the online petitioning experiences of the old generation -if there is any-. Hence, it can be inferred that SES factors still maintain their determining role in political participation in Turkey no matter how online and digital facilities have eased participation for the young and the females. At this point, online and digital facilities fall short to close the gap between different socioeconomic groups in society and overcome the longstanding barriers before participation in the Turkish society.

Bearing in mind the increasing popularity of change.org in Turkey among several other national and international online petitioning platforms as discussed in Chapter 3, the thesis aimed to find out the opinions of the change.org campaigners about online petition campaigns and change.org. It was hypothesized that as the citizens who have utilized the platform in question, the change.org campaigners have positive attitudes toward online petition campaigns and change.org.

The interviews revealed that change.org constitutes the most known and most preferred non-governmental petitioning site among many others in Turkey for the majority of the campaigners, who have already had accounts there and, therefore, were knowledgeable about the online petitions before initiating their campaigns. The findings show that the platform is regarded as “goal-oriented”, “simple”, “international”, “well-known”, “powerful”, “reliable”, “practical”, “objective”, “fast” and “free”, which are among the most common factors that make it more preferable for Turkish change.org campaigners among other petitioning sites of states or non-governmental organizations. Specifically, being able to publicize petitions, conduct a mass petition campaign, gather signatures for the petitions, or see other people of the same opinion are not the acts Turkish citizens can do on state platforms, though they are allowed to submit online petitions on several state platforms. In addition, having

no time to submit a petition by hand, inability to receive satisfactory answers to petitions, waiting for a long time for a reply, or the burden of bureaucratic procedures when petitioning are among the drawbacks of the traditional official petitioning process that turn people to change.org. On the other hand, the opportunity to gather signatures from other countries, share the campaign via email or social media platforms, or add comments on the petition page is not provided by most of the petition platforms in Turkey. Therefore, change.org, as a platform that combines petitioning and campaigning, seems to better meet the participation needs of the Turkish citizens.

Another point arising when interviewing is that change.org owes its popularity to the fact that the platform does not belong to a state organ and, therefore, people feel more comfortable with expressing themselves there. With the increase in the number of technological facilities, citizens resort to handwritten petition less to raise demand and, therefore, the society may lose its competence to write in that specific genre after leaving this habit. The freedom to write online in a less structured scheme may attract especially the young generations, who are relatively less subject to petitioning in the classical sense. Secondly, utilizing a website for campaigning is considered easier than writing to a public institution where a petitioner takes a higher stake by officially revealing his/her ID.

Obviously, the claimed advantages of change.org by the campaigners have contributed to its rapid popularization and mass use. However, the interviews revealed insufficient knowledge of most of the respondents regarding change.org as a company, its business model, its history or the way it works. Besides, they have contradictory opinions about the legal value or the function of the petitions on the platform. That the petitions on the platform do not bear a binding force before the law is known to only a few participants. Some of them do not know or even care how to finalize the campaign or utilize the signatures of the supporters for a legal process. It is partly because the platform serves as a space to voice demands, complaints and suggestions in public for some campaigners, and partly because it helps some to meet others of the same opinion in addition to its classical aim of reaching the target authorities via a legal political participation act, petitioning. At this point, the findings suggest that what change.org promises is beyond the standard petition submitted to the authorities but a chance to pour one's heart out and a hope to address masses, mobilize and unite them

for a cause, create public opinion, put pressure on addressees of the petition, make an impact in the society or even change the world.

The interviews have showed that a few participants regard utilizing change.org suitable for exercising political participation and citizenship while the rest does not do so despite acknowledging its advantages aforementioned and the contribution of the platform to some cases in which the relevant authorities such as government officials took action after the issues in petition campaigns gained public recognition. The prevailing opinion is that the platform helps participating and voicing the demand and rights, rather than using the right itself. Therefore, it can be inferred that online petitioning on the platform has not been considered to have the same effect with classical, legal participation activities, yet.

When it comes to the number of signatures collected and the victory of the campaigns, the statements of the participants revealed two groups of opposing views. For the first group, the fact that a petition is written because there is a right demand is enough for it to deserve attention of the relevant authorities and the authenticity of the user accounts or the number of the signatures does not matter since the cause itself mentioned in the petition is real. On the other hand, the second group believes that the numbers count and the more numbers gathered means the greater the consequences a petition can create. Accordingly, some groups of Turkish campaigners have tackled a huge petition campaign to increase the chances of getting more signatures by utilizing various strategies such as contacting key people, effectively using social media or other media organs, translating the petition text and so on. These acts among others are already suggested strategies by the platform and have proved to be working since almost half of the campaigns of the participants in this thesis ended up with victory. Nevertheless, such an ambition to gather more signatures would change the perception of how the citizens evaluate the importance of a cause in a petition depending on the signatures gathered in time and hurt the sanction power of personal petitions.

The mass use of the platform has brought along some concerns and, therefore, new problems to be considered. One of the concerns raised was online privacy issue. Change.org has millions of users all around the world with their accounts showing which causes they have supported and the potential cases they would react, so their tendencies can easily be detected. Therefore, the platform has a huge pool of user data including emails, petition history as well as tendencies. Considering this power of the

platform, some actions such as selling users' email to third parties like politicians or companies to make money, to enable the detection of tendencies of the society or to blackmail individuals for their political preferences are among the main concerns the campaigners share.

One concern arises from the abuse of the platform's power to quickly spread the causes mentioned in the petitions. Since change.org does not check the authenticity of the user accounts or the reality behind a petition before letting it appear on the platform, it is open to fake accounts or causes. People can easily use the platform to deliberately spread disinformation, manipulate masses, provoke outrage or furious reaction, put some people in a tight spot, harass people or institutions or so on until they are detected.

Another issue regarding the use of the right to petition is the need for the provision of adequate education to citizens on when and to how write petitions. Though the platform presents some directions for writing petition texts, there is not an authority to enforce the rules on the topics to be selected, use of language or the decision makers to be addressed. This has been observed to enable inappropriate, poorly written, insoluble or meaningless petition topics or texts to appear on the platform. The users have worries about such instances fearing these petitions hurt the value of the site or other petitions there.

