THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CREATING POLITICAL AWARENESS AND MOBILIZING POLITICAL PROTESTS

A Focus on Turkey

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Abstract

In the recent years, the internet penetration, social media production and consumption have increased dramatically all over the world. This increase has affected the politics in most parts of the world in many ways. Social media became a tool for politicians to carry out their political campaigns and for activists to create awareness on political issues and mobilize protests. Today almost in all social movements in the countries with high rate of internet access, the role of social media is being discussed. Social media has become a costless and extremely effective tool in reaching mass audiences with political purposes.

This thesis research focuses on the strength of social media in creating political awareness and mobilizing political protests in Turkey. In this study the recent social movements in Turkey are examined as case studies, to understand the role of social media in political movements, to be able to make predictions for the future. The problem was approached with combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. Literature review regarding the subjects related to the social media and politics and information flow in social networks was conducted. After that, two interviews, a survey and a social network analysis to comprehend the role of social media in the two recent major social movements in Turkey, Gezi Parki Protests and Internet Censorship Protests, were carried out.

Depending on the results from research methods conducted, it was found that social media has already become a fundamental part of social movements in Turkey. The young generation in Turkey is extremely interested in joining online social networks. These social networks establish connections between people that are related with weak ties. These connections enable political information to flow on these networks virally, costless and rapidly. Information can be on political news or thoughts to create political awareness and also to mobilize political protests. These advantages of social media combined with biased and ignorant attitude of mainstream media on political events; social media created an alternative source of information in the eyes of the society. Considering the increasing internet penetration, smart phone and social media use for political purposes, the strength of social media in creating political awareness and mobilizing political protests is expected to rise in the future as well.
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1. INTRODUCTION

In the last ten years the world has witnessed the effects of social media in many areas. One of the most substantial effects was seen in the area of politics. Thanks to Web 2.0, internet provided platforms - so called social media - on which millions of users from all over the world can communicate with each other in various media forms such as photos, videos, live-broadcast etc. The Arab Spring (started in December 2010) and Occupy Movement (started in September 2011) can be considered as the two most remarkable and global chains of demonstrations that took place in the recent years. In both, creating political awareness and mobilization of protests through social media has been pointed out and discussed globally. The role and strength of social media’s effect in these movements has been subject of many debates and studies.

In this thesis project, the strength of social media in informing citizens of political events and mobilizing protests in Turkey is studied. The two major social movements, Internet Censorship Protests in 2011 and Gezi Park Protests in 2013 in which social media was used effectively, are case studies that are examined in the thesis. Moreover, a survey, couple of interviews and a network analysis were conducted to reach a dependable conclusion on the subject.

In the introduction chapter the background, research field, purpose and the target audience of the thesis are presented. Then the problem definition is made, main and supporting research questions are listed.

1.1 Background to the Thesis

By the end of the 1980s and start of 1990s as commercial internet service providers (ISP) started to emerge, a new era in communication started. In 1990s internet penetration increased significantly, especially in the western world. By 2001, a third of the developed world had internet penetration.

As the number of internet users started to increase, the commercial and communicational value of internet started to be apprehended. This led to an increase and diversification of services using internet. Internet with World Wide Web laid ground for electronic mail services, discussion forums, blogs, social networks, online shopping sites, media sharing platforms etc. One of the most significant concepts Internet brought to our lives is social media applications where users access various online services by their personal accounts. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the
ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Thus social media is a platform where the users are both producers and consumers of the content. Video sharing websites, social networking sites, discussion forums, blogs are well-known examples of social media. Social media has changed the media perception that people had before.

So what is new in social media? What does it have that traditional media does not have? The three unique features of social media are:

- **Interactivity**
  In mass media the communication is one sided. The broadcasters reach a large audience but the audience can hardly show reaction. Now for example, a blogger can receive instant feedback from her audience by comments and reply back to the comments which could be very hard to do through mass media.

- **Immediacy Transparency**
  Through social media someone can contact the audience without any mediator. In mass media, there are broadcasters which have significant effect on the media produced while serving it. However on social media the media is solely produced by the producer and directly accessed by the audience, such as creating a video and broadcasting on YouTube or a blog page.

- **Accessibility and Participation**
  While the consumption of mass media is very easy, production of mass media is very hard and can be said that open for only a privileged minority. However on social media the production and broadcasting of media is almost as easy as consumption. Every individual can write a blog or share photos without a lot of effort.

Through these three distinctive features, social media managed not only to create a strong alternative to mass media but also provided more opportunities. Now it is possible to watch videos, read blogs or listen to radio broadcast of individuals from the whole world which was not possible by mass media before. The development of technology and spread of internet had revolutionary effects in various areas in society. From producers trying to reach new markets to political activists trying to mobilize protests, different sections of society utilized social media for their own needs and purposes. This led to a huge number of people to use online services. Today, Facebook has more than eight hundred fifty million users and more than 23% of these users check their accounts more than five times a day (Honigman, 2012).
One of the most important outcomes of the increase in the social media use and development of social media technologies can be seen in the areas of politics. As the strength of social media in reaching mass audiences is comprehended, it started to appeal interests of politicians and political activists as well. In many parts of the world, mastering social media is considered as a strong advantage for politicians to succeed in their political campaigns. The effects of social media on the area of politics are not limited by the use by prominent political leaders and parties. The political activist groups can benefit from the advantages of social media too. The political activist groups which find it hard to reach audiences through mainstream media due to various reasons (such as censorship, profit oriented nature of mainstream media) realized that social media creates an expedient alternative. In the recent years the world witnessed that political activists can communicate, create political awareness on social issues and mobilize demonstrations through social media. The Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement are two of the most widely known and effective anti-governmental chains of protests that took place in the last few years. The role of the social media in both has been subject to discussions and debates. For example the effect of social media during the Arab spring created a fierce debate in some academic circles. Researchers such as Philip Howard from University of Washington and Muzammil Hussain have a high opinion on the role social media in the Arab Spring and consider social media as a fundamental factor behind the events. On the contrary, Juergen Pfeffer and Katheen Carley from Carnegie Mellon University don’t agree that the social media played an indispensable role during the Arab Spring. They don’t believe it was the social media which caused the revolutions (Agence France-Presse, 2013).

In the recent years, the effects of social media in the area of politics started to show itself in Turkey where there is a high number of online population. Political parties and leaders started to keep contact with people through social media tools such as Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, YouTube channels etc. During the election periods, the social media was used actively for propaganda. Similar to the examples worldwide, political activists and organizations started to use social media in Turkey to create political awareness and in some cases to mobilize protests. The importance of social media in creating political awareness and mobilizing protests in Turkey was seen in two recent events: Internet Censorship Protests (2011) and Gezi Park Protests (2013).

1.2 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research is to find out if social media in Turkey is a useful tool and an effective alternative to create awareness on political events and mobilize
political protests. Through studies and researches it is aimed to find out if social media can give activists more freedom and action ability than mainstream media in Turkish political conjuncture. It is also considered and argued to make predictions for the future of social media's power in the hands of political activists.

The main reason for conducting this thesis study is that even though the subject is being discussed and studied in some parts of the world, there has not been a considerably important research made on the subject in Turkey.

1.3 Problem

Definition:
The problem is that the political activists in Turkey have had difficulties in mobilizing their political actions, and communicating with mass audiences and their possible supporters through mainstream media. The problem arises from the nature of mainstream media. Mainstream media companies in Turkey belong either to the government or to corporations which target profit maximization. In either case, it is hard for alternative political or anti-governmental ideas to find a place in mainstream media. The thesis study focuses on the question “Whether social media can be an alternative to mainstream media for political activists to spread their ideas freely and efficiently and moreover mobilize political protests”.

Research Questions:
The research questions aim at identifying what sort of advantages does social media hold over the mainstream media and to find out how the social media is being and can be used to create political awareness and mobilize protest movements in Turkey. The main research question, to which the main aim of the thesis study is to find an answer, is that:

"Whether or not the social media is a useful tool for activists to create political awareness on political events and mobilize political protests and demonstrations in Turkey?"

To find a valid and comprehensive answer to the main research question, it is broken down to the following six supporting questions:

1. How widely is social media being used in Turkey?
2. How often and in which ways is social media used by political activists for political purposes?
3. What advantages do social media hold over the mainstream media in terms of
creating political awareness and mobilizing political protests in Turkey?
4. What percentage of people use social media for political purposes, either to inform others or get informed of political events?
5. Do people who use social media for political purposes also actively voice their reactions offline through protests or demonstrations?
6. Which social media tools are used most in creating political awareness and mobilizing political protests in Turkey?

All questions are beneficial and leading to find and answer to the main research question. However, some questions have more direct effect to the main research question while others are indirectly related. It is very hard to formulate in exact numbers how much each supporting question affects the answer to the main research question. However, a categorization of their importance can be done. While the questions number 1 and 6 are indirectly effecting the main research question, questions number 2, 3, 4 and 5 are directly related with the main research question. In the first and sixth questions, it is intended to have an understanding of general effects of social media and the social media culture in Turkey. In the questions that have direct effects to the main research question it is intended to gather data and knowledge to be able to give a valid and comprehensive answer to the main research question.

1.4 Research Field
The main focus of the thesis study is to find out the role of social media in creating political awareness and mobilizing political protests in Turkey. The use of internet and social media for political purposes is examined by using various research methods to gather data from social media users, social networks and experts on the subject. The political protests that took place in Turkey are studied in order to find out the role of social media in these protests.

1.5 Target Audience
This thesis project is prepared to present as a result of the thesis course in master programme of Media Management in KTH.

2. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCESS
This chapter starts with brief information of scientific concepts that are related to the scientific research in general and how these concepts are related to this particular thesis research. Then the approach to the research and methods used for the thesis are described in detail. Also the methodological limitations of the research methods are discussed. The chapter is concluded with ethical considerations related with research
2.1 METHODOLOGY THEORY

In this section the basic concepts on the scientific research are explained.

2.1.1 Objectivity
Objectivity is a very significant value that should be abided in a scientific research. Objectivity is the idea that scientists, in attempting to uncover truths about the natural world, must aspire to eliminate personal biases, priori commitments, emotional involvement etc. (Daston & Galison, 2007). Objectivity has to be followed by the researcher during the whole research process in order to make a scientifically accurate end product.

In the beginning, in the literature study the literature both to emphasize and downplay social media’s role in politics were studied. In the case studies conducted, in order to ensure objectivity, the political dimensions of the case studies were precluded as much as possible and the role of the social media in the events was put in the center of the studies. Besides from the interviews and survey, network analysis was used to access quantitative data which gives no room for prior commitments and emotional involvements.

2.1.2 Reliability
Reliability is the extent to which measurements are repeatable when different persons perform the measurements, on different occasions, under different conditions, with supposedly alternative instruments which measure the same thing. In sum, reliability is consistency of measurement (Bollen, 1989).

In order to achieve good reliability, the questions of the survey and the interview were designed explicitly giving as little room as possible to any doubt or misunderstanding and to avoid environmental factors, so that the same results can be generated by other researchers. In the network analysis part, how and which tools were used, are described in detail. The same results, using the same inputs in network analysis can be deduced by other researchers.

2.1.3 Validity
Validity is another crucial value to be followed in scientific research to achieve accurate results. Validity of research methods is how accurate the research methods are measuring what the researcher wants to measure.
In order to achieve the highest validity possible, the interview and the survey questions were studied carefully before conducting the study. The questions of the interviews and the survey were designed with the aim of finding answers to main and supporting research questions.

Before conducting the actual survey, a study on the social surveys was made. Some social surveys were read. Then a demo survey was prepared and conducted to understand if the surveyors give answers in the right direction to provide data for the thesis research questions. Then some questions were reshaped and some questions that were found irrelevant were eliminated.

A similar process was carried out for the interviews as well. A study on interviews was made and questions were designed and reviewed before the real interview. Brief information on the thesis subject and research questions were given to the interviewee in order to carry out the full interview related to the research questions.

For the network analysis part, which targets to find out the strength and importance of social media tools in the case study, various tools were examined and the most relevant and useful tool among them was selected to find the most valid answers to the questions.

2.2 RESEARCH METHODS

2.2.1 Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods

The scientific research methods can be divided into two basic categories: quantitative and qualitative.

The quantitative methods are designed to acquire numerical values and the results are obtained from these numerical findings.

Qualitative research is intended to penetrate to the deeper significance that the subject of the research ascribes to the topic being researched. It involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter and gives priority to what the data contribute to important research questions or existing information (Higgins & Green, 2011).

In this thesis research, both qualitative and quantitative methods are applied. The survey and the network analysis are used to gather quantitative data while literature review and interviews were used to gather qualitative data on the subject.
2.2.2 Literature Reviews

Literature review is a crucial part of every scientific research. Literature reviews have many benefits for the researchers. By starting with a comprehensive literature review, a researcher,

- Gets a deeper knowledge on the studies made on the subject and gains from different perspectives.
- Learns different research methods to select the best suiting for her research.
- Avoids repeating what others did.

Paul Leedy notes that the more knowledgeable you are, the better you will be able to understand your problem (Leedy, 1989). Jean Aitchison supports the view that a literature review allows the researcher to find out what has been done in terms of the problem being investigated - to ensure that duplication does not occur (Aitchison, 1998).

