

Selective Exposure to Online News:
A Qualitative Study of Young Internet Users in Istanbul

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Declaration of Originality

The intellectual content of this thesis, which has been written by me and for which I take full responsibility, is my own, original work, and it has not been previously or concurrently submitted elsewhere for any other examination or degree of higher education. The sources of all paraphrased and quoted materials, concepts, and ideas are fully cited, and the admissible contributions and assistance of others with respect to the conception of the work as well as to linguistic expression are explicitly acknowledged herein.

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Abstract

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Increased autonomy of individuals to select content in online media has raised serious scholar concerns. It is argued that individuals now could abandon political news for more entertainment exposure; or they could avoid content countering their ideas, and tend to view more of like-minded messages. While a majority of studies testing such hypothesis have been conducted on American society, the literature on Turkey lacks studies that reveal audiences' motivations in media use, particularly their responses to high polarization.

This study focuses on urban and young (18-30 aged Internet users' perception of media and news and their media use habits. The research is based on sixteen semi-structured interviews conducted with young Internet users in Istanbul. The sample included both pro-governmental (Justice and Development Party or Nationalist Movement Party voters and oppositional participants (Republican People's Party, Good Party or Peoples' Democratic Party supporters as well as a generational stratification along Z Generation (18 -24 aged and Y Generation members (25 -30 aged. The findings are analyzed in the light of both socio-psychological theories on information exposure and more contemporary debates on polarization, post-truth and generational trends in media use. This research demonstrates that instead of living in echo chambers where they increasingly interact with only like-minded messages, individuals can also grow an awareness towards polarization and partisanship in media, and mechanisms to cope with disinformation.

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Özet

İnternette Haberlerden Seçimli Etkilenme:

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Yeni medyanın sağladığı imkanlara bağlı olarak bireylerin içerik seçebilme özgürlüğünün artması akademik anlamda önemli kaygılara yol açmıştır. Bu bağlamda medya kullanıcılarının siyasi haberleri takip etmeyi bırakarak daha fazla eğlence unsuruna yönelebileceği ya da farklı siyasi görüşlerden fikirlerle etkileşimden uzak durarak daha fazla benzer görüşte kişi ve mesajla etkileşime girebileceği öne sürülmüştür. Bu hipotezleri test eden çalışmaların büyük çoğunluğu Amerikan toplumu üzerine incelemeler yapmış, Türkiye'deki literatür ise medya kullanıcılarının motivasyonlarını ve özellikle kutuplaşma ortamında nasıl hareket ettiğini açıklamakta yetersiz kalmıştır.

Bu tez çalışması, genç İnternet kullanıcılarının (18-30 yaş medya ve haber algısını ve medya kullanım alışkanlıklarını incelemiştir. Araştırma, İstanbul'da yaşayan genç İnternet kullanıcıları ile yapılan on altı yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeye dayanmaktadır. Örneklem, Cumhur İttifakı (AKP veya MHP seçmenleri ve muhalefet partilerine (CHP, İYİP veya HDP oy veren görüşmecilerin yanısıra, Z Jenerasyonu (18-24 yaş ve Y Jenerasyonu (25-30 yaş üyesi katılımcılardan oluşmaktadır. Bulgular, hem bilgiyle etkileşimi inceleyen sosyal psikoloji teorileri hem de daha güncel olan polarizasyon, gerçek ötesi ve medya kullanımında jenerasyonel eğilimler tartışmaları ışığında analiz edilmiştir. Çalışma sonuçlarına göre sadece benzer görüşte kişilerle etkileşimin olduğu yankı odalarında yaşamak yerine, bireyler medyada polarizasyon ve partizan tutumlara karşı bir farkındalık geliştirerek, dezenformasyonla başa çıkma yöntemleri de geliştirebilmektedir.

44.000 kelime

for my little brother Kayra...

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BTK	Information and Communication Technologies Board
GP	Good Party
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
JDP	Justice and Development Party
NMP	Nationalist Movement Party
PDP	Peoples' Democratic Party
RPP	Republican People's Party
TIB	Presidency of Telecommunications and Communication

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Introduction

The Internet -along with other information and communication technologies (ICTs - has transformed the way human affairs are conducted. From global financial markets and diplomatic relations to daily conversations with one's acquaintances, the Internet is now an integral component of different spheres of human practices. According to the latest statistics, number of Internet users has risen to roughly around 4.3 billion as of March 2019, equaling to a rate of 56.3 percent Internet penetration throughout the world.¹ However, access to and usage of the Internet varies with each social, cultural, economic and political setting considered. This makes the interplay between the Internet and the social reality a complex phenomenon. Therefore, it requires a social scientific perspective to grasp the functions of contemporary technologies and the way they transform the social reality and are transformed by it.

One of the areas transformed by the new ICTs have been the news media and agencies. Since the mid-1990s, several news agencies throughout the world, initially in the USA, have founded their online websites operating on the Internet. Added by the emergence of blogs, independent news agencies, and finally the incorporation of news into social media platforms, the news media are no longer the twentieth century's mass media, which composed of newspapers, radio, and finally television. This transformation attracted the

1 Internet World Stats 2019. Accessed at <https://www.internetworldstats.com/>

scholarly attention and many studies have been conducted to understand the changing dynamics of news production and consumption patterns and their wider social consequences.

Several dimensions of online news media were brought into question. On the production side, scholars scrutinized how the editorial work changed due to online news production process;² how the profession and identity of journalists were affected, particularly by the user-generated content;³ how technological innovations shaped and was applied in online journalism practices;⁴ and the breakdown of traditional producer-audience separation with the incorporation of user generated content into news.⁵

On the use of online news, studies attempted to reveal the patterns of news consumption as well as its effects on the audiences and wider socio-political system. Among these topics, increased content selection options for audiences and its implications for news consumption habits have been a central object of study. In an abundance of information supply, Internet provided the opportunity for greater autonomy of content selection. Consequently, scholars warned that audiences could increasingly turn to content that are of interest to them, to the extent of excluding certain issues all together, including the

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- 2 J. B. Singer, "Stepping back from the Gate: Online Newspaper Editors and the Co-production of Content in Campaign 2004" *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 83, no.2 (2006: 265–80; M. Deuze, "What is Multimedia Journalism?" *Journalism Studies* 5, no.2 (2004: 139–52.
 - 3 P. J. Boczkowski, *Digitizing the News: Innovation in Online Newspapers* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004; S. Allan, *Online News* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006; G. G., Kopper, A. et al., "Research Review: Online Journalism: A Report on Current and Continuing Research and Major Questions in the International Discussion," *Journalism Studies* 1, no.3 (2000: 499–512.
 - 4 M. Deuze, *Media Work* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007; P. Boczkowski, and M. de Santos, "When More Media Equals Less News: Patterns of Content Homogenization in Argentina's Leading Print and Online Newspapers." *Political Communication* 24, no.2 (2007:167 -180; T. Haas, "From 'Public Journalism' to the 'Public's Journalism': Rhetoric and Reality in the Discourse on Weblogs," *Journalism Studies* 6, no.3 (2005: 387–96.
 - 5 Y. Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006; J. Pavlik, "The Impact of Technology on Journalism," *Journalism Studies* 1, no.2 (2000: 229–37.

whole category of news.⁶ In 1995, when Internet technologies were still in its infancy, Negroponte envisioned such a personalized news package that is unique to each individual, which he termed “The Daily Me.”⁷

Studies on the production dimension of new media contributed to these concerns as well. As media development theories demonstrated, content providers have increasingly turned to segmented content production for audiences, which served to smaller audiences with specific content interests rather than heterogeneous national audience.⁸ Therefore, segmented content by media could as well contribute to the emergence of personalized news consumption. Bennett and Iyengar termed this double sided process of diversified information supply and choice options as “stratamentation” which combines “stratification” of information served and “fragmentation” of audiences.⁹

Scholars underscored the possible consequences of specialization of news consumption. It is argued that audiences could be fragmented in terms of their knowledge of political information which, in turn, could lead to widening knowledge gaps and differentiated agendas in the public.¹⁰ Furthermore, studies warned about polarization of audience as a possible consequence which occurs when individuals increasingly consume like-minded media content and avoid counter-ideological content. As a consequence, news audiences could be polarized along their political dispositions, which could harm the

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- 6 David Tewksbury and Jason Rittenberg. “Online News Creation and Consumption: Implications for Modern Democracies,” In *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics*, ed. Andrew Chadwick, 186-200. New York: Routledge, 2009; Markus. Prior, *Post-broadcast democracy: How media choice increases inequality in political involvement and polarizes elections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- 7 Nicholas P. Negroponte, *Being Digital* (New York: Alfred A Knopf Inc. 1995:153).
- 8 John Calhoun Merrill and Ralph Lynn Lowenstein. *Media, messages, and men: New perspectives in communication* (New York: Longman, 1979: 187).
- 9 W. L., Bennett and S. Iyengar, “A New Era of Minimal Effects? The Changing Foundations of Political Communication,” *Journal of Communication* 58, no.4 (2008: 717).
- 10 David Tewksbury and Jason Rittenberg. *News on the Internet: Information and Citizenship in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012; Steven H Chaffee and Miriam J. Metzger. “The End of Mass Communication?” *Mass Communication & Society* 4, no.4 (2001: 365-379).

formation of public consent and functioning of democracy.¹¹ Sunstein pointed out that in the age of Internet, democracies face the dangers of “echo chambers” where people only hear the voice of like-minded individuals as an act of reaffirmation of self.¹²

Beyond normative debates, empirical studies testing the fragmentation phenomena found conflicting results, making the concerns in need of further investigation. Conflicting data created a debate in the field. On the one side, scholars collected evidence for the fragmentation of audiences, showing that proliferation of content options would create greater differentiation between sub-groups of audiences based on their preferred news topics.¹³ On the other side, evidence showed that new media did not change the agenda formation of the news consumers compared to broadcast or print media.¹⁴ Some scholars claimed that instead of fragmentation, audiences were in fact homogenized under the influence of new media.¹⁵

On the other hand, several studies pictured a more optimistic account of Internet and the new media, emphasizing its democratizing features. Scholars emphasized the liberating characteristics of the Internet and greater information it provides. It is argued that online news brought about a “a democratization of the creation, dissemination, and consumption of news and information.”¹⁶ While user-generated content and interactive features of online

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- 11 C. R. Sunstein, *Republic.com* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); R. MacDougall, “Identity, Electronic Ethos and Blogs: A Technologic Analysis of Symbolic Exchange on the New News Medium,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 49, no.4 (2005): 575-599; J. G. Webster and P. Phalen. *The mass audience: Rediscovering the dominant model* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997).
- 12 Cass R. Sunstein, *Republic.com 2.0* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007): xii.
- 13 D. Mutz, “How the Mass Media Divide Us,” In *Red and Blue Nation?* eds. D. W. Brady and P. S. Nivola, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2006): 223-248.
- 14 Renita Coleman and Maxwell McCombs. “The young and agenda-less? Exploring age-related differences in agenda setting on the youngest generation, baby boomers, and the civic generation,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 84, no.3 (2007): 495-508; M. Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
- 15 J. K. Lee, “The effect of the Internet on Homogeneity of the Media Agenda: A Test of the Fragmentation Thesis,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 84, no.4 (2007): 745-760.
- 16 Tewksbury and Rittenberg, “Online News Creation,” 197.

media increased consumer's control over content production, greater media choice options are said to free citizens from the monopoly of mainstream media agencies.¹⁷

Studies on the fragmentation and polarization of news audiences required to analyze a large sample of audience population as these concepts referred to changes in audience composition at societal level. Consequently, these studies mostly preferred national survey methods and simply looked at individuals' news preferences in terms of news versus entertainment or topic selection. Therefore, it does not provide insight about individual media choices, and more importantly, the motivations that guide them.

An alternative branch of research filled this gap in the literature. Inspired by the changing dynamics of media and its possible social consequences, a vast number of empirical research was conducted to shed light on the exposure to information in online media. Due to changing media environment with the 1990s, there has been a resurgence in the field of political communication that aimed to reframe the theoretical and methodological tools advanced in the field earlier.¹⁸ Historically informed by Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory,¹⁹ extensive research in political communication has investigated individuals' selectivity toward like-minded and discrepant messages. In line with what Festinger proposed, these studies tested whether individuals prefer congenial messages while avoiding the uncongenial. With an attempt to reveal the motivations and preferences leading to selective exposure, this research area also contributed to debates about fragmentation and polarization of audiences mentioned above.

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- 17 A. Corrado, "Elections in cyberspace: prospects and problems," in *Elections in Cyberspace: Toward a New Era in American Politics*. eds. A. Corrado and C. M. Firestone (Washington, DC: Aspen Institute, 1996; J. Havick, "The impact of the internet on a television-based society," *Technology in Society* 22, no.2 (2000: 273–87.
- 18 W., Donsbach and C. Mothes, "the dissonant self: Contributions from dissonance theory to a new agenda for studying political communication," In *Communication yearbook* 36 ed. C. T. Salmon, (3–44. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012; , W. R Neuman, "Political communications infrastructure," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 546, (1996: 9–21.
- 19 L. Festinger, *A Theory of cognitive dissonance* (Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson & Company, 1957.

Survey and experimental studies showed that individuals' political beliefs influence their media use patterns and lead to partisan selective exposure.²⁰ However, conflicting findings also showed that selective exposure does not occur to the extent of avoiding counter-attitudinal content.²¹ In fact, social media can operate as a network of diverse contacts which creates the possibility of exposure to uncongenial information.²² Conflicting evidence shows that further investigation is necessary to truly grasp the phenomenon of political selectivity. Literature is also divided in terms of motivations of selective exposure. While Festinger's dissonance theory inspired the bulk of studies, it is also claimed that informational utility model is better to grasp individuals' news consumption motivations and the resulting selectivity.²³ For instance, Knobloch and others' study proved that importance attached to certain issues and the consequently perceived informational value influence exposure patterns.²⁴

Since the field mostly developed in the USA, majority of studies were conducted on the American society. Taking different social contexts and media systems into account, one cannot generalize the findings for other societies. Turkey, as a country where media polarization is at a high level,²⁵ holds a potential of breeding politically motivated selective exposure. In Turkey, studies

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- 20 N. J. Stroud, "Media use and political predispositions: Revisiting the concept of selective exposure." *Political Behavior* 30, (2008: 341–366; S., Knobloch-Westerwick and J. Meng, "Reinforcement of the political self through selective exposure to political messages," *Journal of Communication* 61, no.2 (2011: 349–368.
- 21 R. Kelly Garrett, "Echo chambers online?: Politically motivated selective exposure among Internet news users," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14, no.2 (2009: 265–285.
- 22 S. Messing and S. J Westwood, "Selective exposure in the age of social media: Endorsements trump partisan source affiliation when selecting news online," *Communication research* 41, no.8 (2014: 1042-1063.
- 23 S. Knobloch-Westerwick and S. B. Kleinman., "Preelection selective exposure: Confirmation bias versus informational utility." *Communication Research* 39, no.2 (2012: 170–193.
- 24 Silvia Knobloch, Francesca Dillman Carpentier and Dolf Zillmann. "Effects of Salience Dimensions of Informational Utility on Selective Exposure to Online News." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (March 2003: 91–108.
- 25 U. C. Panayırıcı, E. İşeri, and E. Şekercioğlu, "Political agency of news outlets in a polarized media system: Framing the corruption probe in Turkey," *European Journal of Communication*, 31, no.5 (2016: 551-567.

of online news media have mostly focused on the production dimension of news. Research attempted to reveal consequent changes in the journalistic practices and media system at a macro level.²⁶ However, almost no study dealt with selective exposure to information in Turkey. Several reports by institutions and projects provide media use patterns,²⁷ however, they do not offer insight about which factors shape such patterns.

To fill the gaps mentioned so far, this thesis deals with selective exposure to information in the online media. It should be noted that although research mostly focused on the politically motivated selective exposure and partisanship, selective exposure encompasses several other dimensions. Stroud presented four different types of selective exposure as the following: preferring a certain medium (e.g., television or the Internet; choice between news or entertainment media; selection of different news topics; and finally political motivated selection exposure to information content.²⁸ This thesis will take into account all four types of selective exposure. The main motive behind utilizing this frame is that political selectivity is only relevant for those exposed to political news while many individuals may completely opt out of current affairs and turn to entertainment media. Therefore, all four types of selective exposure will be included to uncover different user profiles. To check all four types of selective exposure, specific information about medium and topic selection, as well as channel or website preferences will be gathered.

Due to concerns about greater consumer autonomy and consequent potential selectivity on the Internet, news consumption in online media will be

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- 26 B. Kalsın, "Geçmişten geleceğe internet gazeteciliği: Türkiye örneği," *International Journal of Social Science* 42, (2016:75 -94; Serhat Kaymas, "When the Journalist Meets New Media: Some Reflections on the Interactions Between Journalist and New Media Driven Journalism in Turkey," *Journal of Media Research* 10, no.3 (2017:26 -47; T. Ö Kutlu and O. Bekiroğlu, "Türkiye'de Yurttaş Gazeteciliği Bağlamında İnternet Haberciliği: Bianet Örneğinde Kentsel Dönüşüm Projesiyle İlgili Haberlerin Analizi," *Selçuk üniversitesi iletişim fakültesi akademik dergisi* 6, no.2 (2010: 254-269.
- 27 Servet Yanatma, "Digital News Report 2018 Turkey Supplementary Report" (Reuters Institute, 2018.
- 28 Natalie Jomini Stroud, "Selective Exposure Theories," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication*, eds. Kate Kenski and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 538.

the central focus of this study. Additionally, data about use of other mediums (television, radio and newspapers) will be retrieved. The aim is to have a complete map of an individual's news sources. More importantly, the purpose will not only be to gather data about medium, topic and website selection but also the motivations that guide these selections. Turkey's currently polarized media environment presents itself as an important case to study selectivity in news exposure. Therefore, interviewees' perception of and attitude towards media and news must be investigated to grasp their media use. Theoretically, cognitive dissonance theory and informational utility model will be utilized and tested to explain motivational factors shaping selectivity patterns in media choices. Furthermore, recent debates about polarization and partisanship media as well as generational media use will be visited.

Therefore, the research question of this study can be framed twofold: "How do young Internet users in Istanbul get exposed to news in the online media?" which aims to reveal selectivity patterns and "which factors influence their exposure to news in the online media?"

The study is based on semi structured in-depth interviews conducted with sixteen young Internet users living in Istanbul. While application of qualitative methods is rare in the literature and would definitely fill a gap, in-depth interviews render it possible to completely focus on an individual's landscape of news sources and his/her personal understanding of and motivations for news consumption. The paper adopts a comparative perspective in analyzing media use. The Interviewees include both pro-governmental and oppositional individuals in political spectrum. In terms of generational differences, the interviewees will be recruited from both Y Generation (aged 25-30) and Z Generation members (18-25). Although the paper deals specifically with young aged urban individuals in Istanbul, generational perspective will provide insight about media use differences within youth category. In an age of swift technological change and perpetual adaptations by society, it is possible that youth is also differentiated within itself in terms of media use.

Findings of this thesis demonstrate that young Internet users in Istanbul do not manifest a strong polarized and partisan attitude when using media. Both pro-governmental and oppositional interviews criticize the news media, depicting it as "partisan, manipulative and biased." They do not direct

their criticism only towards counter-ideological media organs but also to the ones with similar political dispositions with themselves. However, they diverge in their explanations for causes of polarization and partisanship. While pro-governmental interviewees mostly mention systematic problems about society and the state, oppositional interviewees frequently criticize government as the main cause of polarization and partisanship. Due to their experience with partisanship, disinformation and propaganda, interviewees expressed a deep distrust towards all media brands. This cynicism has both negative and positive consequences. On the one hand, the interviewees attempt to cope with disinformation and manipulation in the media, trying to diversify their sources to view different arguments and information from various outlets. There, selectivity and diversification goes hand in hand in their media use. On the other hand, their distrust leads to a disillusionment with politics, and discourage interest in political news. Particularly Z Generation members reported that they were not interested in politics, but mostly in touch with important current events via incidental exposure in social media. All these points show that instead of taking advantage of new media technologies to select more of similar-minded media content, individuals can build an awareness about polarization and partisanship and mechanism to deal with its deteriorating effects on information quality.

To this end, second chapter will provide a theoretical background. It will first introduce the concept of selective exposure and its components. The evolution of the concept through communication studies will be explained as well. Further in separate parts, the chapter will deal with two dominantly used theories in the selective exposure studies, which are cognitive dissonance theory and information utility model. Main assumptions of these theories along with later studies that brought new considerations will be introduced. A summary of empirical findings regarding selective exposure to information in online news media will also be provided. In line with the four different dimensions of selective exposure introduced above, each sub-section will look at empirical evidence collected up to present in four dimension of selectivity. As the chapter will demonstrate, research on selective exposure to information on the Internet requires further investigation. Furthermore, second chapter will present normative concerns and empirical findings regarding polarization and its

relation to media environment. Such a contemporary debate helps us comprehend the operation of polarized media environment and its impact on the audiences. Finally, the literature of generation theory and media generations will be visited with a particular focus on Y and Z Generations.

Before presenting the empirical findings of this thesis study, online media landscape in Turkey must be framed. Therefore, the fourth chapter will consist of a short summary of historical development and current state of news media in Turkey, especially the contemporary polarization in Turkey under JDP rule. Along with that, the second part will present the data from reports and academic studies that inform about the news consumption preferences of individuals.

In the fifth chapter, findings of the in-depth interviews conducted for this thesis will be presented. Interviewees' media choice and motivations for these choices will be analyzed separately with evidences from their self-report. First part will present interviewees' perception of news and media in Turkey, to reveal their dispositions and attitude towards news media. Second part will demonstrate interviewees' media choices in line with four above mentioned dimensions of selectivity. Finally, the sixth chapter will conclude with the main points of each section and general findings of this thesis.

§ 1.1 Methodological Concerns

The findings of this thesis are built upon semi-structured interviews conducted with sixteen young Internet users, aged 18-30, either receiving or graduated from university education and living in Istanbul. The reason why young people are selected as sample is that earlier survey studies showed that online news consumption is mostly adopted by younger generation of Turkey. Reuters Institute's study in 2018 estimated that 48 percent of 18-24 aged individuals and 42 percent of 25-34 aged individuals used Internet (including social media as their main source of news.²⁹ Istanbul is decided to be the geographical location of the study because the city represents a miniature of Turkey in

29 Yanatma, "Digital News," 14.

terms of its immense population as well as socioeconomic, ethnic and religious diversity. Since all the participants live in Istanbul and with high education, the findings are representative for high educated urban sample.

While study focuses on the young individuals in Istanbul, it also aims at elucidating differences within the youth population in terms of media practices. To this end, the study adopts a generational perspective. The interviewees' age group includes members of both Y Generation (aged 25-30, and Z Generation (aged 18-24 which enables it to analyze each generation in a comparative perspective. These two generations represent the latest two age cohorts that were born into years that Internet reached its peak.

Studying selective exposure to online news requires taking political orientations into account as it is a practice affected by political leanings. Creating control groups on political views makes it possible to scrutinize the differences in media use practices of different political groups. Stratification of the sample along political viewpoints also provides the opportunity to see how polarization in Turkey comes into play in individual's media use habits. In other words, it becomes possible to see to what extent interviewees manifest a polarized audience both in their ideas and in their media practices. To build such a perspective, a total of sixteen interviewees were composed to include eight pro-government and eight oppositional individuals. These groups were determined according to the recent voting bloc emerged in the country which included Justice and Development Party (JDP and Nationalist Movement Party (NMP as one side; and Republican People's Party (RPP and Good Party (GP as the leading parties of oppositional front. Furthermore, Turkey's media platforms, to a considerable extent, are divided along a similar line as a high number of media agencies and outlets adopting either a pro-governmental or oppositional perspective in their news production. In order to determine political party support of the participants, each interviewee was asked for which party he or she would vote for if an election was to be held the day after. In this way, an instant and up-to-date snapshot of participants' party support was retrieved. The sample population includes seven JDP supporters, one NMP supporter as pro-government interviewee group; and six RPP supporters, one GP supporter and one People's Democratic Party supporter as the oppositional interviewee group. Both pro-government and oppositional

groups also composes of an equal number of male and female interviewees to provide a perspective on the gender differences as well.

The interviewees were recruited through snowball sampling. Volunteer participants were asked to provide information and communication with other possible volunteers. A stratified sampling method was applied in this study. The interview dates and locations were decided by the interviewees and each interview lasted around forty minutes on average. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. For confidentiality, the names of interviewees are omitted.

Though not many in numbers, several studies conducted large scale quantitative methods and provided a general assessment of online news reading behavior in Turkey. However, no studies of Turkish society applied qualitative methods revealing subjective motivations and practices of news readers. Therefore, this study aims for going beyond simply media choices to answer the questions such as “with which motivations and in which subjective ways do individuals consume news?” and “how these practices acquire meaning within individuals’ wider agency and opinions shaping their social world?”. To this end, a semi-structured interview was planned, compromising of certain fixed questions about individuals’ ideas regarding media and news, and news consumption patterns, along with undetermined questions asked according to flow of interview process and the interviewee’s profile. Such a planning of interview structure renders it possible to go beyond media choices to reveal motivations and perceptions of media and news as well as providing more room for revealing the subjectivity of each interviewee.

Theoretical Background: Selective Exposure

Selectivity can be observed in and shapes almost every part of human daily life and future projections. Individuals select what to eat, what to wear, which profession they will specialize in, which school their children will attend to etc. Either through media or in face-to-face context, receiving and processing of new information through physical sensors is as well governed by such phenomenon. Zillmann and Bryant provides an excellent account of how selectivity comes into play in exposure to information as what follows:

... The 'physical' reception of information by no means guarantees that the information is of any behavioral consequence. The organism focuses its perceptual efforts in unique ways, and it tends to utilize its limited capacity for processing received information in particular ways also. Focusing attention implies, of course, that not all available information can be given equal attention and that some information might not receive any attention. Focusing, then, implies selection. And as not all perceived information can be processed (i.e., behaviorally utilized or stored for later retrieval and behavioral utilization, processing also entails selection. But whereas sensory selection is fixed with the build of the organism, perceptual focus and selective processing are behav-

ioral processes that are characterized by considerable plasticity. Although many of these selective processes are automatic and mechanical, many others are under volitional control and deliberate.¹

As the last sentences of above quotation denote, focusing and processing of information act as a personal filtering mechanism which considerably shapes the exposure to and effects of information. Taking a certain level of selectivity for granted as a natural process, the key question is not about the existence of selective exposure but about the extent to and patterns in which it occurs. As Zillmann and Bryant underscores in the above quotation, the patterns of selective exposure are influenced by instantaneous or calculated choices which reflect the motivations and preferences governing the selectivity.

In this regard, understanding these motivations became a key point in the academic research. Various theories offered insight about the phenomenon while two of them dominated the field: cognitive dissonance theory and model of informational utility. Whereas cognitive dissonance informed the majority of early research on selective exposure, especially on politically motivated selective exposure, informational utility emerged as a response to the drawbacks of the earlier studies. Through contribution of each theory and empirical findings, the concept of selective exposure has gained new meaning and scope since the 1940s. This chapter will first introduce the concept and its evolution. Then, it will present the basic assumptions of two main theories that guided the research on selective exposure and further contributions brought to them.

