


Chapter 12

Entertainment and Persuasion in Online Politics: A Qualitative Study of Young Voters' Approach in Turkey's 2023 Elections

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of entertainment elements on political persuasion among young Turkish voters during the 2023 General Elections. Conducting 31 semi-structured interviews with demographically diverse participants aged 18-30 from various locales, it elucidates the nuanced interplay of cultural factors in shaping political attitudes. While participants exhibit a propensity for incorporating entertainment into political discourse, discernible reservations exist regarding the potential propagation of misinformation and the oversimplification of complex political issues. Ultimately, the findings underscore the primary function of entertainment elements in capturing attention rather than effecting substantive shifts in political decision-making processes.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of entertaining content on social media platforms has transformed political communication, making it a new and innovative tool for political figures to engage with the electorate. The term 'entertaining content' encompasses the deliberate incorporation of popular culture, entertainment modalities, and media dynamics by politicians to enhance their public image and persuade the voting

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population. It has been observed that there is an increasing trend towards the blurring of the boundaries between political action and entertainment, leading to the emergence of “politainment”. Otherwise, the combination of “politics” and “entertainment,” refers to the transformation of political discourse into a form of political communication. This phenomenon has been the subject of numerous studies in recent years, with researchers examining its impact on political communication (Klinger, Kreiss, & Mutsvauro, 2023; Zamora-Medina, 2023; Salazar, 2023; Cervi, Tejedor, & Blesa, 2023; Gonzalo, Medina, & Rebolledo de la Calle, 2021; Bosshart & Hellmüller, 2009).

Karpp and colleagues (2016) highlight the strategic use of celebrity in the 2012 presidential election, illustrating how political figures leverage popular culture to enhance their appeal and reach a wider audience. This trend is further explored by Berrocal-Gonzalo and Capdevila (2022), who delve into the role of popular culture in shaping political narratives, suggesting that entertainment mediums are not just platforms for political messages but active players in the political discourse. Politicians, facing more media exposure, are starting to act like celebrities, turning politics into a kind of show and blending political talk with entertainment. This trend of mixing politics with entertainment is changing how politicians communicate and interact, ushering in a new wave of 'pop politics' (Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2019) and politainment (Berrocal et al., 2021).

The present study, conducted during the campaign period of Turkey's 2023 General Elections, utilizes a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews with young voters to examine the incorporation of entertainment aspects into political communication. Specifically, it examines the ways in which these elements are perceived by voters, with a focus on the strategic use of dance videos, social media challenges, storytelling, humor, edits, captions, and memes. Through focused interviews with young voters, the study sheds light on the employment of these entertainment elements to shape political messages, attitudes, and values. This research aims to fill a notable gap in the literature by examining the perceptions and interactions of young Turkish voters with entertainment elements in political communication during the 2023 General Elections. Although the body of research exploring the evolution of political discourse and politician-voter communication on social media is expanding, there is a limited qualitative study in the domain. This is particularly evident in research centered on the incorporation of entertainment elements in social media strategies during election campaigns. Considering Turkey's demographic profile, with one of the youngest populations in Europe, this study is positioned to offer a critical perspective in political communication discussion. The aim is to provide a detailed analysis of the Turkish election campaign data, ultimately revealing the distinctive ways in which young voters in Turkey interact with and respond to entertainment-based political content. Based on the literature review, three hypotheses have been established within this scope:

H1: The strategic integration of entertainment elements into political campaigns has been effective in influencing the political participation and voting behavior of young voters in Turkey's 2023 General Elections.

H2: Social media communication is creating forms of political persuasion independent of the socio-political context.

H3: The incorporation of entertainment elements in political messages establishes a strategy of political persuasion that overcomes the resistance of young voters with opposing views.

This research aims to explore the relationship between online entertainment and political persuasion, with a focus on the perspectives and behaviors of young voters in Turkey. The first hypothesis emphasizes the impact of integrating entertainment elements into political campaigns on the engagement and voting behavior of young voters in Turkey. It suggests that merging entertainment with political communication

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