2.2.3 Interviewing

Interviewing is one of the most known and widely used research methods. There are different categorizations on research interviews depending on various factors. The main categorization is made on how structured the interview is. An interview can be completely structured, semi-structured or unstructured. The more structured an interview is, the less flexibility and freedom are given to the interviewee. Structured interviews are closer to the surveys in which the choices of responses the interviewee can give are predefined and the results provide quantitative data on the subject. On the other hand, less structured interviews give more freedom to the interviewee to express her ideas and experiences on the subject, thus qualitative data is collected in this type of interviews. Interviewing, when considered as a method for conducting qualitative research, is a technique used to understand the experiences of others (Seidman, 1998).

Another categorization is made on how the interview is conducted; nowadays interviews are conducted face-to-face, on telephone or through the internet.

All types of interviews have some downsides. The main methodological limitations of interviewing as a research method are as follows:

- Interviews are time consuming. Collecting, analyzing and interpreting data can take a long time (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997).
- Misunderstanding of the interviewee or the interviewer can cause confusion. It can decrease the validity of the research.
- The biases, priori commitments or emotional involvements of the interviewee
can result in gathering biased data which can decreases the objectivity of the study.

2.2.4 Surveying

Surveys are another widely used research methods especially in social sciences. A survey is defined as a means for gathering information about the characteristics, actions, or opinions of a large group of people (Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1993). Surveys can either be done orally or written. If done orally, they can also be considered as structured interviews. Written surveys are called questionnaires. Generally, surveys are targeted to get quantitative data on a subject.

Applying surveys as a research method has some disadvantages as well. The most common methodological limitations of surveying are as follows:

- The answers have low depth of information. The responses are not descriptive.
- The ranges of answers the respondents can give are predefined. The respondents are given little room to express their own ideas.
- The respondents can be uninterested and might answer the questions slovenly, which can decrease the reliability of the study.

2.2.5 Social Network Analysis

Social network analysis is one of the techniques used in sociology to analyze social networks. A social network analysis is done through mapping a network diagram consisting of nodes (actors) and ties (representing relationships between actors). Social network analysis enables researchers to focus on relationships rather than actors. Researchers can see the paths of information flow in a social network through social network analyses.

The main shortages of social network analyses are as follows:

- The maps illustrate limited number of types (usually one or two) of connections and nodes. This decreases the depth of information that can be gained from the map.
- It can be hard and time consuming to analyze a complex network map.
- Due to the dynamic nature of the internet, the actors and the connections in an online social network can change and an analysis made can lose its actuality in a short time.

2.5.6 Mixing Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods
The main target in combining the qualitative and the quantitative methods, in this study was to eliminate the weaknesses of one by the strengths of the other. To avoid, personal biases the interviewee might have, the network analysis and the survey were conducted. On the other hand, the interviews were used to give a scientific depth to the data gathered from the network analysis and the survey.

However, mixing methods can also have some risks. A major risk is that reducing rich qualitative data to dichotomous variables renders them single dimensional and immutable (Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib, & Rupert, 2007). Another risk is that using both methods can be time consuming and might result in the researcher limiting the sample sizes which poses a threat for the reliability of the research.

2.3 APPROACH

In this part, how the scientific research methods that are described above are conducted for this thesis research will be described in details. Two quantitative and two qualitative research methods were used. The methods used in the thesis research are as follows:

2.3.1 The Literature Review

In this research a comprehensive literature study helped to gain a deeper knowledge on issues related to the subject. Different perspectives, both supporting and criticizing the effect of social media on creating political awareness and mobilizing political protests were studied. After doing the literature review some supporting questions were modified, more importance was given to some parts and concepts such as the personal ties and the strength of the weak ties. Moreover, the network analysis method which was not thought to be conducted at the beginning was decided to be added to the research and served as one of the central and valuable research methods to reach the conclusion.

The literature review part of the research went from general to specific. The literature review started by examining books and articles on the history of relationship between media and politics and continued into special use of social media by activists for political purposes in Turkey. Moreover, the studies on interpersonal ties and the relation of interpersonal ties with the social media were read.

First, the books on media's effect on society and politics were examined. Then to see the changes that internet and social media brought, the studies on internet, social media and their relationships with the society were dug into. Then to go more into the details the academic studies, the articles and the news on the theories of relationship
between social media and politics relationship were studied. In this part, recent worldwide events such as the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street movement were examined with their relationships with social media. Both the theories, evaluations and the events themselves that took place were examined.

Then to understand the conjuncture in Turkey, a similar type of literature study was conducted. First, literature on general history of media and politics relationship in Turkey was studied. Then the recent studies and the media, on the effects of social media and internet on Turkish politics were examined.

The articles, news and studies criticizing social media’s effect on politics were also studied. These studies mainly gather on issues such as the lack of privacy, surveillance of the internet, slacktivism, disinformation and misinformation through social media. Both the theoretical studies on the issues and the examples worldwide were analyzed. A recent global event, Edward Snowden case, was examined to comprehend the risks of surveillance and privacy in social media and on the internet. Also, the internet filtering regulation and the protests against it and the Gezi Parki Protests, were not only evaluated from the perspective of social media’s effect in creating political awareness and political mobilizations, but also from the aspects of privacy and surveillance of the internet in Turkey.

In the bibliography section there is a list of the books and academic studies that were studied.

While literature review does not provide a direct answer to any of the research questions, it provides a background and a general understanding of the concepts related with all the questions.

### 2.3.2. The Interviews

In this thesis research, two face to face and one online semi structured interviews were conducted in order to extract as much experience and knowledge as possible from the interviewee. The scope of the interview and some basic questions were predefined but freedom was given to the interviewee to share his experiences on the subjects and tell more than only answering the questions. Also some new questions and opinions related to the subjects came up during the interviews. Interviews were recorded by voice recorders.

In order to gain a deep insight on the general Turkish media and the politics relationship and to understand the strength of social media as a tool in the hands of the activists, open ended interviews were conducted. While some parts of the
First, an interview was conducted with associate professor Mustafa Akgul from Bilkent University, who is the president of Internet Technologies Association and the author of the first internet book written in Turkish: “Internet: Bilgiye Erisimin Yeni Arac ve Olanakları” (Internet: New tool and Opportunities for Accessing Information). In this interview the aims were to learn more about the contemporary conjuncture of the Turkish mainstream media and its relationship with politics, to discuss internet freedom in Turkey, opportunities that social media have created in terms of politics and its role on recent political events. Moreover, some predictions on the future of social media and its role on the politics in Turkey were discussed. The Gezi Parki Protest took place a month after this interview. After five months from the initial interview, a follow-up interview, in which the role of social media in Gezi Parki Protests was discussed, was conducted.

The second interview was conducted with political activist Huseyin Arkin Rasit, who is a teaching assistant in the political science department in Sabanci University and a political activist who took part in various political protests and demonstrations including Gezi Park Protests. In this interview it was aimed to gain an insight on how and for what reasons the political activist groups use social media and to learn the advantages of social media in creating political awareness and mobilizing protests in Turkey. Especially Gezi Parki Protests in related to these issues were discussed. Moreover, the attitude of mainstream media during this social movement was discussed.

In the interviews all the supporting questions were discussed and sought to find answers to.

2.3.3 The Survey
The survey is composed of short answer questions and designed in order to get quantitative data from the internet and social media users in Turkey. Survey questions were fixed and the same questions were asked to every participant. The questions were more oriented to understand internet and social media using habits, how widely the social media is used for the political purposes (to get informed or to inform others) and the thoughts on mainstream media.

The survey is designed as a questionnaire and distributed to the following mail groups:
The Internet Technologies Associations
The Students of Industrial Engineering in Middle East Technical University
The Alumni of Middle East Technical University
The Turkish Librarians

The survey was mainly beneficial to find answers to the following research question:

- How widely is social media being used in Turkey?
- What percentage of people use social media for political purposes, either to inform others or get informed of political events?
- Do people who use social media for political purposes also actively voice their reactions offline through protests or demonstrations?

2.3.4 The Social Network Analysis

For the thesis research, a social network analysis of websites that played roles in Gezi Parki Protests is conducted where actors were websites and symbols of Gezi Parki Protest. This social network analysis is beneficial to see the connections of the websites that are related to the Gezi Parki Protests.

To conduct the social network analysis, an online software program called “TouchGraph SEO” was used. In the following sections the technical details, the advantages and the disadvantages of this tool will be discussed.

Creating a Social Network Map Using TouchGraph SEO:

1. Touch Graph SEO is an application that can be used on the internet browsers with Java 1.5.
2. The application is launched by typing a keyword on the website “http://www.touchgraph.com/seo”.
3. By entering the first keyword or the webpage domain, the mapping is initiated.
4. In the example below (Figure 1), “Occupy Wall Street” keyword is typed and the related sixteen websites are listed in the search results on the left column. The related sixteen sites are the top related sites suggested for the term by search engine Google. The websites found relevant, are almost the same results when the keyword is searched by Google’s search engine “google.com”. The eight of these sixteen selected websites are mapped as connected to the keyword. The chosen eight nodes can be replaced by manually with the other eight that are not present on the map. When the star is clicked the website that is not illustrated in the map is added to the map instead of another one that is already in the map.
5. On the related searches tab (Figure 2) the similar keywords are listed. On the top domains tab (Figure 3) the domains of all websites that are related to the keywords or websites are listed.

6. The map can be enlarged by typing new keywords or website domains.

7. The Figure 4 illustrates the enlarged graph, when the keyword Arab Spring is included in the search.
   (In this graph the website “en.wikipedia” was not included in the graph automatically. In the top domains tab it was visible that it had two matches therefore it was added to the graph manually by using the star button)

8. As “adbusters.org” is a website of the organizers of the Occupy Wall Street movement. A second depth search for it should be done. The website is selected from top domains tab and get related button next to the domain name is clicked (Figure 3). Figure 5 shows the map after the second depth search of “adbusters.org” was done. A new node called “Related:Adbusters.org” is created and the related websites (the linked websites to “adbusters.org”) are connected to it.
For second depth search to find related sites to this site

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4
In order to see the effectiveness of the websites during the Gezi Parki Protests a comprehensive network analysis of the websites and the keywords related to the Gezi Parki Protests was done. The symbols (keywords) that are related to the Gezi Parki Protests were listed and then the mapping was done. Then the second and the third level searches for the websites that can be considered as the actors of the events were done.

This social network analysis is especially important to see which types of websites played important roles in informing people and mobilizing protests. The strengths of roles of the websites are determined by the number of connections they have to the keywords and the links they get from the other websites of the Gezi Parki Protests.

**The Advantages of TouchGraph SEO:**
- The tool is free to use.
- The interface of the tool is very user friendly and the tool is quite easy to use.
- The illustration of the network map created is very comprehensive and explicit.
- The Google’s ranking algorithm is used when finding the related websites to a keyword. Google’s ranking algorithm is one of the most trusted and used ranking algorithm in the internet world. The algorithm prioritizes the websites that have higher number of quality links to them assuming more important a website is as more links it gets. So, the mapped websites are arguably the ones that are most popular and related to the keyword searched.
- Searching by both keywords and website domains is possible.
The Disadvantages of TouchGraph SEO:

- Since Google’s search is taken as the reference point “google.com” itself is omitted and cannot be mapped.
- The software sometimes crashes and the mapping has to be done all over again.
- Although it happens very rarely, sometimes nodes having more than one connection are not illustrated in the map. They are included by the star button manually.
- The mapping takes social networks as individual nodes; the role of the pages within the social networks cannot be seen in the map.

Overall, despite having some technical and contextual disadvantages, positive features it has such as Google’s ranking algorithm, both keyword and website search and explicit graphs put TouchGraph SEO forward of the other social network analysis tools for this particular research.

The social network analysis was conducted to find an answer to the following supporting research question:

- Which social media tools are used most in creating political awareness and mobilizing political protests in Turkey?

2.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

During a thesis research there are several ethical issues that can be related with the research methods conducted. In this section the ethical considerations related with this particular thesis study will be discussed.

Copyright: During a thesis research the researcher has to use copyrighted materials. In the literature review part, the literature used was accessed in legal ways by either using or buying or borrowing copyrighted books from the libraries. The social network analysis tool TouchGraph SEO was a free tool so there was no copyright issue to use this tool.

Consent: For a researcher to be able to use data gathered from other people, the researcher has to take their consent. In this study, in both interviews and in the survey consent of the interviewees and the participants was taken by mentioning the aim of the survey and the interview at the beginning. All the participants and interviewees participated voluntarily.

Confidentiality: The researcher should not disclose the identity of the people from
whom the data was gathered unless the participants consent. In the interviews the consent of the interviewees was taken and their identities are written. However, the survey is conducted anonymously.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter basically consists of the results derived from some of the literature study made. The information found relevant for the thesis research is presented in a systematic way to create a framework for the thesis.

3.1 Overview

In the theoretical framework Mark Granovetter's article named “Strength of Weak Ties” holds an important place. Then the theoretical framework builds on it by social media's strength in forming and maintaining weak ties and through these weak ties creating political awareness and mobilization. Then the theoretical framework continues with discussing the studies on the role of social media in the recent worldwide political mobilizations. The chapter is concluded with the studies criticizing the social media’s effect on the politics.

The diagram below shows the concepts that are studied to create the theoretical framework. The diagram is used to show the relationship of concepts with each other. Numbers represent the order of the study.
3.2 Interpersonal Ties

Interpersonal ties in social networks can be defined as information carrying ties between human beings. People are connected to others with these ties and thus form social networks. Below is an example of a simple social network:

The above figure only illustrates if a tie between the individuals exists or does not. However the ties between the people are not homogeneous in the real life. The individuals can have different types of connections depending on various factors.

