



## Chapter 49

# Determinants of the Citizen Engagement Level of Mayors on Twitter: The Case of Turkey


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### ABSTRACT

*Today, politicians like other political actors use social media to interact with their audiences. In the relevant literature, studies on the use of social media by politicians focus more on how politicians use social media for political communication during the election periods and its impact on the election results. Furthermore, these studies mainly focus on national politicians. Few studies focus on the use of social media during a non-election period by the local politicians, and these studies analyse the purpose of using social media. Therefore, in the relevant literature, there is a need for empirical studies to measure the citizen engagement level of local politicians during the non-election period and analyse its determinants beyond the purpose of using social media. In this context, this study aims to analyse the relationship between some factors and the level of citizen engagement of the mayors on Twitter in Turkey. The findings of the analysis show that there is a relationship between the status of municipalities and the engagement level of mayors.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Social media has become a part of people's daily lives in the last decades by dint of the proliferation of low-priced Internet devices. The rise of social media platforms has changed people's communication, shopping and entertainment styles. Advantages of social media were first discovered by the private sector like other technological developments, especially for brand marketing and customer-focused management. Afterwards, social media drew the attention of political actors (Sobaci, Hatipoglu, & Korkmaz, 2018). The political actors such as political parties, politicians and activists have begun to use social media tools to organise, mobilise and engage to their audiences (Larsson & Moe, 2014; Vergeer, Hermans, & Sams, 2013; Kalnes, 2009; Stranberg, 2013; Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). In this context, the use of social media by politicians is not a new phenomenon. However, today, social media are more intensively used by national as well as local politicians (Sobaci & Karkin, 2013).

Social media tools such as Twitter are favourable for online political marketing at the local level. These tools fulfil the needs of local politicians for "a personal, direct, interactive, and speed style" of communication with citizens (Criado, Martínez-Fuentes, & Silván, 2012). Social media are direct and probably the cheapest way for a political campaign during the election period. Therefore, most of the sub-national politicians, as well as national politicians, use social media in their election campaigns (Triantafillidou, Lappas, Kleftodimos, & Yannas, 2018; Larsson, 2018; Welp, Capra, & Freidenberg, 2018). Moreover, the local politicians, especially mayors, use social media tool for engaging the citizens and promoting themselves during the non-election periods.

In the relevant literature, studies on the use of social media by politicians have focused on how politicians use social media for political communication during the election periods and its impact on the election results (Hansen & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2014; Strandberg, 2013; Carlson & Stranberg, 2008; Ozdeşim İkiz, Sobaci, Yavuz, & Karkin, 2014; Welp et al., 2018; Lev-On, 2018). Furthermore, these studies have mainly focused on national politicians (Williams & Gulati, 2013; Hansen & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2014; Strandberg, 2013; Carlson & Stranberg, 2008). Few studies, in contrast, have focused on the use of social media during a non-election period by the local politicians, and these studies have analysed the purpose of the using social media (Sobaci & Karkin, 2013; Vučković & Bebić, 2013). Therefore, in the relevant literature, there is a need for empirical studies to measure the citizen engagement level of local politicians during the non-election period and to analyse its determinants beyond the purpose of using social media.

In this context, this study aims to analyse the relationship between factors, that are personal traits of mayors (age, gender, education), characteristics of municipalities (region and status), and political context (terms of mayor, and mayors' political party), and the level of citizen engagement of the mayors on Twitter in Turkey. This study is organised into five sections. The second section presents the literature review of relationship citizen engagement and social media. Also, literature about the determinants of citizen engagement is reviewed in this section. The third section reveals the methodology of the study, including data collection, measuring the engagement level and statistical methods. The fourth section presents the findings of the study. The study concludes with the discussion of the results.

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