As for the online petitioning experiences of the campaigners, the participants in the study are not indifferent to the problems other people or other strata of society experience because the interviews showed that they have not just initiated their campaigns on change.org, but also supported at least one other campaign on the platform, by signing or sharing on other online platforms. The findings of the present thesis show similarity in the preferences regarding the petitions signed with the change.org reports of 2015 and 2016. Among all the petition themes, animal rights, human rights, health and women rights constitute the topics in the top five topics signed. This shows an ongoing sensitivity of the Turkish society towards these topics in question.

When it comes to the research question, which centered upon the decline in political participation practices, the present study hypothesized that Turkish change.org campaigners have not become apathetic to political participation but prefer

unconventional ways of political participation as well as the conventional ones. The findings confirmed the hypothesis since conventional political participation activities as determined by Verba and colleagues⁷³⁷ such as voting, membership of community problem solving organizations like NGOs, working with others on local/extralocal problem, and working for a non-governmental contacting local or state/national officials were found to be commonly exercised by the participants. Among the unconventional acts proposed by Barnes and Kaase⁷³⁸, just a few of them were found to be practiced like demonstrations or petitions while some risky acts such as boycotts and strikes or inherently destructive ones like damaging property and personal violence were not stated, which could be interpreted in different ways. One explanation can be Turkish change.org users have tendency to prefer only peaceful and legal ways of participation to contribute to politics, while it can also be speculated that some types of unconventional political participation have gone underground and Turkish citizens do not prefer to explicitly reveal themselves having realized actions since they consider it somehow risky for their safety, career or other aspects of life. Another reason behind such a situation may be that some stratas of the Turkish society still preserve their passive position vis a vis the government due to such reasons as paternalistic perception of citizen-state relationship, failure to fully adopt democratic culture, ignorance to politics as well as getting or being forced to be depoliticized depending on the social, political or economic conditions of the country.

In addition to the long accepted political participation activities listed in the classifications of conventional and unconventional political participation proposed by Verba and colleagues⁷³⁹ and Barnes and Kaase⁷⁴⁰, the daily activities of the participants have been found to include other practices of participation such as sticking posters at streets, wearing the badge of a political party, donating money to non-governmental organizations. What's more, statements by the participants have showed that sharing political opinions on online platforms, following the websites of political parties or other political groups, joining related social media groups, and liking, commenting on or sharing political content constitute a part of the participation repertoire of this particular group. These online activities, though the motives behind

⁷³⁷ Verba, Nie, Kim, *ibid*, 58-59.

⁷³⁸ Barnes, Kaase, *ibid*, 552.

⁷³⁹ Verba, Nie, Kim, *ibid*, 58-59.

⁷⁴⁰ Barnes, Kaase, *ibid*, 552.

them remain unclear, have the potential to create political results by putting pressure on political agents and affecting their policies. Besides, considering the long accepted definition of the political participation “those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take.”⁷⁴¹, these online acts can be regarded as novel acts of political participation that entered our lives in the last decades since they also have the potential to affect governmental and non-governmental bodies in both national and international scale. Therefore, it seems that while long accepted conventional acts still continue to be practiced by Turkish change.org campaigners, new forms of unconventional participation acts are being added to their repertoire of political participation day by day in parallel with the developments in political sphere and ICT.

In addition to the expansion of the political participation repertoires of the citizens, the new technological developments may expand the boundaries of the public realm where citizens interact with each other and disclose themselves. This situation, in turn, may help citizens better express their opinions, demands and wishes, and participate in collective and public life with their actions since “in acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world”.⁷⁴²

Considering all the results regarding the condition of political participation of the Turkish change.org campaigners, it would be wrong to mention an apathy towards political participation since their political participation repertoire has been shaped by both conventional and unconventional participation acts. While they preserve their conventional participation acts, the scope of the unconventional acts they practice is widening with the digital and online facilities. This has introduced a new sphere to integrate into political life and added a new dimension to political participation, thus creating a need to reconsider the boundaries of political participation and public realm.

One of the major topics of discussion in the current thesis is the relationship between the Internet and exercising political participation and citizenship, in general. Specifically, this thesis aimed to explore the attitudes of the change.org campaigners

⁷⁴¹ Verba, Nie, **ibid**, 2; Verba, Nie, Kim, **ibid**, 1.

⁷⁴² Arendt, 1998, 179.

toward the Internet as a medium for exercising citizenship and political participation as well as its effects on their political participation attitudes and practices.

First of all, the study has revealed a high rate of Internet use among Turkish change.org campaigners. This finding is similar to the national statistics of Internet use mentioned in Chapter 1. Besides, utilizing online facilities for participation is more popular among the participants, while offline ways of participation are favored by a relatively small part of this group. The reason why offline participation via traditional activities maintains its importance for some is its being perceived to enable face-to-face communication, mobilize others and create more concrete results. Though some activities like public demonstrations require physical attendance of a person, these people's preferring offline ways to practice all kinds of political participation may be considered as a sign of their being digital immigrants, as people who are accustomed to traditional practices because they were not born into a digitalized world, but have met the digital and online processes after a certain age.

While a few prefer the offline sphere for participating, a good part of the participants show a clear preference for online participation over the offline version, regarding it comparatively active, simple, fast, safe, free, effective, confidential, familiar, confidential and powerful. Similarly, the online versions of petitions are favored more than the traditional offline form by the participants, considering its more advantaged position due to the features listed above. Online participation is also considered more preferable for organizing subsidiary actions related to a particular political act realized by enabling to reach masses and mobilize them.

Specifically, simplicity and practicality of the online processes are among the primary reasons to prefer for the Turkish change.org users, who complained about the classical bureaucratic processes' taking long time and not being practical. For instance, several offline procedures like submitting petitions to authorities are deemed ineffective to yield satisfactory results in a short time, although much effort has been put in the process. Considering that elderly citizens are getting used to online facilities more and more and the young generations are already accustomed to digital and online life in Turkey, such activities as using pen and paper to write a petition, going long distances to vote for a candidate, waiting in a long queue to realize a civic duty or getting printouts to submit to a state official are regarded unnecessary and even

illogical to deal with while there are digital or online options available. In this regard, online or digital applications seem to offer a solution to this problem.