§ 2.1 The Concept of Selective Exposure

Selectivity in exposure to media messages was first recognized by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues in their study of citizens' exposure to campaign messages during US elections in 1940s.² Observing that US citizens favored and picked

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- 1 Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant eds. *Selective Exposure to Communication* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1985, 1.
 - 2 P. F., Lazarsfeld, B., Berelson and H. Gaudet, *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign*. (2nd Ed.. (New York, NY: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1948

information about the party they support, Lazarsfeld and his colleagues stated that:

The fact that people select their exposure along the line of their political predispositions is only a special case for a more general law which pervades the whole field of communication research. Exposure is always selective; in other words, a positive relationship exists between people's opinions and what they choose to listen or read.³

The conceptualization and the findings of Lazarsfeld and others overlapped with politically motivated selective exposure which is framed as reinforcement-seeking or *confirmation bias*⁴ or *congeniality bias*⁵ in the literature. However, they also provided a more general understanding of selective exposure as "... any bias of exposure to available communication content."⁶ Such an understanding encompasses more than political motivations to include personal motivations, topic importance and perceptions etc., which is as well adopted by this thesis study. In the years following Lazarsfeld et al.'s study, the scholarly research treated selective exposure mainly in a framework of politically supportive and unsupportive information exposure and tested the assumptions through their empirical findings.

Against the background of diverse understandings of selective exposure, it is a difficult task to define the concept. In order to encapsulate all the approaches, Sears and Freedman's definition of "any systematic bias in audience composition"⁷ can be combined with what Knobloch-Westerwick provided as

3 Ibid., 164.

4 E., Jonas, et al, "Confirmation bias in sequential information search after preliminary decisions: An expansion of dissonance theoretical research on selective exposure to information," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80, (2001:557.

5 Hart et al. "Feeling validated versus being correct: A meta-analysis of selective exposure to information," *Psychological Bulletin* 135, (2009: 556.

6 Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick, *Choice and preference in media use: Advances in selective exposure theory and research* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014,5. (emphasis in original

7 D. O., Sears and J. L. Freedman. "Selective exposure to information: A critical review," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 31, (1967: 195.

“... any systematic bias in selected messages that diverges from the composition of accessible messages.”⁸ These two definitions encompass different aspects of selective exposure. In Sears and Freedman’s definition, selective exposure occurs when a group of audience possibly with similar characteristics tend to be exposed to same content. In other words, selective exposure regarding audience composition exists when a content is consumed by similar group of individuals. For instance, a considerable level of interest and exposure of women to a magazine channel can be seen as selective exposure in audience composition. However, Knobloch-Westerwick’s definition denote that selectivity can also be observed when same content is constantly consumed at the expense of others. This results in a pattern of media choice, the nature and dynamics of which becomes the object of social scientific study.

As mentioned above, the early studies on selective exposure focused on the political confirmation bias. Festinger’s Theory of Cognitive Dissonance⁹ has guided the majority of this line of research as a normative ground. In general, Festinger proposed that individuals experience discomfort when they come across messages and commit actions that conflict with their previously held beliefs. Therefore, they tend to be open to messages and actions that are compatible with their attitudes while ignoring or avoiding those incompatible.¹⁰ Deriving from these assumptions, empirical studies assumed that people would prefer like-minded content in media and avoid counter-attitudinal messages, and tested this proposition. In media effects research, Festinger’s propositions have been a major explanation for limited media effects on consumers.¹¹

In this sense, early studies on selective exposure tested confirmation bias to messages, rather than a broader understanding of selectivity that this thesis aims for. However, early research could not locate strong evidence for cognitive dissonance and confirmation bias. Sears and Freedman stated that this problem arose from a mistaken usage of the concept of selective exposure.

8 Knobloch-Westerwick, *Choice and Preference*, 6.

9 Festinger, *Cognitive Dissonance*, 3.

10 The details of Cognitive Dissonance Theory will be presented in the following heading.

11 J. T. Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication*. (Glenco, IL: The Free Press, 1960.

While literature during 1960s expressed descriptive statements regarding a bias towards congenial messages, it fell short of explaining why and with which causes selective exposure occurred.¹²

Due to weak evidence in empirical studies, selective exposure research declined during 1970s and 1980s. However, new literature reviews in 1980s found strong evidences for confirmation bias and gave synergy to selective exposure research.¹³ Frey pointed out methodological drawbacks of experimental studies conducted until 1970s and underscored the role of certain moderators that operate the dissonance theory. Frey explained such moderators as: “the effects of choice and commitment on selective information seeking, selectivity and refutability of arguments, the amount of available information and its usefulness, the usefulness of decision reversibility, as well as the intensity of dissonance.”¹⁴

Apart from research on dissonance theory and confirmation bias, Atkin’s work in 1973 started a new line of theorization for selective exposure. In general, Atkin put forth the role of information value and utility in message selection consideration, the function of which is to guide individuals to better react and adapt to their environment by compensating their knowledge deficit.¹⁵ As will be demonstrated in the following, Atkin’s theorization received contributions by later research and tested in online news media.

The advent of Internet and online news media created new concerns about selective exposure. Abundance of information and increased selection options on the Internet led to propositions that news audiences may become more and more fragmented and polarized as they have the opportunity to avoid uninteresting content and unsupportive arguments.¹⁶ Sunstein, who extensively

12 Sears and Freedman, “Selective Exposure to Information,” 195.

13 D. Frey, “Recent research on selective exposure to information,” In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 19 ed. L. Berkowitz, 41–80, (New York: Academic Press, 1986; J. L. Cotton, “Cognitive Dissonance in Selective Exposure,” In *Selective Exposure to Communication* eds. D. Zillmann and J. Bryant, 11–33, (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1985

14 Frey, “Recent Research on Selective Exposure,” 43.

15 C. Atkin, “Instrumental Utilities and Information Seeking,” In *New Models For Mass Communication Research* (Vol. 2. ed. P. Clarke, 205–242, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1973.

16 Bruce Allen Bimber and Richard Davis. *Campaigning online: The Internet in US elections*. (Oxford University Press on Demand, 2003.

wrote about the possible consequences of selectivity and filtering on the Internet argued that:

With a dramatic increase in options, and a greater power to customize, comes a corresponding increase in the range of actual choices, and those choices are likely, in many cases, to match demographic characteristics, preexisting political convictions, or both ... If diverse groups are seeing and hearing quite different points of view, or focusing on quite different topics, mutual understanding might be difficult, and it might be increasingly hard for people to solve problems that society faces together.¹⁷

However, research also questioned the idea that Internet would lead to less contact with different perspectives. Different studies showed that Internet can also yield exposure to difference.¹⁸ Therefore, the hypothesis that online media and consequent increased selection ability leads to more confirmation bias in media choices must be further tested. Beyond confirmation bias, studies of selective exposure to news on the Internet included topic selection,¹⁹ a preference for news or entertainment,²⁰ and complementary or replacing role of Internet regarding traditional media.²¹ Thus, the concept of selective exposure evolved both in terms of theoretical assumptions and new dimensions brought about by the Internet.

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- 17 Cass R. Sunstein, *Republic.com 2.0* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 56.
- 18 Garrett, "Echo Chambers Online?"; P. DiMaggio and K. Sato, "Does the Internet balkanize political attention? A test of the Sunstein theory." Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the American Sociological Association. (Atlanta, GA, 2003).
- 19 Iyengar, S., et al., "Selective Exposure to Campaign Communication: The Role of Anticipated Agreement and Issue Public Membership." *Journal of Politics* 70, no.1 (2008): 186–200.
- 20 Mutz, *How the mass media*,
- 21 Mohan J. Dutta-Bergman, "Complementarity in Consumption of News Types across Traditional and New Media *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 48, no.1 (2004):41 -60.

§ 2.2 Cognitive Dissonance Theory

A theory developed by Festinger in the social psychology discipline in 1957, cognitive dissonance has guided the majority of research on politically motivated selective exposure to information. Focusing on the unpleasant feelings generated by a conflict between one's attitude and behavior, and outlining the mechanisms to deal with such discrepancy, the theory has an explanatory power for understanding why people avoid disconfirming content and select like-minded media. However as mentioned above, the phenomenon of political selectivity in media use had been addressed long before Festinger's work, by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues' study of voters' media exposure during election campaign.

Festinger starts to explain the basic assumptions of his theory by pointing out that individuals hold opinions and beliefs that shape their worldview and guide their actions. In order to refer to all the opinions, beliefs and all other "elements" that perform this function, Festinger uses the term "cognition." In his words, cognitions are constituted by:

... [T]he things a person knows about himself [or herself], about his [or her] behavior, and about his [or her] surroundings. These elements, then, are 'knowledges,' if I may coin the plural form of the word. Some of these elements represent knowledge about oneself: what one does, what one feels, what one wants or desires, what one is, and the like. Other elements of the world concern the world in which one lives: what is where, what leads to what, what things are satisfying or painful or consequential or important, etc.²²

The usage of the term "cognition" enables it to address several different psychological concepts such as attitudes, action and belief. While each of these concepts refer to different attributes, the term cognition expresses the psychological dimension of them.²³

22 Festinger, *Cognitive Dissonance*, 9.

23 Joel Cooper, *Cognitive Dissonance: Fifty Years of a Classic Theory* (London: Sage, 2007), 6.

Elements of a cognition serve to define the reality around the individual. The reality may consist of physical or psychological aspects, but, in each case, cognitions shape and give meaning to it, as individuals are in need of such cognitions to pursue their lives.²⁴ For instance, a person's positive cognition about animals may be constituted by several elements such as, the person's positive feelings aroused during interaction with animals, being a pet owner, having positive childhood experience with animals etc.

The elements of cognition that are related in content tend to be in consistency and harmony with each other.²⁵ Festinger explains this tendency towards consistency as necessitated by the reality to which cognitions are attached. "... *The reality which impinges on a person will exert pressure in the direction of bringing the appropriate cognitive elements into correspondence with that reality.*"²⁶ Continuing with the above example, a person who thinks consuming animal products is an unethical act may be expected to pursue a vegan lifestyle and advocate it, which represents a consistency between opinion and behavior.

This type of consistency, which is termed as "consonance", can be considered as ordinary. However, individuals may as well hold discrepant cognitions. For instance, a person who thinks and states that every human being is equal may discriminate between his or her Irish and Somalian neighbors based on race. As in this case, elements of a cognition may be in a conflicting relation, which Festinger terms as "dissonance". Unless resolved, such persisting discrepancies create discomfort for the individual.²⁷

Having defined the concepts of consonance and dissonance, Festinger's main hypothesis can be presented as follows: "the existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance. When dissonance is present, in addi-

24 Festinger, *Cognitive Dissonance*, 10.

25 Ibid., 1.

26 Ibid.,11. (emphasis in original

27 Ibid., 2

tion to trying to reduce it, the person will actively *avoid situations and information*, which would likely increase the dissonance.”²⁸ Festinger argues that dissonance leads to an automatic tendency to reduce it just as someone hungry feels an automatic desire to eat to suppress the feeling.²⁹ The strength of this tendency to reduce cognitive conflict will be dependent on the importance of the elements of cognition. In that, the more an individual attaches importance to a subject, the more “magnitude of dissonance” will be for him/her. In return, as the magnitude is high, individual will feel a more strong and urgent need to cope with the dissonance regarding the subject.³⁰

Festinger explained different mechanism that an individual may recourse on to cope with dissonance. First, an individual may change his or her previous attitude towards an object in a way that new attitude becomes compatible with incoming stimuli.³¹ This may be interpreted as an individual changes his or her ideas regarding a subject when he or she receives considerable counter-attitudinal message conflict with previous beliefs. As a second method to deal with dissonance, he proposes that an individual may change and control his or her environment in order to fit into his or her beliefs or attitudes. According to Festinger’s example, a person who is not sociable and hostile to other individuals may intentionally contact with similar minded people to legitimize his or her own mindset.³² Finally, individuals may recourse on “adding new cognitive elements” which complies with previous ideas and empowers a person’s perspective vis-à-vis uncongenial messages and behaviors.³³ This method can be simply explained as exposing to more supportive messages and forming more congenial ideas to strengthen one’s previous attitudes to suppress the dissonance.

Until 1980s, at least 900 psychological studies were conducted on cognitive dissonance. The main problem was that participants were first asked to report

28 Ibid., 3. (emphasis mine)

29 Ibid., 18.

30 Ibid., 16.

31 Ibid., 19.

32 Ibid., 20.

33 Ibid., 21.

an attitude towards an object and then were exposed to messages. However, daily media use in its natural setting does not involve adopting strict attitudes or expressing opinion before selective exposure. Therefore, psychological studies do not provide insight when it comes to political communication and selective exposure in daily life.³⁴

Furthermore, earlier empirical studies³⁵ showed that political reinforcement seeking is a relatively stronger determinant in message selection. At the same time, the same empirical research shows that people do not perform an ultimate selectivity. While like-minded and confirming messages were relatively preferred more, counter-attitudinal messages were as well selected and consumed although to a lesser extent. These findings conflict with what Festinger's dissonance theory and confirmation bias in general propose.³⁶

When Festinger's initial theory fell short of explaining such phenomenon, scholars searched for conditions under which people prefer supportive or un-supportive messages. In later studies, Festinger³⁷ and Lowin³⁸ argued that that individual cope with unsupportive messages not only through avoiding them but also through refuting such messages when they are more confident about their own attitudes and consider such messages low in quality. In another study, Lowin measured the determinacy of both refutable messages and message receiver's confidence in his or her attitudes and how it relates to selective exposure variance. The study showed that while refutability and quality of

34 Hart et al, "Feeling Validated," 556.

35 C. K. Atkin, J. Galloway, and O. Nayman, "Mass communication and political socialization among college students." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 37, (1973: 443-444; J. G. Blumler and D. McQuail, *Television in politics: Its uses and influence*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969; D. Butler, and Donald E. Stokes. *Political Change in Britain: Forces Shaping Electoral Choice*. (Michigan: St. Martin Press, 1971.

36 Atkin, "Instrumental Utilities," 235.

37 L. Festinger, *Conflict, Decision, and Dissonance*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964.

38 A. Lowin, "Approach and Avoidance: Alternate Modes of Selective Exposure to Information." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 6, no.1 (1967:1 -9.

message have high determinacy, actor confidence does not contain considerable effect on exposure.³⁹

Such findings revealed that cognitive dissonance was not the primary factor behind selective exposure. After a decline in the research on this subject due to poor empirical support, Frey and colleagues' works created a new line of studies that looked at the moderators of selective exposure to uncover in which conditions confirmation bias occurs.⁴⁰ For instance, Frey et al.'s series of experiments showed that when individuals are exposed to a scarce of information package, tendency for selecting confirmatory messages decreases. As they explain, limited information environment affects a person's perception of information quality and makes quality a higher priority among scarcity, therefore suppresses the confirmation bias and leads to more exposure to un-supportive messages.⁴¹

Hart and others conducted a meta-analysis of information exposure research that included 56 studies. The research revealed that information exposure exhibited only a moderate tendency for like-minded information. Data showed that information exposure was shaped by "defensive motivations" and "accuracy motivations."⁴² While defensive motivations refer to confirmation bias denoted by cognitive dissonance theory, accuracy motivations consist of concerns about the utility of information or in other words, information qual-

39 A. Lowin, "Further Evidence for an Approach-Avoidance Interpretation of Selective Exposure," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 5, no.3 (1969): 270.

40 E. Jonas, S. Schulz-Hardt, D. Frey, and N. Thelen, "Confirmation bias in sequential information search after preliminary decisions: An expansion of dissonance theoretical research on selective exposure to information." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80, (2001:557 – 571; E. Jonas, V. Graupmann, and D. Frey, "The Influence Of Mood On The Search For Supporting Versus Conflicting Information: Dissonance Reduction As A Means Of Mood Regulation?" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 32, no.1 (2006: 3–15.

41 P. Fischer, E. Jonas, D. Frey, and S. Schulz-Hardt, "Selective exposure to information: The impact of information limits," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 35, no.4 (2005: 488.

42 Hart et al. "Feeling Validated," 555.

ity. While defensive motivations accounted for the 13% of information exposure, accuracy motivations determined the 7%.⁴³ Furthermore, striking moderators of exposure emerged in this study. Low close-mindedness of information receiver, low information quality, existence of support for information receiver's established attitudes and beliefs, and high confidence in existing attitudes lowered defensive motivations, creating more chances of exposure to uncongenial messages. Additionally, accuracy motivations were active and determinant, when given information was used for completing a task, creating a utility component.⁴⁴ Hart et al. describes the oscillation between defensive and accuracy motivations as "feeling validated versus knowing the truth,"⁴⁵ conveying that confirmation of one's beliefs is not always the primary factor.

As cognitive dissonance and consequent confirmation bias fell short of explaining exposure patterns in the early empirical studies, informational utility was brought to research agenda. The next part of this chapter presents the propositions of informational utility.

§ 2.3 Model of Informational Utility

When Festinger's theory was put into question, the scholars searched for other motivations guiding selective exposure. With this purpose Atkin developed his theory of informational utility. Atkin describes information seeking as an activity that aim for utilitarian purposes which mainly consists of finding solutions to problems arise in everyday context. If the information content contains the means to respond to such problems or confirm the personal ideas, it possesses an instrumental utility for the information seeker.⁴⁶ Atkin provides a model that includes several aspects of instrumental utility. According to him "[T]his model predicts that an individual will select a mass media message

43 Ibid., 576.

44 Ibid., 555.

45 Ibid.

46 Atkin, "Instrumental Utilities," 205.

when he [or she] estimates that the message reward value exceeds the expenditures incurred in obtaining it. Instrumental utility is one major component of reward value.”⁴⁷

In Atkin’s model, “extrinsic uncertainty” plays a major role in triggering the information search. Uncertainty emerges when an individual’s current level of knowledge about an issue is perceived to be insufficient. In that sense, information can be defined as “something that the receiver does not already know.”⁴⁸ Receiving and processing information increase the level of knowledge to an ideal level sufficient enough to make a decision, evaluate the objects or perform an action, or ascertain what a person already thinks or believes.⁴⁹

In the existence of extrinsic uncertainty, the individuals turn to the questioned objects and perform adaptations by increasing knowledge level to meet psychological or behavioral needs. Atkin categorizes such adaptations into four main concepts: cognitive, affective, behavioral and defensive adaptations. Each category overlaps with different motivations and desired needs.⁵⁰

Cognitive adaptation is required when a person feels susceptible to the impact of certain phenomenon. Such adaptation is the result of a desire to possess awareness and knowledge regarding such phenomenon. Gaining surveillance information and diminishing the “awareness uncertainty” is what leads to cognitive adaptations.⁵¹ Affective adaptation is performed when a person feels “evaluative uncertainty” as to how to approach certain topics. This type of adaptation provides “guidance information” to build beliefs and attitudes towards environment.⁵² When an individual experiences “decisional uncertainty” in terms of choosing between things, this adaptation provides to facilitate the choice process. Behavioral adaptation occurs when a person is in need of “performance information” to fulfil and complete actions. In that

47 Ibid., 206.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 207.

50 Ibid., 208.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

sense, behavioral adaptation is associated with “task uncertainty”, “enactment uncertainty” and “communicatory uncertainty.”⁵³ Finally, defensive adaptation is required when an individual desires to ascertain previously held beliefs and attitudes, what is the experience of “post-cognitive uncertainty”. An individual may as well desire to assure himself or herself that he or she performs satisfactorily in an area which Atkin terms “post-performance uncertainty.” In each case, the individual experiences a doubt and is in need of “reinforcement information”⁵⁴ As it is apparent, this form of adaptation overlaps with the assumptions and propositions of cognitive dissonance theory, which denotes that an individual prefer like-minded messages and avoid uncongenial ones to cope with dissonance. However, Atkin’s informational utility brings new dimensions into media and content choices.

Atkin proposed his model as a response to earlier literature on message selection which focused on the relative consistency between message content and receiver’s previously held attitudes (inspired largely by cognitive dissonance theory. Atkin added several extrinsic uncertainties mentioned above to the process. He also incorporated the dimension of expenditure to acquire a message, such as “expense, length, comprehensibility, signal clarity, prominence, and accessibility.”⁵⁵ By emphasizing accessibility and other hindrances and costs, Atkin’s model also enables it to discuss contemporary digital divide between active Internet users and those who do not have the sources and the means of access and use.⁵⁶

Atkin emphasized that reinforcement seeking is only the one factor that shapes exposure to messages. He suggested that surveillance, guidance and performance information must as well be incorporated into future studies on selective exposure.⁵⁷ Moreover, Atkin underscored the role of entertainment

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., 209.

55 Ibid.

56 P. Norris, *Digital divide: Civic engagement, information poverty, and the Internet worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

57 Atkin, 236.

value that information content present to the individual. While an informational message is not preferred alone, the entertainment experience it brings about such as avoiding unhappiness, may lead to selection of and exposure to that message.⁵⁸

Finally, Atkin pointed out the social functions of acquiring certain messages such as maintaining a group membership and its bonds. For instance, a person may attribute inferior qualities to certain media while perceiving others as superior. Accordingly, he or she may attempt to build a self-image by avoiding content perceived inferior and by preferring the content deemed to be superior.⁵⁹

With further research, Atkin's model of informational utility has been developed to incorporate new elements. The contributions were mostly made in what Atkin defined as surveillance as part of cognitive adaptations. Atkin explained surveillance as an integral part of such adaptations as individuals seek renewed knowledge about expected threats and opportunities that may affect individuals' actions, beliefs and expectations.⁶⁰ Knobloch-Westerwick and colleagues⁶¹ conducted extensive research on surveillance information in order to specify under which conditions message selection occurs. According to their model, "information relating individual's prospective and immediate encounters or opportunities" carries informational utility and facilitates message

58 Ibid., 237.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid., 211.

61 S. Knobloch-Westerwick, F. Dillman Carpentier, A. Blumhoff, and N. Nickel, "Selective exposure effects for positive and negative news: Testing the robustness of the informational utility model." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 82, no.1 (2005:181 –195; S. Knobloch, G. Patzig, and M. R. Hastall, "Informational Utility—Einfluss von Nützlichkeit auf selektive Zuwendung zu negativen und positiven Online-Nachrichten." [Informational utility: Impact of utility on selective exposure to negative and positive online news]. *Medien- & Kommunikationswissenschaft* 50, no.3 (2002: 359–375; S. Knobloch, D. Zillmann, Gibson, R., and J. A. Karrh, "Effects of salient news items on information acquisition and issue perception." *Zeitschrift für Medienpsychologie* 14, no.1 (2002: 14–22; S. Knobloch, F. Dillman Carpentier, and D. Zillmann, "Effects of salience dimensions of informational utility on selective exposure to online news." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 80, no.1 (2003: 91–108.

selection.⁶² In this regard, perception of utility for individual becomes a key factor in selective exposure. Knobloch-Westerwick and colleagues proposed that perceived *magnitude* of threats and opportunities, perceived *likelihood* of their materialization, and perceived *immediacy* have a positive relation to message selection.⁶³ These points make it crucial to grasp an individual's perception of news and his or her personal evaluations of issues to study informational utility and selectivity.

In a more recent study, Knobloch-Westerwick and her colleagues tested role of informational utility vis-à-vis confirmation bias. Based on a quasi-experimental online research before 2008 US presidential elections, the study assessed the role of expectations regarding favored party's success or failure and how these expectations shaped voters' exposure to messages of favored or opposite party.⁶⁴ The results demonstrated that informational utility may be more determinant than confirmation bias in certain conditions. Voters' whose favored party was likely to lose, considered opposite party's campaign messages to carry more informational utility and therefore, was exposed to such messages, which showed that utility considerations can be superior to confirmation.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the study showed that individuals who have strong online news use habits manifested less confirmation bias compared to those with weaker online news use habits. Such a finding brought question to earlier mentioned concerns about increasing content selection options on the Internet and thus, to consequent potential for political selectivity.⁶⁶

§ 2.4 Selective Exposure: A Fact or Not?

Whereas selective exposure was first coined as confirmation bias towards existing attitudes and beliefs, the concept gained new meanings and dimensions

62 Westerwick, *Choices and Preferences*, 159.

63 Ibid.

64 Knobloch and Steven, "Pre-election Selective Exposure," 170.

65 Ibid., 189.

66 Ibid.

owing to research on changing news exposure environment derived from advent of the Internet. This thesis adopted four different forms of selective exposure based on Stroud's categorization. Stroud set forth that selective exposure can occur in the form of medium selection (e.g. whether traditional or online media, news or entertainment preference, topic selection and issue publics, and finally politically motivated selective exposure or confirmation bias.⁶⁷ This chapter will present empirical findings in the literature for each form of selective exposure.

2.4.1 *Medium Selection*

With the rise of online media, the future of traditional media has been questioned. In this sense, one of the main scholarly research questions has been of medium selection when consuming news. The literature divided along two main and opposing assumptions, that is, whether the Internet media use substitutes or complements traditional media use.⁶⁸

One line of research argues that use of Internet news media goes hand in hand with offline media.⁶⁹ Such studies generally placed personal motivations over medium-specific features. Put in other words, it emphasized what kind of content news consumers are looking for, rather than how they do it. Flanagin and Metzger's study of media use and motivations showed that computer technologies were used together with traditional and interpersonal media. Moreover, the Internet were perceived by users as equal to other media in

67 Stroud, "Selective Exposure Theories," 538.

68 Mitchelstein, E., and P. J. Boczkowski. "Online News Consumption Research: An Assessment Of Past Work And An Agenda For The Future." *New Media & Society* 12, no.7 (2010): 4.

69 J. K. C. Chan, and L. Leung "Reliance on Traditional News Media and Online News Adoption." *New Media & Society* 7, no.3 (2005:357 -382; J. Hujanen, and Pietikainen, S. "Interactive Uses of Journalism: Crossing between Technological Potential and Young People's News-using Practices." *New Media & Society* 6, no.3 (2004:383 -401; J. M. Kayany, and P. Yelsma, "Displacement Effects of Online Media in the Sociotechnical Contexts of Households." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic* 44, no.2 (2000: 215-229.

terms of its functionality.⁷⁰ Similarly, Dutta-Bergman argued for a complementarity in the use of new and traditional media. According to him, a person who is interested in a specific topic is exposed to information concerning that topic along different mediums.⁷¹ Results of this study showed that an individual interested in politics and use online news media to receive information also received news from the traditional media on the same topic compared to people not interested in politics. Same pattern was also uncovered for many topic readers such as sports, international affairs etc.⁷²

On the other side of debate, scholars argued that new media displace traditional media and decrease its use.⁷³ Within this line of research, the evidence demonstrated that demographic factors can be influential in shaping medium choice. For instance, Coleman and McCombs' study on the generational difference of media use, they found out that younger people spend less time with the traditional media and more time with the Internet, when compared to their older aged counterparts.⁷⁴ Nguyen and Western revealed that Internet use is associated with certain socio-economic factors. According to the data retrieved from their national survey, Internet users composed of younger individuals with higher socio-economic features such as university education, a sufficient income to afford their lives. The study found no relation in terms of gender.⁷⁵ One should also take into account that such user profiles may not

70 Andrew J. Flanagin, and Miriam J. Metzger. "Internet Use in the Contemporary Media Environment." *Human Communication Research* 27, no.1 (2001): 171.