Below is an illustration of a social network with depicting strength of ties.

--- A strong tie
---- A weak tie

In this social network, three types of tie can be seen.

A to B: Strong tie
A to D: Absent tie
C to E: Weak Tie

The strong ties can be considered as the close friends or the family members, while the weak ties are the acquaintances. The absent ties are when two people have no or negligible amount of relationship.

According to Granovetter, the strength of a tie is the linear combination of 4 factors:

1. Amount of time spent
2. Emotional Intensity
3. Intimacy (mutual confiding)
4. Reciprocal services (Granovetter, 1973)
All these factors are directly proportional to the strength of a tie. “Trust” can be considered under the intimacy (mutual confiding) factor since the definitions of both are close. The hostile relationships in Granovetter’s study are neglected to avoid an unnecessary complexity in the research.

**Bridges:**

Moreover, there is a concept called “a bridge”, a tie which connects two different groups. For example, the connection between C and E forms a bridge between the group ABC and the group EDFG. This tie establishes a channel for information flow between unconnected individuals. Between A and G there is no tie or absent tie. However, information flow can occur between G and A through the bridge, the weak tie between E and C.

### 3.3 Granovetter's Theory on the Strength of Weak Ties

Mark Granovetter's sociology paper named “The Strength of Weak Ties” written in 1973 has been highly influential on marketing, political science and information science.

The main result of the paper is that weak ties are more influential in information carrying in a society since strong ties tend to overlap each other, meaning that if A has a strong tie to B and B has a strong tie to C, it is highly possible that A and C will be connected as well. Considering the weak ties removed the people with strong ties would form closed groups without bridges to the other groups and this would disable them to receive information from outside of their own groups. In the above model, considering that C and E had an absent tie than information flow between A and D would be impossible. However, the weak ties exist and they connect the group members to the members of other groups. The information flows from one group to another through these weak ties.

The information flowing in the strong ties tend to repeat since the ties overlap. For example, B can hear the same news from A and C. However, the information coming from a bridging weak tie is mostly likely to be novel to the group. For example for the person C, information coming from E is unlikely to come from his strong ties since E’s strong ties are different than C’s and E and C’s contacts has no other connection.

Therefore Granovetter claims that the weak ties are vital for information flow. Granovetter used the labor market, where it is very common that people find jobs
through their personal networks. Granovetter surveyed 282 professional, technical and managerial workers in total. The aim of the survey was to find out through which contacts they found their jobs.

- 16.7% of the respondents found the jobs through the people they contact often (at least once a week)
- 55.6% of the respondents found the jobs through the people they see occasionally (more than once a year but less than twice a week)
- 27.8% of the respondents found jobs through the people they see rarely (once a year)

When they were asked whether they were told about their current jobs through a friend, most answered "not a friend, an acquaintance". In this case study, Granovetter reaches the result that weak ties are important resources in occupational mobility. Granovetter's study does not only target to reach a conclusion for the job market. In his paper, he states that “the strategy of the present paper is to choose a rather limited aspect of small-scale interaction – the strength of weak ties- and to show in some detail, how the use of network analysis can relate this aspect to such varied macro phenomena as diffusion, social mobility, political organization, and social cohesion in general” (Granovetter, 1973).

In other words, if people learn about jobs from their weak ties they can also learn about the political events the same way. A person can be informed of a political event through his weak ties and share this information with his own group.

3.4 Roles of Interpersonal Ties in Online Networks

In online social networks people stay in touch both with their strong ties and weak ties. In the worldwide used social networks such as Twitter and Facebook people get newsfeeds or tweets not only from their close friends but also from their acquaintances. So a frequent user of a social network can receive tweets or posts from a contact that she has not seen more than a year. This was not possible before online social networks came into our lives. Thanks to its low cost and instant communication, social media facilitated an easier and diverse information flow even between weak ties.

Even though in social media people are related to every contact in the same way, the type of information flowing differs depending on the type of tie. “Social features of online networks: the strength of intermediary ties in online social media” is a research paper written in IFISC (Institute for Cross-Disciplinary Physics and
Complex Systems) in Mallorca, Spain. The study examines the differences in the information flow between weak ties and strong ties. The research finds parallelism between offline and online communities in the sense of strength of weak ties. The research is carried on Twitter. The research finds that the “mentions” tend to exist mostly in links within a group or in links connecting two different close groups. On the other hand, “re-tweets”, which are associated to information propagation events, appear with higher probability in links between groups, especially those that connect groups that do not show a high overlap, and more importantly on links connected to users who intermediate between groups (Grabowicz, Ramasco, Moro, Pujol, & Eguiluz, 2012).

Another study, conducted in the US, shows the political activities of the users on online social networks in the US. In Pew Research Center’s study in summer 2012, the results show that two thirds of the adults in the US have engaged in some form of political activity using social network sites like Facebook and Twitter. The study finds out that 38% of the adult social media users have ”liked” or promoted materials associated with politics or social issues. Around a third of these users have turned to social networking sites to post their thoughts on politics and share content that someone originally posted on a political or a social issue. (Martinez, 2012)

Evaluating the results of the studies of IFISC and Pew Research Center, it is possible to conclude that posts and sharings with political concerns hold an important percentage of information that flows through the weak ties in the social networks. Therefore, novel information on political issues is likely to flow in a social group through a weak tie of an intermediary group member.

### 3.5 Social Media's Strength in Creating Political Awareness on Political Issues

Considering the factors above, social media became an advantageous area for political organizations and activists to voice their thoughts and send out their propaganda to many people with low cost and effort. As the power of social media on politics has been apprehended and started be utilized, the world has witnessed various effects of it in the recent years. The US presidential election in 2008 was important in showing the world that using social networks can be an important tool in carrying out political campaigns. On the other hand, in the last three years the world witnessed two major worldwide protest movements proving that social media can be a strong weapon in the hands of the political activists as well. These two worldwide events showed the world that the significance of social media in creating political awareness and mobilizing political protests.
3.5.1 **The US Presidential Election 2008**

Starting from 2000s, political leaders started to use social media very actively in order to carry out their election campaigns by contacting the voters through these platforms. One of the most notable examples is the US presidential election that took place in 2008, where both candidates Barack Obama and John McCain used social media to address the voters, especially the younger ones.

Obama counted more than two million American supporters on Facebook, while McCain had just over 600,000. On the micro blogging platform Twitter, Obama could count on more than 112,000 supporters "tweeting" to get him elected. McCain, for his part, had 4,600 followers on Twitter. Obama’s supporters uploaded more than 1,800 videos onto the BarackObama.com channel, which counted about 115,000 subscribers. The channel attracted more than 97 million video views during some 18 million channel visits. On the other hand McCain’s videos were uploaded to the JohnMcCain.com channel, which attracted just over 28,000 subscribers. The McCain channel attracted barely more than 2 million visits and some 25 million video views (Dutta & Fraser, 2008).

3.5.2 **The Arab Spring (began on December 2010)**

The Arab Spring is a revolutionary protest movement started in Tunisia on 18th of December 2010 and soon after that the protest movement spread to other Arabic countries in North Africa and the Middle East. The movement resulted in major protests in many countries. In Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Egypt, the governments were forced out from the power.

The key difference between the revolutionary protests before the Arab Spring and the Arab Spring is the use of social media by the protestors. Throughout the protests social media is used to communicate, create political awareness and organize the demonstrations.

The blogs, the video sharing websites, the social networks gave great opportunities to activists. The protest movements were announced by Facebook events, the propaganda videos were shared on YouTube, the personal opinions, the articles supporting the movement were written and shared on the blogs. Some studies after the movement underline the significance of the social media during the protest movements. Nine out of ten Egyptians and Tunisians responded to a poll that they used Facebook to organize protests and spread political awareness (Mourtada & Salem, 2011). As a precaution the internet was blocked almost in entire Egypt by the government which could not stop the activists who had already prepared and organized through the social media beforehand.
The protest movements started due to the dissatisfaction of people from governments and social media gave them a great opportunity to organize and carry out the protests. The Arab Spring proved the world that it can be a significant tool for political activists under the right circumstances.

3.5.3 The Occupy Movement (Began on the 17th of September 2011)

The Occupy Movement is a protest movement started by activist group “Adbusters” with the inspiration from the Arab Spring. First protest of the chain took place in New York and soon protests spread to other cities in the United States and also to other countries. The Occupy Protests took place in ninety five cities in eighty two countries. The reasons behind the protests were social and economic inequalities.

The activists used social media efficiently in similar ways to the Arab Spring. Facebook and Twitter were used to organize the demonstrations and the discussions. YouTube channels were used to share the videos of events with the world. The issue was discussed in forums and blog pages. Moreover, the social media gave opportunity to the activists to contact with other activist groups living in different parts of the world. For example, Skype was used to conduct conference calls with the participants from different parts of the world.

In a short time, the protest movement managed to create political awareness and started to find place in mainstream media. Even though no major tangible result of the Occupy Movement has been seen yet, during the movement social media stood out as a tool for mobilizing political protests and spreading them worldwide and thus getting the attention of the mainstream media by creating massive social movements.

3.6 Criticisms of Social Media's Effect on Politics

There are also opinions contradicting the social media’s positive contribution to the political participation. The opposing ideas gather around the following three main arguments:

3.6.1 False and Unreliable Information

False and unreliable information is one of the weaknesses of social media. There are two types of spread of false and unreliable information. Misinformation is when it is done unintentionally and disinformation is when it is done intentionally. The false information on internet can be initiated intentionally or unintentionally but usually spread as misinformation by people who are unaware if the information is true or false. The following examples prove how some false information can scatter on the
social networks rapidly.

In Mexico, Twitter and Facebook are often used to warn of gunbattles or other dangers. However, in the last two years, these social networks were used to spread false news which caused chaos in several cities of Mexico. For example in 2012 In Nezahualcoyotl, authorities received 3,000 phone calls due to the false reports of violence in one night. (Rodriguez, 2012).

A twitter account promised a 1$ donation to victims of Boston marathon explosion (April 2013) for every retweet. The account received more than 50,000 retweets and then was suspended by Twitter. Another account @HopeforBoston, claimed that it shared the images of children killed in Boston explosion. The account received more than 100,000 retweets. However, the images were fakes. (Chalabi & Burn-Murdoch, 2013).

So, it is possible to say that social media being prone to false news can sometimes cause panic and problems for the society.

3.6.2 Lack of Privacy, Surveillance and Exposure to Government Intrusion

Another problem of social media is that people share a lot of private information on social networks which makes it possible for third parties to access. Some researchers claim that rather than activists and political groups, it is the authoritarian regimes that benefit from social media through harvesting information of opponent groups easily.

According to Evgeny Morozov, it is not that hard for governments to retain threats against them on social media. “If tweets of a particular user are re-tweeted more often than average, it’s a good idea for the government to start watching that individual closely and learn more about his social network. The viral culture of social media may at least indirectly help solve the problem of information overload that has affected censorship as well. It’s the ‘online marketplace of idea’ that tells secret police whom to watch. From the perspective of the secret police, people who are unpopular probably don’t even deserve to be censored; left to their own devices and nearly zero readers, they will run out of blogging energy in a month or so” (Morozov, 2011).

In June 2013, the leakage from the National Security Agency (NSA) proved that the concerns about the government intrusion and the surveillance of the internet are not conspiracy but a reality. In June 2013, Edward Snowden, a former NSA employee, leaked out some documents claiming that NSA is tracking the entire internet and the phone traffic all over the world by programs called “PRISM” and “Tempora”. The NSA president Keith Alexander had to inform the US Congress in a secret meeting on
the issue. Google, Facebook and Microsoft asked US president Obama to disclose court orders, which ask these internet companies to provide user information. This justified Edward Snowden’s claims. This event proved that governments indeed try to track the internet traffic on the cost of privacy of others (Ormeci, 2013).

3.6.3 Slacktivism
Another criticism associated with the internet and the social media is that they cause slacktivism. Slacktivism is a term derived from combination of two words “slacker” and “activism” and used for activism on the internet simply by liking a page or re-tweeting without being really engaged or devoted to make a change in real life. Some researchers believe that people sign online petitions, change their avatar on their social networks, join some online groups to feel happy inside without putting much effort. However, in reality this doesn’t play an important role to make a change. Eugene Morozov, exemplifies this criticism with a Facebook cause, “Save Children of Africa” which has 1.7 million members but only 12 000 dollars donations made (Morozov, 2011).

4. POLITICS AND MEDIA RELATIONSHIP IN TURKEY

To understand the current media and politics relationship in Turkey, we need to take a look at the history to comprehend the factors affecting and shaping this relationship. In this section, first, the history of relationship of media and politics in Turkey will be discussed broadly and then the contemporary situation will be investigated. The information that is to be presented in this chapter is also gained from the literature review.

4.1 History of Mainstream Media in Turkey

To understand the relationship between the politics and the media in this section mainly the print media is studied, since until 1990s commercial TVs and radio channels were not established. The first radio broadcast was in 1927 and the first television broadcast was in 1968. The broadcasts of both were under the control of TRT (Turkish Radio and Television) until 1990s. The head of TRT was assigned by the government so the audio and visual press had no independent political position until the establishment of the commercial ones.