Though online participation is accepted to a large extent, some online activities including signing e-petitions, liking or sharing a post, commenting on social media are claimed to be inferior to their offline versions and named with some pejorative terms like clicktivism or slacktivism in the political literature. This study revealed two arguments for and against this view. The first group claims that offline participation creates concrete results while online participation is non-binding and weak, and criticizes online participation for causing its backlash like pacifying the energy of masses for taking action. On the other hand, the second group deems online participation as a more proper way of taking action considering the modern digital era that we live in and objects to judge it less valuable than the offline version. This finding suggests that online participation has not been welcomed by all Turkish change.org campaigners as a legal political process yet; however it is accepted invaluable by the majority of them in this study. Considering that new generations are born into a world that rapidly introduces novel digital and online applications into our daily life, it would not be wrong to expect that the rate of Turkish citizens who favor online participation will increase in a short time.

The interviews revealed the presence of a third group of Turkish citizens, who somehow have lost their faith in achieving concrete results after exercising participation no matter it is realized via traditional offline ways or in the online sphere, arguing that the results of their participation depend on the attitude of the relevant authorities and political agents at the end of the day. This may indicate a lack of trust in the political agents or the way participatory democracy is practiced in the Turkish political context. No matter what it originates from, this trust issue seems to be a problem which worsens state-citizen relationship that needs to be treated.

The lack of trust in political agents or how the system works aforementioned constitute only one of the concerns that the interviews revealed the participants share. The findings also indicate four areas of concern. Since the present thesis specifically deals with petitioning, the concerns regarding this act are of importance and constitute the first concern area to be mentioned. The results show that while Turkish citizens support online mass petition campaigns with their signatures, when their signatures will create a concrete result like being submitted to a court for a lawsuit, an important

part of them show a hesitant approach or totally reject signing the petition. Considering that a great deal of people regard online signatures non-binding before law, it can be interpreted that they sign petitions just to show reaction to the issue mentioned in the petition and give moral support to the people of the same idea. On the other hand, citizens are anxious about putting their wet signature for offline campaigns fearing their signatures would be used for malicious reasons because this type of signature is regarded to have sanction power before law and, therefore, should be realized more carefully than its online version. Though the signatures on change.org do not have a binding force, the signatures in the online sphere have different types such as digital and electronic signatures, some of which are recognized legally and, therefore, needs the same sensitivity shown to the offline versions.

Interestingly, another concern is related to taking an action on a political issue since it is considered somehow risky. Though the change.org campaigners have already initiated a mass signature campaign which itself is a rather challenging political activity that requires a high level of skill, competence, engagement and courage, an important part of them avoid being involved in political the acts except civic duties, especially the unconventional ones, fearing that their career, family or life in general will be hurt. Traditional, offline participation such as petitioning, protesting, shouting slogans or joining sit-ins, no matter they are legal and permitted, are regarded risky due to the general feeling that other people will respond probably by rebuking, harassing verbally, attacking, or at least ignoring. In addition to an interaction between citizens, this situation, in fact, also indicates the presence of a distrust in the state to keep the confidentiality of the citizens when they complain about the state services or third parties. They seem to be somehow afraid of being punished for voicing their demands or discontent with the present condition, which takes us back to the phenomenon of the Father State, which identifies the state-citizen relationship in Turkey with the one between father and a child in family by positioning the state as a paternalistic element that both “cares and beats” at the same time, and citizens as children expected to well-behave and obey.⁷⁴³

If we put the fear factor on one side, the campaigners’ leading huge international mass petition campaigns, but hesitating to raise political opinions, join a

⁷⁴³ Ünsal, *ibid*, 22.

political activity or signing petitions with the topics falling into the field of politics indicate that some groups among the change.org campaigners regard their action as a kind of voluntary civic participation to raise a social complaint in the name of all the citizens through non-governmental means rather than a political participation. Such a perspective is of great value to consider because this may be the indication of a political transformation in the society. First, it may show there is a trend that citizens become alienated in conventional politics as mentioned in Chapter 1. Secondly, it may suggest a transition from citizen-oriented activities characterized by traditional participation acts like voting or contacting, to a cause-oriented participation identified by new social movements and advocacy networks to create some social and economic impacts as argued by Norris.⁷⁴⁴ Although some campaigners may avoid practicing or admitting to have practiced some political activities due to their fears, the findings of this study show that the majority of them regularly realize political participation activities, especially the conventional ones. On the other hand, the second explanation seems to be more reasonable considering that 21st century is speculated to be characterized by transnational activism for such issues as environment, human rights or women⁷⁴⁵, as well as a shift from dutiful to actualizing citizen form, which prioritizes loosely networked activism for personal values⁷⁴⁶ and practice civic engagement in virtual settings⁷⁴⁷.

Though online participation offers numerous conveniences as opposed to the bureaucratic burdens of offline participation and saves citizens from several concerns experienced while realizing offline participation, it brings about new concerns peculiar to the virtual space such as hacking, trolling, disinformation, fraud or censoring among many others according to Turkish citizens. This space is open to malicious use and would especially pose a danger for the naive citizens, who can easily get manipulated through false arguments and led to take an action for the benefit of some groups. That would undoubtedly threaten the credibility of their participation.

The issue of digital literacy is another issue that has grown in importance in parallel with the proliferation of online participation and is stressed to be paid attention since being able to smartly use the online facilities is a critical point as well. As there

⁷⁴⁴ Norris, 2003, 22.

⁷⁴⁵ Falk, 1994, 131.

⁷⁴⁶ Bennett, 2008, 14.

⁷⁴⁷ *ibid*, 836.

are accepted ways of participation in the offline sphere, citizens should adopt the digital etiquette and literacy to benefit from the online services and better practice participation in this sphere. However, since some stratas of society go through an adaptation process, some are known to have not even met online facilities, yet. For now, this situation may not be a big problem because most of the participation acts can be realized through traditional offline ways; nevertheless, it may constitute a serious challenge citizens and state should deal with when more number of civic duties or rights are exercised online thanks to technological developments as predicted. As people, who are in an advantaged position in terms of SES, dominate the field of politics and are represented more than the ones in a less advantaged position, the people with better digital skills would do so in the near future. Therefore, digital literacy may introduce another area of challenge to be overcome by deepening the representation gap between different stratas of society.