71 Dutta-Bergman, "Complementarity in the Consumption," 41.

72 Ibid., 55

73 M. Gentzkow, "Valuing New Goods in a Model with Complementarity: Online Newspapers." *American Economic Review* 97, no.3 (2007:713 -744; B. Gunter, G. Russell, R. Withey and D. Nicholas, "The British Life and Internet Project: Inaugural Survey Findings." *Aslib Proceedings* 55, no.4 (2003:203 -216; B. K. Kaye and T. J. Johnson, "From Here to Obscurity?: Media Substitution Theory and Traditional Media in an On-line World," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 54, no.4 (2003:260 -273.

74 Coleman and McComb, "The Young and Agenda-less?" 503.

75 An Nguyen and Mark Western. "Socio-structural correlates of online news and information adoption/use: Implications for the digital divide." *Journal of Sociology* 43, no.2 (2007: 177.

stable and prone to change, since technologies diffuse over the society over time.

2.4.2 *News or Entertainment*

Greater possibility of content selection brought about by the Internet has raised several concerns about what audiences prefer to consume and related effects on the political knowledge. One of the first to uncover these patterns was Baum and Kernell's study on cable television. In an effort to explain declining interest for watching presidential appearance on TV, they conducted a survey and time-series rating data, the results demonstrated that cable TV subscription and resulting ability to selective TV watching created was the reason behind the phenomenon.⁷⁶

Building on such concerns, Prior conducted an extensive research on user motivations' to prefer news or information. His main departure point is that when television was a popular medium, individuals used to be exposed to both entertainment and information, due to structured programming in the broadcasting. However, with the advent of cable TV and the Internet, individuals now experience "high-choice media environment" where they can avoid news and consume entertainment.⁷⁷ The more people avoid news, the more the difference of political knowledge and turnout will be.⁷⁸ To assess the user preferences for information or entertainment and their impact on the political knowledge, Prior conducted a panel study, which asked individuals about their favorite genres. The results of surveys showed that people who prefer news in cable TV and on the Internet have higher political knowledge, compared to those who live in limited choice media environment.⁷⁹ Furthermore, those use the Internet and cable TV and have a higher "relative entertainment preference" hold a lower political knowledge.⁸⁰ In general, the study showed

76 M. A. Baum, and S. Kernell. "Has Cable Ended the Golden Age of Presidential Television?" *American Political Science Review* 93, 1999: 99.

77 Markus Prior, "News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout," *American Journal of Political Science* 49, no.3 (2005: 577.

78 *Ibid.*, 578.

79 *Ibid.*, 582.

80 *Ibid.*, 586.

that with the greater availability of choice in new media may lead to avoidance of news to consume entertainment media more, and a consequent drop in political knowledge.

Mutz argued that in a society where media choices multiply, there will be still be those who will deliberately consume political news and participate in politics. But, there will also a group of people that opt out of politics and consume entertainment, whose political knowledge level will be influenced more with a selection prone environment. Finally, those who are on the intersection of these two groups, who have a slight interest in politics, will be depended on incidental exposure to continue their political participation and keep their political knowledge sufficient.⁸¹

Indeed, the literature showed that people may be unintentionally exposed to news while they were searching the Web for reason other than information acquisition. Tewksbury and others showed that when an individual accidentally comes across with news, they may build an interest towards the content and continue to further investigate it.⁸² Recently, Kim and others searched for the cues of incidental exposure to news online and entertainment content preferences and investigated their impact on political participation. They found that while incidental exposure increased people's political participation, and this effect was higher for those who do not prefer entertainment media. The results showed that accidentally consuming news media may exacerbate the difference of knowledge level between news and entertainment media users.⁸³ In another study, Lee and Kim conducted survey and experiment based research on incidental exposure and demonstrated that social media's pluralistic network and the existence of weak connections among individuals

81 Mutz, "How the Mass Media Divide Us?" 235.

82 David Tewksbury, A. J. Weaver, and B. D. Maddex. "Accidentally Informed: Incidental News Exposure on the World Wide Web," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78, no.3 (2001:536.

83 Kim, Y., H. T. Chen, and H. G De Zúñiga. "Stumbling Upon News on the Internet: Effects of Incidental News Exposure and Relative Entertainment Use On Political Engagement." *Computers in Human Behavior* 29, no.6 (2013:2607.

multiply accidental exposure to news, while motivations of individuals had almost no impact on correlation.⁸⁴

Therefore, the literature so far indicates that research on news versus entertainment preferences must take incidental exposure into account as the new media consumption environment introduced new dynamics into news exposure patterns.

2.4.3 *Topic Selection and Personal Agenda*

Another dimension of selectivity in online news media has been of topic selection and consequent personal agenda formation. Althaus and Tewksbury examined and compared the personal political agendas of online and print audiences of the New York Times through an experimental study.⁸⁵ Main point that is considered to change the agenda of online and offline news readers, is that newspapers and websites structure their news coverage differently. In newspaper format, the readers need to search for the specific information through simply turning the pages which may expose the reader to other issues as well. The front page functions as an agenda setter in newspaper formats and catches the attention of the readers. Whereas, websites divide their news coverage into different categories, which provides the opportunity to directly go to that topic and avoid others.⁸⁶ Tewksbury and Althaus found that readers of press version of the New York Times recalled more news topics than online news users and they included more international problems and topics in their personal agenda.⁸⁷

Another important branch of study within topic selection has been issue publics. The concept of issue public was first coined by Converse. He stated

84 J. K. Lee, and E. Kim, "Incidental Exposure To News: Predictors In The Social Media Setting And Effects On Information Gain Online." *Computers in Human Behavior* 75, (2017: 1008.

85 Scott L. Althaus, and David Tewksbury. "Agenda setting and the "new" news: Patterns of issue importance among readers of the paper and online versions of the New York Times." *Communication Research* 29, no.2 (2002: 180.

86 Ibid. 182.

87 Ibid. 194.

that belief systems in modern societies did not compromise of totally ideological clusters but of issue publics which consists of citizens that are attracted and knowledgeable in issue-specific areas and developed certain demands.⁸⁸

As an effort to reveal issue publics in the online media, Iyengar et al. designed a study based on multimedia CD given to registered voters, to test two different hypothesis in pre-election period: individuals prefer to be exposed to favored party's campaign information; and individuals prefer to receive information about the topics they attach importance.⁸⁹ The results showed that while conservative or Republican individuals manifested a tendency to view messages and content about candidate Bush in line with the hypothesis. However, democrats viewed as much messages about candidate Gore as Bush, exposing to unsupportive content as well.⁹⁰ Furthermore, number and distribution of visits to certain chapters of CD showed that individuals tended to view certain topics that they deem to be important. Put in example, Catholics tended to see messages about abortion 80% more than those that are not a member of this issue public.⁹¹ In a similar study, Kim analyzed the impact of increased control over information in the new media on the Web behavior of issue public members. Kim hypothesized that members of issue publics would manifest more selectivity in their new media use habits and therefore increase their issue-specific information.⁹² The study demonstrated that there was no considerable difference between issue public members and non-members in terms of traditional media habits. On the other hand, issue public members chose political radio as a medium more than non-members.⁹³ Furthermore,

88 P. E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," In *Ideology and discontent* ed. D. E. Apter, New York: The Free Press, 1964, 54.

89 S. Iyengar, et al "Selective Exposure to Campaign Communication: The Role of Anticipated Agreement and Issue Public Membership." *Journal of Politics* 70, no.1 (2008: 186.

90 *Ibid.*, .195.

91 *Ibid.*,

92 Y. M. Kim, "Issue Publics in the New Information Environment: Selectivity, Domain Specificity, and Extremity." *Communication Research* 36, (2009: 259.

93 *Ibid.*, 262-3.

the study showed that issue public members manifested highly selective manner in choosing their respective issues and avoiding other topics.⁹⁴ These findings make it evident that issue publics become more apparent in a high-choice media environment as they tend to interact with topics of their interest.

2.4.4 *Confirmation Bias*

Based on the concerns that Internet may encourage individuals to be more selective, Sundar investigated the relationship between mediums and political selective exposure patterns. Conducted in pre-election period of 2004 elections in the USA, Sundar examined the selective exposure patterns of newspapers, political talk radio, cable news and political website users.⁹⁵ The study demonstrated that people's political dispositions affect their media choices in both Internet, cable TV and radio usage.⁹⁶ Put more clearly, "... 64 percent of conservative Republicans consume at least one conservative media outlet compared to 26 percent of liberal Democrats."⁹⁷

While a preference for like-minded messages has been central to the research, avoidance of uncongenial is also a crucial dimension of selective exposure. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Festinger put forth both dimensions as a way to cope with dissonance. However, the literature found conflicting evidence. In a telephone survey study just before 2009 election in the US, Garrett uncovered that while people use greater selection options to largely view like-minded ideas, they do not completely avoid uncongenial information.⁹⁸ According to the results of the study, a greater number of Bush supporters followed Republican or conservative media brands while the same occurred for Kerry voters for Democratic or liberal outlets. Moreover, strong or weak support for a candidate did not change the media usage patterns con-

94 Ibid., 270.

95 Stroud, "Media Use," 347-348.

96 Ibid., 359.

97 Ibid., 358.

98 Garrett R. K., "Politically motivated reinforcement seeking: Reframing the selective exposure debate." *Journal of Communication* 59, no.4 (2009: 676).

siderably, therefore, questioning the role of self-assure as a moderator of selective exposure. In fact, weak Kerry supporters viewed more websites favoring Kerry than those more strongly support Kerry.⁹⁹ More importantly, the study showed that individuals who have a strong online news use habits and can control their information exposure did not opt out unsupportive arguments. Interestingly, Kerry voters actually increased their exposure to Bush content, compared to their Kerry voters who dominantly use newspaper and television.¹⁰⁰ In another study, Garrett showed that existence of disconfirming elements in an information piece has almost no effect in decisions of selection. Although individuals have a tendency to pick more like-minded messages, avoidance of counter ideas found to be small in effect. Similarly, individuals spent a considerable amount of time with both supportive and unsupportive information.¹⁰¹ Therefore, Garrett's extensive findings revealed that avoidance of uncongenial and preference for reinforcing messages do not operate together, casting shadow over Festinger's propositions about dissonance. Garrett also underscored the importance of exposure to political difference for democracies. He emphasized that while constant interaction with like-minded information may lead to stronger dispositions however, the lack of interaction with political difference can be very detrimental for tolerance and healthy operation of democracies.¹⁰²

Scholars also analyzed the impacts of evolving online news media environment on exposure patterns. Messing and Westwood emphasized the unique features of social media. Instead of relying on certain media brands, individuals in social media can access to news from different sources and individuals in a single location. Hence, social media enables it to select news from a great pool of information. Moreover, individual news sharing activities and recommendation options turn news into social activity and introduce a

99 Ibid., 686

100 Ibid., 691

101 R. Kelly Garrett, "Echo chambers online?" 279.

102 Garrett, "Reframing Selective Exposure Debate," 692.

socially informed motivation to select news.¹⁰³ The findings of Messing and Westwood's study showed that people preferred recommended news more than not recommended, and the influence of social aspects of news selection on social media can override partisan affiliations and lead to consumption of more disagreeing content.¹⁰⁴ As other studies also illustrate¹⁰⁵, new forms of information exposure emerging in social media may have effect that may override partisan use of sources and news.

§ 2.5 Media, Polarization and Post-Truth

Political and social polarization has been a reality that affects political life in many countries, as well as daily lives of the people. In the last decade, the topic has been of special interest to public and scholarly debates. With an attempt to understand the dynamics leading to polarization, relationship between media and political polarization has been analyzed in different angles.

Comprehending such a complex relation necessitates to consider many factors such as social media use, disinformation, political engagement and politicians' behaviors that can lead to and be led by polarization, and in overall, affecting the quality of democracies. In order to clarify these dynamics, the interrelation between disinformation and polarization must be analyzed. It also requires to question the role of social media usage in creating both of

103 Messing, Solomon, and Sean J. Westwood. "Selective exposure in the age of social media: Endorsements trump partisan source affiliation when selecting news online." *Communication research* 41.8 (2014): 3-4.

104 Ibid., 14-15.

105 Michael A. Beam, and Gerald M. Kosicki "Personalized News Portals: Filtering Systems and Increased News Exposure," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 91, no.1 (2014):59 - 77; Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick, Nikhil Sharma, Derek L. Hansen and Scott Alter. "Impact of Popularity Indications on Readers' Selective Exposure to Online News," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 49, no.3 (2005): 296-313.

these dynamics. Social media, through its reach network and liberating functions may actually exacerbate the level of disinformation and polarization.¹⁰⁶ From a different angle, such dynamics may influence citizens' political participation, which then affects democracies. Partisanship and the existence of polarization may discourage citizens from political participation, while online propaganda can push individuals to extremes. Finally, online propaganda and disinformation derives from traditional media sources and circulates in social media. Therefore, it also requires to take traditional media into consideration, when analyzing the sources of polarization and disinformation.¹⁰⁷

When unfolding this web of complex interrelations, one of the first points to analyze is the role of partisan media and disinformation as a catalyzer of polarization. Strongly adopted partisanship may lead to emergence of low quality information that range from fake news to politically slanted information. Such information can be created by both individuals as non-professional news makers or news producing media outlets.

Low quality information can take many forms in polarized media environment. *Disinformation* implies incorrect information that is produced and distributed intentionally. Historically, it has been generated by secret state officials to shape public opinion but in today's media environment it can be done by several political actors.¹⁰⁸ *Misinformation*, on the other hand, denote un-deliberate spread of incorrect information which differs from propaganda because it is always incorrect and which differs from disinformation in that because it is unintentional.¹⁰⁹ Finally, *propaganda* is composed of true or untrue information that is spread by political opponents to gain public consent. It is manly achieved through framing the opposing political arguments in an un-congenial form. While traditional public diplomacy aims to attract public

106 Tucker, J. A., et al. (2018). Social media, political polarization, and political disinformation: A review of the scientific literature. *Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature*, March 19, 2018.

107 Ibid., 4.

108 Kelly Born, and Nell Edgington. "Analysis of philanthropic opportunities to mitigate the disinformation/propaganda problem," (Hewlett Foundation, 2017: 4.

109 Ibid.

opinion, propaganda “relies upon non-rational means of persuasion – using emotional appeals not to convince or attract but to disrupt, divide, confuse, or otherwise damage target audiences’ understanding or political cohesion...”¹¹⁰ Such forms of information plays a corruptive role for the arena on which politics is discussed and political consent is achieved and it is again exacerbated by the polarization existent in a country.

Although the Internet provides opportunities for greater exposure to political information, disinformation and related consequences cast shadow over its informational prospects. Digital media environment enabled many individuals to create and circulate political content without considerable costs. The content creators include those individuals with no professional journalistic skills as well as media outlets, and the information quality can be completely incorrect and misleading. Many actors may take role in the proliferation of disinformation in the media, ranging from “trolls, bots, fake news websites, conspiracy theorists, politicians, highly partisan media outlets, the mainstream media, and foreign governments”¹¹¹ Emergence of social media with its own content recommendation algorithms has replaced the role of traditional editors. Such algorithms embedded in social media prioritize the advertising and profits and not the informational quality of the news. Therefore, it has been pronounced as a reason for the rise of fake news and other types of disinformation.¹¹² Allcott and Gentzkow’s study provided an excellent example of how social media serves to promulgate fake news. In their study on 2016 election in the US, they discovered that while social media accounted for the 10 percent of total visits to news sites of traditional media agencies, it accounted for the 41.8 percent of visits to 65 fake news sites in the US, which was followed by search engines with 22 percent of total visits.¹¹³

110 Ibid.

111 Tucker et al, 22.

112 Martens, B., et al. “The Digital Transformation of News Media And The Rise of Disinformation And Fake News” *Digital economy working paper*. Joint Research Centre Technical Reports. (2018:26.

113 Allcott, Hunt, and Matthew Gentzkow. "Social media and fake news in the 2016 election." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31, no.2 (2017): 222.

Media bias either in the form of fake news or partisanship and propaganda, may have adverse effects on the political participation, elections and general public policy in democracies. For instance, through his experimental study, Levendusky showed that partisan media affects the more hard-liner citizens and encourages them to adopt more extreme ideas. Such polarizing effects on the individuals endure even several days after the exposure to polarizing information. Such a consequence of partisan media renders it difficult to reach at public consensus.¹¹⁴ According to Levendusky, although human beings hold both accuracy and confirmation motivations when seeking information, the latter has a strong appeal for them. This tendency, combined with the existence of partisan media and a package of strongly confirming news, produces polarization. On the other hand, when encountered with anti-attitudinal or disconfirming information, those individuals with strong attitudes and with information about the issue at stake will try to falsify such arguments and get even more polarized, which Levendusky confirms with his experimental study.¹¹⁵ In another study, Bernhardt and his colleagues show that media bias occurs because sustained profits depend on the partisanship of the audience and producing confirming information for them. Although voters are aware of the polarization and media bias, they cannot compensate for the disinformation created by such bias in news production. Acquiring incorrect information about the candidates and the parties may easily lead to wrong choice during elections and a poor level of judgement. Bernhardt and others add that if in an election, both of candidates are exposed to scandals created about themselves, the voters would only hear about the scandal regarding the opposite candidate.¹¹⁶

In another study, Levendusky and Malhotra analyzed the impact of media's coverage of polarization in the politics on the actual level of polarization.

114 Levendusky, Matthew S. "Why do partisan media polarize viewers?" *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no.3 (2013): 611.

115 Ibid., 613-614.

116 Bernhardt, Dan, Stefan Krasa, and Mattias Polborn. "Political Polarization and The Electoral Effects of Media Bias." *Journal of Public Economics* 92, no.5-6 (2008): 1101.

With their experimental study, they showed that a portrayal of society as polarized encourages the individuals to adopt more moderate positions regarding the issues. However, it also leads to a more polarized vision of other people with different ideologies. As Levendusky and Malhotra explains it, individuals encountered with a portrayal of polarized society consider such information as “anti-cues”, seeing polarized individuals not similar to themselves.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, it encourages individuals to adopt a more negative view of opposing party/candidate and its supporters as a source of polarization as well as considering like-minded polarized citizens as an extreme case. In this sense, their study showed that capturing polarization in media and politics and exposing audience to such content actually increases overall level of polarization instead of erasing it.¹¹⁸

Impact of partisanship, disinformation and specifically fake-news in the media brought about deeply ontological disagreement. The continuous debates in politics about the facts and truths came to be termed as “post-truth” epoch. In 2016, Oxford Dictionaries declared “post-truth” as the word of the year, due to 200 percent of increase in its usage by public. Oxford Dictionary defined the term as “an adjective relating to circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than emotional appeals.”¹¹⁹ The word “post-truth” came to be influential under the impact of several recent political disputes especially during Brexit process and Trump’s election as president and his much debated claims.

It is claimed that the roots of post-truth era can be found in debates regarding the tobacco-cancer relation and political skepticism about global warming. Such issues, due to political interests, were made a topic of political debate and it brought scientific evidence into question in public’s eyes. The success of such skepticism in the past has served as an encouragement and an already tested strategy for today’s populist politicians.¹²⁰ McIntyre provided a

117 Levendusky, Matthew, and Neil Malhotra. "Does Media Coverage of Partisan Polarization Affect Political Attitudes?" *Political Communication* 33.2 (2016): 294.

118 Ibid.

119 BBC News “'Post-truth' declared word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries” 16 November 2016.

120 L. McIntyre, *Lee. Post-truth*. (MIT Press, 2018: 34.

detailed account of post-truth as a concept. He emphasized the motivations behind questioning the facts and stated that:

Someone does not dispute an obvious or easily confirmable fact for no reason; he or she does so when it is to his or her advantage. When a person's beliefs are threatened by an "inconvenient fact," sometimes it is preferable to challenge the fact. This can happen at either a conscious or unconscious level (since sometimes the person we are seeking to convince is ourselves, but the point is that this sort of post-truth relationship to facts occurs only when we are seeking to assert something that is more important to us than the truth itself. Thus post-truth amounts to a form of ideological supremacy, whereby its practitioners are trying to compel someone to believe in something whether there is good evidence for it or not. And this is a recipe for political domination.¹²¹

Slater explains the politicians' ability to convince and persuade the masses about dubious claims with recent economic and political developments. In his view, economically disadvantaged groups that could not cope with globalization process feels underrepresented. Due to this, they manifest a declining trust in politics and institutions against the establishment. According to Slater, populist politicians take advantage of such loss of trust in media. Such a new media environment makes it easy for rumours and fake-news to proliferate and spread. Slater argues that "a false balance" in media journalism is also responsible for the rise of "post-truth politics." False balance in journalism implies that journalists and news media outlets give space to the arguments of both political sides, without delving deeper into what is factual or not and informing public accordingly. He states that in such an environment, "truth becomes a matter of opinion or assertion, not fact."¹²²

The relation between polarization and media can also be seen from a different angle, which is the media use habits of audiences. The abundance of information in new media as well as increasing content selection options for

121 Ibid., 13.

122 Jane Suiter, "Post-Truth Politics," *Political Insight* 7, no.3 (2016): 26-27.

users raised concerns that individuals may increasingly consume like-minded information while discarding and avoiding non-confirmatory content. Scholars debated about the possible societal and political consequences of such a mechanism. It has been argued that individuals who take the advantage of new media choice options would be increasingly living in “echo-chambers” and “filter bubbles” where they only interact with like-minded messages.¹²³

Iyengar and Hahn attempted to reveal if a pattern of political selectivity exists in media use habits. Their study showed that the political affinity of the news source and consumer’s own political dispositions influenced the media choices. While conservatives chose to view content from Fox News, they avoided the content of media outlets with liberal affinity. Similarly, Liberals chose to view content from CNN and NPR while discarding Fox News. Such a pattern of selectivity was observed not only in hot issues drawn great public attention but also in news topics such as travel or crime. Furthermore, politically more active individuals performed more political selectivity in their media choices, compared to their politically less interested counterparts. Overall, the study showed that increased availability of choosing different sources with new media may indeed breed polarization.¹²⁴ It is also demonstrated that there has been a media audience migration among Republican and Liberal news readers. Hollander’s analysis of longitudinal media exposure demonstrates that availability of more media use options drawn less partisan individuals to entertainment content, while partisan users remained as the audience of the political news. Moreover, among the remaining partisan audience of Fox and CNN news, there has been a tendency to move towards ideologically similar brands, in that more and more Liberals watching CNN and avoiding Fox, as more conservatives consuming Fox News content during periods of years.¹²⁵

123 Sunstein Cass, *Republic 2.0*. (Princeton: Princeton Uni Press, 2007; Eli Pariser, *The filter Bubble: What The Internet Is Hiding From You*. (NewYork, NY: Penguin Press. 2011.

124 Shanto Iyengar, and Kyu S. Hahn. "Red Media, Blue Media: Evidence of Ideological Selectivity In Media Use." *Journal of communication* 59, no.1 (2009): 19.

125 Barry A Hollander, "Tuning Out or Tuning Elsewhere? Partisanship, Polarization, and Media Migration from 1998 To 2006." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 85, no.1 (2008: 31-32.

From a different angle, Stroud tested whether partisan selective exposure in media contributed to the polarization. Her study showed that Liberals consuming like-minded content manifest more polarized viewpoints towards election candidates compared to Liberals who consume less of liberal-democrat media. The same also holds true for Conservative-Republican media users. Another important finding from this study is that counter-ideological media use is related to lower levels of polarization, which means that individuals interacting with politically non-confirmatory information manifest less polarized viewpoints.¹²⁶

In order to explain the emergence of polarization on the Internet, Sunstein exemplifies the group polarization dynamics. Group polarization mainly implies that members of a group tend to arrive at a more extreme point of view closer to original and initial ideas of average group members. In the case of online groups of similar minded individuals, after a period of socialization, members of such groups will hold their initial ideas in a stronger manner.¹²⁷ As an example of the functioning of group polarization, Sunstein demonstrates the results of an experiment made in Colorado, together with liberal and conservative participants. Three questions about issues of same-sex couple's civil unions, affirmative action in employment towards disadvantaged groups and global warming were asked to the participants and their initial ideas about issues are retrieved. After group discussion among like-minded individuals, participants manifested a more assertive and stronger manner towards their early ideas about the specified issues. For instance, liberal were more positive about civil unions of same-sex couples while conservatives disagree more. More importantly, conservative participants who initially abstained from proposing an argument, became strongly opposed to combatting global warming through an international treaty after discussions. As another result of the experiment, the discussion with like-minded individuals diminished the internal diversity of groups. While initially groups had a certain level of differentiation in terms of ideas, the discussion reduced it to a slighter level.

126 Stroud, "Selective Exposure" 566.

127 Sunstein, *Republic 2.0*, 60-61.

In general, the experiment widened the gap between liberal and conservatives, pushing them to more extremes.¹²⁸

There have been several explanations for group polarization. A strong explanation takes into account the power of persuasion, and can be explained in Sunstein's words as such:

If the group's members are already inclined in a certain direction, they will offer a disproportionately large number of arguments tending in that same direction, and a disproportionately small number of arguments tending the other way. As a result, the consequence of discussion will be to move people further in the direction of their initial inclinations. Thus, for example, a group whose members lean in favor of the nation's current leader will, in discussion, provide a wide range of arguments in his favor, and the arguments made in opposition to him will be both fewer and weaker. The group's members, to the extent that they shift, will shift toward a more extreme position in favor of the current leader. And the group as a whole, if a group decision is required, will move not to the median position, but to a more extreme point.¹²⁹

A second explanation for group polarization is the social acceptance and approval. It mainly implies that in order to be considered congenial by other people, individuals tend to revise their position and adopt closer views to what is dominant and held by a majority. Finally, it is claimed that confidence as well leads to extremism in ideas. When an individual is confirmed about his/her ideas in that it is shared by other members of the group, he or she tends to be more assertive and extreme compared to initial position.¹³⁰

Sunstein warns that group polarization may operate within the Internet to a great extent. It is because the autonomy Internet provides makes it easier for people to gather and socialize more with like-minded individuals and expose to more congenial content. Sunstein argues that such a picture could lead to

128 Ibid., 61-62.

129 Ibid., 64.

130 Ibid., 65-66.

fragmentation in public, in that while individuals do not hold strongly divergent ideas initially, they may end up believing in completely opposite arguments due to polarizing impacts of what they consume in the media. He also warns that such an environment could lead to errors in knowledge about issues or people, due to distorted portrayal of the facts.¹³¹

Although above empirical studies confirm that emergence of highly partisan media and availability of media choices may bring about polarization in the public and politics, it is still ambiguous whether new media is the main reason for polarization or other variables influence and shape the dynamics. Prior comments that the ambiguity results from a lack knowledge about to what extent and what kind of people are exposed to which sort of messages.¹³² In other words, Prior's words emphasize that while scientific community gathers information about what messages people choose to view under controlled conditions in an experiment, there is less knowledge about their media choices in actual life. Prior puts forth that what we know with strong evidence is that politics of Congress have become more polarized over time, due to increase in the number of slanted content and partisan messages, as well as a growing opposition between two parties in the Congress.¹³³ When it comes to analyzing polarization and partisanship not in media but in public, Prior stresses that political attitudes, perceptions and behaviors must be distinguished from each other clearly. While Americans manifested a growing partisan manner in their voting behavior, Prior states that, it does not equal to attitude polarization about public issues where individuals adopt extreme and irreconcilable ideas vis-à-vis others. Therefore, measuring polarization becomes a complex and difficult task.¹³⁴

There has also been findings and arguments countering the hypothesis of partisan selectivity and consequent polarization in the new media. The Internet as a platform carries many different interfaces and functions, which, con-

131 Ibid., 69.

132 Markus Prior, "Media And Political Polarization." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16 (2013): 102.