4.1.1 Ottoman Era
The establishment of press media dates back to the Ottoman era. The first newspaper printed in Turkish in the current Turkish Republic land was called “Takvim-i Vekayi”. The newspaper started to be published in 1831 by the will of Sultan Mahmoud II. The newspaper served as the voice of the government. It was completely under government control and the news consisted of worldwide and local incidents,
announcements of government regulations and reforms that are to be followed. Especially in the second half of 19th century the number of newspapers and magazines in the Ottoman Empire started to increase and contents started to diversify. However, the government control over the press was always strict.

The government suppression on press caused many writers to immigrate to Europe and start free press there. So, the opponent ideas to the monarchy started to be published in papers by Turkish writers living abroad. Even though the ideologies of the papers were different, common ideology was that all were in agreement in criticism against the monarchy.

In summary, in the Ottoman Era press was strictly suppressed and opposing ideas could only find place on the papers that were published in other countries by the writers opposing the monarchy.

4.1.2 One Party Era

After the independence war following World War I, the monarchy was aborted and the republic was established in 1923. However, the establishment of republic did not result in radical changes in the freedom of the press. Until 1945, there was only one legal political party and the government was under the full control of the party. This era is called one-party era in the history of the Turkish Republic.

During the first years of the republic, there were some newspapers voicing criticisms against the government but soon the regulation of "Takrir-i Sukun" (proposal of tranquility) was legislated by showing the riots as a reason. This regulation limited the press freedom very tightly. Many newspapers were shut down and many journalists were sentenced because of their ideas against the press regulation and other government policies.

4.1.3 Multiparty Era from until 1990s

In the multiparty period starting from 1945, both the number of the newspapers and the circulation of the newspapers increased significantly. When the governing party changed in 1950, the new government decreased the suppression on the press initially but when the newspapers started to voice criticism about the new government, the government tried to control them through limiting paper supplies and applying other economic enforcements. The suppression on the press got more severe by time. Many journalists were imprisoned and many newspapers were shut down.
After the legislation of the new constitution in 1960, the suppression on the press alleviated considerably. After 1960, many newspapers and magazines based on different political ideologies started to be published. Many political groups started to communicate, organize and announce their political activities such as demonstrations, protests and also to voice criticisms against the government through newspapers and magazines.

However, during the military coup periods in 1970 and 1980 again many newspapers were closed and many journalists were imprisoned. Regulations limiting press freedom were effectuated.

So, the multiparty era was a period of time when the press freedom had considerable fluctuations depending on the political conjuncture. As the governing forces saw press freedom as a threat, they did not hesitate to apply pressures.

4.1.4 1990s and 2000s

In the 1990s after the introduction of commercial televisions and radio channels, different ideas could find more channels to reach mass audiences. Many channels started to broadcast political discussions, different perspectives on political events and gave room for opponents to voice their criticisms.

Moreover, by the fast increase in the internet penetration in the 2000s, a new source of media became available for Turkish politicians and political activists.

However, the freedom issues are still way behind the western standards. In recent years many opponent journalists were killed and the cases are still unsolved. Also many journalists are still being imprisoned. According to the Journalist Union of Turkey, “ninety-four reporters are currently imprisoned for doing their jobs” (Filkins, 2012).

Turkey, ranked 154th in the press freedom index 2013, which was prepared by the international independent organization, Reporters without Borders (Reporters without Borders, 2013).

Internet in Turkey also faces censorship problems. Several thousand internet websites, blogs are blocked in Turkey. The most popular video sharing website YouTube has been also blocked several times.
To summarize, censorship has always been a serious issue in the history of Turkish politics and media relationship. The recent events and the actions show that even though the number of channels for different political opinions increase, there is still a lot of suppression and the media that is not under their control is considered as a threat by the governors.

4.2 Internet and Social Media in Turkey

In Turkey public access to the internet started in 1993, but the growth in the number of users was significant after 2000. The 3% penetration rate in 2000 increased more than sixteen fold to 49.1% in April 2013.

The age group that uses internet most is 16-24 and the internet penetration in the cities is higher reaching up to 57.4% (Turkiye Istatistik Kurumu, 2013).

The most common uses of internet in Turkey according to a study taking place between January and March 2012 are:

1- Reading and downloading news from online newspapers, magazines (72.5%)
2- Sending/Receiving E-mails (66.8%)
3- Searching information on goods and services (61.3%)
4- Playing or downloading games, images, films or music (49.1)
5- Posting messages to chat sites, social networking sites, blogs, news groups, discussion forums, instant messaging (41.6%) (Turkiye Istatistik Kurumu, 2012)

According to the study of “socialbakers.com” made on January 2012, the internet users in Turkey are highly interested in social networks. Turkey rates 6th in the number of Facebook users, 8th in the use of twitter and 9th in the use of GooglePlus (Hahtvadmin, 2012).

Moreover, Turkey has a high number of blog readers. With 81.9 percent of the internet users reading blogs, Turkey rates the 4th in the world (Demirel, 2011).

Also, Turkey rates fifth in average hours of social media use per month with 10.2 hours/month average (Statistic Brain, 2012).

4.3 Social Media's Effect on Politics in Turkey

Following the recent trend in the world, Turkish politicians and activists also apprehended the power of social media in terms of reaching mass audiences, creating political awareness and mobilizing political demonstrations. Most Turkish politicians use social media. They have Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. The president of
the republic and the prime minister in Turkey are the second and the third most followed people on Twitter in Turkey.

2. Abdullah Gul as cbabdullahgul (president of republic) – 3681196 followers
3. Recep Tayyip Erdogan as RT_erdogan (prime minister) – 3368044 followers

Three Turkish politicians that have over one million fans on Facebook pages are as follows:

- Abdullah Gul- 1,037,992 likes
- Recep Tayyip Erdogan – 2,316,313 likes
- Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu (leader of the opposition party)- 1,479,473 likes

Moreover, the politicians use social media effectively to make public announcements. In the recent years, Turkey witnessed mainstream media covering news of political interactions that took place on social media. This is more often seen on the Twitter accounts of mayors, the politicians whose actions are more actively affecting the daily life of the society. The twitter interactions between the mayor of Ankara, “Melih Gökçek”, and the twitter users criticizing his policies has been subject to news on the mainstream media several times (Habertürk, 2012).

A study called "TT (trend topic) mayor" was carried out by Istanbul University. In this study, the comments of Twitter users on the accounts of the mayors of the three major cities (Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara) were investigated. The purpose of the study was to find out the mayors with most positive mentions (positive comments), most negative mentions (negative comments) and with most mentions (positive+ negative+ neutral mentions) most. The study was done through categorizing the tweets posted on the twitter accounts of mayors (Gürsül, Ünal, Karındaş, Dursun, İkbal, & Şahin, 2012).

This study became the seventh trend topic in the world in general staying there for thirty five minutes and the first in Turkey staying up for fifteen hours. The attraction to this study proved the Twitter users in Turkey are very willing to comment on and criticize the local politicians.

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1 From Twitter.com accessed on 17th of September 2013
2 From Facebook.com accessed on 17th of September 2013
4.4 Internet and Censorship in Turkey

The increase in the number of internet users and the internet traffic, brought along concerns on crimes committed on internet. The Turkish internet law is regulated by law number 5651 which came into force in 2007 aiming to struggle against crimes committed on the internet.

The law targets crimes such as pornography, gambling, promoting and providing illegal drugs and also crimes against Ataturk (M.K Ataturk, the founder and the first president of the republic of Turkish Republic) on the internet. The websites with contents against the law are either shut down or access to them is prevented.

This law became a basis for shutting down or blocking many websites. Access to Youtube and Google Groups was prevented for a period in Turkey by showing this law as a reason. This law put Turkey in the list of countries with internet censorship. Even though the number of websites that are blocked is not stated by the government, it is estimated that the number is around 30 000 by January 2013 (IstanbulHaber, 2013).

Generally, the sites which have contents that are mentioned in law 5651 (obscene and other illegal contents) are closed. However, many controversial and arbitrary closings were done by showing the law as the reason too. Youtube, Google Groups, Myspace and “richarddawkins.net” (a website defending the evolution theory) are among the sites that faced censorship (Akdeniz & Altiparmak, 2008).

In March 2010, the international non-governmental press organization, Reporters without Borders, added Turkey in the list of under surveillance countries. The arbitrary prohibitions, especially the Youtube banning, and the legal proceedings against online journalists are shown as the reasons of this (Reporters Without Borders, 2010).

Lack of privacy and the surveillance of the internet, have also been issues of concern in Turkey. Public concerns on the privacy and the surveillance issues peaked with the discussions of internet filters. During the Gezi Parki Protests, the people were arrested because of their sharings on the social media. These will be discussed in more details in the following sections.

4.4.1 Internet Filtering Regulation

Information and Communications Technologies Authority (BTK) designed a new regulation of internet use on 22nd of January 2011. BTK decided to require the
internet service providers to offer consumers four choices of internet filters. Using these four options users would access to websites from an interface. Also a categorization of websites is made. Sites with “dangerous” contents are classified as black and sites with “safe” content are classified as white.

The filtering options are:
- **Family Profile:** Sites with black labels are not accessible.
- **Child Profile:** Only access to sites with white labels is possible.
- **Standard Profile:** Only access to generally banned sites (by the law 5651) is blocked.
- **Domestic Profile:** Only access to their domains in Turkey which don’t have black label is possible.

The regulation was to come into force in August 2011. However, soon after the regulation was announced on January 22nd, criticisms aroused. The criticisms to the regulation were mainly on the following issues:

- How and why the sites were labeled as dangerous was unclear.
- All the profiles, including the standard profile, had limited access to the web.
- The profiles meant access to internet from an interface which became a concern about privacy and fear of being labeled.

As all the profiles are included in the filtering system and the users connect through an interface, they can be logged by third parties. This means that all users can be tracked and labeled. Also their internet traffic can be controlled illegally by third parties. This is considered as a threat to both political and personal privacy. This threat became one of the main motivations of the protests against the internet filtering regulation (Uckan, Turkiye'de Internet Sansuru, 2011).

### 4.4.2 Protests against Internet Filtering Regulation

On the social media the upcoming internet filtering regulation was discussed and criticized heavily. #22Agustos (the date which the regulation was to come into effect) was the hashtag on Twitter that users tweeted on and soon it became a trend topic (Ntvmsnbc, 2011). On Eksisozluk (a widely known and followed Turkish folksonomy website) the regulation was criticized by hundreds of entries (Ntvmsnbc, 2011). Online petition against the upcoming regulation was signed by more than 8000 people soon after its announcement on Facebook and the number of members of the online group “Internetime Dokunma” (don’t touch my internet) reached to 250 000 members (Ntvmsnbc, 2011).
The protest movement started on social media but did not stay only online. As the reaction grew, the activists decided to go offline and organize demonstrations countrywide. The demonstrations were announced on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. On May 2011, in 35 cities of Turkey and also in Cologne, Wien and Amsterdam nearly 1 million people protested the upcoming regulation with the slogan of "Don't Touch My Internet". After the protests, BTK stepped back and revised the regulation. The number of filters was decreased into two (family and children profiles) and applying a filter was made optional. So, only if a user wants to have a filter one of these two profiles would be applied.

Many non-governmental organizations and activists are still unsatisfied with the revision. They have two main criticisms:

- The problem of blocked/shut down websites continues.
- BTK doesn’t have the right to create black and white lists arbitrarily. It is not stated by any law and BTK is not authorized with this responsibility.

Alternatif Bilisim Dernegi (a non-governmental IT organization), took the regulation to court to cancel it completely.

Even though the revision did not save internet from censorship, the events causing revision are especially important to examine the power of social media in terms of its effects on politics by creating political awareness and mobilizing protests. The protest movement managed to change the initial regulation and showed the dissatisfaction of the society against the limited internet. The Internet Censorship Protests was talked over in the interview with Mustafa Akgul and the subject will be discussed again in Chapter 5 in the results of interviews section.

4.5 2013 Gezi Parki Protests

Gezi is a park in Taksim, one of the most populated and touristic centers of Istanbul. On 28th of May 2013, Gezi Parki became the host of a demonstration of about fifty environmentalists when Istanbul municipality decided to demolish the park to carry out their urban development plan. Police’s aggressiveness and excessive use of power, including use of tear gas against the demonstrators, resulted in growing number of protesters and spread of protests in all over the country. Soon the main target of the protests and the demonstrations became authoritarian and suppressive policies of the government. Gezi Parki Protests turned into one of the biggest social movements in the history of the Turkish Republic. While the thesis is being written,
the protest chain started with Gezi Parki is still ongoing.

Besides from the social, economic and political sides, the Gezi Parki Protests revived the discussions and criticisms of mainstream media. Events became a clash area of the mainstream media and the social media. In most debates and analyses the roles of the mainstream and the social media in the events are discussed widely.

The section will continue with a timeline of the first days of Gezi Parki Protests, stating numerical data on Gezi Parki Protests and will be concluded by the discussion of both mainstream media and social media’s roles during the events.

4.5.1 Timeline of Gezi Parki Protests

27th of May 2013: The first construction vehicles started to destroy Gezi Parki. Five trees were denested. A civil association called “Taksim Platformu” and other activists started to gather in Gezi Parki. Activists decided to keep guard of Gezi Parki twenty four hours to avoid the destruction.

28th of May 2013: The police interfered protests aggressively using tear gas against the protesters. The police emptied Gezi Parki and construction vehicles came back to demolish the park. However, Sirri Sureyya Onder, a parliamentarian from the area stood in front of the vehicles and then the activists came to stop the demolishment. More politicians came to Gezi Parki and joined the protesters later on.