Though statistics from Turkey indicate high levels of Internet connection and use as mentioned in the earlier chapters, the interviews showed that using the Internet for political participation reasons is not proportional to the Internet use in total. While the contribution of digital and online facilities for participation cannot be denied due to the reasons as pointed out in the earlier chapters, Turkish citizens have not fully adopted them as a means for exercising participation. This condition can be regarded as a new barrier before participation and integration into political life in the 21st century since digital literacy will constitute another challenge to be overcome for individuals in addition to low SES factors.

Since online activities have turned out to be one of the critical variables of participation in the last decades, uneven distribution of opportunity to Internet access would lead to new problems for representation. For instance, people with low SES may have limited or no Internet connection at all that would enable them to voice their opinions, complaints or demands as the group that needs such a change the most. In addition, the old generations, as digital immigrants, would be estranged from politics unless they are not provided with state initiated education programs to learn novel technological tools. Considering that the increasing liberation of the Internet and the facilities it provides do not necessarily suggest an obligation of realizing political

deliberation on the Internet to the citizens⁷⁴⁸, the numbers will be limited with just the ones who are capable of using these facilities and somehow motivated to participate unless there are some state initiatives to disseminate and encourage political deliberation and participation in this sphere, and citizens educate themselves to be better digital citizens. Otherwise, digital and technological factors would only serve to deepen the participation gap between stratas in the society such as SES groups, generations or genders in the society as reinforcement theories suggest. At this point, it is of great value to pay attention to what Coleman and Blumler predict:⁷⁴⁹

“Those who are digitally proficient, socially confident and politically articulate are the most likely to take the trouble to search for an online network with which they can establish and sustain a virtual relationship. These are precisely the citizens who are currently over-represented in political participation. For less technically or politically minded citizens, the ordeal of finding an entry point to online activism could well lead to frustration, thereby exacerbating participatory inequality.”

Though digital media is considered to promise to contribute to public communications and democracy, its utilization for such purposes seems to require proper infrastructure as well as the support of corporations, policies and institutions.⁷⁵⁰ Considering that the young in the digital age, as opposed to the earlier generations, are used to realizing their daily activities through digital and online facilities, it will be helpful to adopt new media for enabling it to exercise participation and citizenship as well. That’s why, politicians need to pay attention to what is online. Moreover, online media platforms are needed to be created, especially social media sites should be utilized by political authorities for information sharing, online processes, enhancement of participation and public relations. On the side of the citizens, the platforms in question should be made available for them to voice their opinions, exchange ideas and offer suggestions.

Last but not the least, as Bennett points out, to better integrate the young people into politics, social and political actors should assume different roles since they “must not only prepare citizens for politics but also improve politics for citizens”.⁷⁵¹ First, politicians and public officials must identify the communication and citizenship preferences of the youth.⁷⁵² Second, educational professionals and youth staff must

⁷⁴⁸ Scheufele, Nisbet, *ibid*, 61.

⁷⁴⁹ Coleman, Blumler, *ibid*, 136.

⁷⁵⁰ *ibid*, 11.

⁷⁵¹ Bennett, 2008, 4-12.

⁷⁵² *ibid*, 12.

recognize the generational trends in social identities and political choices to create related education programs. The online state or private platforms must work on networking and interactive media. Moreover, news industry must adopt engaging formats on citizenship for the youth. Finally, scholars must take on the task of informing and motivating all the parties aforementioned.⁷⁵³

This study has revealed that change.org means more than a petition platform for gathering signatures to submit the relevant authorities. Although the petitions do not have a legal sanction and basically serve to publicize a cause the petitions are written for, mobilize people for that particular cause and pressure the targeted addressee; the statements by the participants have shown that change.org is mostly treated as a legal platform that meets the petitions both with masses and relevant decision makers. Therefore, it points a need for a platform to provide such a transparent, interactive platform and seemingly, change.org fills a void in this regard for now.

In accordance with the need for new opportunities for exercising participation and citizenship in the digitalized world, Turkey has started to adopt digital/online applications for the services of public institutions and agencies. Nevertheless, the present study may underline the limitations Turkish citizens have in terms of acquiring required skills or knowledge to utilize these applications consciously and effectively. At this point, in addition to the efforts of state agents, citizens themselves would take the responsibility to obtain digital literacy skills. It will not only enable citizens to enjoy these technologies, but also to save themselves from the online/digital perils awaiting them, thus, become better digital citizens as expected in this era.

Thirdly, since schools should bear the task of educating and guiding “digital citizens” as well as good citizens in this century⁷⁵⁴, educators and curriculum providers need to update their knowledge about social identities and political preferences to present suitable civic education models, and academicians need to work on the strategies for educating and engaging all the stakeholders in politics⁷⁵⁵. Moreover,

⁷⁵³ *ibid*, 12.

⁷⁵⁴ Aytekin İşman, Özlem C. Güngören, “Digital Citizenship”, *TOJET: The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, vol.13. no.1 (2014): 73.

⁷⁵⁵ Bennett, 2008, 12.

news agencies and information providers should adopt more engaging information formats for the new generation.⁷⁵⁶

All in all, the present thesis has been an attempt to present the current condition of citizenship and political participation in Turkey with specific to the experiences of change.org campaigners. One of the contributions of this study would be to reveal the profile of Turkish change.org campaigners as a segment of society, which actively uses online facilities as new media of participation. The findings show that the change.org campaigners in this study constitute a young, urban group with the average age of 36. They are well-educated and seek ways to improve their intellectual capacity by continuing formal education after graduating from university. They have prestigious jobs and a good part of them do two or more jobs at the same time. The careers of most of them are related to information technology and the information sources they utilize are mostly online ones including news sites and social media. A great part of them earn income above the average in Turkey and most of them belong to the middle or upper middle class.

Though the hypothesis of this thesis in terms of SES has been nullified since the Turkish change.org campaigners belong to an advantaged group in that respect, other demographic data received of the participants has revealed a more heterogeneous group. For instance, the present study has showed that the hegemony of the male citizens in the field of participation has been destroyed since almost half of the change.org campaigners in this study are female and the young constitute the majority in such a highly active group in terms of participation. It would also be wrong to categorize the campaigners in a specific world-view since they have different ideologies and political party preferences. Though most of the Turkish change.org campaigners show oppositional positions to the present policies adopted or the government in Turkey, a few support the relevant current developments. This group shows various preferences for participation tools and news sources as opposed to counting on limited number of traditional participation or news media. They belong to rightist, leftist, Kemalist, nationalist or non-political segments among others, and most of them display moderate attitude towards other opinions. Besides, there are a few representatives of different belief or ethnic groups such as Christian, atheist, Kurdish,

⁷⁵⁶ *ibid*, 12.