133 Ibid., 102-103.

134 Ibid., 104-105.

sidered within social settings, might produce different political and social effects. In that sense, social media carries potentials of both further polarization and compromise. It has been argued that social media can actually reduce polarization. Barbera, in his study of social media users in Germany, Spain and the USA, argued that social media like Twitter and Facebook increase the volume of interpersonal communication but it also changes the diversity of personal contacts through its networking function. Increasing contact with close social circle does not considerably increase political knowledge, since such interaction already continues in offline sphere. However, changing diversity of networks may have important effects on an individual's information diet.¹³⁵ Social media, with its opportunity to create weak online ties with initially unknown individuals, provide the chance of exposure to novel information from such ties. Since such weak ties may include both ideological similar and different interactions, it enables exposure to a greater diversity of political ideas compared to offline settings.¹³⁶ Barbera's study showed that Tweeter users in Germany and Spain, and to a lesser extent in the US had a political diversity in their online networks and such individuals manifested less extreme and more moderate political opinion over time.¹³⁷ In a similar fashion, Boxell and his colleagues questioned the hypothesis that Internet breeds polarization. In their study, it is evident that young age group were experiencing moderation in their political views whereas very old age group (75 and above manifested largest increases in polarization. Similarly, polarization increase was greatest among the populations with lesser use of social media and Internet.¹³⁸ Their study showed that increasing polarization cannot be explained directly with social media and echo chambers, but many other moderating factors can reframe the dynamics. In overall, their findings show that more empirical evidence is needed to comprehend the complex relation between polarization and media.

135 Pablo Barberá, "How Social Media Reduces Mass Political Polarization. Evidence from Germany, Spain, and the US." *Job Market Paper, New York University* 46 (2014): 3.

136 *Ibid.*, 2.

137 *Ibid.*, 24.

138 Levi Boxell, et al. "Is The Internet Causing Political Polarization? Evidence from Demographics." *National Bureau of Economic Research*, no. w23258 (2017): 10-11.

§ 2.6 Generation as User of Technology

The use of generations as a level of analysis in the social sciences is developed by Mannheim's conceptual framework. Mannheim explains the formation of a generation in resemblance to an individual's class position in society. Class position is a determined structure regardless of its members' acknowledgment of it. Generation, as a category functioning similar to class, contains this component of common and shared "location" within the wider social structure.¹³⁹

Generational location is formed due to existence of life and death cycle in the human life, where individuals born in the same year(s) automatically share the same location within the biological flow of social life in a historical timeline.¹⁴⁰ However, generational location of individuals, or in other words, formation of generations is not completely built on this biological reality. Mannheim claims that as all social structure is constituted by sociality, so is the generations. "The *sociological* problem of generations therefore begins at that point where the sociological relevance of these biological factors is discovered."¹⁴¹

While both class and generations attach individuals to a certain location in the wider social organization, they also,

... [L]imit them to a specific range of potential experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action. Any given location, then, excludes a large number of possible modes of thought, experience, feeling, and action, and restricts the range of self-expression open to the individual to certain circumscribed possibilities... Inherent, in a *positive* sense in every location is a tendency pointing towards certain definite modes of behavior, feeling, and thought. We shall therefore speak in this sense of a tendency "inherent in" every social location; a

139 Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations." *Psychoanalytic review* 57, no.3 (1970: 166-7.

140 Ibid.

141 Ibid., 168.

tendency which can be determined from the particular nature of the location as such.¹⁴²

What Mannheim's statements imply is that belonging to a generation determines the perception of the sociality and the behaviors developed on such enculturation. In other words, the generational location of an individual shapes what is available to him/her as a partial element of the social reality, as well as how this reality is interpreted, providing an "approach" to individual. Thus, a cultural element persists so long as the "location of relationships" of individuals adopting it remains intact.¹⁴³

Mannheim provided rich insight about how a generational bond comes into existence. In order to be included in the same generational location, it is not sufficient to be born in the same years, but it also requires to be born and live in the same region. Therefore, it also requires a spatial commonality.¹⁴⁴ However, these conditions are still not sufficient to create a generation with all its potentials realized in its members. Mannheim distinguished between a generation as location and *generation as an actuality* which required not only time and space share in the history, but also *participation in the common destiny* which means to be exposed to same social factors embedded in the society."¹⁴⁵

Mannheim also distinguished between actual generations and "a generation unit" formed within it. According to him, "*Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation; while those groups within the same actual generation which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute separate generation units.*"¹⁴⁶ In order to further clarify his points, Mannheim states that romantic-conservative wing and liberal-rationalist wing of youth in 1810's Prussia was two different generation units sharing the same generational location as urban youth.¹⁴⁷

142 Ibid., 168-9.

143 Ibid., 169.

144 Ibid., 182.

145 Ibid., 182-183.

146 Ibid., 184. (italic in original)

147 Ibid., 183.

Mannheim asserts that members of a generation unit holds stronger ties, and share a “mental data” that make up their world view. However, more than the mental data shared, it is the “fundamental integrative attitudes and formative principles” that play the key role in the formation of group through which such data gain a meaning, expression and feeling that creates a socializing effect on the group members. Such an attachment of feeling can be observed in an artistic expression or in a slogan, as Mannheim denotes.¹⁴⁸

Mannheim claims that it is not always possible to see an actualized generation in every epoch or age group, while there is always a shared generational location among individuals in a society. When the pace of social change changes in the society, earlier stable enculturation of traditions does not meet the mental and behavioral requirements of adaptation. Here, according to Mannheim, we can see a new set of principles and actions as an actualized generation which he names as “a new generational style” or “a new *generational entelechy*.”¹⁴⁹

Mannheim’s theory of generations was in one way a criticism towards the positivist understanding of the generations as a way of predicting the social change and “the rhythm of the history.” Whereas the positivist perspective coined an understanding of the time as a quantitative object, divided along measures such as decades and years, Mannheim advocated both the quantitative and qualitative (shared historical experiences dimension of the time, therefore bringing the social embedded nature of generations into the agenda.¹⁵⁰ He attempted to include biological realities of human beings, that is the generations, into a sociological account of social change without favoring the naturalistic factors at the expense of social ones.

Mannheim’s framework provides a sophisticated conceptualization, however, it left behind unanswered empirical questions as to how to study generations. As Pilcher stated earlier, Mannheim made it unclear how to define and study “generational consciousness” as well as an ambiguity about what is to

148 Ibid., 185.

149 Ibid., 189. (italic in original)

150 Jane Pilcher, "Mannheim's Sociology of Generations: An Undervalued Legacy." *British Journal of Sociology* 45 (1994): 487.

consider as “knowledge” that constitutes such a generational consciousness. In general, it is a question of how to study the connections between human mind and social objects.¹⁵¹

Similarly, there have been criticism towards the use of concept of generation with multiple meanings in the literature. Alwin and McCammon stressed out three main meanings attached to the generation in the studies which is confusingly and interchangeably used by the scholars. With an effort to clarify such terminological ambiguities, they defined three conceptualizations of the term generation. These are “generations as positions in lines of descent,” “generations as cohorts,” and “generation as historical participation.”¹⁵²

Generation as positions in lines of descent denotes the kinship relations within a family as new generations take over the place of their parental generation. In the studies of family life-cycle, this conceptualization of generation is used to locate individuals in a biological sequence of family members with an effort to analyze intergenerational culture transmission. Therefore, it does not involve the meaning of shared historical time, which is more close to generation as cohorts.¹⁵³ Secondly, generations as cohorts implied a group of individuals that were born and grown up in the same period of years, or in other words, sharing a historical time but not a biological time.¹⁵⁴ Mannheim’s conceptualization of generation can be regarded as such a use of cohort, which attempts to explain the social change through change of cohorts in the society. However, Alwin and McCammon differentiated between three different dynamics that can separately account for social change. One of them is simply aging, that is an individual’s change over his/her course of life due to many factors. The other dynamics are period and cohort effects which shall be analyzed separately. When certain events in the society, such as a revolution affect all the people regardless of certain age groups, it is called period effect. On the other hand, if social factors influence only a birth cohort, it is defined as cohort

151 Ibid., 492.

152 Duane F. Alwin, and Ryan J. McCammon. "Rethinking Generations." *Research in Human Development* 4 no.3-4 (2007: 221-229.

153 Ibid., 223.

154 Ibid., 224-225.

effect. A cohort effect is “a distinctive formative experience that members of a birth cohort (or set of birth cohorts) share that persists throughout their lives.¹⁵⁵ Finally, the term generation carries a third meaning as historical participation. Rather than sharing the same historical location as birth cohorts, this meaning of generation involves an active participation in the social and historical events of a specific time period. Such a differentiation overlaps with what Mannheim stated about generation as location and generation in actuality. The main idea behind such a separation is that existence of birth cohorts does not automatically produce a generational identity arising out of common participation in the macro social events. Resulting difference among two different concepts requires it to differentiate generational identities from cohort effects which may create empirical mistakes.¹⁵⁶ On the emergence of generational identities or generation units in Mannheim’s words, Alwin and McCammon states that today’s pluralistic societies make it difficult to draw the boundaries of such units while it also bears the possibilities for the emergence of several generational units that helps to explain pop culture or technological trends. Therefore, all three conceptualizations of generation are still of empirical value to understand contemporary cultures and social change.¹⁵⁷

Indeed, the concept of generation has been used to understand changing trends in the perception and use of technologies by different age groups. Within the media studies, it has been claimed that early experience with media at a young age period gives shape to an audience’s media use habits in the rest of their lives. Furthermore, through narratives, symbols and discursive practices used in media, a generation earns a common place to build their identity and sense of belonging. These dimensions invite scholars to study media audiences ‘different media usage habits from a generational perspective.¹⁵⁸

Media generations can be traced back to times long before the advent of new media. Early literary movements such as Romanticist literary movements

155 Ibid., 228.

156 Ibid., 229.

157 Ibid., 233.

158 Andra Siibak, Nicoletta Vittadini, and Galit Nimrod. "Generations as Media Audiences: An Introduction." *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 11 no.2 (2014): 101.

in the 19th century claimed to be the core of their contemporaries. However, the emergence of media generations in a systematic way overlaps with the advent of television and radio. While 1920s generation were known as radio generation, 1950s in the US was marked by a generation that is socialized to television broadcasting.¹⁵⁹ Early research and writings on the media generations adopted technologic determinism to understand the generational habits, prioritizing the technological elements and environment as determining the social practices and meanings. However, empirical studies on young generations of recent technologies showed that there is also stratification and heterogeneity among young individuals in terms of media use practices.¹⁶⁰

There have been different categorizations of generational cohorts in the literature. For instance, Tapscott categorized the cohorts as Baby Boomers (1946-1964, Baby Bust –or Generation X- (1965-1976, and finally Net Generation or Generation Y or Millennials (1977-1997. He also categorized the next or coming generation, starting from the 1998 as the birth year.¹⁶¹ As the first generation “bathed in bits”, Tapscott defined eight main norms for Net Generation. “ They want freedom in everything they do, from freedom of choice to freedom of expression. They love to customize, personalize. They are the new scrutinizers. They look for corporate integrity and openness when deciding what to buy and where to work. The Net Gen wants entertainment and playing in their work, education, and social life. They are the collaboration and relationship generation. The Net Gen has a need for speed -and not just in video games. They are the innovators.”¹⁶² Geraci and Nagy emphasized that web platform is a very complex environment with an abundance of data and Millennials are occasionally need of direction. “The dominance of the internet as a medium for the young derives from their ability to *control it* -to receive

159 Nicoletta Vittadini, Andra Siibak, and Irena Reifová. "Generations and Media: The Social Construction Of Generational Identity And Differences." Audience Transformations. (Routledge, 2013:4.

160 Ibid., 6.

161 Don Tapscott, *Grown up digital*. (Boston: McGraw-Hill Education, 2008: 16.

162 Ibid., 34-36.

guidance but to be able to tame its boundaries. The internet aids in self-discovery, as finding a new, cool site or activity."¹⁶³ The study of Geraci and Nagy showed that main functions that Millennials expect from the websites in importance order, are providing research place, leading to interesting sites, providing entertainment, servicing information and different products, providing downloadable or shareable music and giving the latest news.¹⁶⁴

Later adaptation of new technologies after 2000s brought questioning to the age borders of Y Generation. Therefore the children born in the late 1990s may have totally different media use habits as they were born and grown up in an environment very saturated with digital technologies. Named as Generation C or Generation Z, this group of later digital media users were considered as a distinct group from Generation Y in the analysis.¹⁶⁵ According to Turner, members of Generation Z were grown up in an environment where smart phones and tablets provided a constantly connected world to them. As active users of smart phones, they perform many activities, done early by different devices, all encapsulated in mobile phones. They also manifest high attachment to their mobile devices, seeing them as an indivisible component of their life.¹⁶⁶ They use Facebook frequently and feel more comfortable in their online interactions compared to real life. It is also stated that they may use digital world as an escape way out of difficulties of real life which may harm their crisis management skills.¹⁶⁷

There have been different studies that compared media use across generations. Fietkiewicz and others found important differences among Generation Y and Z members' social media use. While Generation Y or Net Generation used Facebook more, Generation Z were more inclined to use Instagram and video-sharing platforms. It was explained that Generation Y wanted to have

163 John C. Geraci, and Judit Nagy. "Millennials-The New Media Generation." *Young Consumers* 5 no.2 (2004): 22-23.

164 Ibid.

165 Kajaj Fietkiewicz, et al. "Other Times, Other Manners: How Do Different Generations Use Social Media." *Arts, Humanities, Social Science & Education Conference*. (2016): 5-6.

166 Anthony Turner, "Generation Z: Technology and social interest." *The Journal of Individual Psychology* 71 no.2 (2015): 104-107.

167 Ibid., 108-109.

more business network and contacts while Generation Z prioritized interaction with close friends.¹⁶⁸ Pew Research Center's study on political news consumption provided rich insight about Millennials in a comparative perspective. According to the Result, the writers named social media as "the local TV of Millennial Generation" as a source of news. While 60 percent of Baby Boomers relied on local TV as news source, 61 percent of Millennials did so on Facebook. It was also revealed that Millennials had the most contact with political news, compared to Baby Boomers and Gen X, which is valid for politically uninterested members of Millennials. A quarter of Millennials stated half of the content they see on Facebook is about politics and current affairs which is lesser for other generational cohorts.¹⁶⁹

While a considerable number of studies acquired information about generational media use in a comparative way, the generational definitions and specific media environment in a country may change all the formulations. Therefore, it is crucial to replicate such studies within the unique socio-economic, political and cultural realities of different countries.

168 Fietkewicz, 8-9.

169 Amy Mitchell, Jeffrey Gottfried, and Katerina Eva Matsa. "Millennials and Political News." *Pew Research Center 1* (2015).

Polarization and News Media in Turkey

Contemporary news media in Turkey consists of a wide range of mediums, channels and online platforms. Especially after the introduction of cable television and later the Internet, channels and platforms to receive information extremely diversified. Since 2000s, social media further penetrated into individuals' daily lives with the proliferation of Internet and computers and increasing numbers of smart phones and represented a new source of both information and entertainment. However, diversifying mediums and consequent individuation of media choices is only the one side of the same coin. These developments can only be fully grasped with the accompanying political, social and economic changes that gave form to media environment in Turkey.

Political and economic interests have constantly dominated media system and news-making culture throughout the history of Turkey. Kaya and Çakmur argues that a high level of "political parallelism" have always shaped Turkish media.¹ During Ottoman Empire and early years of Republican Turkey, media have witnessed restrictions and censorship in line with dominant ruling ideologies. Especially in the single-party period (1923-1945, media had to operate

1 R. Kaya and B. Çakmur, "Politics and the mass media in Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 11, no.4 (2010): 521.

according to Republican values and government policies of Republican People's Party. During Democrat Party rule, journalism has gone through a modernization process, however previous practices of media repression continued to fall victim to political clashes of ruling government. After 1960 military intervention, new constitution provided relative relief for media and press by granting protections against arbitrary judgements by political forces.²

Post-1980 military intervention period represents a completely different phase in the history of Turkey's media. Under the influence of neo-liberal economic policies started with Özal government, state monopoly over media dissolved and media ownership structure have seen radical changes.³ With a purpose of building a hegemony through media, Özal encouraged business owners to invest in media industry which brought about conglomeration. He also established personal bounds with media patrons and journalists to shape the agenda and discussions.⁴ As neo-liberal policies allowed ownership of media by private sector, this conglomeration took a different form in Turkey compared to other neo-liberal economies. In Turkey, big business owners who already invested in other sectors also started to participate in media industry. Such strategy bore the purposes of advertising the commodities of other invested industries and sectors, as well as creating a favorable public perception through media.⁵

This situation significantly transformed media environment in Turkey. In a more competitive atmosphere, television channels and newspapers have rapidly diversified. Although news production has gained a better quality with private channels compared to state monopoly period of TRT (Radio and Television Institution of Turkey) channel, it brought significant changes to media structure. Kaya and Çakmur puts forth three main changes related to media

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- 2 Murat Akser and Banu Baybars Hawks. "Media and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a Model of Neoliberal Media Autocracy." *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 5, no.3 (2012:304 -305.
 - 3 Ibid p.305
 - 4 Kaya and Çakmur, "Politics and the Mass Media," 530.
 - 5 Gülseren Adaklı, "The Process of Neoliberalisation and the Transformation of the Turkish Media Sector in the Context of the New Media Architecture," In *Mediating Europe: Communication in Contemporary European Culture Contents*. Edited by Jackie Harrison and Bridgette Wessel, (Oxford: Berghahn, 2009: 291.

structure. First, the content of media came under the influence of commercialization. Old distinction between information and entertainment gave way to an amalgamation of these two elements. Frequent references to sports and scandals along with increased space for advertisements abolished the separation of political affairs, entertainment and advertisement. Secondly, marketization of media in Turkey did not bring more autonomy but a higher level of political parallelism and exploitation of media for political purposes. Lack of commonly shared journalistic roles and practices, along with disappearance of unions due to neo-liberalism, have further damaged autonomy of media and journalism. The same dynamics also served to the dominance of commercial interests in media business and journalistic practices. Lastly, privatization provided space for Islamist or conservative media to proliferate in the 1990s. In 2000s, Islamist media could easily compete against mainstream media due to support from religious orders.⁶

In order to understand contemporary partisanship and disinformation today's Turkey, one need to look at polarization at political and societal levels. As many writers below points out, polarization in Turkey has reached a high level under JDP rule. Since its first electoral victory in 2002, JDP has gained consecutive majorities in different election and referendums. These continuous victories gave JDP an "electoral hegemony." Simply, existence of hegemony provided little chances for the opposition to be a considerable opponent and alternative to the government party. Not only in its capacity to mobilize the masses, but in terms of its perception as an alternative was deprived due to JDP's electoral hegemony in the system. Electoral victories did not only give JDP a legitimizing ground but also justified its dominant rule over the society in the public perception, refining democracy only into winning elections.⁷

On the background of such an electoral success, JDP became "a dominant party" in Turkish politics. Furthermore, JDP's dominant party position was accompanied and empowered by a dominant and strong leader figure as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. While Erdoğan's strategic policies and charisma became a

6 Kaya and Çakmur, "Politics and the Mass Media," 528-529.

7 E. Fuat Keyman, "The AK Party: Dominant Party, New Turkey and Polarization." *Insight Turkey* 16 no.2 (2014): 23.

crucial component, it also left oppositional parties as disadvantaged by lacking such leadership.⁸ Keyman explains the dynamics of JDP's dominance as being built on a 'cycle of dominance' by defeating its opponents, expanding its core social support, enlarging its zone of governance both nationally and locally, strengthening its class, sector, and identity-based societal alliances, and consolidating its constituency."⁹ Against a history of coalitional governments in the 1990s, JDP's electoral hegemony gave it the power to enact the legislation it desired and implement them on the society, to expand its ties with the society and empower its societal support.¹⁰

Due to transformation in every sphere of social life under JDP rule, Keyman states that Turkey is undergoing a process of emergence of "New Turkey" in reference to Erdoğan's own words. Keyman explains this New Turkey as:

The New Turkey entails a new state, a new historic block that includes a new military and judiciary, an emerging and indigenous group of intellectuals, a new stratification with a growing middle class of creative and active communities, and highly urbanized, globalized, Europeanized and dynamic social relations. It is a post-tutelage Turkey in which the civilian government is stronger than the military and the judiciary. The New Turkey is also a post-secular polity where religion is more visible, active, and established, and a post-modern society that consists of new class and identity dynamics.¹¹

Such an image of New Turkey actually have many problems. The biggest problem of today Turkey is a very high level of polarization both in politics and society. Although JDP has ruled over the country with its dominance, it did not create cohesion but split. Keyman argues that JDP used polarization in the country to stabilize its majority by pitting one group against the other. However, the result has been an ongoing and increasing divide in society along

8 Ibid., 25.

9 Ibid., 24.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid. 26-27.

ethnic, religious, and secular lines.¹² Balta and Düzgit explains that populist politicians use existing ethnic or religious divisions in the society. In Turkey's case, populist discourse operated through a division between "people" and "elites" where governing right wing party represented the will of people and opposition represented "the elite."¹³ Kalaycıoğlu shows how the concept of Kulturkampf explains the politics in the country. As constitutional referendum of 2010 demonstrated, citizens in Turkey were divided along cultural elements, mainly "socio-cultural liberal and secular coastal" regions and "religious conservative hinterland" inhabitants in the society.¹⁴ Another cause of polarization has been the constantly held elections especially in the form of referenda. Such a state of electoral policy forced citizens to think in terms of "yes or no" mentality, making the political division and debates bolder.¹⁵ For instance, Furman and Tunç study of individuals' Twitter use on 2017 referendum night showed that political debate mostly operated along partisan lines with polarization. Unlike a Habermassian public sphere where individuals openly debate on the political issues in a cross-cutting fashion, individuals acted with the motivations of homophily.¹⁶

The polarization in political arena also reflect itself onto social relations and the society. Report on Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey provided rich insight about this phenomenon. Built on in-depth interviews with 2004 participants and focus groups with JDP, RPP, NMP and PDP voters, the report revealed that participants had a negative image of counter-party supporters as being "a threat to the country," "cruel," "hypocrite," "bigot," and "selfish" while attributing positive characteristics such as "patriotic," "honorable," and

12 Ibid., 29.

13 Senem Aydın Düzgit, and Evren Balta. "Turkey After The July 15th Coup Attempt: When Elites Polarize Over Polarization." *Istanbul Policy Center* (2017): 6.

14 Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, "Kulturkampf in Turkey: The Constitutional Referendum Of 12 September 2010." *South European Society and Politics* 17 no.1 (2012): 1.

15 Ibid., 7.

16 I. Furman, and A. Tunç, (2019), "The End of the Habermassian Ideal? Political Communication on Twitter During the 2017 Turkish Constitutional Referendum." *Policy & Internet*: 1.

“open minded” to supporters of like-minded parties.¹⁷ Düzgit and Balta’s workshop with politician in Turkey also revealed rich insight about elite’s view on polarization in the country. The result of the study showed that even elites themselves were not in consensus about the existence of polarization in the country. While JDP affiliated politicians considered polarization as a “perception,” oppositional participants saw polarization as a striking problem existent in politics and society. This situation manifests that there is polarization even on the problem and existence of polarization in the country among elites.¹⁸

As can be expected, severe polarization in politics and society also reflected itself on the media system. In order to understand today’s media structure and partisanship in Turkey, an assessment of JDP’s media policies since its early years is a requirement. JDP period brought new dimensions into the interplay of economy, politics and the media. During JDP rule, new media ownership structures appeared with the support of government. Especially between 2002 and 2008, media ownerships of Uzan and Ciner group dissolved and handed over to more government-friendly groups. Cem Uzan, the owner of Uzan group, the second largest telecommunication operator (TELSIM and also a political rival to JDP during two elections, lost its media power after several disputes and final accusations of corruption by judiciary. Uzan family lost many assets such as Star TV, Star Newspaper, Joy FM, Rock FM, METRO FM and its telecommunication operator TELSİM. Star TV was taken by Doğan Group, owned by Aydın Doğan, which held the biggest media share afterwards.¹⁹ As the case of Uzan group demonstrates, JDP period have been characterized by clashes over media ownership and political parallelism. More recently, the sale of media holdings such as Hurriyet Daily, CNN news and Doğan Haber Agency and many other radio and TV channels by Doğan group

17 Emre Erdoğan, “Türkiye’de Kutuplaşmanın Boyutları Araştırması,” *İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi* (2017: 14.

18 Balta and Düzgit, 9.

19 Akser and Baybars-Hawks, “Media and Democracy in Turkey,” 308.

to Demirören group (a government friendly media group in 2018, was another criticized step in media ownership change.²⁰

Akser and Baybars-Hawks defined five different methods through which JDP government controlled the media: “conglomerate pressure,” “judicial suppression,” “online banishment,” “surveillance defamation,” and “accreditation dissemination.”²¹ Conglomerate pressure included tax fines for media agencies, government manipulation of agenda and mobilizing to boycott certain media critical of media. Another mechanism have been to arrest journalists for their writings in press or online or house controls by police. Such wave of arrests began in 2008 with the famous journalists from Milliyet, ODATV and Cumhuriyet.²²

Although online communications provide prospects for democratization and autonomy from dominant media agencies, as Yeşil puts forth, authoritarian tendencies toward media regulation continued in the cyber sphere in Turkey. During 1990s when Internet was at its infancy in Turkey, government left the regulation of Internet to penal code that applied similarly to traditional media organs. With the mid 2000s, the JDP government started to penetrate into cyber sphere through regulatory laws. Referred to as “Internet Law”, first Internet-related regulation in 2007 gave authority to the Telecommunications Presidency (TIB to ban a website if it includes elements of “obscenity, the sexual abuse of children, suicide, prostitution, gambling, drug abuse, and the slandering of the legacy of Atatürk.”²³ Additionally, several other legislations such as Anti-Terror Law, the Penal Code, Law 5816 (about Atatürk’s memory and Intellectual Property Law can be recourse on to judge online speech.²⁴

20 Yılmaz Özdil, “Doğan MEDYA Grubu Satıldı. İşte Türk Medyasının Son Hali,” *Sözcü*, March 27, 2018.

21 Akser and Baybars-Hawks, “Media and Democracy in Turkey,” 302.

22 *Ibid.*, 312.

23 Bilge Yeşil, “State Policy toward Online Communications and the Internet Regulatory Regime in Turkey.” In *Locating Emerging Media*. eds. Germaine R. Halegoua, Ben Aslinger, (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2016, 47.

24 *Ibid.*, 48.