29th of May 2013: The Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan decided to ignore the protests and stated that their project in the area will be carried out no matter what the protesters do. The protesters started to use social media to access many others and share their concerns and ideas.

30th of May 2013: At 5 a.m. the municipality workers and the police attacked Gezi Parki using excessive force. Municipality workers burnt some of the tents of the activists and the police fired tear gas in the area. As police became more aggressive, more people including some artists and politicians joined the activists in Gezi Parki.

31th of May 2013: The police launched another aggressive attack against the protesters at 5 a.m. and started using plastic bullets against the protesters. The protests spread to other cities. The second biggest protest was organized in Ankara on social media. Thousands of people joined the protest in Ankara Kugulu Park.

The protests started to be broadcasted live in many international TV channels. However, major channels in Turkey ignored the protests and didn’t change their
broadcast streaming. Only a couple of TV channels that are known to be opponent to the government broadcasted the events live. Most people followed the events on internet. Twitter and Facebook helped the protesters to organize protests, to voice criticisms against the government and also to share links for direct broadcasts of the protests on the internet.

1st of June 2013: More and more people, politicians and artists joined the protests in Gezi Parki. Besides the government, the mainstream media also became the target of the protests and slogans because of their ignorant attitude. Turkish people living in other countries such as Italy, Belgium and USA organized demonstrations.

Other than Turkish artists, world-wide artists showed their support to the demonstrators on social media.

2nd of June 2013: The Prime Minister described Twitter, one of the most effective social media tool used by the protesters to mobilize protests and voice criticisms, as a menace to the society. The protesters organized protests in front of the headquarters of the major mainstream media companies. Some artists made a press conference in Taksim and stated their criticisms against major mainstream media’s ignorant attitude.

The protests continued until the end of July by demonstrations, by worker and civil servant strikes and even by festivals. After a calm August, the protests started again in September in Middle East University. It can be said that the Gezi Parki protests started a chain of other protests and the process is still going on.

In June while the protests were active, the neighborhood forums acting as people’s committee started to be constituted in many districts of various cities with the aim of discussing the political events and taking organized actions. The forums are still active.

4.5.2 Gezi Parki Protests by Numbers

- 7 people one of which was a police officer died during the protests.
- In 79 of 81 cities of Turkey protests were held (Milliyet, 2013).
- According to the numbers of the interior ministry, 2.5 million people joined the protests (Milliyet, 2013).
- Nearly 4000 people were injured (Milliyet, 2013).
• 3694 people were taken under custody. 120 people were still under arrest by 24th of July 2013. Yet there are no convictions but there are some trials continuing (Dag Medya, 2013).

• Before 31st of May 2013, the average daily tweet in Turkey was 8 million. From 31st of May to 11th of June daily average increased by 68% to 13.5 million (CnnTurk, 2013).

• Facebook page Diren Gezi Parki (resist Gezi Parki) reached more than 650 000 fans. ³

Since the protests are still continuing the numbers are subject to change.

4.5.3 Social Media Arrests during Gezi Parki Protests

During the Gezi Parki Protests, social media became the center of criticisms in the statements of the government members. The Prime Minister described Twitter and the social media as menaces and centers of lies and exaggerations (Torun, 2013). The Governor of Istanbul, Huseyin Mutlu, stated that there were people using social media to provoke others and that the police would take action against them (Radikal, 2013). The Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc, said if they wanted they could have blocked the internet. The reactions against social media from the government did not stay limited with statements. In Izmir (3rd biggest city) thirty three people were taken under custody because of their tweets of police violence (Akan, 2013). In Adana, 13 people were taken under custody with the reason of provoking people using social media (HaberTurk, 2013). Even though all these people were released, the government stated many times that an operation on social media could take place. This caused a fear in some of the social media users. Lawyer Gokhan Ahi says that, these custodies aim to decrease the use of social media in mobilizing protests and to intimidate the social media users of the political use (GazeteA24, 2013).

4.5.4 Gezi Parki Protests as a Clash Area of Social Media and Mainstream Media

Gezi Parki is a massive social movement in Turkish Republic and its political, social and economic outcomes are very though to fully evaluate now while the events are still ongoing. One of the most controversial issues that Gezi Parki Protests has

³ Accessed from Facebook.com on 17th of September 2013
brought out is on media. Starting from the first days of the protests, the mainstream media was subject to criticisms while the social media and the internet were seen as valuable communication tools by protesters.

On night of 31st of May 2013, one of the massive protests took place in Taksim and police interfered using excessive force. While Norwegian TV was broadcasting live from Taksim, major TV channels in Turkey ignored the events. In the following days, the protests were held in front of the headquarters of some TV channels such as NTV and Haberturk. The CEO of Dogus Media Group (the corporation owning NTV) apologized for not broadcasting the events and admitted that their attitude was wrong. The attitude of mainstream media in Turkey was not criticized only in Turkey. Some foreign media and observers of the events also criticized Turkish mass media heavily. On 4th of June BBC made an analysis of the mainstream media’s attitude with the headline “Turks deprived of TV turn to Twitter for protest news”. The analysis continues as follows:

“A large section of Turkey's media shies away from clashing with the government or actively supports it, to the extent that it has come to be known among Turks by the label "pro-media.

Their motives for doing so are varied. Some outlets - such as Islamic TV channels Kanal 7, Samanyolu TV and Ulke TV and the Islamic daily Yeni Safak - simply have a strong ideological affinity with Mr Erdogan's Islamist-leaning AK Party.

The owners of the private channel 24 TV - which has taken a strongly critical line towards the protesters - are known to be personally close to the prime minister.

But most mainstream media outlets - such as TV news channels HaberTurk and NTV, and the major centrist daily Milliyet - are loath to irritate the government because their owners' business interests at times rely on government support. All of these have tended to steer clear of covering the demonstrations.”

There are exceptions, however. CNN Turk - owned by the Dogan media group - and the little-known Halk TV - a mouthpiece of the opposition People's Republican Party's (CHP) - are seen to have provided more coverage than the state-owned stations.

Halk TV in particular has provided continuous coverage, often with TV pictures from scenes of protest” (Katik, 2013).

Also during the events famous American actor Bruce Willis tweeted: “Let everyone know.. Press in Turkey is not working” Is people dying on the streets? Turkey is suffering! Tweet pls: #dayangeziparki” (InternetHaber, 2013)
As mass media failed to fulfill its duty of informing citizens during the events, social media rose out. Many of the protests were announced on the social media. People shared photos, videos, their thoughts and ideas on the events. The citizen journalism played an important role. The harsh reaction of the government and the police against the social media is another proof of the effectiveness of the social media in the events. As stated before, the police took thirty three people under custody because of their tweets on twitter. The Prime Minister accused Twitter as being a menace against society. Dr. Ozgur Uckan from Bilgi University Communication Faculty regards Gezi Parki Protests as a turning point for the mainstream media and the internet relationship and the importance of the citizen journalism (Uckan, Gezi Parkı ve sosyal medya, 2013).

Moreover, he points out the multifunctional use of the social media by the activists and the protesters during the protests. He states that the social media was used for:

- Calling for medical help
- Calling for judicial support
- Proving police violence
- As a discussion and a debate platform for the protesters and the activists to reach a consensus for their actions.
- Creating a plain, ironic and effective language of the process (Uckan, Gezi Parkı ve sosyal medya, 2013).

Uckan, underlines the importance of proving and documenting the police violence and using these as proves to sue both civil and police attacks against the protesters.

### 4.5.5 Disinformation and Misinformation through Social Media

Even though, social media played a multifunctional and effective role during the events, it also received some criticisms because of false news and posts. The lack of control mechanisms in social media and high emotional commitments of people during the events resulted in sharing, false news and photos from time to time. Photos from other public events that happened in other countries were presented as news from Gezi Parki. Some of the false news shared most on social media is:

- A policeman using tear gas against a dog. (The photo was taken in Italy)
- “Thousands of policemen retired because of the events” (The number was exaggerated, only a few policemen retired)
- “Police used orange gas against the protesters” (The orange gas is classified as a chemical weapon and it is deadly. It was not used during the events. )
- “CNN international ended its partnership with CNN Turk” (This was also
false news that was shared by many people)

To summarize, Gezi Parki was a huge demonstration chain in Turkey and during these protests social media was used effectively and versatile. The citizen journalism using the social media got ahead off the mainstream media in informing citizens of the events. Despite, some negative sides such as disinformation and misinformation, Gezi Parki can be considered as a turning point for the internet and the social media’s roles in creating political awareness and mobilizing protests in Turkey.

5. RESULTS

In this section the results from the survey, the interviews and the network analysis will be presented. Since the knowledge and the insight gained from literature review is written in the chapter three and four, it will not be repeated in this section again.

5.1 Survey

In this section the aim is to discuss the answers given to the survey questions. From 21st of April 2013 to 12th of July 2013, 158 participants answered the survey. Questionnaire was Turkish and 145 of 158 participants answered the survey in Turkey.

Only four people filled the survey after the start of the Gezi Parki Protests. So the effect of Gezi Parki Protests in the survey results is negligible.

PART 1: Demographic Questions:

- Age:
  18-29: 42.3%  30-39: 26.8%  40-49: 16.8%  50-59: 8.1%  60+: 6%

- Education:
  Primary: 0.8%  Secondary: 1.3%  High School: 4%  Undergraduate Degree: 36.9%  Post Graduate Degree: 57%

PART 2: The Use of the Internet and The Social Media:

- The Internet Use Frequency per Day:
  Never: 0.8%  0-2 hours: 14.9%  3-5 hours: 36.4%  6-8 hours: 27.3%  More than 8 hours: 20.7%
• **Aim in Use of Internet:**

  Information Search: 43%
  
  Online newspapers, radio, TV: 8.3%
  
  E-Posts: 14%
  
  Social Media: 25.6%
  
  Games: 1.7%
  
  Other: 7.4%

• **Which of the following words below define the social media best for you?**

  Entertainment: 13.2%
  
  Communication: 46.3%
  
  Sharing: 33.1%
  
  Others: 7.4%

• **The Frequency of Use of Social Media Applications:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>55.37%</td>
<td>33.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youtube</td>
<td>42.98%</td>
<td>48.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>25.62%</td>
<td>38.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linkedin</td>
<td>19.83%</td>
<td>42.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Plus</td>
<td>20.66%</td>
<td>33.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myspace</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3.31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• **The number of friends/followers on social media that you use most:**
  
  Average: 549.96

• **With how many of these friends do you meet often?**
  
  Average: 87.56

  The average of
  
  (Often met friends of an average surveyor)
  
  /
  
  (Total friends of an average surveyor): 21%

• 82.6% of the surveyors think that the social media helps them to keep in touch with their acquaintances that they do not see often.
• 46.3% of the surveyors follow the status of others rather than sharing and updating their own status.
  6.6% share and update their status actively and often.
  29.8% say they do both sharing and following equally.
  17.4% say that they do not share or follow others on the social media.

• When asked whose sharings they follow most,
  15.7% say that they follow only their close friends.
  71.1% say that they follow all interesting posts.
  13.2% say that they don’t follow any post on social media.

PART 3: Social Media and Politics

• 68.9% of the participants follow actual politics.
  29.2% follow actual politics from time to time.
  Only 1.9% of the participants answered that they don’t follow actual politics.

• 11.3% of the participants say that they often make sharings on political subjects on the social media.
  38.7% say that, although not often, they share on political issues that are interesting to them.
  30.2% say that they don’t share on politics but they follow political sharings of others.
  19.8% say that they don’t spend time on politics while they use the social media.

• When asked if they re-post or re-tweet the sharings that they liked,
  31.1% answered yes, while 38.7% said sometimes. 30.2% answered no.

• 29.2% said that their political perspectives are affected by political sharings made by others

• 34% of the people have either blocked or deleted a contact of theirs on social media because of political sharings they made.

• 50% of the surveyors follow a politician, a political group or an activist page/account on the social media.

• But only 16% of the surveyors believe that the politicians in Turkey use the social media effectively.
The following six questions were asked in a different format. A statement was given and it was asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement. Five choices were given. (Strongly disagree-disagree-neither agree nor disagree-agree-strongly agree)

- In total 72.64% of surveyors say that they either agree or strongly agree with the statement: “I learn about political issues and news on social media”

- In total 74.53% of surveyors agree or strongly agree with the statement “Sometimes I learn some news on social media that are not present on the mainstream media”

- 83.01% of the surveyors disagree or strongly disagree with the statement “I believe that mainstream media is unbiased, objective and free”. None of the surveyors strongly agreed with this statement.

- When it was asked if they agreed with the statement “I trust news on social media more than news on the mainstream media” the most popular answer was “I neither agree nor disagree” with 50.94%.

- 71.70% of the respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement “I believe that social media is an efficient tool to access people on political issues and create awareness”.

- 71.70% of the respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement “I sometimes learn about political meetings, demonstrations, protests or conferences on social media”.

- 37.70% of the respondents have at least once joint a political meeting, a demonstration, a protest or a conference of which they were informed by social media.

- 59.4% of the respondents believe that showing reaction or making criticism on social media is an effective way of making political opposition.