Armenian and so on in addition to Muslim and Turkish individuals that make up the majority in Turkey. Though they currently reside in urban areas, they come from different corners of Turkey, both urban and rural areas. In addition, they include both married and single groups; students, a retired person and the ones who have active working life. Therefore, Turkish change.org users portray a parade of Turkish citizens from various camps. What unites them is not their ideologies or digital skills to initiate a campaign online. It is, in fact, their strong bonds with the society they are born in and sensitivity to freedom and the rights of living beings in the world. They want better life conditions for human beings and animals as well as the protection of the environment.

Another contribution of this thesis would be to discuss whether there is a shift in the citizenship and participation practices of the Turkish change.org campaigners. The study has revealed that these campaigners have not been alienated from politics nor have their political activities declined. On the contrary, the findings have shown that almost of all the campaigners regularly realize their civic duties and show participation via conventional and unconventional channels. Almost all of them have once been a member of a community problem solving groups like NGOs or have supported them via their volunteer work or donations. Though they do not prefer to realize offline participation activities much if there are online options or avoid realizing unconventional activities that are inherently violent or risky, they have added novel conventional and unconventional online participation activities into their participation repertoire, which enlarged the scope of their participation and helped to voice their opinions, demands and complaints. Considering their participation and change.org campaigning process, it can be suggested that though Turkish change.org campaigners have not estranged from the politics or exercising participation, there are some areas of need to be considered like the problems hindering participation including but not limited to the concerns the citizens share, online perils, false citizenship consciousness as well as inadequate digital/online facilities for participation and digital literacy in the Turkish society.

All in all, the findings of the study are valuable to display the current situation of participation and citizenship in Turkey. Hopefully, the current study will shed light on the obstacles to exercising participation and citizenship as well as the relevant areas of need in Turkey for the political participation and citizenship studies in the political

literature. Besides, it is expected to offer helpful suggestions for the problems experienced while exercising citizenship and participation in this digitalized era and contribute to the policies that aim to increase the participation level of the Turkish citizens because as Coleman and Blumler point out “democracy is a classical common good which works only if it is inclusive and accessible”.⁷⁵⁷

5.1. Implications for Further Research

The last point this chapter aims to provide is some suggestions for further research. First, since this thesis explores if there is a shift in political participation and citizenship in the Turkish context, the findings have revealed to what extent such a shift has occurred and where to position the new political activities within the scope of political participation. However, the participants of this study is limited to 20 Turkish change.org campaigners whose data would be generalized only to Turkish change.org campaigners and, therefore, fall short to provide a broad view of participation repertoire and tendencies of the whole Turkish society. For this very reason, it would be worthwhile to further explore these variables with a wider group of participants which can represent all the segments of the society to have a generalization for the whole Turkish society in general. Such a study would be valuable to undertake because the political participation and citizenship concepts would be revisited to describe the new citizen profile as well as the political participation perception and repertoire of these citizens in the globalized and digitalized world.

Secondly, the present thesis has showed that change.org provides a service to individuals to take action and change some conditions in the society exactly the way the political participation concept is defined. In fact, it is platform by a private company and preferred by millions of people since most of the states in the world have not established such a system that meets citizens with other citizens and state officials transparently. Hence, further research should aim to explore the efficiency of the digital/online state platforms for enabling citizens to integrate into the political life in Turkey and other parts of the world. It would provide an opportunity both to get feedback from Turkish citizens regarding current services and to make comparisons

⁷⁵⁷ Coleman, Blumler, *ibid*, 164-165.

between Turkish and foreign initiatives and, therefore, demonstrate the areas of need for providing better participation facilities in the 21st century.

The last but not the least, almost all of the recent studies in Turkey as mentioned in Chapter 1⁷⁵⁸ have dealt with the digital citizenship concept in accordance with the definition by Ribble and Bailey⁷⁵⁹ as “the norms of appropriate, responsible behavior with regard to technology use” and focused more on the pedagogical aspect of digital citizenship, thus ignoring the political aspect of the term, which defines an individual as a person that utilize digital and online facilities to exercise participation to have a say in politics and to contribute to the society. However, digital citizenship is also defined as the “the ability to participate in society online”, “representing capacity, belonging, and the potential for political and economic engagement in society in the information age” and the digital citizen as a person who uses “technology for political information to fulfil their civic duty, and who use technology at work for economic gain”.⁷⁶⁰ This perspective to the digital citizen and citizenship concepts would yield fruitful data to better understand the presence of citizens in the online sphere, which is an undeniable fact for the developing and developed democracies. Therefore, studies incorporating the digital citizenship and citizen concepts as defined by Mossberger and colleagues⁷⁶¹ and explore the condition of citizenship in Turkey in the digitalized era would be invaluable for the political studies.

⁷⁵⁸ Çubukçu, Bayzan, *ibid*, 148-174; Kaya, Kaya, *ibid*, 346-361; Aslan, *ibid*; Eda Bakır, *ibid*; Görmez, *ibid*; Vural, Kurt, *ibid*, 60-80.

⁷⁵⁹ Ribble, Bailey, *ibid*, 10.

⁷⁶⁰ Mossberger, Tolbert, McNeal, *ibid*, 1-2.

⁷⁶¹ *ibid*.

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APPENDIX A

Table 5: Dutiful and Actualizing Styles of Civic Action and Communication by Bennett, Wells, Freelon

	Civic Style	Communication Logic
Dutiful	• Oriented around citizen input to government or formal public organizations, institutions, and campaigns • Rooted in responsibility and duty • Channeled through membership in defined social groups	• Primarily one-way consumption of managed civic information (news and political ads) • When individual content production occurs, it is aimed at specific institutional targets (contacting elected officials, letters to newspapers)
Actualizing	• Open to many forms of creative civic input, ranging from government to consumer politics to global activism • Rooted in self-actualization through social expression • Personal interests channeled through loosely tied networks	• Lines between content consumption and production blurred • Individual content production and sharing over peer networks that tie personal identity to engagement (which can occur in traditional political contexts such as viral video sharing in political campaigns)

W. Lance Bennett, Chris Wells, Deen Freelon, "Communicating Civic Engagement: Contrasting Models of Citizenship in the Youth Web Sphere", **Journal of Communication**, Vol.61. (2011): 840.