In 2011 and 2012, new regulations were introduced that further restricted online speech and access. In 2011, Information and Communication Technologies Board (BTK, a governmental agency, introduced and obligated the use of a filtering system for the protection for children and family. Although amendments to this regulation made it mandatory to use filtering system, Internet service providers are obligated to provide such filtering to their customers. While the criteria for access blocks to websites are blurred, it has been claimed that the ruling party uses arbitrary blocks for political purposes as well. Another regulation banned the usage of certain terms such as *gey* (Turkish word for gay, *çıplak* (Turkish word for naked and certain English words like “free”, “teen”, “anal” etc.²⁵ A final regulation in 2012 was announced by Binali Yıldırım, then minister of transportation, informing the public that government considers to block access to Twitter and Facebook, when “a threat to public safety” detected. Although criticized by many in academia and the press, such regulations were actualized as observed in the blockage of sites such as YouTube, Myspace, and Dailymotion.²⁶

After the coup attempt in July 2016, JDP’s policy towards media, particularly the Internet have gained a new shape. Yeşil and others claim that JDP’s policy towards Internet has been widened and tightened.²⁷ During state of emergency right after the coup attempt, JDP government issued several decrees. Specifically Decree Law 671 and 680 authorized BTK to confiscate any company to protect national security and public order and prevent crimes as well as authorizing Department of Cybercrimes to intervene directly in the flow of content on the Internet and gather any personal data without court authorization. Furthermore, several social media platforms and private messaging instances were restricted after terrorist attacks. Beyond legal restrictions, JDP also practiced Internet shutdowns and VPN and cloud restrictions. At an institutional level, another act of intervention was the closure

25 Ibid., 49-50.

26 Ibid., 52-53.

27 Bilge Yesil, Efe Kerem Sözeri, and Emad Khazraee. "Turkey's Internet Policy after the Coup Attempt: The Emergence of a Distributed Network of Online Suppression and Surveillance." *Surveillance & Society* 15, no.4 (2017): 558.

of TIB with suspicions regarding involvement of coup supporters. The powers of TIB were transferred to BTK. Finally, there have been thousands of arrests and prosecutions of ordinary social media users, some of which have been denounced by citizens themselves.²⁸

Against this background of limited autonomy and political influences, Turkey's contemporary media environment is under the effect of polarization. While there can be found frequent discussions regarding partisanship and credibility in public discourse, academic literature as well addresses the same problem. According to Çarkoğlu and others, Turkey's media system reflects "press-party parallelism" due to four main dynamics: "... commercialization, political polarization, ties between media and political institutions, and newspaper's judgements about reader preferences."²⁹ They empirically examined the content of newspapers that are either close to JDP, RPP or mainstream during 2011 election campaign and found that the newspapers tended to favor separate blocs in election and their respective ideologies by limiting their content plurality in terms of representation of competing parties.³⁰ In a similar fashion, Toker analyzed the newspaper coverage of several issues such as European membership and important cases such as Balyoz and Ergenekon during 2011 elections and revealed a "... fragmented, volatile and ideologically polarized election coverage ..."³¹

Especially after 2010, JDP's illiberal policies created pressure on the society and started to fragment its early social alliances. In order to compensate for its social media support, JDP recourse on a strategy of political trolling within a context which is defined as "digital populism." Main function of such trolling has been to manipulate and shape the political discussions as well as rallying the fragmented groups in social media.³² One of the themes of digital

28 Ibid., 556-559.

29 A., L Çarkoğlu, Baruh, and K. Yıldırım, "Press-Party Parallelism and Polarization of News Media during an Election Campaign: The Case Of the 2011 Turkish Elections," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 19, no.3 (2014: 295.

30 Ibid., 299.

31 H. Toker, "More National Less European? The Comparison of the Last Two General Elections in Turkey." *European Journal of Communication* 30, no.2 (2015: 203.

32 Ergin and Yörük, 4094-4095.

populism has been the motto of serving to people by JDP. Both in politics and social media, opposition were pictured as against the JDP's services to the people. The trolls mostly criticized opposition and emphasized JDP's services such as building airports, bridges etc.³³ Second theme of digital populism has been the will of people which is represented by the electoral results by pro-government mindset. In this manner, JDP's policies has been seen as representing the will of people, especially those have been excluded by the establishment.³⁴ A final element of digital populism have been a discourse of "enemies" which gained speed especially after Gezi Park protests. AK Trolls aimed to demonize the oppositional voice, by creating and spreading conspiracies that depict domestic and foreign enemies working against the will of people.³⁵

Erkan Saka claims that JDP has adopted an understanding of social media similar to that of traditional media outlets. Instead of a purpose to develop a media strategy, JDP government attempts to shape social media with external means such as tax fines or introducing new legislation to circumscribe Internet use. However, Saka claims that this strategy fails, as it cannot discourage skilled Internet users who are able to by pass government obstacles to social media. Although it may not sufficient to contain social media users, it can harm profits gained through digital platforms and affect the country's economy adversely.³⁶

In a polarized and partisan media environment, credibility and disinformation become a problematic aspect. A recent report on online news consumption in Turkey demonstrated that 53% of urban population stated that they came across with "stories where facts are spun or twisted to push a particular agenda," followed by individuals who report viewing news that are made up for political or economic motives and experiencing non-professional news production.³⁷ In order to fight disinformation and check the credibility of news, new operations that perform fact checking on the Internet emerged

33 Ibid., 4104.

34 Ibid., 4105.

35 Ibid., 4106.

36 Erkan Saka, "The AK Party's Social Media Strategy: Controlling The Uncontrollable." *Turkish Review* 4 no.4 (2014): 422.

37 Yanatma, "Digital News Report," 25.

such as Teyit.org or Doğrulukpayı.com. As the above developments and current state of media manifests, Turkey's media environment makes it crucial to take concerns about polarization, credibility and media bias into consideration when analyzing news consumption behavior.

§ 3.1 Online News Media Environment and News Consumption Trends

Turkey's first Internet connection has been created with experimental purposes first through Netherlands in 1992, and then through US National Science Foundation Network with a TCP/IP Protocol in 1993. Turkey connected to the global Internet in 1993 with DPT project conducted by TUBİTAK-ODTÜ cooperation. Turkey's first web server, website in '.tr' domain (Campus Wide Information System) was founded by ODTÜ. First Internet service provider of Turkey, TR-Net was again founded by ODTÜ in 1995. In the following years, different universities such as Ege University, Boğaziçi University and İstanbul Technical University provided Internet connection. During its infancy, Internet was largely used for academic and technical purposes, example of which is ULAKBİM that aimed for connecting all educational institutions in the country to provide a central information system.³⁸ Today, there are several Internet service providers in the country, to name a few, TTNNet and, Superonline and TurkNet.

Emergence of online news media in Turkey is mostly initiated by big media groups. Same media groups such as Doğan, Çukurova and İhlas were also leading figures in the development of Internet infrastructure in the country. These business groups started to transfer their traditional media activities to the digital platforms. They had the advantage of extensive investment and advertisement potential which would make leave the digital arena without serious competitors. Motives for such strategy included increasing Turkish content on the Internet in order to attract more customers for Internet

38 İbrahim Toruk, *Gutenberg'ten Dijital Çağa Gazetecilik: Türkiye'de Haber Siteleri*. (İstanbul: Literatürk, 2008, 270.

connection. The idea that new media on the Internet could easily compete and take the lead against traditional media was also influential. Finally, these media groups held shares in other businesses such as industry and wanted to increase their commercial product range.³⁹

First online news media websites were created as an extension of traditional press media in Turkey as daily newspapers founded their online versions. Aktüel and Lemn magazines were first to open their online versions in 1995, followed by daily newspapers Zaman, Milliyet and Sabah. Representing a different format, the first online news portal Xn (Eksen was formed in 1996, and it mainly collected news from different websites and presented it to the Internet users. Being the first example of digital born newspaper, Net Gazete was founded in 1998 and prepared its own news content rather than collecting it from other sources.⁴⁰ The first examples of online newspapers in Turkey simply transferred their press or broadcasting content to their websites without any considerable change. Except from user e-mailing option, majority of websites did not enable interactive features such as user comments on news or viewing other users' comments. Other interactive features of online media, such as chatting among users and customization of news package was as well absent from almost all online newspapers in Turkey during early 2000s.⁴¹

Especially during late 2000s, online news media in Turkey developed to acquire more features of digital newspapers developed in the world. Today, online journalism includes aggregation of content from traditional news rooms, creating original content for the Internet and designing content for story telling format which reflects the social reality to the Internet.⁴² A closer examination of Habertürk and Hürriyet's press and online versions shows the main features of online news in Turkey today. Press versions of these newspapers use approximately 1600 characters while online versions use reach 5500

39 Tolga Çevikel, "Türkçe Haber Siteleri ve Türkiye'de İnternet Gazeteciliğinin Gelişimini Sınırlayan Faktörler." *Galatasaray Üniversitesi İletişim Dergisi* 1, 2004: 151.

40 Toruk, *Gutenberg'ten Dijital Çağa*, 294.

41 Çevikel, "Türkçe Haber Siteleri," 152.

42 Berrin Kalsin, "Geçmişten Geleceğe İnternet Gazeteciliği: Türkiye Örneği." *The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies* 42, (2016:78.

characters at maximum, including extensive image and video content. Without space restriction, online newspapers can provide all the news in the package, and with constant updates, informing citizens about more stories faster than their offline counterparts. Besides, the agenda of online newspapers of Hürriyet and Habertürk are shaped according to reader interests, making online content more dense and diverse.⁴³

Furthermore, new forms of journalism such as citizen journalism started to develop in Turkey. In this form of news making, ordinary citizens operate the data collection, aggregation, approval and presentation of news. The examples of such journalism can be seen in the events of Gezi Park Protests, where hundreds of citizens uploaded individually collected content to Twitter and circulated it.⁴⁴ This form of news production is also used by several digital born news outlets in Turkey, to name a few examples, Bianet and Dokuzsekiz Haber.

Apart from websites of media brands and digital born news outlets, social media in Turkey represent another platform of online news media. Many news media brands and outlets have their social media accounts, utilizing the interactive environment of social media to disseminate their content. Doğu's study revealed the network of media accounts and their dominance and connections on Twitter. According to the data he provides, Bianet, BBC Türkçe, Sendika.org and T24 are the most central news outlets in Twitter network and have more connections to other media organs. The data shows that pro-government media outlets have a periphery place and mostly have connections to other pro-government outlets while certain mainstream brands such as CNN Türk, Hürriyet, Milliyet and NTV are more central to Twitter network.⁴⁵ Due to these findings, it can be claimed that critical media outlets dominate the Twitter environment in Turkey, making social media an alternative space for oppositional voice.

43 Derya Aydoğan, "Türkiye'de Dijital Gazetecilik: Habertürk Ve Hürriyet Gazeteleri Örneği." *The Turkish Online Journal of Design Art and Communication* 3, no.3 (2013): 36.

44 Kalsın, "Geçmişten Geleceğe," 85-86.

45 Burak Doğu, "Turkey's News Media Landscape in Twitter: Mapping Interconnections among Diversity" *Journalism* 27 (June 2017): 10.

Turning from production to consumption aspect, as the Internet infrastructure improved during 2000s, Internet penetration continuously rose in Turkey. Today, computer and Internet use of 16-74 age group is 59,6% and 72,9% respectively. When gender is taken into consideration, computer and Internet use is 68,6% and 80,4% for men and 50,6% and 65,5% for women.⁴⁶ Although Internet penetration rates are high at country level, Yıldız shows that several disadvantaged groups exist in terms of access to and use of the Internet. While more men than women have access to the Internet, education level, socio-economic background and rural-urban difference determine the access.⁴⁷ Another barrier appears in terms of Internet access costs. Turkey has a relatively higher cost of Internet service which demands an important part of citizens' income. These factors continue to create inequalities for society in Internet use.⁴⁸

Turkish citizens' news consumption patterns are revealed by a recent report conducted by Reuters Institute in 2018. Based on online surveys with individuals above the age of 18, this study represents an urban sample who already have access to the Internet. According to statistical data, 87% percent of participants stated that they used the online media (including social media as news source, which is followed by television with 77% and social media with 66%. However, when asked about their main news source, 48% stated TV as their main news source, followed by online media (including social media with 39% and only social media with 13%.⁴⁹ It can be inferred from the data that while online media is much more used for news in Turkey, a majority of population still rely on TV as a news source. Main source of news also changes with age and political leaning. While the elder and right-wing people prefer

46 TUIK, 2018 Hanehalkı Bilişim Teknolojileri Kullanım Araştırması (Household Information Technologies Consumption Research.

47 Mete Yıldız, "Digital Divide in Turkey: A General Assessment" In *Handbook of Research on Overcoming Digital Divides: Constructing an Equitable and Competitive Information Society* eds. Enrico Ferro, Yogesh Kumar Dwivedi, J. Ramon Gil-Garcia, Michael D. Williams, (IGI Global, 2010, 77-78.

48 Ibid., 79.

49 Yanatma, "Digital News Report," 12.

TV more, young aged and left-wing people prefer online media.⁵⁰ In terms of political dispositions, the data shows that online media represent a platform for more oppositional voice for individuals in Turkey whereas traditional media appeals to those are pro-government one.

A detailed examination of online media demonstrates crucial points. Among various Internet based news sources, 66% of participants stated that they used social media last week, which is followed by the websites of traditional media agencies with 45% and digital-born news websites with 35%.⁵¹ These figures show that social media is a heavily used news source for Turkish citizens. According to the report data, Turkey takes the lead among many countries in terms of using social media platforms and instant messaging applications such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and WhatsApp for news consumption purposes. Report writer Yanatma explains the rise in the use of WhatsApp due to fears about government control of media content.⁵² As the above data reveals, traditional media are still preferred to a considerable degree. In this media system, Fox TV, CNN Türk, NTV, Hürriyet and Sözcü are the most consumed TV and print brands in order of popularity in 2018. In terms of top online brands in order of popularity, CNN Türk, Hürriyet, NTV, MyNet and Sözcü appears as the most read digital newspapers and portals.⁵³

In contemporary Turkey, social media have become an important news source. The automation technology and filtering mechanisms make it an excellent platform for news agencies to disseminate their content and reach more individuals through social media.⁵⁴ Twitter's network of user following structure creates a web of interconnections among individual users and media brands which has the potential to include thousands of users. This big network

50 Ibid., 14.

51 Ibid., 13.

52 Ibid., 28.

53 Yanatma, "Digital News Report," 15.

54 C. S. Sütçü, and S. Bayrakçı, "Sosyal Medya Gazeteleri Nasıl Etkiliyor? Haberlerin Twit ter'da Yayılması Üzerine Bir Araştırma." *The Turkish Online Journal of Design Art and Communication* 4, no.2 (2014): 40.

makes it possible to circulate content among enormous numbers of individuals just through following and tweeting functions.⁵⁵ In their study, Sütçü and Bayrakçı examined the circulation of news content in Twitter. Data shows that news coverage such as current affairs, sports, economy and world affairs are tweeted approximately twice in Twitter. Among news topics, current affairs and politics are tweeted the most, especially when important issues emerge in the political agenda of the country.⁵⁶

Perception of credibility of media is warning in Turkey. Trust levels for media in Turkey reveals the dimensions of polarization and disinformation of media. Citizens have a high level of distrust for news. 40% percent of participants stated that they do not rely on news while 22% percent were indecisive regarding their trust in media. The distrust level for Turkey is the highest among all media markets included in the report. Furthermore, 33% of participants stated that they do not trust even the news sources they use.⁵⁷ The report also provided trust levels for particular brands. It is interesting that critical brands such as FOX TV News, NTV News, CNN Türk, Cumhuriyet and Sözcü, which all are composed of critical or mainstream agencies, are the most trusted brands among participants while pro-government Sabah, TRT News and Ahaber have very low brand trust grades. However, when asked about the trust in the media they use for news, the participants stated pro-government AA and TRT scores high as well as Fox TV News, which shows that individuals regard the media they use as trustworthy in general.⁵⁸ Strong level of distrust in news must be taken into consideration when analyzing news consumption behavior and selective exposure because it reflects individuals' perception of information quality. Information quality may appear as a determining motive for selective exposure rather than political loyalties or media habits.

55 Doğu, "Turkey's New Media," 3.

56 Ibid., 49.

57 Yanatma, "Digital News Report," 20.

58 Ibid., 22.

Research Findings: Perception of Media and News

Following two chapters will present the findings of 16 interviews conducted with young Internet users in Istanbul. In order to reveal the selective exposure patterns in four dimensions mentioned above and motivations guide them, particular questions are asked both about exact media choices in terms of media brands and platforms as well as perceptions of Turkey's media and different mediums and news topics. This chapter will first present interviewees' ideas about media environment to lay the ground on which media use practices are conducted. In the next chapter, selective exposure patterns regarding four different dimensions –medium selection, news vs. entertainment, topic selection and confirmation bias- along with motivations will be assessed.¹

Before delving deeper into the findings of this research, a description of the interviewees' background will be useful. As mentioned earlier, the interviewees' ages range between 18 and 30, including both Y Generation (aged between 25 and 30 and Z Generation (aged 18-24. All the participants live actively in Istanbul, therefore the sample is representative for urban population. The interviewees are composed of students and wage laborers as well as an unemployed individual. Due to age, while Z Generation members are

1 The interviewees will be referred to via pseudonyms and their gender, age, occupation and political party support respectively, e.g. (Male-19-Student-JDP

mostly student, Y Generation members are wage laborers, graduated from the university. All the participants hold a minimum level of university education, including those with graduate education. In terms of education and occupation sample is determined to include different sectors such as public and private sector employees, as well as different professions. Student interviewees are recruited both from social and natural sciences to create a balance in representation.

All the participants had both economic and educational means to actively use the Internet, either through mobile phone or computer. They are highly experienced with the Internet which makes them possible participants for studying online news consumption habits. As will be demonstrated further in the chapters, the participants use the Internet very densely in their daily lives.

In terms of political orientation, the sample included an equal number of both pro-government (JDP or NMP supporters and oppositional (RPP, GP and PDP supporters, and each group includes an equal number of male and female individuals. The sample is composed of seven JDP supporters, one NMP supporter, six RPP supporters, one GP supporter and one PDP supporter. In terms of lifestyles, pro-government participants especially females, reflected sensitivity in their discourse. In general, pro-government interviewees avoided a direct criticism towards the party in the rule, but mentioned more systematic criticism towards society and state, while prioritizing moral principles. On the contrary, oppositional participants reflected a more secular lifestyle. They frequently criticized the government and expressed their resentment. In total, the interviewees were not satisfied with the political system and were disillusioned with the politics, avoiding an active political participation. They did not hold a specialized interest in politics, instead keeping themselves updated about recent current affairs and political developments through a relatively passive way. In general, this disillusionment was more intense among the young aged Z Generation members.

§ 4.1 Polarization and Partisanship

Regarding the findings of this study, first thing to be mentioned is that all the interviewees, regardless of their political dispositions, age or gender, picture

Turkey's media as very problematic and expresses their resentment about it. Main criticism towards the media is that it is partisan and produces slanted news. Under the effects of partisanship, they describe a media environment that is polarized along two main sides, which is the government and the opposition. In their perspective, a majority of media environment and the quality of the news are under the impact of such polarization, especially the mainstream media agencies that also dominate the broadcast and press media. When they talk about the media, they frequently used words such as "manipulative, partisan, fake, unreliable."

For instance, Çağrı (28-Unemployed-RPP-Y Gen) underscores the impact of politics over media and believes that there is a serious polarization problem in Turkey's news media where every side of polarization dominates its own perspective. Similarly, Fatma (24-University Personnel-JDP-Z Gen) said that: "I do not find them (news media successful and I think they produce biased news. No matter which side they take, I do not believe that there is a neutral news media. They show the things not as they are, but as what they want it to be."² Melih (21-Student-NMP-Z Gen) reported that there is serious information pollution in politics and one needs to stay away from the biased and partisan media to be able to cope with this contamination.

Serhat (28-Architecture-JDP-Y Gen) depicted a media environment mainly divided along the political clash in the country as such:

In my opinion, not as left or right wing, but JDP and RPP, the media is divided along two. Because of this divide, your ideas are directed in the way that the media you follow goes. If you're accepting what you hear, without questioning whether it's correct or not, it becomes a problem. Because it is said that people blindly trust the media they follow, if it is in a similar ideology.³

2 Başarılı bulmuyorum ve taraflı haber yapıldığını düşünüyorum. Hangi taraftan olursa olsun haber medyasının tarafsız olduğuna inanmıyorum. Gerçekleri olduğu şekilde değil de kendi istedikleri şekilde göstermeye çalışıyorlar

3 Benim görüşüm, sağ ve sol olarak değil de, AKP ve CHP olarak medya ikiye bölünmüş durumda. İkiye bölündüğü için de takip ettiğiniz medyaya göre yönlendiriliyorsunuz. Gerçek

Sinem (28-Research Assistant-GP-Y Gen a n oppositional interviewee complained about the manipulation in media organs in the broadcast media as: “Certain media organs are using the manipulation very effectively. Actually, individuals may not be aware that they are manipulated. Maybe I may not realize that I am manipulated too. I cannot tolerate such media outlets that I think contain 98 percent manipulation, I do not watch it, and shut it down.”⁴

Although all young Internet users complain about the credibility and bias in the media, they diverge in their evaluations about the cause of such problems. This differentiation largely derives from political dispositions. Whereas oppositional interviewees primarily criticize government’s policies and its repression of media, pro-government interviewees mostly mentioned polarization and political disputes in the country or a moral decline that reflects itself into media environment. It is possible to see this difference in below self-reports. For instance, Ahmetcan (23-Student-RPP-Z Gen states that:

I think they (news media are actually under repression. I do not believe that certain news can be published and announced with bravery. It is so apparent that they hesitate to say certain things clearly because in our day, producing certain news can be regarded as crime. Those who see it as a crime frighten the people and news producers do their job not to inform people but to protect their own freedom.⁵

Ekin (20-Student-PDP-Z GEN thinks that broadcast and press media is under government influence and describes it as such:

olup olmadığını da kabul edip araştırmıyorsanız bu sorun oluyor. Çünkü insanlar genelde takip ettiği ve kendi görüşünden olan sitelere körü körüne inanıyormuş.

- 4 Bazı yayın organları manipülasyonu çok iyi kullanıyor. Açıkçası insan manipülasyona uğradığının farkına bile varmayabilir. Ben de belki farkına varamayabilirim. %98 burada manipülasyon yapılıyor diyebileceğim yerler benim tahammülümü azaltıyor. İzlemiyorum, kapatıyorum.
- 5 Aslında baskı altında olduklarını düşünüyorum. Bazı haberlerin cesurca yayımlanabildiğini düşünmüyorum. Tam anlamıyla olmasa bile bazı şeyleri söylemekten çekindikleri çok açık Çünkü artık yapılan haberler suç unsuru olarak görülebiliyor. Bunu suç olarak gören kesimler de insanları korkutuyor ve insanlara doğru haber vermekten çok kendi özgürlüklerini koruma odaklı habercilik yaptıklarını düşünüyorum.

I do not have almost no interest in television. I think there is so much censorship in television and it is so exaggerated when serving news. In the name of neutrality, a very wrong government policy is presented in a way as if there is no wrong in it. They legitimize such presentation by claiming that politics should not be mixed with the news. Actually, what I expect from them is not politics because it must be told that whether a policy works or not for the country.⁶

Burcu (28-Financial Manager-RPP-Y Gen considers social media as a platform free from the repression and fear present in the mainstream media agencies as such:

I think it is under pressure and repression. I think, because of this, people try to spread information more via social media. Similarly, people started to be more active on Instagram in the recent years. We started to watch individuals and well known people more from social media. After all, since mainstream media is under repression, there is no environment of trust. Frankly, I believe that people in mainstream media are afraid.⁷

As the above quotes indicate, the oppositional participants emphasized the pressure of the government over media organs. “Repression,” “fear,” and “censorship” are much more pronounced by the oppositional young individuals to explain the media problem. From a different angle, a pro-government inter-

-
- 6 Televizyonla aram neredeyse hiç yok. Televizyonda çok fazla sansür uygulandığını düşünüyorum ve bu haberlerde daha çok abartılıyor. Tarafsızlık adı altında iktidarın izlediği çok yanlış bir politika ortada hiçbir yanlışlık yokmuş gibi anlatılıyor. Haberlerde siyaset yapılmaması gerekiyor denerek bu tutum meşrulaştırılıyor. Aslında bu siyaset yapmak değil çünkü politikanın ne kadar işlediğinin veya işlemediğinin gösterilmesi gerekiyor.
- 7 Baskı altında olduğunu düşünüyorum. Artık bu yüzden insanların olup bitenleri daha çok sosyal medya üzerinden duyurmaya çalıştığını düşünüyorum. Yine Instagram üzerinden de son yıllarda daha çok aktif olmaya başladı insanlar. Takip ettiğimiz sanatçıları ve göz önünde olan insanları buradan daha çok izlemeye başladık. Yani baskı altında olduğunu düşündüğüm için de bir güven ortamı olduğuna inanmıyorum. İnsanların korktuğunu düşünüyorum açıkçası.

viewee Fatma (24-Student and University Personnel-JDP-Z Gen blames individuals for being used in the polarization by politics and media. She argues that: “the news media is very biased because people also want it to be. They want to be fanatic and they identify themselves vis-à-vis others. Actually, those who control the superstructure also want it and use it, and contribute to the problem.”⁸ Emine (28-Housewife-JDP) points to a moral decline in the society and explains the situation by adding her religious sensitivities:

Yes, all the media brands do it. For example, whatever political idea you have, if you’re not a person with principles, you may conduct partisanship for everyone. You may violate others’ rights, tell lies or break hearts. Our citizens often praise Anatolia, saying “we’re Muslims, we have wisdom,” but those days are gone and such people have already passed away. This is the reality of Anatolia. You can find such unprincipled people in every sector. For example, I do not trust the words of a grocer that I do not know, anymore.⁹

As above analysis demonstrate, the interviewees consider mainstream media as corrupted by partisanship and polarization. However, it is important that how they locate such problem, in other words, whether they politically put the blame on the counter-ideological media brands. A very important finding is that the interviewees refer to media in totality and criticize not only the ideologically different media but also media brands close to their ideology. For instance, Ekin (20-Student-PDP-Z gen) stated that:

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- 8 Haber medyası çok taraflı çünkü insanlar da bunu istiyor. Fanatik olmak ve kendini başkasının üzerinden tanımlamak istiyor. Aslında bu durum üst yapı araçlarını elinde tutan insanların da bunu istemesi ve kullanmasından kaynaklanıyor
 - 9 Evet, her taraf yapıyor bunu. Mesela sen düzgün, ağır oturaklı bir insan değilsen, hangi görüşten olursan ol, o görüşün partizanlığını yaparsın. İnsanların hakkına da girersin yalan da söylersin, kalp de kırarsın. Biz böyle çok Anadolu güzellemesi yaparız, müslümanız irafınımız vardır, insanlarımız ariftir diye ama onlar eskide kaldı ya da ölüp gittiler. Anadolu’nun gerçeği bu yani. Bunu yapan insanlar her alanda çıkıyor. Örneğin ben artık tanımadığım bir esnafın bile söylediklerine hemen inanmıyorum.

At the moment, there is no channel that produces neutral and unbiased news. AHaber can be seen as an example of it. Birgün can also be seen as an example. I believe that they are used so apparently as a propaganda tool. We can only pick from which propaganda we will receive the news.¹⁰

Another two pro-government interviewees (respectively Emine and Levent reported same kind of criticism towards all media including ideologically similar brands as what follows:

I think they are irritating. I don't believe that there is a free press, free media. There may be those who try to be free. I do not find it abnormal that individuals produce more news about those who have similar lifestyles or political affiliations. After all, what kind of news flow and news production could we expect from T24 or AHaber? I am a JDP voter but I hate AHaber and alike. When it comes to BeyazTV and alike, I wouldn't watch it even if you threatened to kill me to make me watch. (28-Housewife-JDP-Y Gen ¹¹

I don't find the news media as healthy. I think both sides are biased. When I see AHaber's news, I feel like the country is in very good conditions, as if we have reached the space, as if everything goes perfect.