5.2 Interviews

5.2.1 Mustafa Akgul
On April 11\textsuperscript{th} and October 26\textsuperscript{th} (the follow-up interview to discuss Gezi Parki Protests) two interviews with Mustafa Akgul, associate professor in Bilkent University and the head of Internet Technologies Association, were conducted. The issues discussed in the interviews are categorized under six headlines:

**Mass Media vs. Social Media in Turkey:**

Mustafa Akgul underlines the low cost and the instant communication features of social media as advantages over mainstream media. Now, every individual with access to the internet can write his own newspaper, broadcast his own radio and TV if he has something to say and a bit of talent. On the other hand, he thinks the lack of control mechanisms in social media is a drawback since it sometimes causes spread of false and unreliable information. He thinks that the professional journalism is also vital and both the citizen journalism and the professional journalism should coexist and affect each other positively.

Mustafa Akgul believes the mainstream media in Turkey suffers from government control, censorship and self censorship. The internet portals of the mainstream media often present news with low quality, targeting people to spend more time on their websites and increasing their popularity and thus the advertisement incomes. Media owned by the government such as Anadolu Ajansi, TRT are doing the government propaganda. Moreover since the corporations, owning media companies are also doing other businesses they wish to keep good relationships with the government. This results in applying self censorship. Mustafa Akgul points out the lack of a strong democracy culture and intolerance to criticisms as reasons of censorships and suppression against the media in Turkey.

**The Internet Censorship Protests:**

Soon after the regulation was announced on the official journal, a reaction was shown by Alternatif Bilisim Dernegi. The law was criticized by the association and the first protest was made in Istanbul by couple of thousands people including some academicians. After the regulation was reported on the independent online news portal Bianet, the young generation got informed of the regulation. The regulation was perceived as a severe threat to the internet freedom. Several Facebook groups against the regulation were created, discussions were made on online forums, and criticisms were made on Twitter and Eksisozluk. Then the mass demonstrations took place in various cities of Turkey and even in Europe. The issue became global as foreign media started to report the protests.
As the people organized online through social media, got out to the streets and made demonstrations BTK, stepped back and restructured the regulation. However, still the internet in Turkey is not free, the censorship problem is not resolved and many websites are blocked by law 5651. Even though some academicians tried to continue the movement against whole the censorship problem, the public support did not continue. After the restructuring of the regulation the protests ended and the issue lost its popularity. However, the movement played an important role in BTK’s restructuring of the regulation and proved that social media can be an important tool to create political awareness and mobilize protests.

Role of Social Media in Global Protest Movements

Mustafa Akgul describes the internet as a very efficient tool in connecting people all over the world. Now a person living in any part of the world can live the excitement of the Arab Spring at the same time with people on the streets of Middle East. The internet made it much easier for people to inform, create political awareness and solidarity with others. However, for social movements to occur in real life activists are needed to lead the movements and political and social conditions should be ready for it. Revolutions and social movements have occurred before the presence of internet when conditions were ready. The internet eased the communication, organization and spread of the movement. Arab spring may have occurred even if the internet was not there but it would have taken much more time and effort.

Use of Internet in Turkey

Mustafa Akgul explains the high number of internet and social media users in Turkey with the need of communication. Now instead of cafés people are communicating on the internet. He says even though there are high number of online political groups, fans and followers, it is rare that these online communities do something to make a change in the real life. Today the meaning of activism is different than before. Showing reaction online is perceived as a way of activism. However, rarely when people feel the need of showing a reaction in real life, when there is a stimulus and leading activists, people do go out and mobilize demonstrations in the real life too. The internet censorship protests movement is a good example of this.

Today, even though most political leaders and parties have accounts and high number of followers and fans on social media, they don’t use social media interactively. They only use to make announcements but don’t use it to get feedback from their fans and followers.
The Future of Internet Censorship Problem and Use of Social Media

The countries suppressing the freedom of expression are one of the major problems of the internet today. In Turkey even though there is a big censorship problem and many websites are blocked, the control mechanism against the activity of individuals online are not that harsh. The internet freedom is a controversial issue in all over the world. The problem may be solved by itself as more people learn how to use the internet and exploit its benefits and as an internet culture develops. Maybe we are very new in the internet era and now we are in a transaction period. As the classical production structure has changed, the media is affected by it and it will take more time for people to get adapted.

The Arab Spring and the other social movements proved that social media and internet are invaluable communication tools for political activists. In the future the benefits of social media will be better apprehended and it will be used by more politicians and activists to communicate with people interactively.

The Gezi Parki Protests and Social Media (the follow-up interview on 26th of November)

The new regulations and ongoing political issues created dissatisfaction and a potential for a reaction in some parts of the society. This potential turned into reaction in the Gezi Parki Protests. During the protests, social media, especially Twitter and Facebook with high number of users created platforms for people to organize, communicate and mobilize the protests. Also blogs and activist webpages played some roles but they were not as effective as Facebook and Twitter. Another important aspect was that increased number of smart phone users enabled most of the protestors to communicate on the area of protests. This extensive use of social media was never seen in any other social movement in Turkey before. With the Gezi Parki Protests, social media proved that it is an important part of our lives and politics in Turkey and also that it will continue to exist and become even more important.

On the other hand, most of the mainstream media tried to ignore the events as much as possible to avoid a clash with the government. After the protests and movement grew, they broadcasted it partially. Some media that are very close to the government denigrated the movement. Only very few of the media broadcasted and covered the events intensively.

During the events, the disinformation and the misinformation on social media happened from time to time. This was due to the lack of digital literacy and a strong internet culture. However, the disinformation and the misinformation were not so
severe and didn’t have a strong impact on the course of the movement.

5.2.2 Huseyin Arkin Rasit

The interview with Huseyin Arkin Rasit, a political activist and a teaching assistant in Sabanci University in the Political Science Department, was conducted on 8th of September 2013. The issues discussed in the interview are categorized under four headlines:

Political Use of Social Media by Activists

Huseyin Arkin Rasit personally uses Facebook and Twitter for political purposes. He uses Facebook to share his ideas on current political events and Twitter to read mostly the political tweets of the people he follows. He finds Twitter’s word limit constraining.

Besides worldwide social media, he underlines the use of blogs and websites by the activists. The blogs are generally specialized in particular subjects such as women rights, environmental awareness etc. The activist news portals are focused on the actual politics and give place to opponent ideas and the movements. These blogs and activist websites also promote their links on the worldwide social networks. Almost all activist sites have their own pages on these networks. Thanks to Facebook and Twitter’s viral nature and high number of use, news, analyses, announcements on blogs and activist websites reach much more people.

Political Use of Social Media by People

In Turkey, a high number of people are interested in sharing and reading on political issues especially in the bigger cities. However, there are also many people who use social media merely to keep in touch with others and to play online games. Even people who use social media for entertainment and communication read political sharings of their contacts. So the scope of political sharings and posts on social networks are not limited to only people who are interested in politics.

The number of people using social media and the load of political sharings on social media has increased by the start of the Gezi Parki Protests considerably. While political blogs and activist websites are almost always active, political sharings on Facebook and on Twitter can increase or decrease depending on the political climate in Turkey.

The general tendency in Turkey is that the use of social media for political purposes
is on an increase as the number of social media users go up and the positive effects of social media in creating political awareness and mobilizing protests in the Internet Censorship Protests and the Gezi Parki Protests are comprehended.

**Social Media’s Role on Politics**

Social media and internet are not the real stages of making politics. Internet cannot replace the synergy, the solidarity and the co-occurrence of the social movements that are done in real life. While inequalities, violence, suppression and other problems happen in the real life, you cannot stop these on the virtual life. However, the internet and social media are effective in informing people of these problems and mobilize protests when there is a potential for it. The potential is not created online but the internet can help to expose an existing potential into reaction in the real life. If there is no potential in the society to make a change, social media itself is pointless.

Before the Gezi Parki Protests, the political conjuncture in Turkey created a potential for a reaction. The police violence against the peaceful demonstration was the straw that broke the camel’s back. There, social media played an important role in informing people of the events and announcing demonstrations. Without social media, the events could not develop so fast and massively.

As more people use the internet and social media the strength of social media in informing people and mobilizing protests will increase. Also the young generation in Turkey consumes media mostly on the internet. Instead of watching TV, young people watch videos on YouTube; instead of newspapers they read blogs and posts of their contacts. As the scope of social media expands, it will be a more important instrument in molding public’s opinion than mainstream media’s in the future.

**The Role of Mass Media and Social Media in Gezi Park Protests**

The mainstream media in general opt to be on the same side with the government either because they are owned by the government or they don’t want to harm their relationships with the government. The mainstream media’s biased attitude came off in the Gezi Parki Protests. While ten thousands of people were making demonstrations in the center of Istanbul, the mainstream media thought they could ignore the events and get away with this. While foreign media was broadcasting live from Taksim Square, Turkish news channels were not even broadcasting the events. Their attitude put themselves on the target of the protests. As the demonstrations were started to be held in front of the headquarters of media companies, some part of the mainstream media stepped back. Even though, the mainstream media started to cover the events later on, the commentaries were still biased and they tried to downplay the
protest movement probably in order not to annoy the government. The foreign news agencies were much more interested in the protest movement.

While the mainstream media failed to inform people of the events, social media played an impressive role in informing people and organizing the protests. Moreover, social media was used for other purposes such as documenting police violence, calling for medical and juridical help. Twitter and Facebook were the dominant social media during the protests since they have most number of users. Activist organizations, artists, politicians and most importantly protesters themselves used these social networks greatly and efficiently during the protests. Citizen journalism by sharing photos, videos, live broadcasts and reports from the demonstration areas had a strong influence on the development of protests.

The events were particularly important in proving the strength of social media in informing people and creating political mobilizations. It was proved that in today’s Turkey, with the help of social media holding the control of mainstream media is not enough to stop people from getting informed and making opposition.

5.3 Social Network Analysis

The social network analysis was done on 9th of September 2013 using TouchGraph SEO software The initial map was generated by the following seven keywords.

- **Gezi Parki Direnisi (Gezi Parki Resistance):** The name of the protest movement.
- **Taksim Dayanismasi (Taksim Solidarity):** A confederation of associations and some political parties that took parts in the events.
- **Kirmizili Kadin (Woman in Red):** A symbol from a Reuters photo of a woman in red dress being exposed to tear gas in the first days.
Capulcu (Looter): How prime minister described the protesters. The name was adopted by protesters later on.

Duran Adam (Standing Man): A protester who stood alone on Taksim Square for hours to protest the police violence. The protest movement was continued by other protesters later.

Ethem Sarisuluk: Name of the protester who was killed by a policeman during the protests in Ankara.

Parklar Bizim (Parks belong to us): The name and the slogan of the movement of constituting neighborhood forums during the Gezi Parki Protests.

After the initial map was created by these keywords, the second and the third depth searches of website connectedness were made. Here is the resulting graph of social network analysis of Gezi Parki Protests:
The nodes in rectangle represent either the keywords searched or the second and the third depth searches made from a website. The circle nodes represent the websites that have connections. For example, “Taksim Dayanisma” is the keyword used. “Taksimdayanisma.org which is the home page of the association is found relevant to the keyword and mapped by the tool. Then from this node second depth search was done and the node “Related: taksimdayanisma.org” was created and related sites were connected to it. If a second depth search is done from a website, the website is the parent of this search. For example “taksimdayanisma.org” is the parent of “related:taksimdayanisma.org” search.

Below is the table describing websites that have more than one connection:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Language &amp; Type</th>
<th>Total Connections</th>
<th>Connections with keyword</th>
<th>Connections with websites</th>
<th>Created a new</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

50
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>rds</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>search</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twitter.com</td>
<td>Multilingual, Social Network/Microblogging</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youtube.com</td>
<td>Multilingual, Video Sharing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook.com</td>
<td>Multilingual, Social Network</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parklarbizim.blogspot.com</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parklarbizimizmir.blogspot.com</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>huffingtonpost.com</td>
<td>English, News-Blog</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haber.sol.org.tr</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eksisozluk.com</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gundem.milliyet.com.tr merged with milliyet.com.tr And siyaset.milliyet.com.tr</td>
<td>Turkish, News Portal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Ntvmsnbc.com</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Turkish, News Portal</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Vimeo.com</td>
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<td>Arsiv.hurriyet.com.tr merged with fotogaleri.hurriyet.com.tr</td>
<td>Turkish, News Portal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here is a numerical analysis of the graph including websites with one connection (some are not on the graph but listed in top domains section):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>English</th>
<th>Multilingual</th>
<th>Total Connections</th>
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<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>News Portals</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activist Websites</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Websites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>116</strong></td>
<td><strong>Av: 2.37</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. ANALYSIS

6.1 Survey
The demographic results show that the people who answered the survey are young, well-educated internet-using people mostly living in the bigger cities of Turkey. So the results do not represent the Turkish average but give important evidence on this section of society.

One of the apparent results derived from the survey is the distrust against mainstream media. People find mainstream media neither reliable nor free. Social media is seen as an alternative to the mainstream media in informing people of news and political issues. Moreover, social media has already become a tool in informing a high number of people on political events such as conferences, meetings and demonstrations. Most people see social media as a valuable tool to access people and create political awareness. Even though it is not the majority, there is a considerable amount of people who actively mobilize through social media and join political actions. Half of the people follow or are fan of political parties, organizations or activists but only very small number of participants (less than one five) believes that politicians use social media effectively. The data shows that the political use of social media is quite common and an important portion of the internet users get mobilized by social media for political purposes.