Table 6: “Dutiful (DC) and Actualizing (AC) Forms of Four Categories of Civic Learning” by Bennett, Wells, Freelon

Definition	Knowledge		Expression		Join Publics		Take Action	
	Information that citizens should know	Information created and shared by peers	Training in effective public communication skills	Learning how to connect to others through networks and groups	Actions that engage citizens with specific public issues or campaigns			
DC	Information provided by authorities (e.g., teachers, officials, press)	Information created and shared by peers	Training for traditional forms of public address to institutions & authorities (e.g., letters to newspapers, petitions to public officials)	Membership in traditional, hierarchical organizations	Membership in peer-defined networks and groups	Activities defined and managed by formal organization or authorities	Activities generate and endorsed by peers	AC

W. Lance Bennett, Chris Wells, Deen Freelon, “Communicating Civic Engagement: Contrasting Models of Citizenship in the Youth Web Sphere”, **Journal of Communication**, vol.61. (2011): 842.

Table 7: Abstract map of and Individual's Political Behavior by Milbrath

		Inputs to the system by individuals	Outtakes from the system by individuals
Active	Instrumental	Leader selection (vote) Party activity Contributing money Keeping informed Volunteering Disobedience	Stewardship Communication opportunities Services Economic opportunities Conflict resolution Justice
	Expressive	Allegiance Demonstrations Protests (vote) Political argument	National symbols Sense of identification Governmental protests Sense of superiority
Passive		Obedience Compliance Conscription Paying taxes Indifference	Public order Security

Lester W. Milbrath, Political Participation: How and Why People Get Involved in Politics? (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1965), 17.

Table 8: Hierarchy of Political Involvement by Milbrath

Gladiatorial Activities	Holding a public and party office Being a candidate for office Soliciting political funds Attending a caucus or a strategy meeting Becoming an active member in a political party Contributing time in a political campaign
Transitional Activities	Attending a political meeting or rally Making monetary contribution to a party or candidate Contacting a public official or a political leader
Spectator Activities	Wearing a button or putting a sticker on the car Attempting to talk another into voting a certain way Initiating a political discussion Voting Exposing oneself to political stimuli
Apathetics	

Lester W. Milbrath, Political Participation: How and Why People Get Involved in Politics? (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1965), 18.

Table 9: Four Modes of Participation and the Dimensions of Participation by Verba, Nie, Kim

Modes of activity		Conflict Dimension	Scope of Outcome	Initiative Required
Electoral activity	Voting	Conflictual	Collective outcome	Little
	Campaign activity	Conflictual	Collective outcome	Some
	Cooperative activity	Usually nonconflictual	Collective outcome	Some or a lot
	Citizen initiated contacts	Nonconflictual	Collective or particularized outcome	A lot

Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie, Jae-on Kim, **Participation and Political Equality: A Seven-Nation Comparison**, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987): 54.

Table 10: 21 Political Participation Activities by Verba, Nie, Kim

Voting	Vote in national election (1960) Vote in national election (1964) Vote in provincial elections Vote in local elections Vote regularly
Taking part in campaign activities	Persuade others for a candidate Ever worked for a party Attended political meetings or rallies Given money in a campaign Member of a political club or organization Display or distribute campaign posters or leaflets
Communal activities	Active member of organization engaged in solving community problems Worked through group on a community problem Helped form local group to deal with a community problem Contacted local official with others Contacted extralocal official with others Worked through a group on an extralocal problem Contacted local official with social referent Contacted extralocal official with social referent
Particularized contacts	Local official on personal matter Extralocal official on personal matter

Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie, Jae-on Kim, **Participation and Political Equality: A Seven-Nation Comparison**, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987): 58-59.

Table 11: Expectations Concerning Six Types of Participants and Their Predicted Activity Patterns by Verba and Nie

Type of actor	Voting	Campaign activity	Communal activity	Particularized contacting
Inactive	-	-	-	-
Voting specialist	+	-	-	-
Parochial activist	0	-	-	+
Communalist	+	-	+	0
Campaigner	+	+	-	0
Complete activist	+	+	+	0

Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie, **Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality**, (New York: Harper & Row, 1972): 78.

Table 12: The Theoretical Typology of Political Action by Norris

REPERTOIRES			
		Citizen-oriented repertoires , including voting, party work, and contact activity	Cause-oriented repertoires , including consumer politics, demonstrations and petitions
A	Traditional voluntary associations , including churches, unions and political parties	Older generation	
G			
E	New social movements and advocacy networks , including environmental and humanitarian organizations		Younger generation
N			
C			
I			
E			
S			

Pippa Norris, “Young People & Political Activism: From the Politics of Loyalties to the Politics of Choice?”, Council of Europe Symposium, 27-28th November 2003, Strasbourg, 22.

Table 13: The Classification of Political Participation

	Conventional	Unconventional
General / Traditional	• Institutional framework • Regular, formal • Voting activities within political parties, contacting politicians etc.	• Civic framework • Sporadic, informal • Forms of protest, political consumerism, mobilizations etc.
Digital / Online	• Extended to online forms of communication and digital media • Institutionalized context • E-voting, browsing political websites, following a politician on Fb etc.	• Extended to online communication and digital media • Civic context • Online protest, online mobilization, building online forums and associations etc.

Mitja H. Fink, Tanja O. Črnič, “Digital Citizenship as Multiple Political Participation? Predictors of Digital Political Participation in Slovenia”, *Teorija in Praksa*, vol.51. no.6 (2014): 1291.

To provide a better explanation of clicktivism, Halupka refers to the notions of “Cause” and “Object”⁷⁶². Here, while Cause refers to the factors influencing a decision to take action, which can be observed via their impact, Object is considered as the created content in the online environment. These two conceptions are interrelated: the individual utilizes Cause to create Object, which enables political engagement, which utilizes Cause successively. Clicktivism, therefore, is distinguished from online activism, since it is a reaction to and an interaction with an established political Object and realizes this reflexive action based upon the existing Cause.