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- 10 Şu an Türkiye'de hiçbir şekilde objektif habercilik yapan bir kanalın olduğunu düşünmüyorum. Buna AHABER de örnek verilebilir, Birgün de örnek verilebilir. Hepsinin bir propaganda aracı olarak çok net bir şekilde kullanıldığını düşünüyorum. Biz sadece hangi tarafın propagandasından daha net bilgiler alacağımızı seçebiliyoruz.
- 11 Sinir bozucu olduklarını düşünüyorum. Özgür bir medya, özgür bir basın olduğuna inanmıyorum. Özgür olmaya çalışanlar olabilir belki. Kişilerin yaşadığı hayat ve bulunduğu cemahtan olan insanların haberlerini daha çok yapmasını da anormal olarak görmüyorum. Ulusal TV'nin veya TV24'ün nasıl bir haber akışı olmasını, insanlara nasıl haberler sunmasını bekleyebiliriz ki sonuçta. Adaletli oldukları, sapıtmadıkları ve yalan haber yapmadıkları müddetçe, bunun normal olduğunu düşünüyorum. Ben AKP seçmeniyim ama AHABER'den falan nefret ediyorum. Hele BeyazTV falan, öldürsen izlemem o kanalları.

However, when I see OdaTV or SolHaber's news, I feel like our country is invaded, as if the economy has crumbled and as if all our industry has been shut down. (28-Engineer-JDP-Y Gen ¹²

These self-reports show that young Internet users do not see the polarization and problem created by only one political bloc, but consider it as produced by different ideological groups and media outlets. Therefore, they do not manifest a polarized mindset in their approach. It also shows, that they have built a consciousness about post-truth politics where same subject can be framed totally different and contrary to each other in the media and by politicians. As shall be demonstrated in the next chapter, this is an important point in that it also affects their interaction with political difference through media use.

§ 4.2 Perception of and Interaction with News

When asked about what they expect from news and what they feel when viewing news, interviewees provided important evidence. The word “news” have acquired a political and bad connotation in their minds. When the word “news” is used by the interviewer, all the interviewees considered it firstly as political news. Consequently, almost all interviewees expressed the similar feelings of “disappointment, anger or sadness” when they see news. For instance, Burcu (28-Financial Manager-RPP-Y Gen explained her feelings when seeing the news as: “I can say that I feel disappointment when I read political news about Turkey. I can say that I feel anger and fear. After every bad development and incident, we ask what is going to happen next?”¹³

The reasons for such feelings are explained differently by the young individuals. It is evident that oppositional interviewees consider the news a mirror

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- 12 Ben haber medyasını sağlıklı bulmuyorum. Her iki tarafın da yanlı olduğunu düşünüyorum. Bugün bir AHABER'i açtığımda ülke çok güzelmiş, sanki uzaya çıkmışız gibi her şey mükemmel gidiyormuş gibi anlatılıyor. Ya da bir Sol Haber'i ya da bir ODATV'yi açınca ülke sanki işgal edilmiş, ekonomimiz yerle bir olmuş, bütün fabrikalarımız kapanmış gibi hissediyorum.
- 13 Daha çok Türkiye ile ilgili siyasi haberleri okurken hayal kırıklığı diyebilirim. Öfke diyebilirim. Yine korku olabilir. Her kötü gelişmeden sonra devamında ne olacak diye düşünüyoruz.

of bad government and adverse developments in the country. For instance, İbrahim (24-Accessory Producer-RPP-Z Gen said: “Frankly, the news are disappointing. I think all the news we see are destroying our dreams. Because when I read the news, I can never feel like I live in a country that develops and catches up with the contemporary level of development.”¹⁴ Berke (Male-23-Student-RPP-Z Gen puts it as such:

When I receive a news about politics, generally the people of this country comes to my mind. I get angry when I see that people who rule this country earn so much money but do nothing for the people. I say they do not deserve the place they occupy. This is the same for the party that I vote for. In politics, as I say, if a party is successful then I support it, but I also want its success to be continuous. When I see pointless actions in politics I get angry. For example, when I see news about fights in the parliament, I talk to myself “what do you expect” and I lose my hope.¹⁵

Similar resentment about the country’s daily life is also observed in the self reports of the pro-governmental interviewees. For instance, one Fatma (24-Student and University Personnel-JDP-Z Gen explains the developments in the country with her religious sentiments as such:

I feel very upset. I do not know if it is correct to mix religion with politics, but, I think that the fear of God, whether you have it or not, is very crucial for providing order to society. However, this feeling is also

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- 14 Açıkçası haberler umut kırıcı Hayallerimizi yok ediyor bence okuduğumuz bütün haberler. Çünkü haberlere baktıkça hiç gelişme noktasında ilerleyen, çağa ayak uyduran bir Türkiye’de yaşadığımı düşünemiyorum. Hayal kırıklığı, pişmanlık ve üzüntü, hepsi bir arada... Çünkü iyiye giden bir şey olduğunu görmüyorum.
- 15 Siyasetle ilgili bir haber aldığım da genel olarak halk geliyor aklıma. Baştaki insanların aslında gereğinden fazla maaş alıp insanlar için bir şey yapmadığını gördüğümde sinirleniyorum. Hak etmiyorsunuz olduğunuz yeri diyorum. Bu, benim oy attığım parti de olabiliyor. Siyasette dediğim gibi bir parti olduğu yeri hak ediyorsa desteklerim ama başarılarının devamlı olmasını dilerim. Dediğim gibi lüzumsuz işleri gördüğümde de sinirleniyorum. Meclis kavgaları ile ilgili bir haber aldığım zaman mesela “Ne bekliyorsun ki?” demeye başlıyorum ve umudu kaybediyorum.

disappearing in the society. A man can easily kill another man. Because he is forgiven, and easily gets out of jail. People have no fear of anything. We need to fear something. Because when we are left alone, we find the truth. Because we are human beings. ¹⁶

Due to polarization and partisanship existent in the media and the politics, the news also come to reflect the political conflict in the country. One pro-governmental interviewee, Emine, (Female-28-Housewife-JDP-Y Gen described news as a reflection of polarization in the country and expressed her irritation with it as such:

Actually, I feel irritated when reading political news. I feel like we are in a game. Same thing happens and repeats itself for years. They (the politicians are always arguing against each other but nothing changes. The most intense feeling I have is irritation. Sometimes I feel anger. Sometimes I say “ How can they write such a thing?” and cannot believe it. Very rarely I say “ Oh, this is high quality news what they make.”¹⁷

Although the way they frame the resentment about the political news is different, all interviewees depicted news as frustrating in its content. Here, news can be seen as a door opened to the political arena in the country. Through learning what they feel about the news, one can learn how satisfied individuals with current developments in their country are. It is striking that not only op-

16 Çok üzülüyorum. Belki siyaset ve dini karıştırmak doğru mu bilmiyorum ama Allah korkusunun, size göre vardır veya yoktur ama onun toplum düzenini sağlamakta çok işe yaradığını düşünüyorum. Ama artık bu da çok azaldı. Adam adamı bile çok rahatlıkla öldürebiliyor. Çünkü affediliyor, hapisten çıkıyor. Bir şeyden korkusu yok insanların. Bir şeylerden korkmamız gerekiyor. Çünkü kendi halimize bırakıldığımızda asla doğruyu bulamıyoruz. Çünkü insanız.

17 Bıkkınlık geliyor açıkçası siyasi haberleri okurken. Bir oyunun içindeymişiz gibi hissediyorum. Yıllardır aynı şey oluyor. Birbirilerini yiyorlar ama değişen bir şey yok. Hissettiğim en yoğun duygu bıkkınlık. Zaman zaman öfke hissediyorum. Yok, artık bu da yazılır mı dediğim oluyor. Çok çok nadir, iyi haber yapmışlar, dediğim oluyor.

positional interviewees, but also pro-governmental interviewees are dissatisfied with societal and political situation. It reflects a general disillusionment with politics and the way it is conducted in the country.

Such a negative connotation and perception of news may be expected to influence an individual's interaction with news, which is his/her interest in general news. It can be claimed that continuous disappointment with political news and partisanship make Z Generation members avoid politics. Almost all of Z Generation members reported that politics is not one of their top news topic, or sometimes they totally avoid seeing it to prevent similar bad feelings.

For instance, Fatma (24-University Personnel and Student-JDP) said that:

The fact that extreme political discourse surrounds the media made me stay away from it. I believe that news media sector also utilizes such discourses. That's why I started to avoid political news. For example, I did not know that Meral Akşener is a woman, I learnt it after the elections. Similarly, I learnt that we have transited to presidential system 6-7 months after the elections. I am kind of detached from the politics. Because politics became something like a literature work at primary school level. It does not promise anything to me.¹⁸

Similarly, Ahmetcan (Male-23-Student-RPP-Z Gen) explained his distaste of politics and news as: "The political news are at the end of my news reading list. When I follow the news, because of my distrust, the political news comes as the last. I can say that I check the media every day, but you ask me when you

18 Medyada özellikle siyasi söylemlerin aşırı bir şekilde var olması açıkçası beni biraz uzaklaştırdı. Habercilik sektörünün de bunu kullandığını düşünüyorum. Bu yüzden artık siyasi haberleri takip etmemeye başladım. Gazete olur, televizyon olur yani herhangi bir kitle iletişim aracından siyasi içerikli haberler okumamaya başladım. Meral Akşener'in bayan olduğunu bilmiyordum örneğin, seçimlerden sonra öğrendim. Mesela başkanlık sistemine geçtiğimizi 6-7 ay sonra öğrendim. Siyasetten kopuk sayılırım. Çünkü siyaset biraz okul ortaokul edebiyatına dönüştü. Çok bir şey vaad etmiyor.

last saw a political news, I would say that I haven't seen any since the local elections in March."¹⁹

Derya (21-Student-RPP-Z Gen) expressed herself that she feels regret because she does not have a considerable habit of news reading:

I feel like I do not do enough about reading news. I always say to myself that I should read the news. I believe that there must be certain news sources that I use when I am following the news. I can not gain this habit in any way. I have this bad side. I mostly see the news when I am surfing on the Internet, when I log into Instagram.²⁰

Finally, Rabia (24-Student and Architect-JDP-Z Gen) expressed her hopelessness about politics and how it affects her news consumption as:

For a while, I worked for a company. At that times, every morning I used to check the current affairs via computer. I do not like to watch evening news now. Because I get effected. The incidents are told in such a bad way. I do not believe that it is good for human psychology. That's why I prefer Internet news more. Nowadays I do no follow political news at all. I do not believe that I can change anything. I want to focus on thing that I can do and change.²¹

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- 19 Siyaset haberleri benim için son sırada, bir habere bakıyorsam güvensizliğimden dolayı siyaset son sırada yer alıyor benim için. Her gün medyayı inceliyorum diyebilirim ama en son ne zaman siyasi bir haber okudun deseniz seçimlerden sonra bir daha bakmadım diyebilirim.
- 20 Haber okumak konusunda kendimi eksik hissediyorum. Hep diyorum böyle açık haberleri okumalıyım. Haber okurken kafamda yer etmiş sabit haber kaynaklarının olması gerektiğine inanıyorum. Ama bir türlü bunu kendime kazandıramıyorum, böyle eksik bir yönüm var. Haberleri genellikle Internette dolanırken görüyorum. Instagramı açtığımda görüyorum.
- 21 Bir dönem bir şirkette çalışıyordum. O zaman her sabah işe başlamadan önce bilgisayarımdan gündeme göz gezdirirdim. Akşam haberlerini izlemeyi çok seviyorum. Çünkü çok etkileniyorum. Öyle bir kötü anlatılıyor ki olaylar. İnsan psikolojisine iyi geldiğini düşünmüyorum. Bu yüzden Internet haberlerini daha çok tercih ediyorum. Bu aralar siyaseti pek takip etmiyorum. Değiştiremediğimi düşünüyorum bazı şeyleri. O yüzden belki gözümü kapatmak istiyorum. Yapabileceğim, değiştirebileceğim şeyler üzerine yoğunlaşmak istiyorum.

§ 4.3 Distrust for News and Source Diversification

As a consequence of their perception of partisan and manipulation media and direct experience with it, the interviewees have grown a high level of cynicism towards all the media environment and it was also observed during interviews. “Distrust” and “doubt” were frequent words that they used to express their ideas. Derya’s words reflect this cynicism perfectly: “I have this deep distrust for news inside me. When somebody comes and tells me “do you know that this and this and that happened?” I can’t easily believe and say “Oh, really?”²² (21-Student-RPP-Z Gen Similarly, Ekin (20-Student-PDP-Z Gen explained her deep distrust as: “ I can never fully trust the news. That doubt always stays to an extent. For example, when an event happens, I try to read the information from people living near to the incident to become more assured about it. For example, about sexual harassment incident in Kanarya, many fake news were made. I learnt about the truth from people living in Kanarya. I guess I will never be able to fully trust the news.²³ A different pro-government interviewee Murat (20-Student-JDP-Z Gen explains his distrust with his experience as such:

Of course, I can not help but feel distrust. Generally, it is as if there is a copy of the same news content that is distributed to each media institution of same political disposition. When I watch something on channel A, I see the same content on channel B with exactly same wording. As I say, there are maybe one or two media outlets now that we can see as objective.²⁴

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- 22 İimde bir gvensizlik var haberlere karřı. Biri bana “Ya bak byle bir olay olmuř” dediĐinde “Hadi ya yle mi olmuř” diyemiyorum mesela
- 23 Hibir zaman tamamen gvenemiyorum. O gvensizlik biraz da olsa kalıyor. rneĐin bir olay olduĐunda olaya yakın yerde yařayan insanların yorumlarını okuyarak belki biraz da netleřtirmeye alıřıyorum. rneĐin Kanarya’daki tecavz olayında bir sr asılsız yapıldı. GereĐi oradaki insanlardan ğrendim. Sanırım hibir zaman tam net gvenemeyeceĐim.
- 24 Tabii canım yani ister istemez gvensizlik yařıyorsun. Genel olarak yapılan haberlerin hepsinin sanki kopyası aynı taraftakine (aynı grřteki medya organlarına daĐıtılıyor gibi. A kanalında bir Őey izlediĐin zaman B kanalında 5 dakika sonra aynı haber geiyor ve hep aynı

Levent (28-Arcitech-JDP-Y Gen) explains his distrust as:

Actually I can not trust the news. They have certain interests and I believe they want to direct people into certain ideas. I think they aim to create a perception about everything. They make people have blinders on and do not see any other thing.²⁵

Aycan (22-University Personnel- JDP- Z Gen) explains how she gets confused when reading news as:

Whenever I receive a news I actually believe in it. Then I see another news about the same issue in a different site and it starts to change my mind. Then I see a completely different story about the same issue in third media that rejects and falsifies the claims of the early two. This makes me feel complicated.²⁶

As pervious section showed such a cynicism is double-edged. While it creates an awareness of polarization and possible manipulation by propaganda and partisanship, it also suppresses the motivations for seeking political news, discouraging individuals about political content. As it is mentioned earlier, such a situation holds true for especially Z Generation. On the other hand, the interviewees are not completely detached form current affairs and try to learn about the “truth” regarding important events they consider.

As an important mechanism to cope with media bias and disinformation, diversification of news sources appears. A majority of total interviewees reported that they aimed to increase their sources when analyzing an event, checking different arguments regarding it, before arriving at an assumption. Such a strategy basically represent a means for avoiding reliance on certain

kelimeler. Sanki aynı yazılı metin herkese dağıtılmış sıra sıra okunuyor gibi. Ama dediğim gibi, tarafsız dediğimiz haber yapan ya bir ya da iki tanedir.

- 25 Valla açıkçası güvenmiyorum haberlere. Çıkarları var ve insanları bir yerlere yönlendirmeye çalıştıklarını düşünüyorum. Her konuda bir algı yaratmaya çalıştıklarını düşünüyorum. İnsanlara bir at gözlüğü takıp haberlerde sadece onu gösteriyorlar, diğer şeyleri göstermiyorlar.
- 26 Herhangi bir haber aldığımda aslında ilk başta habere inanıyorum. Sonra başka bir medya grubunda başak bir açıklama görüyorum ve etkileniyorum. Sonra tamamen başka bir sitede ikisinin de yanlış olduğunu duyuyorum ve karmaşık duygular içinde kalıyorum.

perspectives and agencies not to be manipulated. Following quotes from Derya, Melih and Aycan exemplify the existence of this strategy.

There are many sources on the Internet. If I read newspaper, I would have to buy many newspapers see all perspectives. However on Internet, I can search Google and find millions of sources. When I look at many sources about an incident, and when I see that nine of them deny the arguments and two of them approve, I can assure myself about the facts.²⁷ (21-Student-RPP-Z Gen

In order to do fact checking, I search for the thing I see on social media via websites like teyit.org. I follow this kind of fact checking sites. Doğrulukpayı.com is a similar website and active on Twitter. If something is told in a very positive and admiring way in Turkey, I search for foreign media outlets to see how it is told there. BBC and CNN are among my most visited foreign sites. I think of all of these as a polar side. I try to neutralize them by positive and negative sides. In domestic politics, I sometimes check how same story is told in Sözcü or in Sabah and in Ortadoğu newspaper which is close to NMP ideology.²⁸ (21-Student-NMP-Z Gen

On Twitter, there is a Germany based news platform named DW Turkish. Many stories from many different news sources can be read through this platform. I can see both domestic and foreign media

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- 27 Internette çok fazla kaynak var. Gazete okuyor olsam fazladan kaynak görmek için birden çok gazete almam lazım. İnternette ise açıp Google'dan milyonlarca kaynak bulabilirim. Birçok kaynağa baktığımda dokuzu hayır böyle ir haber yok deyip iki tanesi ise var diyorsa, ben de bu olayın gerçek olmadığını anlıyorum.
- 28 Teyit etmek için bazen sosyal medyada gördüğümüz şeyleri teyit.org diye bir siteye bakıyorum. Bu tarz siteleri takip ediyorum mesela. Doğrulukpayı.com var aynı şekilde. O da Twitter'da etkin bir site. Türkiye içerisinde mesela bir şey çok güzellenerek anlatılıyorsa bu sefer de yabancı medyada konuyla ilgili bir şey var mı diye bakarım. Örneğin BBC ve CNN en çok baktığım iki yabancı medya. Hep bir kutup gibi düşünüyorum bunları. Artı ve eksi olarak dengelemeye çalışıyorum. Aynı haber Sözcü'de nasıl Sabah Gazetesinde nasıl yapılmış buna bakıyorum. Ya da MHP'ye yakın Ortadoğu Gazetesinde nasıl yapılmış diye bakıyorum

sources at the same place here. Checking the sources of different sides and then shaping my decision makes more sense to me. (22-University Personnel-JDP-Z Gen ²⁹

Diversification of sources is one of the main findings of this research regarding how a citizens acts under the pressure of polarization, though such behavior may not be same for other demographic groups in the society. It must be emphasized that such a way of news following is actually demanding both mentally and in terms of time consumption and it can be said to have a negative impact on interest in news. Therefore, interviewees reported that they perform such a strategy for the news that they deem to be very important, about which they want to reach the facts. On the other hand, diversification has a capacity to neutralize the effects of polarization and partisanship on the citizens, providing space and opportunities for interaction with political difference. It is interesting that under circumstance of new media where individuals are free to choose and specialize their news sources, both selectivity and diversification goes hand in hand under the realities of polarization.

§ 4.4 Trust for Institutions vs. Individuals

As an important finding, it can be argued that young Internet users' distrust for and negative experience with the media translates into a caution and suspicion towards media agencies and brands. They expressed a desire not to rely on media brands and institutions when receiving news. Diversification of news resources, as shown in previous section, is one evidence of such perception. By diversifying their sources, interviewees mainly escape relying on certain media outlets and their dominant perspective in news making. Rather than institutions, particularly Z Generation interviewees prefer to follow ordinary citizens, politicians and journalists etc. that they deem to be reliable and more objective, and receive the news through their online activities and

29 Twitter'dan Almanya kökenli DW Türkçe diye bir site var. Türkiye'deki birçok haberi birçok farklı kaynaktan bu platform sayesinde okuyabiliyorum. Yurtdışından ve Türkiye'deki farklı kesimlerden kaynakları bir arada görebiliyorum. Her tarafta kaynaklara bakmak ve kendi düşüncemi belirlemey çalışmak bana daha mantıklı geliyor.

comments on the social media. It is apparent that individuals replaced the institutions as “more reliable and credible” source of news in their perception for Z Generation. As social media constitutes their main news platform, Z Generation members use their personal online network to connect to trustful individuals in receiving news. Fatma (24-University Personnel and Student-JDP-Z Gen) explains that she prefers individuals to follow agenda as such:

I don't trust agencies anymore. On Twitter, rather than media institutions, I follow the news through individuals. In this case, I prefer to follow individuals. I follow individuals that I admire their world view and trust their ideas. I receive the news from them. Things that they retweet are mostly either against or for an argument on the agenda. Thanks to this, I occasionally visit and become familiarized with certain news websites that these individuals post and share.³⁰

Melih (Male-21-Student-NMP-Z Gen) explained how he prioritizes information from individuals over institutions with these words:

Nowadays I am interested in automobile sector. When I want to learn about conditions of the cars, I do not prefer websites about cars. Because such sites produce biased information about the cars, I can never trust them completely. This is also same for mainstream media or news media. Instead of them, I go and search about the model of car in Ekşisözlük and check the comments of people. This makes a lot more sense to me. Of course, I don't believe in everything I see there either.³¹

30 Ajanslara güvenim kalmadı. Twitter'da kurumlardan çok kişiler üzerinde haber takibi yapıyorum. Ben bu konuda kişileri takip etmeyi tercih ediyorum. Siyaset konusunda fikrine güvendiğim, dünya görüşünü beğendiğim insanları takip ediyorum. Onlar üzerinden haber alıyorum. Onların retweetlediği şeyler ya gündeme karşı alıyor ya da desteklemek için. Bu vesileyle onların paylaştığı haber kuruluşlarına da girdiğim, aşinalık kazandığım oluyor.

31 Son zamanlarda otomobil dünyasına ilğim arttı. Arabaların durumlarını öğrenmek için gidip bir araba sitesinden öğrenmeyi tercih etmiyorum. Çünkü bunlar ısmarlama yazılar oluyor ve bunlara tam manasıyla hiçbir zaman güvenmem. Bu ana akım medya için de söz konusu haber siteleri için de söz konusu. Bunlar yerine, Ekşisözlükte gidip arabanın markasını modelini

Ekin (20-Student-PDP-Z Gen) explains how her network of individuals on social media turned into a news source in itself for her:

There are academicians and famous people I follow such as Barış Yarkadaş and Erkan Celal. But generally, more than famous and known people, I follow ordinary people like me, whose news share and comment I admire. These people, in a way, represent a news source for me. In this way, when I open Twitter, it functions as a whole newspaper for me. The news post of those people I follow is always running through my main page. Thanks to these people, I started to follow many other platforms and individuals that I haven't known before.³²

As above quotes note, social media functions as a whole package of news along with entertainment for young individuals, but especially for Z Generation. Murat (20-JDP-Student-Z Gen) explains the importance of social media for him as "I use the Internet for mostly social media. My Internet connection is always on. I think it explains the intensity of my Internet use. Because I feel like the Internet is the only place where I can get relief."³³ In a similar line, Aycan (22-University Personnel-JDP-Z Gen) expressed her dependence on social media as:

I use the Internet mostly Twitter, Instagram and Whatsapp. Especially I use Whatsapp very much both for my job and also for my daily conversations. I also spend too much time on Instagram. I can say that it

aratarak araba kullanıcılarının yaptıkları yorumlara bakıyorum, bu bana daha mantıklı geliyor. Burada gördüğüm her şeyi de peşin olarak kabul etmiyorum tabii.

- 32 Barış Yarkadaş, Erkan Celal onun dışında takip ettiğim birkaç akademisyen var. Ama genel olarak ünlü kişilerden çok benim gibi sıradan bir vatandaş olup haber paylaşma ve yorum yapma şeklini beğendiğim ve takibe aldığım kişiler var. Bu kişiler de benim için bir tür haber kaynağı görevi görüyor. Bu sayede Twitter'ı açtığımda komple benim için bir haber sitesi görevi görüyor. Bu kişilerin haber paylaşımları sürekli benim ana sayfa akışımda oluyor. Bu kişiler vasıtasıyla da aslında öncesinde hiç duymadığım mecraları ve kişileri takip etmeye de başladım.
- 33 Genellikle sosyal medya için kullanıyorum İnterneti. Sürekli İnteretim açıktır yani o kadar seviyede kullanıyorum hani. Çünkü kafamı dağıtabildiğim tek dünyamış gibi hissediyorum orayı.

became something like an addiction. In total, I spend four and a half to five hours on Internet everyday.³⁴

On the contrary, Y Generation members were more affiliated with new agencies and big media groups and when asked, they were able to provide certain names of media outlets. For example, Çağrı (28-Unemployed-RPP* Y Gen says that:

I have got a certain package of news sources and I mostly focus on them when I follow news. I can count Sputnik, Cumhuriyet and Sözcü among them. The motivation for me to choose them is their reliability. Besides, they are big media outlets in their field of work. Again on the reliability, there are certain news sources that I consider as more objective which creates news from a third perspective. Especially Sputnik and Cumhuriyet are among them.³⁵

First emerging as an individual networking site, social media became in important news source especially after 2013 with Gezi Park Protests in the country and gained a new meaning. Younger members of Z Generation were completely uncultured in a period where social media reached to a certain level in terms of news. Therefore, social media represent for them a platform where many activities and practices coexist. On the other hand, older Y Generation members also witnessed the period where mainstream news agencies and outlets were more dominant and polarization exited to a lesser extent in the country. Therefore, Z Generation members have lesser trust in institutions and adopt more social media network whereas Y Generation members are more

34 İnterneti genellikle Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp için kullanıyorum. Özellikle Whatsapp'ı çok fazla kullanıyorum. Hem iş açısından hem de sohbet etmek için çok kullanıyorum. Instagramda da çok fazla zaman geçiriyorum. Yani benim için bağımlılık gibi bir şeye dönüştü diyebilirim. Toplasam 4,5-5 saatimi gün içinde İnternete veriyorum diyebilirim.

35 Belirli başlı haber kaynaklarım var. Bunların dışarısına pek fazla çıkmıyorum. Sputnik TR, Cumhuriyet, Sözcü gibi kaynakları bunların arasında sayabilirim. Bunları tercih etmemde güvenilirliği ön plana çıkıyor. Ve tabii ki kendi alanlarında büyük haber kaynakları olmaları. Yine güvenilirlik konusunda, daha dışarıdan ve objektif bir gözle haber yaptığını düşündüğüm kaynaklar var bunların arasında. Özellikle Sputnik ve Cumhuriyet.

familiar with news outlets and include them in their news diet by directly visiting these websites.

Research Findings: Media Choices and Selective Exposure

For the purpose of assessing selective exposure to online news on the Internet, young Internet users were picked as the interviewees of this qualitative study. This chapter will merely focus on the media use practices of young individuals. These practices mainly include their media choices while consuming the news, for instance, which news brands or news topics they choose to read. These practices will be evaluated to answer the research question of the thesis, along with four different dimensions of selectivity framed above. The findings are as well analyzed along generational and political orientation differences among interviewees, in order to capture recurrent and divergent patterns across these two groups. Finally, the assumptions about general polarization debate and Turkey's polarized media environment will be made according to the media use practices of the interviewees.