Some other valuable information gathered from the survey concerns the weak ties concept on social networks. People share and read the political sharings of others even of those they are not close with. The average ratio of close friends to all contacts on the social network is 21%. It means that almost four of five connections of an average respondent are weak ties. Strong majority of respondents (82.6%) believe that social media enables them to keep in touch with their acquaintances that they don’t meet often (weak ties). Most people read not only sharings of their close friends but also any post or sharing that is interesting to them. A high number (69.8%) of people also often or sometimes re-tweet or share a post they see on social media. So, it can be said that Granovetter’s strength of weak ties study is also valid for social networks and political information. People get informed of political events and news through their weak ties. Data supports the arguments made in literature study that by the help of social media, political information flows through the weak ties. That wouldn’t be possible without social media.

**Methodological Limitations of the Survey**

The survey was distributed as a questionnaire by mail to the mail groups of some university students, alumni and librarians. This limited the respondents of the survey to well-educated internet using people. Thus the results are far from representing whole Turkey.
It is seen that the later questions get fewer replies than the first questions. Even though the decrease is not extreme, it shows that the concentration or the will of the respondents get lower when answering the survey.

Lastly, the survey was conducted before the Gezi Parki Protests was started. So, the effects of Gezi Parki Protests are not observed in this survey. It was decided not to conduct a follow-up survey since there is a fear of being labeled in some parts of the society. The reliability of a survey at this time can be low.

6.2 Interviews

6.2.1 Mustafa Akgul

The interview with Mustafa Akgul was extremely beneficial to get a deeper knowledge on the subject in the Turkish conjuncture. First of all, Mustafa Akgul states that mainstream media in Turkey is stranded with many problems such as being focused on profit increasing, censorship and self censorship. Therefore, fails to fulfill its main duty. Even though social media has some drawbacks such as lack of control mechanisms, its instant and cost efficient nature enables citizen journalism which is a great help to social movements since mainstream media stays behind. The citizen journalism during the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement proved that social media is a very effective tool for spreading the information all over the world and creating political awareness and solidarity with people who live far away. Also it helps to mobilize protests. A similar example to these worldwide protests was seen when a new regulation regarding internet filtering was introduced in Turkey. Before the regulation came into force, the criticisms were voiced on the social media and eventually demonstrations took place in various cities in Turkey and also in Europe.

In the Gezi Parki Protests, it was witnessed that with the higher number of social media and smart phone users, social media becomes more important in creating political awareness and mobilizing political protests. Especially, Twitter and Facebook played a highly important role. If it was not for them, it would be impossible for events to get this massive. Even though some disinformation/misinformation was faced, the Gezi Parki Protests proved the increasing and indispensable role of social media in political protests in Turkey.

Internet is a tool enabling instant and low cost communication, and when the political and social conditions are ready, it helps people to make a change.

Even though there are high number of people using internet and social media in Turkey the benefits of them are not fully comprehended by neither the politicians nor
the people. As the internet culture develops the problems of internet censorships can be solved in the future. Also in the future both the activists and the politicians will be more attracted to use it to access more people freely and instantly.

6.2.2 Huseyin Arkin Rasit

The interview with Huseyin Arkin Rasit was beneficial to learn the strength social media in terms of politics from the perspective of an activist and effects of social media during the Gezi Park Protests from a person who experienced it personally.

In Turkey social media and the internet are widely used for political purposes. Even the people, who aren’t interested in politics, get to see political sharings of others due to the viral nature of social media. As the politics in the country gets fierce, the use of social media for political purposes increases. Because of the shift in young generations’ media consumption habits from mainstream to social media, and increase in the internet penetration, the use of social media for political purposes is likely to increase in the future and thus it will be a much more efficient tool than it is now.

Social media itself doesn’t make a social change but if there is a potential for a change in the society, social media plays an important role in making this potential to come out faster than before.

Social networks, Twitter and Facebook, activist websites and blogs are the online platforms that the politics is discussed mostly. However, as there are millions of people on Twitter and Facebook they are the principal platforms in terms of politics. The bloggers and websites also use these social networks to access more people. The reason why Twitter and Facebook took the lead in organizing protests is that they enable information flow through the weak ties. This creates a viral flow of political events. People get to learn about political events from people they don’t see often.

During Gezi Parki Protests, mainstream media failed to fulfill its duty to inform people. In these protests, social media proved it can be a strong alternative to the mainstream media. Social media was the principal tool in informing people and organizing protests. It was also used for other purposes such as calling for medical/juridical help and documenting the police violence.

Methodological Limitations of Interviews

The data gathered from the interviews was not quantitated for the analysis so the richness of gathering was not lost. However, the main limitation was that the
interviews were time consuming to arrange, analyze and interpret. Due to dynamic political atmosphere and ongoing social events, most importantly the Gezi Parki Protests, the new parts had to be added to the interview with Mustafa Akgul. So a follow-up interview with Mustafa Akgul was conducted.

Also, since the interviews were based on political and social events, the political orientations of the interviewees might have affected the interviews.

### 6.3 Social Network Analysis

The one of the most eye catching result is that the worldwide social media websites Youtube, Facebook and Twitter are at the center of the graph. They have the highest number of connections in both the first and the deeper level searches. They have the highest number of connections with the keywords that are symbols of the Gezi Parki Protests and with the websites that are related to the Gezi Parki Protests. These three social network websites were selected as mostly used in the survey and the importance of them was underlined in the interviews as well.

Another result is that even though having much less connectedness compared to the social networks, the news portals rank the second in terms of average connectedness. While Turkish news portals have higher connectedness, it is seen that events were reported in various channels of foreign media too.

Also it is seen from the graph and the tables that the protests were covered in blogs and activist webpages. Also there are some blogs that were launched after Gezi Parki Protests which are “parklarbizim.org”, “parklarbizimizmir.org”, “duranadam.com” and “translatingtaksim.wordpress.com”. It is vital in showing that the activists also want to voice their thoughts on their own pages. “translatingtaksim.wordpress.com” is a blog aiming to spread information from Turkey in English language aiming for foreigners to learn about the events. Also one being foreign, four activist websites are found relevant to the Gezi Parki Protests.

Folksonomies are famous and frequently used social media in Turkish internet culture. From the first table, it is seen that Eksisozluk, the most widely known and used online folksonomy, has three connections which is more than the average.

The dictionary and the game website are related with the term “Capulcu”. The reason behind is that Prime Minister’s use of the word added a new term to the protest movement. The term was used in foreign media as well. A platform game where a protester struggles against policemen was developed on Google Games. The game was downloaded more than 10 000 times. The website of developer is the Facebook
group “Resist Gezi Park”. The English translation of the word “chapulling” (derived from capulcu) on “urban dictionary.com” became a website with a high rank probably due to searches by foreign observers of the events.

Looking at the last table, it is seen that the events found place not only on foreign news portals but also on foreign blogs, activist websites and user generated websites. This means that the events were not limited to Turkish audience but also they were observed and commented on by foreigners as well.

Again, here the establishment of weak ties by the social networks put the social networks in the first places. People usually turn to the social networks to learn latest political events. This is because of the high number of people using them and the viral nature which is facilitated by these weak ties. This makes news portals and activist blogs to use these social networks to reach more audience than they can on their own domains. Here the consumers are promoters of the news as well. So a news portal or a blog that doesn’t have a tie to prominent social networks can hardly reach mass audiences.

**Methodological Limitations and Technical Analysis**

The TouchGraph SEO was a beneficial tool to create and illustrate a network map of internet actors of Gezi Parki. However, the tool was not perfect and some limitations came along. Other than the general limitations of network analysis method itself, the tool had its own technical and contextual limitations:

**Technical**
- Even though sixteen websites were found relevant to a keyword, it only mapped eight of them.
- Sometimes while mapping, the nodes (websites) having more than one connection were not mapped. They were found from the top domains and added to the map manually.
- During the creation of the network map, the tool crashed several times and the mapping had to be done from the beginning.

**Contextual:**
- Since the Google’s related websites are used to find relatedness, “google.com” itself was not included in the map. The relatedness of Google Search to websites and concepts is neglected.
- The social networks such as Twitter and Facebook were treated as individual nodes, so the pages and accounts within these networks are not shown in the analysis. Therefore which accounts, pages or groups are related with the
concepts and websites is unknown.

7. CONCLUSION

In this section it is aimed to answer the supporting questions and the main research question and then draw a valid and reliable conclusion based on the theoretical framework and the results of the research methods conducted. Then a critique of the study is made and thoughts for the future researches on the subject are presented.

7.1 Answers to the Research Questions

**How widely is social media being used in Turkey?**

In Turkey, the half of the population has internet connection and most of the people having internet connection use social media. Moreover, the internet penetration and the number of social media users are increasing rapidly. The internet and social media users are more mostly in cities and among the younger generation. In Turkey, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube are the most popular social media websites. Besides worldwide social networks, blogs and folksonomies have an important role in Turkish social media culture.

**How often and in which ways social media is used by the political activists?**

In Turkey prominent politicians, political parties and social movements have high number of followers or fans on the social media websites especially on Facebook and Twitter. However, the politicians do not use social media effectively. Politicians in Turkey use social media to access people to make announcements but do not use it interactively to get feedback or criticisms from the others.

In the last few years we have witnessed active and effective use of social media by political activists. Initially, its effects were seen in the worldwide social movements especially in the Occupy Movement and the Arab Spring. These events inspired Turkish activists. It can be said that by the recent protest movements, the Internet Censorship Protests and especially the Gezi Parki Protests, the political activists grasped the strength of social media in informing people and mobilizing protests in Turkey. Social media plays an important role in serving as a discussion, communication and organization platform for political events. Today, many people in Turkey learn of political meetings, conferences and demonstrations through social media. During the Internet Censorship Protests and the Gezi Parki Protests, demonstrations were announced and spread by Facebook and Twitter much more effectively than any other media. During the Gezi Parki Protests, the social media has
been used by protesters in creative ways such as to document police violence, calling for medical and juridical help and to create an own language and humor of the events. Besides Facebook and Twitter, video and photo sharing websites were used to share the videos and photos of the protests and also the police violence. This intensive and multi-functional use of social media was not seen before in any political demonstration in Turkey. Also, by sharings and comments of activists including artists and politicians, through social media solidarity, synergy and moral support were provided all over the country.

Furthermore, blogs, folksonomies and activist websites are also remarkable social media tools that are used by political activists to discuss and argue on the ongoing political events. Beside discussions and comments on the events, on these platforms people share photos, videos, live broadcast links as well. Blogs and activist websites usually promote their new posts and reports on widely used social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter. Using their viral nature, the blogs and activist websites reach much more people than their own followers.

What advantages do social media hold over the mainstream media in terms of creating political awareness and initiating political mobilizations in Turkey?

First of all Turkey has a very young population which uses internet and social media often. The media they consume is different than their parents did. They prefer to watch videos online, read blogs and post on social networks. This makes the platform of politics to shift from the mainstream media to social media. So, social media becomes a more important medium to access people and spread information on politics.

Social networks, such as Twitter and Facebook enable people that don’t meet in real life (connected with weak ties) stay in touch on the internet. The most of the contacts in these social networks consist of weak ties. A sharing of a person on the social networks reaches to all her friends (including weak ties) and if shared again to even to people she even doesn’t know. So a sharing of a person can reach to people she has never met in less than a minute and even gets feedbacks to it through comments or likes. So a sharing can spread on social networks virally. This is one of the main advantages of social media which was not possible in other media tools before. This creates a viral nature for political information to flow. Similar to Granovetter’s study in job market, in social networks people get to learn of political information from their weak ties, this time on online social networks.

Another advantage of social media in Turkey is due to its being free of inveterate problems that the mainstream media has. The mainstream media in Turkey either
belong to the government or the media corporations. They both face the government suppression, censorship and self-censorship problems. These problems decreased the trust in mainstream media heavily especially in the recent years. Since social media are free of these problems, many people turn to social media to learn about political issues.

Also being fast and low-cost, announcing protests or demonstrations on social media is much more attractive than methods used in the past such as handouts or posters. Using the viral nature established by network of weak ties, on social media the announcements can reach many people instantly without much cost or effort. Moreover, social media created a new term called citizen journalism which has affected the process of the movement during the Gezi Parki Protests. Citizen journalists from the protest areas not only informed other people of the protests but also reported police violence and created a platform for support and solidarity with others.

However, social media bears some disadvantages too, such as being prone to spread of false news due to lack of control mechanisms. False news being spread on social media has partly affected the reputation of some social movements negatively. Due to the emotional commitments and rapid development of events, people don’t always check what they share. This combined with the viral nature of social media; false news can reach many people in a very short time. During the Gezi Parki Protests, some false news was shared on social networks. Even though it is impossible to measure exactly to which extent false information reached, considering the number of sharings made, it can be said that many social media users were exposed to false information. These spread of false news from time to time undoubtedly affects the reliability of information on social media in general.

Also, the threats and actions from the government against social media also had a negative effect on social media users during the political protests. As the people were taken under custody and government stated that the social media operation can be initiated anytime, some people got intimidated. So, the vulnerability of privacy and ease of surveillance by government on social media have also negative effects on social media’s strength on political issues.

**What percentage of people use social media for political purposes, either to inform others or to get informed of political events?**

It is very hard to determine the exact percentage of people using social media for political purposes since the numbers are subject to change depending on the political climate.
The people using internet in Turkey are highly interested in politics and most of them read and share on political issues on social media. The most active issues and the subjects on Twitter are usually on political issues and also Facebook groups and pages with highest number of fans are the ones that are political. Most of the people use social media to get informed of events and to read the posts and sharings of other people. However there is also a decent amount of people that share political post and also re-post or re-share the post of their contacts. The political data load flowing among Turkish social network users is very high especially when the political climate is fierce.