He has developed a heuristic identifying seven dimensions of it and differentiating it from other modes of political engagement. Halupka lists the features of clicktivism as follows⁷⁶³:

- **“Situated online.** Clicktivism is a political act situated in a digital environment.
- **An impulsive gesture.** A clicktivist action is an impromptu response to an existing political Object. While the act may occur after a time of contemplation, it is characteristically spontaneous.
- **Noncommittal.** A clicktivist act is disposable, requiring no further commitment to the campaign following the initial action.
- **Does not draw upon specialized knowledge.** Clicktivism is an extension of the minimum skill set required to engage in a digital environment. This includes the navigation of, and interaction within, online environments.
- **Easily replicated.** A clicktivist action must be simple enough to be reproduced by the general population.
- **Engages a political object.** Clicktivism, as a responsive act, must engage an established political Object. This differentiates it from those acts that draw upon the Cause as a point of engagement.
- **An action performed.** Clicktivism is the act perpetrated by the individual. In this way, it is independent of the campaigns that it supports, and of broader political ideology.”

⁷⁶² Halupka Max, “Clicktivism: A Systematic Heuristic”, *Policy and Internet*, vol.6. no.2 (2014): 115.

⁷⁶³ *ibid*, 124.

APPENDIX B

The Interview Questions

Demographics

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself?
 - a. What is your occupation?
 - b. What is your education level?
 - c. How old are you?
 - d. Can you tell the total household income per month?

Petitioning and Change.org

2. Can you briefly explain the campaign process?
 - a. Why did you decide to start a campaign online?
 - b. How did you take the first step?
 - c. Are there interesting experiences you had during the process?
 - d. What else did you do for this issue?
 - e. Did the campaign become successful or does it still continue?
3. Have you ever considered to initiate a mass petition campaign offline?
 - a. Is there a difference between initiating a mass petition campaign offline or online?
 - b. Which one do you prefer more?
 - c. Why?
4. How often do you follow online petition campaigns?
 - a. What kind of petition campaigns do you generally support?
 - b. What are your reasons for supporting or starting an online petition campaign?
 - c. Do you share an online campaign online via social media after starting or signing it?
 - d. Did you share your campaign online? If yes, on which platforms?
5. What do you know about Change.org?
 - a. What do you think the goals of the site are?
 - b. Why did you choose Change.org among other petition sites?
 - c. What kind of service do they provide for you?
 - d. How effective do you think the platform is for political participation and civic engagement?
 - e. How appropriate do you think the platform is for political participation and civic engagement?

Political Participation

6. Other than signing or starting online petitions, what kind of political activities have you done?
 - a. In what ways do you participate in political activities?
7. What do online and offline political participation mean for you?
 - a. What are the differences between them?
 - b. Which one do you prefer more?
 - c. Why?

Digital citizenship

8. How much time do you spend online?
 - a. For what purposes do you use the Internet?
 - b. What social media sites do you use?
 - c. Which one do you prefer more? Why?
9. Do you use the Internet for political and civic reasons?
 - a. How often do you use the Internet for political and civic reasons?
 - b. What kind of sites do you visit for political or civic reasons?
 - c. What do you aim when you use the Internet for political and civic reasons?
10. As a citizen, what kind of activities do you think you can do online?
 - a. What are your expectations?

APPENDIX C

The Profile of the Participants

1. Deniz

Deniz is approximately 30 and has a special interest in literature, the rights of animals and education of the disabled. He has two bachelor's degrees and continues his education for the third one. Currently, he has been working with kids with special education needs and enjoys helping them. Meanwhile, he has been providing voluntary health and accommodation services for stray animals. He also often writes about animals as a voluntary columnist for a local newspaper and online social content platforms.

2. Özgür

She likes to read about religions, mythology and philosophy. She is university graduate and has experiences in writing for magazines and has published her own books. She is aged approximately 35 and married with children.

3. Derin

She is a 45 year old medical expert with PhD degree and has active work life both in academic and practical level. She has participated and assumed the leading roles in student clubs, political organizations and professional associations. She is known for her social, political voluntary activities and initiatives. She is married with children.

4. Ediz

He is a 23 year old entrepreneur that has a lot of experience in product-business developing. He is into technology and likes to meet technology with social projects. He has published his articles with tens of other voluntary columnists on a blog he initiated for a local community. He has his own website, and has started to post his vlogs on YouTube as well. Currently, he continues his undergraduate study. Besides, he has just started to live in abroad as a part of his job.

5. Kayser

Kayser is approximately 30 and currently has been studying at his second university. He has an active student life with voluntary activities for such issues as renewable energy. He has initiated a few student clubs and led others to create useful ideas in cooperation and inform others through conference or meetings. He also has a special interest to social and political issues. He likes to share his ideas and suggestions to solve community problems by participating meetings as well as regularly writing online through such platforms as crowdsourced online dictionary.

6. Bilge

She is a 63 year old housewife with a bachelor degree. Before retiring, she worked on designing and business management. She is interested in the rights of the disabled and social rights. She has many years of active work for a non-governmental organization of which she was among the founders and members of board. She was in cooperation with other government organizations and NGOs. She pioneered the formation of NGOs, organization of meetings, official participation of her NGO to a congress, as well as publication and sale of a book among many others.

7. Bahar

Bahar is an approximately 50 year old officer. She is into different fields such as business, arts, tourism, and gives importance to increase her intellectual knowledge in these fields. She has three bachelor degrees. She also cares and spares time for street animals.

8. Toprak

Toprak is a 50 year old business manager with a bachelor degree. In addition to her initial vocation as an officer, she likes to engage in the field of tourism. She is sensitive to issues related to environment and natural life, and has some initiations against habitat loss. She is also married with a child.

9. Eylem

Eylem is a 39 year old and well-educated petitioner with a PhD degree. She has worked in cooperation with a variety of NGOs and political parties. She exhibits rather active political participation. She is an expert on activism and mobilizing masses for a cause. She is into environment, indigenous people's rights, peace movement, individual disarmament and women's rights and has several works and initiations on these topics in question.