§ 5.1 Internet as Main News Source

Observing the extent and the density of Internet by interviewees, it can be argued that Internet saturates the everyday life of young Internet users especially through smart phones. Rather than sparing certain period of the day for Internet use, young individuals very often connect and check the Internet during a day. For instance, Derya (21-Student-RPP-Z Gen said that she holds the

mobile phone all the day in her hand to constantly check the Internet.. Mobile phone usage is very popular. Put in numbers, 15 out of 16 interviewees reported using mobile phones. While they use computer and mobile phones complementary, news consumption is largely done through mobile phones. For instance, Melih (21-Student-NMP-Z Gen says that: “Only thing I do through mobile Internet is to follow the current affairs. I follow both the country agenda and my social environment’s agenda through social media.”¹

Using mobile phones for Internet connection enables young individuals to be updated about the topics and platforms they show interest. Notification features of mobile news applications and social media play a key role in constantly alarming and updating young Internet users. Levent (28-Architect-JDP-Y Gen. who uses a mobile news application expresses that his main apparatus for accessing news is notifications with these words: “absolutely, the notifications are what makes me follow and read news. It is mostly those that come through Bundle (mobile news application and rarely via Facebook. Apart from notifications, I do not open the news and read them.”² This is a completely different pattern of news following compared to news broadcast timelines where audience need to spend certain periods of day to receive news. Instead of audiences reaching the news, the news reach the audiences through notifications. Mostly, the notifications are created according to the user’s content interests and such information is retrieved from the user’s earlier search habits. However, as a function of the notifications, the users mostly have a general knowledge of current affairs and keep updated about them, instead of doing more detailed readings about the issues.

Similar to mobile applications, social media platforms function as a filtering mechanism for the young individuals. Especially Z Generation members use social media as their news source, instead of visiting the websites of news agencies. Instead of showing a specific interest for political news, Z generation

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- 1 Mobil İnternet üzerinden yaptığım tek şey gündem takip etmek. Hem genel ülke gündemini hem de sosyal çevremi gündemini takip ediyorum sosyal medya üzerinden.
 - 2 Kesinlikle haber okumama vesile olan şey bildirimler oluyor. Genelde bundle üzerinden gelenler. Nadiren Facebook’tan geldiği de oluyor. Bunun dışında kendim açıp haberlere baktığım olmuyor.

members use social media to be familiar with political developments. For instance, Derya (21-Student-RPP-Z Gen) stated that: “ I do not specifically follow a news agency or website. I especially look at different sources for news. And I do this only when I see news that I find very interesting and I want to do research about it. There are no news sites that I check every morning.”³

The main activities young individuals do on the Internet include communicating through online messaging, checking social media and searching for information. For instance, Fatma (24-University Personnel and Student-JDP- Z Gen) said :

I have two mail accounts that I use actively. One of them is my personal mail and the other belongs to the place I work for. I actively use Instagram and Twitter in social media. I use WhatsApp as messaging platform. In terms of my academic interests, I visit Academia once two days to see new uploads.⁴

Relative to the Internet, traditional media loses its importance for the young interviewees. Except for minimal and occasional consumption interviewees stated that they do not use television, radio or newspapers. This situation holds through without any generational or political support difference among interviewees. According to their reports, the main reason for this is that they associate the traditional media, particularly broadcast media, with political bias and lack of credibility and see it as the main apparatus of manipulation. Rabia (24-Student and Architect-JDP-Z Gen) criticizes broadcast media as what follows:

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- 3 Özellikle şurada haber okuyayım, dediğim bir haber sitesi yok. Çok çeşitli yerlerden okuyorum ve bakıyorum haberlere. Bunu da çok ilgimi çeken bir haber görüp aslını araştırmak istediğimde yapıyorum. Sabahları açıp buradan haberlere bakayım dediğim bir haber sitesi yok.
 - 4 Aktif kullandığım iki mail adresim var, biri kurumun biri de şahsıma ait olmak üzere. Sosyal medyada aktif olarak Instagram’ı ve Twitter’ı kullanıyorum. Anlık mesajlaşma uygulaması olarak Whatsapp kullanıyorum. Akademik olarak Academia.edu’ya neler yüklenmiş diye iki günde bir girip control ediyorum siteyi.

If I need to speak about television, I wish that the government, the news makers or the police did not have such an influence on our citizens. Because I cannot trust neither state nor police with my eyes closed. I wish there were news platforms that I could judge easily with my eyes closed. There is always this idea of “what if?” passing through my mind. I actually admire myself that I do not unconditionally surrender myself to media but not everyone has this awareness. People see what is presented to them on television.⁵

Sinem (28-Research Assistant-GP-Y Gen) said that there are many channels on television that are quite manipulative and that she cannot tolerate such incidents and therefore, turn it off.

On traditional media use, time and efficiency considerations as well as established habits prevail. The interviewees stated that they do not have the time and the desire to use newspapers, because their lifestyle and more demanding nature of using newspapers compared to Internet discourages them. Derya (21-Student-RPP-Z Gen) described newspapers as “old-fashioned” and stated that she becomes surprised when she still sees people with holding newspapers at their hands. On radio usage, very few interviewees report using radio rarely and mostly for entertainment purposes while they are in car or at night. Burcu (28-Financial Manager-RPP-Y Gen) explains her habits of media use and ideas regarding newspaper and television as such:

Why I do not buy newspapers? This is something about the habits. Maybe if I investigate a bit, I would decide to buy a newspaper that I consider as objective. Buying newspapers is a forgotten habit for me.

5 Televizyon için konuşmam gerekirse, yönetim olsun, haberciler olsun, polis olsun bizim insanımız üzerinde bu kadar etkisinin olmamasını isterdim. Çünkü koşulsuz bir şekilde ben kimseye güvenemiyorum, ne devlete ne polislere. Gözüm kapalı doğru veya yanlış olduğunu söyleyebileceğim mecralar olmasını isterdim. Hep bir “acaba” var. Koşulsuz teslim olmama konusunda takdir ediyorum kendimi ama herkes bu farkındalıkta değil. İnsanlar televizyonda nasıl gösteriyorsa öyle görüyorlar. Televizyonu da bunun bir parçası olarak görüyorum.

Besides, I believe that many newspapers make biased news. I think the television is the same.⁶

Interviewees also provided information about their close friends' and parents' news following habits. It was evident that parents of many interviewees depended on traditional media in their news use, especially on TV. Interviewees explained this situation in a negative manner and criticized that their parents completely rely on a limited number of channels on TV. For instance Rabia (Female-24-Architect- JDP-Z Gen) said that: "For example, my grandfather watches ATV and never opens other channels. My uncle watches Halk TV and never watches other channels. He turns it off immediately he sees other channels. My mother does not discriminate between channels, but her ideas are so stable and I can never change it. I actually gave up trying to change her ideas."⁷ Such a finding shows that media use may differ among different age groups as older age groups may be expected to have stronger brand loyalties and established habits. It also bears the potential that effects of partisan media may be completely different on them. However, such a proposition requires further research to arrive at conclusions.

All the interviewees defined the Internet and the online media as their main source of news. Internet, particularly due to mobile phones, fits best with their everyday lives where they can constantly check the Internet and continue their daily activities. Young individuals underscore certain features of the Internet to explain their preference. According to their ideas, the Internet provides an alternative channel against traditional media, where they do not have to rely on certain media brands and can be exposed to a diversity of sources and voices to assure themselves about the truth. Therefore, the Internet becomes a mechanism to cope with and escape "polarized and manipulative"

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- 6 Neden gazete almıyorum? Bence bu daha çok alışkanlıkla alakalı bir şey. Belki biraz araştırsam tarafsız olduğuna inandığım bir gazeteyi almayı düşünebilirim. Bu tamamen unutulmuş bir alışkanlık benim için. Bir de çoğu gazetenin yanlış haber yaptığını düşünüyorum. Televizyon için de aynıını düşünüyorum.
- 7 Dedem mesela ATV izler, ama diğer kanalları açmaz. Eniştem Halk TV izler, o da diğer kanalları izlemez. Sesini duysa kapatır. Annem aslında her kanalı izler, ayırt etmez. Ama onun da fikirler çok sabit. Asla değiştiremiyorum, artık yeltenmeyi bile bıraktım.

media. Levent (28-JDP-Architect-Y Gen compares television and the Internet by using a metaphor as such: “ Television is under control of grandfathers. Whatever they command, from above, the news makers write accordingly. That’s why I find Internet more sincere. On the Internet, everyone can write about his or her ideas, that’s why one can see different colors there and different colors are beautiful. Even I see the color I like, one color is not enough and good. But, television has only one color.”⁸ It is striking that pro-government individuals criticized the broadcast and press media, although there are many government-friendly outlets in this area. This shows that there is a dissatisfaction about traditional media among young individuals regardless of political dispositions. It can be seen as a consequence of polarizations and its adversary effects on the quality of information.

Another feature of Internet that interviewees admire is the speed at which Internet can provide information and updates regarding events. In this sense, Internet is dominant in shaping their daily agenda and performs better than traditional media in terms of presenting instant information and new developments. On this, Derya (Female-21-Student-RPP-Z Gen compares traditional media and the Internet and reports that:

I prefer Internet because when there is breaking news on the agenda, I can instantly learn about it but if I used television or newspaper, I could barely learn about it in the evening news program or the day after. On the Internet, the news come to you with little delay and you may learn about it from many sources, you do not see it from only one source. If I read newspapers, I need to buy several newspapers to see the same news from different sources. But on the Internet, I can enter Google and can find millions of sources. When I check several sources, and when I see that nine sources deny the same information and two

8 Televizyon ağı babaların elinde. O yukarıdan ne belirliyorsa ona göre yazıyorlar. Onun için ben İnterneti daha samimi buluyorum. İnternette herkes fikrini yazabildiği için farklı renkler güzeldir. Tek renk görünce hoşuma gitmez sevdiğim bir renk de olsa ama televizyon öyle değil, hep tek renk.

other sources approve it, I can understand that the information is not correct.⁹

Fatma (Female-24-University Personnel and Student-JDP- Z Gen) underscored the Internet's ability to inform individuals instantly and also mobilize them to perform political activism and reactions to the agenda in a fast way. She explains it with important incidents happened in recently in Turkey:

On the 15th of July, the president was able to communicate with people via Facetime and all the country suppressed a coup attempt. This is a striking example. When Gezi Park Protests happened, I was at the other edge of the world but still I learnt about it. I immediately called my friends and asked them how they were. At that moment, I was in Qatar, and those Turkish people in Qatar learnt about the protest and immediately formed a protest in Qatar to support Gezi Park. This is very interesting. This is a kind of mobilization that Internet provides.¹⁰

These findings answer our first question regarding medium selection and selective exposure. Online news media does not complement but replaces traditional media use and young Internet users are strongly selective in their medium choice. They adopt the Internet as their main source of news and spend no or little time with traditional media. The main motivation behind this is

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- 9 İnterneti tercih ediyorum çünkü çok yeni ve bomba bir gelişme olduğunda televizyon ve gazetede bunu ancak akşam haberlerinde ya da ertesi gün öğrenebiliyorum ama İnternette anında öğrenebiliyorum. İnternette haber çok sıcaktır ve kaynağı da birden fazladır. Tek bir yerden bakmazsın ve birden çok kaynaktan görebilirsin. İkinci olarak da çok fazla kaynak var. Gazete okuyor olsam fazladan kaynak görmek için birden çok gazete almam lazım ama İnternette Google'ı açıp milyonlarca kaynak bulabilirim. Birçok kaynağa baktığımda dokuzu "hayır böyle bir haber yok" dediğinde ben de böyle bir haberin gerçek olmadığını görebiliyorum.
- 10 15 Temmuz olaylarında Cumhurbaşkanı Facetime'dan bağlanıp insanlarla iletişime geçebiliyor ve bütün bir ülke kalkışmayı bastırabiliyor. Etkileyici bir örnek bence bu. Gezi Parkı olayları olduğu zaman ben dünyanın öbür ucundaydım ve hemen duyabildim. Hemen telefondan arkadaşlarımı aradım ve onlara nasıl olduklarını sordum. Ben o sırada Katar'daydım ve Katar'da da yaşayan ve olayları öğrenen Türkler orada küçük bir Gezi Parkı protestosu yaptılar hemen. Bu çok ilginç. İnternetin sağlayabildiği bir mobilizasyon.

the perceived low quality of information in traditional media due to polarization and bias, whereas Internet provides them an alternative and escape way out of it and enable them to see multiple voices from multiple sources and judge the events more objectively. This shows that under the effects of polarization, a medium can acquire a new meaning to represent a political disposition. In the case of Turkey, the Internet represents a way out of political polarization. The important point is that this holds true not only for oppositional interviewees who try to escape government discourse, but also for pro-government young individuals.

§ 5.2 News vs. Entertainment Media Preferences

Another dimension of selective exposure this study assesses is the preference for news or entertainment. At this point, whether individuals prefer entertainment over news and opt out of exposing to political news and current affairs is decisive. Majority of interviewees reported that they follow the agenda through their social accounts where they also conduct other activities. This means that entertainment and news actually exist together. Social media contains and incorporates both elements and provides opportunities for both information and entertainment content exposure. For instance, Berke (19-Student-RPP-Z Gen explained his Internet use activities as: “I use the Internet very often. I spend a big part of my time for the Internet. I usually spend time on social media. I have many accounts such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. I also follow the current affairs via social media. I also do my research there and communicate with other people.”¹¹

Due to a rich network of personal connections and constant flow of news in the main page in social media platforms, young Internet users can be in touch with agenda and current affairs. Whether they have high interest of politics or not, such a mechanism provides the channel through which they stay updated about events and form opinion regarding them. While Y Generation

11 İnterneti çok sık kullanıyorum. Hayatımın bayağı bir kısmını harcıyorum internette. Genelde sosyal medyada vakit geçiriyorum.. Birçok platform üyeliğim var, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter ve Whatsapp gibi. Gündemi de buradan takip ediyorum. Hatta araştırmalarımı falan da buradan yapıyorum. Buradan insanlarla da görüşüyorum.

members reported more interest in current affairs and political news, Z Generation members were less interested. However, they were still in touch with political agenda through more passive means. For instance, Derya (Female-21-Student-RPP-Z Gen who do not have high interest for politics states that: “Instead of directly going to news, I wait for news to come to me on Instagram. When I come across with political news, I frequently read them. If I find such political news on Instagram’s discover button or through my friends’ posts, I certainly read them.”¹²Such a news exposure can be framed as incidental exposure, which occurs when individuals come across with political information although they are not specifically looking for it. Such an exposure comes from the sharing and commenting activities of other users of social media, therefore, turning news consumption into a social activity as well.

As an example of this form of incidental exposure to news, Ayca (22-University Personnel-JDP-Z Gen states that:

On the Internet and social media, the agenda keeps changing frequently. If I see a news there, if I come across with it, I read it. If I hear about an incident from my friends, I also read about it. But aside from that, I do not tend to be curious about an issue and specifically read about it. I do not have a habit of checking the news at a time period of day. When I log into Twitter, I read the short summary of news from the site I follow on Twitter.¹³

Many of the interviewees stated that they post and share links with their friends to inform their social environment. Ekin (20-Student-PDP-Z Gen explained her motivations for sharing and posting on social media as such:

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- 12 Direkt haberlere bakmak yerine Instagram’da haberin bana gelmesini bekliyorum. Önüme siyasetle ilgili haberler düşünce sıkça takip ediyorum. Instagram’da keşfet butonunda veya arkadaşlarımla paylaştığı şeyler içinde bu tarz haberler olduğunda mutlaka bakıyorum.
- 13 İnternette ve sosyal medyada gündem zaten sürekli değişiyor. Orada görürsem, karşıma çıkarsa habere bakıyorum. Arkadaşlarımla sohbet ederken duyarsam bakıyorum. Haber sitelerini açıp ayrıyeten bu konuda ne olmuş diye araştırmak için haber okumam. Belirli bir saatte haberlere bakmak gibi bir huyum yok. Twitter’a girdiğimde takip ettiğim birçok siteden gelen haberlerin kısa kısa özetini okuyorum.

I especially share the speeches of politicians and ministers that conflict with their early speeches. I also share content prepared on them. Because I don't like that people see these politicians as 100% reliable and I want to destroy this perception. I share such content whether it is about the president or RPP, or whatever ideology they have. I share news about male violence and sexual harassment because I want to expose such events to public. For example, trans-killing is being normalized in our society.¹⁴

Interestingly, female pro-government interviewees demonstrated a lower interest in politics and political news, stating their alienation from politics because of polarization. For instance, Fatma (Female-24-University Personnel and Student-JDP) stated that she stayed away from politics and news about current affairs because of manipulation she experienced with mainstream media. However, she also reported that although she do not follow political agenda regularly, she is exposed to such information on social media and find herself reading such news.

This shows that incidental news exposure on social media compensates for the lack of political knowledge although an individual is not interested in politics. As above quotes demonstrates, such a news exposure is valid for Z Generation members among interviewees. Earlier research warned that increasing options to select content would lead politically less interested to completely opt out of news content and turn to entertainment media. On the other hand, incidental exposure adds a new dimension to selective exposure literature and can act as a moderator which increases contact with the agenda and current affairs. However, more research is needed to further evaluate the effects of incidental exposure, in terms of its exact impact on political knowledge and po-

14 Özellikle siyasetçilerin bakanların daha önceki beyanlarıyla çelişen sonraki beyanlarını ve bunlarla ilgili hazırlanan içerikleri çok paylaşıyorum. Çünkü insanların bunları salt güvenilir insanlar olarak görmesinden rahatsız oluyorum ve bunu da yıkmak istiyorum biraz. Bir gün Cumhurbaşkanı olur bir gün CHP'den biri, görüşü ne olursa olsun böyle içerikleri paylaşıyorum. Erkek şiddeti ve cinsel saldırı haberlerini çok sık paylaşıyorum çünkü bunların görünürlüğünün artmasını istiyorum toplumda. Örneğin trans cinayetleri normalleştirilmeye çalışılıyor toplumda.

litical participation. What this study shows is that incidental exposure on social media, due to its potential of creating networks of information, makes it possible to process entertainment and information exposure. In terms of proper functioning of democracy and formation of public opinion, social media and incidental exposure seem to have positive effects by creating a channel for knowledge acquisition.

Furthermore, Z Generation members' exposure to political news changes due to agenda. When big events occur, exposure to news about current affairs seem to increase. Berke (19-Student-RPP-Z Gen stated that:

Sometimes there are big events that dominate the agenda. In order to follow them, I frequently visit news websites and social media. For example, recently the local elections have been at the top of agenda and I often followed the news about it, especially on Twitter. I mean, the more the agenda is busy, the more I have the desire to follow the news. If the agenda is not busy, then I follow the news by reading whatever I come across on social media as normally. If there is an event on the agenda, I do specific readings about it in certain platforms.¹⁵

As an example of exposure to agenda and big events, Aycan (22-University Personnel-JDP-Z Gen states that: " Lastly, I remember the economic sanctions of the USA and their threats on Turkey. I remember Trump's words like 'I destroyed your economy once, and I can do it again.'" Just as what above quote denotes, all other young individuals reported that they followed the news and developments about recent local elections and repeated İstanbul election, by checking the accounts of municipal elections candidates, parties and well-known individuals. These findings show that even in the existence of low political interest, young individuals keep informed about the country's agenda, avoiding a total political detachment. However, following solely important

15 Gündemi kaplayan bazı olaylar oluyor. Bunları takip etmek için çok sık bazı haber sitelerine ve sosyal medyaya girdiğim oluyor. Mesela son zamanlarda seçim konusu gündemdeydi. Bu konuda sürekli haber takip ettiğim oldu. Özellikle Twitter'dan takip ettim. Yani gündem ne kadar kalabalıksa o kadar hbaer takip etme isteğim oluyor. Gündem yoğun değilse, normal akışta haber takibi yapıyorum. Sosyal medyada önüme ne düşerse onu okuyorum. Gündemde bir olay varsa, onun üzerine özellikle belirli mecralardan okuma yapıyorum.

events on the agenda may lead to a low level political knowledge and only a slight opinion formation about the politics. From another perspective, these findings can as well be explained by what Atkin coined as information regarding threats and opportunities in the course of life that may have important effects on an individuals. Big events on the agenda attract young Internet users' attention because of their possible consequences to create threats or opportunities, which adds an informational value to news about such events.

Interestingly, use of mobile news applications is more prevalent among Y Generation members. For instance, Çağrı (28-Unemployed-RPP-Y Gen reported using "Bundle" news application where he receives notifications about news, including current affairs, politics, gaming, and technology. These mobile applications enable it to collect news from the sources selected prior to using, and provides direct contact with news coverage of online newspapers and digital news outlets. However, those who use such applications as their main source of news also reported using social media for the same purposes. On the other hand, Z Generation members reported using social media as their main and occasionally sole source of news. This differentiation may come from a generational difference. Older interviewees, due to longer experience with traditional media, are more familiar and socialized more with media brands. However, they had a similar suspicion about media brands and agencies, and adopted strategies to cope with bias in media, such as reading international media brands such as Emine (Female-28-Housewife-JDP or selecting a diverse package of brands to be able to objective such as Serhat (Male-28-Architect-JDP

Regarding another dimension of selective exposure mentioned in this thesis, news vs. entertainment, it can be argued that news and entertainment goes hand in hand for young Internet users and they do not opt out of news when selection options increase in online media. Either through direct contact or through incidental exposure to news, young individuals stay informed about the current affairs and view news content. While Z Generation members are less interested in political news, they are still exposed to such content through incidental exposure, an effect of their wide social media usage. Y Generation members, were more familiar with traditional media brands and agencies due

to their age, and had more direct contact with political news via visiting news sources.

§ 5.3 Topics Selection and Absence of Issue Publics

Topic selection and emergence of public issues are another dimension of selective exposure assessed in this study. According to the findings, regardless of political party support or generation difference, all the interviewees created their own package of news topics, along with their interests, occupation and other motives which shaped the bulk of their news exposure. It is evident that young individuals utilize the Internet's content selection opportunities to be exposed to their favored topics. For instance, a financial manager Burcu (28-Financial Manager-RPP-Y Gen) in energy sector said that she is interested in news about finance and energy sector because she needs to be updated all day. Sinem (28-Research Assistant-GP-Y Gen) said that she has to be active on Instagram because she is a sports coach and needs to get news about sports as well as her players. Serhat (28-Architect-JDP-Y Gen) stated that he has a special interest for technology and gaming follow the news about these topics.

These findings can be explained with adaptations framed in Atkin's informational utility model. As mentioned in second chapter, individuals perform adaptations to environment to conduct their daily lives. In order to fulfill adaptations, individuals need surveillance information regarding important subjects for their lives to cope with their uncertainties about how to react to dynamic reality.

However, a great majority of interviewees cannot be regarded as members of issue publics. When they select political news, they do a general reading of current affairs and get informed about new developments but do not seek specific information about particular issues. Main motivation behind this is to be informed about important events that can affect their lives. İbrahim (24-Accessory Producer-RPP-Z Gen) explains that as such:

I am not very interested in politics. I am mostly interested in the effects of politics upon people. I evaluate the news in terms of what a kind of effect may have a politician's speech or acts on the people. As long as I

can foresee, I try to avoid such dire situations that politics can create. After all, we live under a 25 year long hegemony and we are now experienced about what to is coherent or not. By evaluating new developments, I try to foresee how these could affect my job or my personal network and relationships.¹⁶

Therefore, exposure to political news does not always come from a high level of interest but is seen as a necessity. As a consequence of this, either as direct search with high interests or with incidental exposure due to low interest, politics and current affairs news is included almost all interviewees' personal readings, showing that selective exposure to news topics does not occur to the extent of opting out of current affairs. As the earlier section showed, Z Generation members are mostly exposed to politics incidentally, while Y Generation members are more interested in politics and go directly for news producers to view news. Sinem (28-Research Assistant-GP-Y Gen) explained her interest for current affairs and her motivations as such:

As my job necessitates, I follow news about agriculture and I also prefer culture, art and sports news. Politics comes as an encompassing category with them. If I add the political news, it comes at the top of this list. Because, especially in our country, everything is affected by politics. That's why, one feels the need to place politics at number one. Because, when someone says something to another, dollar increases in value. When an event occurs in politics, the concert you want to go to is cancelled.¹⁷

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- 16 Siyasetle pek ilgilenmiyorum. Daha çok siyasetin insanlar üzerindeki etkileriyle ilgileniyorum. Bir siyasinin söyleminin ülkeye ne katkısı olabilir ya da ne zararlar verebilir diye düşünerek değerlendiriyorum haberleri. Öngörebilme anlamında, oluşabilecek zor şartlara karşı önlem hazırlığı gibi görüyorum diyebilirim. Sonuçta 25 senelik bir hegemonyanın altında yaşıyoruz ve ne kadar tutarlı olup olmadığını görüyoruz. Bunları değerlendirip iş hayatımın nasıl ilerleyeceğini veya insan ilişkilerimin nasıl etkilenebileceğini görmeye çalışıyorum.
- 17 İşim gereği tarım ve bunun yanında kültür, sanat ve spor haberlerini takip ediyorum. Siyaseti bunların yanında bir yelpaze gibi. Siyaseti eklediğimizde bunların en başında geliyor. Çünkü özellikle bizim ülkemizde her şey siyasetten etkileniyor. O yüzde ister istemez siyaset

Although there is a considerable interaction with political content, only one interviewee, Ekin (20-Student-PDP-Z Gen who is politically active, can be regarded as a member of issue public. She expressed her interest in sexual harassment trials and important cases and the decisions of judiciary as such:

There are certain days that protests are held, such as 8th of March or 1st of May. In these times, I follow the events frequently, and I read about the cases opened and trials such as Gezi cases or Şule Çet's case. I think every detail of Şule Çet's case was very important. During all the trials, Şule Çet was judged although she has passed away. People discussed and judged things like she had a boyfriend, she was not virgin and she was outside at late night. Apart from this case, there was Berkay Üstünbaş's case of Gezi. I also followed this case closely.¹⁸

This situation demonstrates that young individuals are not specialized political content readers with specific issue interests but have only a rudimentary knowledge of political developments. Absence of issue publics and specific interest in policy areas casts shadow on the active citizenship of young individuals and their opinion formation process. It can be explained by a disillusionment with politics and a low interest in politics especially for Z Generation members.

§ 5.4 Confirmation bias vs. Accuracy Motivations

Another dimension of selective exposure, which is widely discussed in chapter two, is confirmation bias. First of all it must be stated that young individuals' brand choices mostly overlap with their political dispositions. For instance, a

hakkında haberleri listede bir numaraya koyuyorsunuz. Çünkü birisi birisine bir şey diyor, dolar artıyor. Bir olay oluyor, gideceğiniz konser iptal oluyor.

- 18 Belirli eylemlerin olduğu günler oluyor 8 Mart 1 Mayıs gibi. Bu zamanlarda haberleri çok sık takip ediyorum ve açılan davaları takip ediyorum. Örneğin Gezi davaları, Şule Çet'in davası. Şule Çet davasının her bir detayı bence çok önemliydi. Bütün duruşma boyunca hayatta olmadığı halde Şule Çet yargılandı. Erkek arkadaşının olması, bakire olmaması, geç saatte dışarıda olması gibi şeyler tartışıldı. Onun dışında Berkay Üstünbaş'ın Gezi olaylarından davası vardı. Bunu da çok takip ettim.