The data from the survey also shows that the social media users in Turkey are strongly engaged in politics. 59.4% of the respondents believe that showing reactions on social media is an active way of making opposition. 71.70% of the respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement “I believe that social media is an efficient tool to access people on political issues and create political awareness”. Only 1.9% of the survey respondents say that they don’t follow political news. 34% of the respondents have either deleted or blocked their friends because of their political posts. The number of deleting/blocking friends is especially high when compared to the similar study done by Pew Internet in the US. According to research of Pew Internet, 18% of social network users have blocked/unfriended/hidden somebody because of the political sharings made (Pew Internet Research, 2012).

These numbers indicate that most of the survey respondents consider social media as a direct or an indirect tool for political purposes. These data also show that social media in Turkey is highly politicized. Therefore the politically related information holds an important place in information traffic in social networks in Turkey.

To sum up, it is very hard to know exactly what percentage of people use social media for political purposes but the data from the survey, and the numbers of fans and followers of political accounts on social networks show that social media in Turkey is highly politicized.

Do people, who use social media for political purposes, also actively voice their reactions offline through protests or demonstrations?

The short answer to this question is “depends on the conditions”. Slightly more than one third of the survey respondents have already joined a political event (conference, meeting, demonstration etc.) even before the Gezi Parki Protests.

Almost every day, there are discussions of political events and reactions are shown
online. However, the mobilization occurs when the conditions are ready meaning when the people feel the need of making a change and they are led by political activists. Turkey has witnessed two major social movements in the recent years. In the Internet Censorship Protests and the Gezi Parki Protests, in which social media played an important role, a high number of people who showed reactions online in fact went out to voice their thoughts and dissatisfaction on the streets too. The common point of both is that there was a potential in the society to make a reaction against the government and social media helped them to communicate and organize the protests.

What are the most used social media tools in creating political awareness and mobilizing political protests?

The most used social media tools in creating political awareness and mobilizing protests are the social networks that have most number of users. Twitter, Facebook and Youtube lead. Especially during the first days of the Gezi Park Protests rise in the average tweeting and number of fans of Facebook pages of the protest movement was especially fast. Most people followed the events either directly on these networks or from the links they learned from these networks.

These worldwide social media tools are in the center of the network cluster of the Gezi Parki Protests since they have higher number of connectivity to other webpages related with the movement. They have most links to them from the other websites. Since they have high number of accounts and that they connect weakly tied people and enable viral information flow, they became the center of political sharings. Even, other political blogs and websites use their accounts on these social networks to promote their links and to reach more people.

Other than worldwide social networks, blogs, folksonomies, especially Eksisozluk, and activist websites are also used for political purposes during the social movements. Besides sharing photos, videos, links, these websites are used by citizen journalist to analyze the events and they served as discussion platforms. In the network analysis, both political and personal blogs showed some degree of relatedness to the concepts of the Gezi Parki. However, looking at the number of blog pages read, the blogs seem to have left behind the social networks. On the blog pages of the news portals, the blog posts on the Gezi Parki don’t rank among the most popular ones. For example, in “blog.radikal.com.tr”, the most read blog on Gezi Parki has 44.252 readers whereas there are blog posts with hundreds of thousands readers. However, it is impossible to know how many people read these blog posts since they are also shared on social networks. Also many blogs have already their own accounts on social networks themselves. During the Gezi Parki Protests, both
political and personal blogs covered the events, the posts evaluating the protests were written. However, no blog name or blogger itself took the lead. There was no single blog or blogger that came into prominence and led the movement. The nature of being without a leader of the Gezi Parki Protests also reflected on the social media.

The social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, facilitate contacts of people that are related with weak ties. The traffic of political information on these networks is extremely high and viral. A sharing reaches a high number of people in a short time by the viral nature of these networks. So, both in creating political awareness and mobilizing protests, these social networks are invaluable. This is why other political blogs and websites use these networks by opening accounts. This way, they reach even more people than they can by their own websites.

First of all, Turkey has a young population who use internet and social media often. One of the things that these people do on social media is to read, watch, listen and also write and upload media on political issues. The most common platforms of political sharings are Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

On social networks Facebook and Twitter, people have much more contacts than they see in their daily lives. These social networks facilitate connections between people and their weak ties and also the information flow through these weak ties. This creates a nature of viral information flow. So, when a post or another form of media is shared by a user the viral nature of these platforms enables it to reach much more people than it would be possible in any other way. This is especially true when the sharing is not a personal but a general issue such as a political sharing. Political sharings flow on weak ties and reach to people even who don’t have any connection with the initial poster. This sharing can be to create political awareness or to mobilize a protest movement.

The mainstream media in Turkey has fundamental problems such as government suppression, censorship and self-censorship. These problems make the mainstream media biased and unreliable in the eyes of the people. This makes more and more people to follow political events and social movements on social media. As more people turn to social media the social media’s power of molding public opinion increases while the mainstream media’s decreases.

In the recent social movements, the Internet Censorship Protests and the Gezi Parki Protests, social media played an important role in both creating political awareness and mobilizing protests. In both, the potential for a reaction in the society turned into
demonstrations in all over the country by the help of social media. The social media enabled people to learn about the situation, to see the reactions of other people, to discuss the events and to organize the demonstrations. With any other medium, it would be impossible to reach this many people therefore the demonstrations couldn’t be this massive and effective. Moreover, during the Gezi Parki Protests, social media took the place of mainstream media and the protesters broadcasted and reported the events from the demonstration areas to whole world by social media tools.

So, today social media is already a strong tool in creating political awareness, molding public opinion and mobilizing protests in Turkey. The roles the social media played in the recent social movements are the strongest proofs of this. Also, by the rapid increase in internet, social media and smartphone users combined with activists’ grasp of social media’s strengths, it is expected that it is going to be much stronger in the future.

### 7.2 Critique of the Study

The main drawback of the thesis was that the thesis research started nearly six months before the Gezi Park Protests which was a very important social movement in Turkey and one of the turning points for social media’s use for creating political awareness and political mobilization. The survey and the interview with Mustafa Akgul were conducted before the events started. A short follow-up interview was made with Mustafa Akgul but the survey was not repeated. The reason was that questions regarding Gezi Parki Protests are met with cautiousness and there is an ongoing fear of being labeled depending on answers given to questions regarding the Gezi Parki Protests. In these circumstances, the risk of not getting valid and reliable data was high so it was decided not to conduct a follow-up survey. So, survey misses the impact of the Gezi Parki Protests.

The survey was distributed on internet via mail groups of alumni, internet associations and university students, so the results represent only internet using well educated people. Still nearly half of the population in Turkey do not use internet and the average education is much lower compared to the average of the respondents. So the survey is far from giving data for the whole country but still important in giving data from an important section of the society.

Since the chain of protests started with Gezi Parki is still ongoing and the effects are not fully comprehended, the discussions and examinations of the events are still fresh and not completely adequate. Therefore, the literature study on the events was limited with a book and some articles on the internet.
TouchGraph SEO, the tool used for the network analysis, doesn’t map the pages within the social networks but maps the social networks as individual nodes. Therefore, it is not possible to see which pages in these social networks play important roles.

### 7.3 Future Research

A study after some time passes over the Gezi Parki Protests would be beneficial to have a better covering of the events and its reflections concerning the role of the social media and the internet. The social network analysis, the surveys and the interviews would provide richer and more comprehensive data.

Moreover, in a more extensive study a survey targeting larger sections of the society can be conducted. It would be beneficial to reach wider results in Turkish society.

Also it could be interesting to examine how politicized the social media in Turkey is in comparison to other countries. The developing countries or countries with similar internet penetration rate can be investigated.

### 8. REFERENCES


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Pew Internet Research. (2012). *Social networking sites and politics*.


A. SURVEY- THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

158 respondents between 21\textsuperscript{st} of April 2013 to 12\textsuperscript{th} of June 2013

Questionnaire Available on Turkish on page:

http://freeonlinesurveys.com/s.asp?sid=nd5ye3i690eapqd222517

Demographic Questions:

- *1 Your Age:
  - 18-29
  - 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60+

*2 Education:
- Primary
- Secondary
- Graduate School
- Bachelor’s Level
- Master’s Level or Higher

Internet and Social Media Use

*3 Average internet use time a day?
- Never
- 0-2 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 6-8 hours
- More

*4 When you are online what do you do mostly?
- Information search
- Newspaper, TV, Radio
- E-mail
- Social Media (YouTube, Blogs, dictionaries (*a form of forum in Turkish*), Facebook, twitter..)
- Games
- Other:

*5 What does social media mean for you most?
- Entertainment
- Communication
- Sharing
6. How often do you use the social media applications below?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
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<td>MySpace</td>
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<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

7. How many followers/contacts do you have on the social network you use most?

8. How many of them are people you often meet?

9. Do you believe that social media helps you to stay in touch with people you don’t see in real life often?
   - Yes
   - No

10. Which of the statements below is defining you best about the sharings and updates on social media?
   - I rather follow other’s updates and sharings.
   - I actively do sharings and update my status.
   - I do both equally.
   - I don’t share or up or sharing and update my status on social media and don’t follow others.

11. Whose sharings do you follow on social media?
   - Only my close friends or people I see often.
• Any sharing that is interesting to me.
• I don’t follow sharings on social media.

Social Media and Politics

*12 Do you follow politics?
• Yes
• Sometimes
• No

*13 Which of the statements below on using social media for political purposes define you best?
• I often do sharings on political subjects on social media.
• Even if not so often, I do sharings on political subjects which interest me.
• I don’t do sharings on political subjects but I follow political sharings of others.
• I don’t spend time for politics on social media.

*14 Do you forward or retweet a political sharing you liked on your own account?
• Yes
• Sometimes
• No

*15 Do political sharings made on social media affect your ideas or thoughts on the subject?
• Yes
• No

*16 Have you ever deleted/blocked a friend of yours because of his/her political sharings?
• Yes
• No
• *17 Is there a politician or a political activist that you follow through social media?
  
  □ Yes  
  □ No  

• *18 Do you believe that politicians in Turkey use social media effectively?
  
  □ Yes  
  □ No  
  □ I have no idea  

*19 Please answer how much you agree with the statements below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I sometimes learn about political news from social media.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I learn some news on social media that were not broadcasted in the mainstream media</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe that mainstream media is objective and free.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I trust news I get from social media more compared to mainstream media.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe that social media is a strong tool for reaching people and creating awareness for political purposes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I get informed of some political demonstrations, protests or conferences through social media.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*20 Have you ever joined a political demonstration, protest or conference that you have been informed about on social media?
Do you think political reactions/criticisms on social media are effective methods of political opposition?
- Yes
- No
- I have no idea

B. INTERVIEW WITH MUSTAFA AKGUL

Conducted in Turkish on 11th of April 2013 and 26th of October 2013 (cover up interview)

INTERVIEWEE: Mustafa Akgul: Associate Professor In Bilkent University

President of INETD (Internet Technologies Association)
Head of the committee organizing events: INET-TR Internet Conferences, Academic IT and Internet Week
Author of first internet book written in Turkish: Internet: “Internet: Bilgiye Erisimin Yeni Arac ve Olanakları”
(Internet: New tool and Opportunities for Accessing Information)

INTERVIEW:

Introduction of myself and thesis
Asking for permission to tape the interview and use his name in the thesis

Questions:

Mainstream Media-Social Media

- Do you think that mainstream media in Turkey is trustworthy? Is there any pressure or censorship on it?
- What do you think on social media’s effect in worldwide events such as Occupy movement and Arab Spring?
- Compared to mainstream media what type of advantages does social media have in terms of creating awareness and mobilizing political protests?
Social Media and Political Organization

- Statistics say that young generation in Turkey use social media very actively. What do you think about young generation’s use of social media for political purposes?
- Do you think that political activities on social media are effective in creating awareness and mobilization? Do you think it is possible to make opposition online? How effective are online reactions on politics?

Internet Freedom, Internet Filtering Regulation, Protest Movements

- What are your thoughts of level of internet freedom in Turkey?
- What do you think about the role of the protest movement in BTKs revising and changing the regulation?
- What do you think about the future? Is social media going to be a stronger communication tool in terms of politics? How will it contribute to the democracy?

COVER UP INTERVIEW:

- What do you think about the role of the social media during the Gezi Parki Protests?
- How do you evaluate the attitude of the mainstream media in Turkey during the Gezi Parki Protests?
- What do you think about the disinformation/misinformation problems experienced on the course of the Gezi Parki Protests?

C. INTERVIEW WITH HUSEYIN ARKIN RASIT

Conducted in Turkish on 8th September 2013

INTERVIEWEE: Huseyin Arkin Rasit: Political Activist and teaching assistant in Sabanci University in Political Sciences

INTERVIEW:

Introduction of myself and thesis
Asking for permission to tape the interview and use his name in the thesis

Questions:
• Do you use social media? Which social media tools do you use?
• How do other activists use social media?
• How was the attitude of mainstream media during Gezi Park Protests? What kind of role did social media play during the Protests?
• How often do people use social media for political purposes (to inform or get informed)?
• What do you think about other online oppositions? Do Twitter, political forums, Facebook groups are effective forms of showing opposition?
• What do you think about the future? Is social media going to be a stronger tool in terms of creating awareness and mobilizing political protests?
D. THE NETWORK MAP
E. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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