10. Erdem

When asked to introduce himself, he defines himself as an art activist and a father. He is aged approximately 50 and married with children. As a father devoted to his children, he published a book addressing to one of his daughters. Currently, he is secondary school graduate and continues his high school through open high school. Although art or politics are not directly related to his primary profession, he has led or contributed to numerous successful projects and campaigns related to art, city and politics. He actively uses social media and regularly produces online content for fun as well as informing and opinion sharing. He gives importance to networking and often hold talks with opinions leaders of the society of which records he broadcasts on social media. He belongs to an ethnic and religious group which has a minority status in Turkey. Though he emphasizes his sub-identity as a non-Muslim individual, he expresses his pleasure to be a Turkish citizen and to contribute to the improvement of life conditions in Turkey.

11. Barış

Barış is a 40 year old officer with a bachelor degree. He is sensitive about the disabled and the rights of patients. Though being a volunteer of a NGO, he has individually realized numerous contacts with local and national authorities about the cause he is

sensitive about and led an extensive campaign by mobilizing hundreds of thousands with his own efforts. He is married with children.

12. Ufuk

Ufuk is a 27 year old petitioner who has two bachelor degrees. He is interested in arts and makes money by filmmaking. He especially enjoys creating works of cartoon and short films.

13. İlkin

İlkin is a rather well-educated petitioner who is currently studying for his third bachelor degree. He is interested in software development and develops applications to offer solutions for daily life for a living. He also likes to share his knowledge in his field through teaching others. He is 38 and married with a child. When explaining the ration behind his campaign, he defines himself as a person who is sensitive about national and moral values.

14. Tuna

Tuna is a 26 year old petitioner. Currently, he has high school degree and studies at two different universities at the same time. Meanwhile, he works on designing websites for a living. He is fond of travelling foreign countries and knows four languages. He has established his own business and now lives abroad.

15. Yener

Yener is a petitioner with a bachelor degree. He is interested in law, taxes, as well as social and job security. He is keen on politics and has a family member who is actively involved in politics. He gives importance to spending time solving community problems via his political connections and the NGOs he has been a member of. He is 32 and married with a child.

16. Işık

Işık, 20, is a literature student at university and works part-time job in her free time. She has worked voluntarily for non-governmental organizations and gained experience in social responsibility projects. She is sensitive to social issues and likes to contribute to the solution.

17. Uygur

He is a university student and has a part-time job experience. Though being a young individual at 21, he has shown both conventional and unconventional political participation through various activities and active works like within such groups as political parties and NGOs. His participation repertoire includes working for a political party or a candidate; joining meetings, demonstrations; drawing or sticking poster on walls; designing visuals; and preparing videos among many others. He is especially sensitive about Atatürk and the protection of his principles.

18. Ekin

Ekin is a petitioner who has lived in different countries throughout his life. He enjoys learning new things and describes himself as a researcher. He knows two foreign languages and likes making translations on different types of topics for a living. He

enjoys actively using social media and shoots videos with his child for his YouTube channel. He has a master degree in international relations. He closely follows international politics and also has a few initiations for aid campaigns for the countries in war. He is 45 and married with children.

19. Yağmur

Yağmur is 35 year old petitioner who belongs to an ethnic group which has a minority status in Turkey. She has academic studies on gender issue, including the rights of women and LGBTI individuals, as well as labor economics, particularly the rights and working conditions of workers. Besides, she has worked for and issued press releases on behalf of various groups and non-governmental organizations to voice. She has completed her PhD education and her studies have taken place in academic publications as well as local and national media. Currently, she does not have a full-time regular job, but earns her life through translation and working for an NGO.

20. Cihan

Cihan is a petitioner with a bachelor's degree. He is a computing enthusiast and works in the information sector. He enjoys spending time online searching for new developments and designing practical digital systems to respond the needs and problems in different sectors. He is also into vehicles and has some initiations for the professionalization and education of workers in this field. In addition, he has led the formation of an NGO working on the field in question and has taken in charge of the several projects of this organization. As a person sensitive to issues such as education and social aid, he has contributed to the works of other NGOs or individually led small-scale aid campaigns. He is 32 and married with a child.

CURRICULUM VITAE

ÖZNUR DEMİRKAYA

oznur.demirkaya@gmail.com
Born 1990 in July, 27 in İstanbul, Turkey
Resident of Bartın, Turkey

EDUCATION

- 2013 – 2018** **Yıldız Technical University, İstanbul**
Faculty of Arts and Science, Humanities and Social Sciences
GPA:3.75/4.00
- 2012 – ongoing** **Anadolu University, Eskişehir**
The School of Economics, International Relations GPA:3.46/4.00
- 2008 – 2012** **Boğaziçi University, İstanbul**
Bachelor of Arts, Foreign Language Education Department GPA:
3.39/4.00

EXPERIENCE

- English Instructor** 2015-ongoing
Bartın University
- English Teacher** 2012-2015
Yunus Emre Secondary School
- English Teacher** 2013 Summer
Galatasaray University Language Course
- Teacher Trainee** 2011 -2012
FMV Ayazağa Işık Private Primary School and High School
- English Teacher** Summer 2011
Tomurcuk Education Center
- Volunteer Teacher** 2010
Educational Volunteers Foundation of Turkey (TEGV)

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Standing of 43rd in Turkish University Entrance Examination, 2008
- Graduating Çapa Anatolian Teacher Training High School with the second best grade, 2008

PAPERS PRESENTED

- “Change.org and Redefining Political Participation in Turkey: The Case of Change.org”. IPSA 2017 International Conference Political Science in the Digital Age. Hannover, Germany. December 4-6, 2017.

CERTIFICATES

- “Flipped Classroom in the Lifelong Learning – Supporting trainers and adults’ participation to innovate educational course”, Rome, Italy, 18-22 April 2016.
- Art Certificate, Boğaziçi University, 2012

PROJECTS

- **Researcher – MENTALK: Alternative Language Learning Techniques for Male Learners Active in Tourism Sector** – ERASMUS+ Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices, Strategic Partnership for Vocational Education and Training, 2015-2017
- **Trainer – Millennium Classrooms in the Lifelong Learning-** European Union Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) Human Resources Development Operational Program, 2015-2016

LANGUAGES

Turkish	Native language
English	Speak fluently and read/write with high proficiency
German	Speak, read and write at an elementary level

COMPUTER KNOWLEDGE

MS Office, Adobe Photoshop, Html, Dreamweaver

INTERESTS

Foreign languages education, political sociology, social movements, political participation, media, arts.

Fine Arts: animation, painting, marbling

Sports: tennis