JDP supporter Serhat (28- Landscape Architect-JDP-Y Gen) said that he follows NTV, Sabah, Hürriyet and Milliyet and NTV through his mobile application. Another JDP supporter Levent (Male-28-Engineer-JDP-Y Gen) criticized certain pro-government and anti-government outlets such as AHaber and SolHaber and reported using MyNet, SonDakikaHaber, and EnSonHaber, thinking that these news portal exhibit less bias and more objective compared to others. Again, oppositional interviewees also tended to view ideologically close media. For instance, a PDP supporter Ekin (20-Student-PDP-Z Gen) reported using Bianet, Birgün, SolHaber, criticizing that sometimes these outlets as well can produce biased news and propaganda.

As mentioned earlier, younger Z Generation members have a suspicion for media institutions and outlets and mostly tend to check individuals whom they attribute credibility. It is observed that interviewees try to escape polarization in social media platforms as well but tend to follow ideologically similar individuals. For instance, a RPP supporter İbrahim (24-Accessory Producer-RPP-Z Gen) said that: "I follow individuals I trust and value their ideas, such as columnist and former minister of internal affairs Memduh Bayraktaroğlu, Murat Özün, Can Ataklı, and İrfan Değirmenci. Without exception, they touch upon every subject on the agenda."¹⁹

However as mentioned in previous chapter, when they select news outlets, they try to diversify their news sources to assure themselves about the credibility of news and select platforms that they consider as most objective possible. Ekin (20-Student-PDP-Z Gen) explains her motivations as such:

I try to read the news from many sources and the ones that I can rely on a bit more than others. That's why I largely use social media. Instead of directly going for news websites, I read the news they prepare on the

19 Köşe yazarı ve eski içişleri bakanı Memduh Bayraktaroğlu, Murat Özün, Can Ataklı, İrfan Değirmenci gibi güvendiğim ve fikrine değer verdiğim kişileri takip ediyorum. Hiç eksiksiz gündemdeki birçok olaya değiniyorlar.

social media. In this way, as the agenda shifts, I can compare the way they prepare the news and can arrive at an assumption.²⁰

In their outlet selection, young individuals try to select those sources they perceive as “less partisan” or “more objective” compared to others. Above media choices demonstrate that individuals avoid picking strongly pro-government or oppositional outlets in their news diet. It is evident that they consider certain media outlets as completely biased and unreliable and avoid using them while trying to choose those they consider more objective in news production. For instance, a JDP supporter Murat (20-Student-JDP-Z Gen criticized pro-government media outlets for being biased and reported using Haberturk, which he considers “more objective” in news making. He believes that there are just a few outlets that can still be considered as “neutral.” It is interesting that pro-government young individuals avoid using many pro-government media outlets and search for more neutral media. It reflects a frustration with like-minded media and turn to other channels for seeking objective information. Another pro-government young individual Melih (21-Student-NMP-Z Gen reported using fact-checking sites such as Teyit.org or Doğrulukpayı.com to assure himself about the news he receive.

The choice to diversify their sources to reach the facts also leads them to expose to ideologically different media and individuals. This can be interpreted as a personal mechanism to cope with extreme polarization and media bias. Many interviewees stated that in order to reach facts and not to rely on only one perspective, they viewed the news of “both sides.” For instance, Serhat (Male-28-Architect-JDP-Y Gen said that he feels the need to further investigate and search about the news he sees because “both sides” manipulate the audience. As another example, a JDP supporter Emine (28-Housewife-JDP-Y Gen reported using Mediascope on Twitter, which is an outlet very critical of government.

20 Daha az güvensizlik duyduğumu söyleyebileceğim yerlerden hatta birçok farklı kaynaktan okumaya çalışıyorum. Bu yüzden sosyal medyayı daha çok kullanıyorum. Haber sitelerinin direkt kendilerini değil de sosyal medyada yaptıkları haberleri takip ediyorum ki gündem değiştiğinde bu mecraların haber yapma biçimlerini karşılaştırıp ortalama bir şey çıkarabileyim.

In order to learn about the “truth” and escape manipulation, the interviewees report checking the media and individuals of different political camps. Fatma (Female-24-University Personnel and Student-JDP-Z Gen explained her strategy to understand the facts as “ I look at the discourses. For example if someone is blamed for something, I first look at the discourses of the both sides. Then I look at what other people say about this issue. I also look at what foreign media say about it. Then I think a framework appears. Absolutely, it shouldn’t be one sided. There cannot be an idea like ‘I read it from that specific source or person, that’s why it must be correct.’”²¹ Murat (20-Student-JDP-Z Gen stated that in order to assure himself about the news, he checks both Fox TV and AHaber when he receives an information from one of these brands. He added that he wanted to know the arguments of other brand on the same issue.

As a motivation to be exposed to politically different media and individuals on, knowing the arguments of different perspectives appear as an important factor. Sinem (Female-28-Research Assistant-GP explained her motivations as such:

There are many media organs on television that broadcasts very biased such as ATV, Kanal D, CNN Turk, and Haber Turk, an especially channels like AHaber. I follow these and people that use them on Twitter. Instead of individual news brands and agencies, there are people such as politicians, journalists and columnists that can influence masses. I follow these people. Even if they do not share my ideas and think in opposite way, I follow them to understand their viewpoint.²²

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- 21 Ben söylemlere bakıyorum. Mesela bir kişi bir şeyden ötürü suçlanıyorsa, öncelikle her iki tarafın söylemlerine bakıyorum. Sonra diğer insanların konu üzerine ne dediğine bakıyorum. Türkiye dışı medya buna nasıl yorum yapıyor ona da bakıyorum. Ondan sonra belirli bir çerçeve çıkıyor bence. Kesinlikle tek taraflı olmaması gerekiyor. Şu gazeteden okudum, doğrudur. Bu kişi söyledi, doğrudur gibi bir düşünce olamaz.
- 22 Televizyonda birçok yayın organı mesela ATV, Kanal D, CNN Türk, HaberTürk bunlar çok yanlı yapıyorlar. Özellikle Ahaber gibi kanallar. Bunlar ve bunları sosyal medyada takip eden insanları ben de Twitter’den takip ediyorum. Bireysel haber kuruluşları değil de, gazeteci, yazar, siyasetle ilgilenen insanlar yani kitlelere seslenebilen insanlar var. Onları takip

From their reports, interviewees provided further evidence for exposure to political difference. As an example of this, a JDP supporter Fatma (24-University Personnel and Student-JDP-Z Gen explained the news she saw on Twitter as such: “I came across with very upsetting tweets about economy. I came across with upsetting tweets like ‘the country is falling down, they ruined the country, and we will starve’. I doubted and said ‘what if it is true?’ The situation is apparent from the dollar and the economy. But I learnt about country’s economic situation from such tweets.”²³ As another example of exposure to political difference, a majority of interviewees reported following the accounts of both Binali Yıldırım and Ekrem İmamoğlu during recent local elections of Istanbul. For instance, Murat (20-Student-JDP-Z Gen reported that: “I mean, even if they are not in my following list on Twitter, when Ekrem İmamoğlu tweeted about an issue or RPP says something about it on Twitter, I find it and read it. Since they are open to all accounts to see, there are also times that I occasionally enter their accounts and check what they say.”²⁴ These findings show that interviewees were aware of the arguments of both candidates before Istanbul local elections of March and June 2019.

As the final dimension of selective exposure in this study, evidence regarding confirmation bias so far demonstrates that while young Internet users have a preference for like-minded media they also include ideologically different media brands in their source selection. In other words, participants manifested moderate confirmation bias and did not completely avoid uncongenial information. Along with what literature review denoted, findings pose question to Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory. While Festinger’s theory proposed that individuals prefer like-minded media and avoid dissonant ones to prevent psychological discomfort, his theory does not fit into media systems

ediyorum. Benimle karşıt görüşte olsa bile benim inanmadığım şeylere neden inandığını görmek için takip ediyorum.

- 23 Çok üzücü tweet’lerle karşılaştım ekonomi konusunda. ‘Ülke yıkılıyor, ülkeyi mahvettiler, aç kalacağız’ gibi çok üzücü tweetlerle karşılaştım. Ya gerçekten böyle mi acaba diye bir şüpheye bile kapıldım. Dolardan vs ekonomik durum anlaşılıyor. Ama ülkenin durumunu böyle olumsuz tweetler üzerinden öğrenmiştim.
- 24 Şöyle ki, takip etmediğim halde mesela Ekrem İmamoğlu bir tweet atmış veya CHP yine benzer konularla ilgili bir tweet atmış, girip bakıyorum ya da bazen kafama esiyor girip bu hesaplara bakıyorum zaten herkese açık olduğu için.

where polarization is a defining feature. As this study revealed, young Internet users' experience with polarized media and poor news quality affect their perception of information utility. Since news from like-minded media does not equal to high quality information for interviewees, they diversify their news sources to the extent of exposing to politically different perspectives to make reliable and correct judgement. Therefore, information quality and utility appeared as a stronger factor than confirmation bias in this study. According to informational utility model mentioned in the second chapter, individuals utilize information to cope with uncertainty and perform their adaptations to the environment. However, perception of low information quality in Turkey does not meet the needs of young Internet users to perform such adaptations. In other words, in a polarized media environment, receiving a credible and reliable information and "knowing the truth"²⁵ becomes a dominant motivation shaping news exposure. This shows that the particular features of a media system as a structural factor, such as polarized media in Turkey, can be a strong determinant of news exposure patterns and can moderate selectivity.

In terms of polarization and media discussion, the findings tells us that partisan media and availability of content selection do not directly lead to polarized audiences, as interviewees in this study showed, although to a lesser extent, interest in the arguments of opposite political camps. Such a picture shows us that polarization does not affect the society in an even manner, but its effects depend on the demographic parameters as well as on media use habits.

25 Hart et al., "Feeling Validated," 556.

Conclusion

This thesis analyzed the selective exposure to online news by young Internet users in Istanbul. The main motive behind this study is the scholarly debates regarding the effects of online media. Such debates were centered on the abundance of information and increased content selection options on the Internet. As the literature review illustrated, it has been argued that due to autonomy that online media provides, individuals may turn to solely consume content that is of interest to them. It was hypothesized that such an autonomy could lead to complete abandoning of political news and public affairs or to consumption of like-minded media at the expense of interacting with political difference. Such a consequence can be very detrimental to democracies as it impedes formation of public consent and tolerance. However, empirical evidence provide conflicting results in terms of testing these hypothesis. Therefore, the impact of online media on news consumption habits and wider socio-political system is still in need of further research.

With these concerns in mind, this thesis aimed to investigate the cues of selective exposure among young Internet users in Istanbul. This line of research in Turkey has not developed and mostly depended on reports provided by institutions. Turkey's media environment have strong signs of polarization, which may have important impacts on the patterns of exposure to news. In order to reveal young individuals' perceptions and ideas regarding media and

news in Turkey, this thesis adopted a qualitative method. Furthermore, patterns of selective exposure by young Internet users was questioned in four different dimensions: medium selection, topic selection, news or entertainment preference and finally political selective exposure. Therefore, the study adopted a twofold research question as: "How do young Internet users in Istanbul get exposed to news in the online media?" which aims to reveal selectivity patterns and "which factors influence their exposure to news in the online media?" When analyzing the interviewees, the research adopted a generational and political dispositions perspective. The young aged group is divided along generational (Y and Z Generation and political line (pro -governmental and opposition. Such a perspective provided a comparison between mentioned groups, seeing the heterogeneity of youth group within itself.

In order to answer these questions, firstly a theoretical background was presented in the second chapter. In the early literature, the concept of selective exposure referred to political confirmation bias in exposure to information. This line of research was largely inspired by Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory. In general, Festinger proposed that individuals seek to maintain a balance and coherence between their attitudes and incoming stimuli. When a person's knowledge and attitude conflicts with new cognitions, he or she experiences a discomfort. In order to avoid this end, individuals tend to receive congenial stimuli, while they discard and prevent uncongenial ones. These propositions have been interpreted as a preference for like-minded information content and also avoidance of unsupportive messages in the media. However, the literature showed that such propositions could not be strongly proved with empirical research. While a preference for supportive messages has been detected, aversion hypothesis has found little to no support. After a decline period during 1970s and 1980s, selective exposure research flourished in the 1980s. As a response to the drawbacks of Festinger's theory, later research pointed out several moderators of selective exposure such as information quality and strong or weak confidence in one's own belief.

Another brand of research was framed by Atkin's informational utility model. Mainly, Atkin proposed that decision to select an information piece is related informational value that the message contains. As individuals experi-

ence deficit of knowledge to cope with their uncertainties, informational utility becomes the key factor in selection. According to Atkin, individuals perform different “adaptations” to their environment in conditions of insufficient knowledge. The utility of information in terms of fulfilling such adaptations is a determinant of selection process. Moreover, Atkin emphasized the threats and opportunities that may affect an individual’s life create higher informational utility. Therefore, an individual would specifically receive information regarding such threats and opportunities to shape and react to its consequences. As the second chapter illustrated, Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory falls short of explaining selective exposure to information, particularly in terms of interaction with disconfirming messages. Atkin’s informational utility brings a new dimension to selectivity and has an explanatory potential for different forms of selective exposure.

In order to demonstrate the current state of research, fourth part of this chapter presented empirical literature conducted on online news exposure in four different dimensions. In terms of medium selection, the research generated a debate regarding whether online new media complement or replace traditional media. While complementarity mostly emphasized content preference of audiences, replacement underscored demographic differences in audiences and a potential for young individuals to abandon traditional media. In terms of news versus entertainment preferences, the research was guided by expectations that increasing entertainment selection options would lead to avoidance of news content. While empirical studies indicated that entertainment audiences consume more entertainment content in high-choice context, other studies also show that incidental news exposure may compensate for emerging knowledge gaps between entertainment and news audiences. In terms of topic selection, empirical evidence showed that individuals on the Internet can have a narrower agenda and topic range due to selection options. Existence of strong relation between issue public membership and exposure to respective issue-specific messages confirmed this hypothesis. Finally, literature on confirmation bias in online media brings serious questions to Festinger’s theory. As researchers pointed out, greater control over content online does not lead to a strong selectivity in terms of partisan media use. In

fact, accumulation of different sources in social media platforms may provide access to non-partisan sources and politically different perspectives.

Along with traditional psychological theory in media choice, the chapter also presented normative debates about polarization and generational media use. As the literature showed, the relation between polarization and media is a complex one with diverse Dynamics embedded in the process. Such dynamics may be seen as social media use, elite polarization, political polarization and disinformation, which in different ways contribute to the polarization and decline of democratic standards. Among them, disinformation has received high level of attention in the scholarly debate. Existence of partisanship and polarization is highly related to quality of information circulating in the media. Low quality information under polarization may take different forms, such as disinformation, misinformation and online propaganda. Such information can be circulated by bots, trolls and many other agents, made even more autonomous by the existence of social media. As scholars showed in different cases, disinformation and partisanship in media creates more incentive for polarization, by particularly affecting politically interested individuals and pushing them to more extreme issue attitudes.

Existence of fake news and politically slanted information have created many debates in public arena, bringing a questioning to the very existence of matters. Such a period is called “post-truth” era where truth has become an assertion, where it becomes difficult to share common grounds on a debate. In Oxford Dictionary, post-truth has been defined as simply where objectivity has less importance than emotional bias. While political information and debate regarding Trump’s election process and Brexit have been cases of post-truth politics, it has been argued that such form of politics can be traced back to debates regarding tobacco’s adverse effects of the existence of global warming.

Another way of looking at media and polarization relations is the individual use of political information. Scholars raised concerns that existence of a high-choice environment thanks to new media would encourage individuals to consume more of like-minded media, creating echo chamber and filter bubbles. As Sunstein explained, echo chambers have adverse effects on the individuals, simply encouraging them to adopt more extreme versions of their

early arguments and ideas, after being socialized with only like-minded individuals. Many empirical studies found evidence for such claim, simply showing that individuals in a free-choice environment consume outlets of similar ideological stance. While many empirical studies demonstrated that there is evidence of partisan selectivity, it is also shown that social media can encourage interaction with political difference and even reduce polarization. Therefore, rather than a technologically deterministic perspective, polarization and media relation should be shed light from an empirical perspective, showing to what extent individuals manifest features of polarization and in which ways they use perceive and use the media environment.

Another concept that have the potential to guide media studies is generation. This concept was mostly shaped by Mannheim's writings which became a ground for further studies. Defined in similarity to class position in society by Mannheim, generations imply a shared location by individuals born and raised in the same year period in the socio-historical complex. Added by a shared geographical location, generation provides its members a set of thoughts, historical experience and performative ground on which individuals practice sociality. Mannheim mentioned such shared mentality as inherent in a generation only actualized in a common participatory action by its members. Youth groups within a generation make comprise generation units, reflecting specific materialization of shared historical experiences, turned into a form of fundamental integrative attitudes and formative principles, woven by a strong bond among its members. Mannheim's conceptualization of generations has been visited frequently in student movements of 1960s, simply in a manner of revealing generational units and their role in social change. However, it is criticized that generational studies suffered from a poor conceptualization which did not separate between "generations as positions in lines of descent," "generations as cohorts," and "generation as historical participation."

Recently within the media studies, it has been claimed that early experience with media at a young age period gives shape to an audience's media use habits in the rest of their lives. Furthermore, through narratives, symbols and discursive practices used in media, a generation earns a common place to build their identity and sense of belonging. These dimensions invite scholars

to study media audiences' different media usage habits from a generational perspective. Empirical studies on media generations specifically concentrated on Net Generation, born into new technologies of Internet and later social media. Named digital natives or X Generation elsewhere, it has been claimed that Net Generation members developed completely different media use habits. More recent studies warned against technological determinism, and raised concerns about heterogeneity among youth, defining sub-generations or excluding the youngest segments as a different generational object.

Before delving into the details of interview findings of this study, third chapter provided a general picture of news media in Turkey, with specific focus on the development of online news media and consumption habits. The historical background of Turkey's media showed that since the late Ottoman Empire, media has always been under the pressure of politics. Especially with neo-liberal policies of 1980s, Turkey's media ownership completely changed and transferred to private business groups. Commercial interests and close relations with governments exacerbated the party and media parallelism in Turkey. Under JDP rule, media polarization became more evident due to government interferences in media sector. Political clashes with media business groups and change of ownership transformed media environment into a very polarized arena. Compounded with social and political polarization in the country, news media is under strong influence of politics and partisanship today.

Internet infrastructure developed during 1990s in Turkey, and Internet use penetration has reached to a considerable level recently. In its infancy, online news media mostly resembled to their offline counterparts in terms of content production and interactive features. In today's Turkey, online news media comprises of online newspapers, digital born outlets, and social media which provides for new dynamics of news consumption. As the statistical data showed, online news media performs as main source of news for a considerable number of individuals in Turkey, particularly for younger generations. Reports illustrate that distrust in media and exposure to poor quality news is at high levels in Turkey due to polarization. Therefore, this chapter indicated that impact of polarization on perception of media and news should be definitely taken into consideration when analyzing news consumption behavior.

Fourth and fifth chapters presented the findings of interviews conducted with young (18-30 aged Internet users living in Istanbul. In order to grasp and reveal the impact of polarization, first chapter presented interviewees' perception of media and news in Turkey. Interviewees' self-reports make it apparent that they perceive a polarized, biased and unreliable media in Turkey. Although pro-government and oppositional interviewees differ in explaining the causes of polarization in media and politics, they do not manifest a polarized attitude towards counter-minded media outlets and consider polarization as a problem created by all. Because of their experience with polarization and partisanship, they have also grown a dislike of politics and political news, showing a general disillusionment with politics. News, at that point, becomes a mirror of political life in their eyes. Because of this, particularly Z Generation members' political news consumption is not a priority but a necessity in their eyes, mostly occurring through incidental exposure in social media. Similarly they have shown a greater distrust for news institutions and a more tendency for individuals as news sources in social media while Y Generation members were more familiarized with media outlets and could give names of them when asked. This can be explained by a media generation perspective illustrated in chapter two. Z Generation members were born and raised during when social media acquired a meaning as news source and when polarization were at high levels. On the other hand, Y Generation members were also active in a period where mainstream media outlets in broadcasting and press sector were still dominant and polarization were at less level. Therefore, they have socialized with different mediums under different contexts.

Fifth chapter dealt with selective exposure patterns of young Internet users, along four dimensions explained above. With regards to medium selection, findings showed that interviewees manifest a strong selectivity. Young individuals do not use Internet as a complementary to traditional media. Instead, they mostly abandon traditional media and consider online news as their main source. Behind this exposure pattern, a distrust towards particularly broadcast and press plays the key role. Young individuals consider Internet as a platform where they can escape the effects of polarization and where they can choose what they want to view. Additionally, the speed and time efficiency advantages of the Internet vis-à-vis traditional media is another factor

behind this pattern. Self-reports of interviewees showed that their parents had dissimilar media consumption habits with more reliance on television and with a more polarized vision where brand loyalties are stronger. Although this study did not include older age groups in its sample, such reporting shows effects of polarization may be differ among different segments of society.

In terms of news or entertainment preferences, young Internet users mostly get their news from social media, where entertainment and news exist together. The fact that an important number of Y Generation interviewees are interested in public affairs and include it in their news consumption is a sign that entertainment and news does not replace each other. Moreover, similar to what literature review denoted, Z Generation interviewees who were less interested in political news still had exposure to political agenda due to incidental exposure especially through social media. Many participants reported increasing their political news consumption and following the agenda more actively when big events occur in agenda. Increased political news exposure can be defined with what Atkin framed as threats and opportunities that possibly affects individuals' lives. As Atkin proposed, information regarding big events carry more utility and leads to their selection as news items.

In terms of topic selection, self-reports of interviewees showed that particular interests deriving from habits, occupation etc., shaped most of the news exposure. This pattern matches with what Atkin proposed about environmental adaptations to increase knowledge level to cope with uncertainties. In order to continue to conduct their lives, individuals feel the need of surveillance information to be updated about certain issues. However, this study did not reveal strong issue-public members among young Internet users. Interviewees did not manifest specific interest of and exposure to information relating strict policy areas. They mostly read political news through agenda updates with a special interest for big events that dominate the agenda, such as elections. Such a finding can be explained with disillusionment with politics due to polarization and its reflection on media use habits. As the self-reports showed, while individuals were dissatisfied political news both in its bias and alarming stories about the country, they still felt necessity to keep connected to the agenda of country.

Finally, the interviewees did not show strong confirmation bias or defensive motivations in their news exposure. While they manifested a considerable preference for like-minded media and individuals on social media, this does not occur to the extent of avoiding politically different brands and individual networks. Main motive behind this is that interviewees have a distrust for general media environment and media institutions without strict discrimination between supportive and unsupportive media. Such a media environment makes high quality information rare and carry utility in their perception. In order to learn about facts, young individuals diversify their sources, to the extent of lesser interaction with political difference to check their arguments. As an example, almost all interviewees reported following both Binali Yıldırım and Ekrem İmamoğlu in pre-election period. These findings show that as a structural factor, polarized media environment plays an important role in shaping news exposure. While polarization have bold effects in defining and directing individuals' media perception and use habits, it does not always lead to more polarization and echo chambers. As interviewees in this study showed low confirmation bias and more concerned with information quality, it is clear that polarization may also lead to more concern for objective information. From the perspective of socio-psychological theories explained in chapter two, low information quality environment heightens accuracy motivations vis-à-vis defensive motivations. Therefore, Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance falls short of explaining information exposure patterns of urban and educated young members of Istanbul. As several points so far illustrated, Atkin's informational utility model and Festinger's theory reflects two possible outcomes of polarization that may simultaneously occur for different segments in the society. From a generational perspective, urban and educated young members of society can be said to have accumulated more exposure to political difference- for instance through university education- and also more affiliated with social media and Internet. This provides them an alternative media environment where they can build a different reaction towards polarization, regardless of their political dispositions. Compared to older generation, these young individuals, particularly Z Generation, were born into a period where polarization is at a very high level and institutions were severely questioned in Turkey. They also came of age in a period where social media

became an alternative to mainstream media in the country. The fact that they use this high-choice media environment not in a polarized way, shows us that news media do not automatically lead to more partisan behavior in terms of media use, but a counter force against polarization itself. Whether this occurs or not also depends on who uses it and how he or she perceives politics and media environment.

Along with the purposes of this study, it has been revealed that polarized media systems may generate different moderators of selective exposure. However, in order to fully grasp its effects, this study must be replicated with different samples that include diverse demographic and socio-economic groups.

Appendix A List of Interviewees

PRO-GOVERNMENT INTERVIEWEE GROUP

	Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Party Support	Generation
1	Fatma	24	University Personnel & Student	JDP	Z
2	Emine	28	Housewife	JDP	Y
3	Rana	24	Architect and Student	JDP	Z
4	Aycan	22	University Personnel	JDP	Z
5	Levent	28	Engineer	JDP	Y
6	Serhat	28	Architect	JDP	Y
7	Murat	20	University Student	JDP	Z
8	Melih	21	University Student	NMP	Z

OPPOSITIONAL INTERVIEWEE GROUP

	Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Party Support	Generation
1	Derya	21	University Student	RPP	Z
2	Sinem	28	Research Assistant	GP	Y
3	Ekin	20	University Student	RDP	Z
4	Burcu	28	Financial Manager	RPP	Y
5	İbrahim	24	Accessory Producer	RPP	Z
6	Çağrı	28	Unemployed	RPP	Y
7	Ahmetcan	23	University Student	RPP	Z
8	Berke	19	University Student	RPP	Z

Appendix B Interview Questions

BEFORE RECORDING

Before recording, information regarding age, education, occupation and political view is acquired. (For confidentiality, the participants did not want to share their personal information during the recording.

DURING RECORDING

- 1 How do you spend your daily life? What are your interest areas?
- 2 To what extent and for which activities do you use the Internet?
- 3 How do you find the news media in Turkey?
- 4 Have you ever felt distrust for the news you read or see?
- 5 What are your motivations and expectations for following the news?
- 6 What do you feel when you see the news?
- 7 Are there specific times that you follow the news?
- 8 Have you seen any news that impressed you recently?
- 9 Are people around you interested in the news? What about your family and close friends?
- 10 How would you describe your news reading habit? Is it a regular habit for you? Why? Why not?
- 11 With which mediums do you follow the news? (Television, Radio, News and Internet
 - a. What are the reasons for you to prefer such medium(s)?
- 12 There are many news websites, news portals and applications. Do you use any of these sources for following the news?
 - a. What are your reasons for preferring such outlets and not others? What do you think about their news producing quality?
- 13 Do you know about the news sources that people around you use?
- 14 Are there any news topics you regularly or mostly follow?
 - a. What are your motivations for preferring such topics?

- 15 To what extent do you use social networking sites such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter as news sources? Are there any specific individual or news account you follow?
 - a. Why do you prefer such accounts?
- 16 Do you receive know from instant messaging applications such as Messenger or Whatsapp?
 - a. If yes, in which topics and from which individuals you receive such news?
 - b. To what extent do you consider such news sharing as credible?
- 17 Do you share news on the Internet?
 - a. If yes, with which motivations do you share the news?
 - b. If yes, in which topics and through which sources do you share the news?
- 18 Apart from your cyber network, do you share news with individuals in your real life?
 - a. If yes, in which topics and within which social circles do you share the news?
- 19 How did you learn about the recent developments in our country's agenda?
- 20 Have you ever come across with news about the country's economy? How did you find them? Are there any other topic you have recently viewed?
- 21 Would you like to add anything?

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