
SOCIAL SHARING SITES AND PARTICIPATION: A STUDY ON ACADEMICS IN ISTANBUL

Betül ÖNAY DOĞAN*

ABSTRACT

Social sharing sites, on the internet, which have millions of users who are able to share information and links within seconds, is of huge importance when looking at its density of usage. It can be/has been observed that according to studies/research conducted around/on social sharing sites, there has not been enough study/research conducted on how people of a higher level of education perceive or use social sharing sites. In this sense, this study is aimed at targeting academic staff to try to determine how they evaluate and use the internet and social sharing sites. In the survey study conducted on 150 academicians, it was aimed to focus on academicians from a similar background in the sense of public and foundation universities and quantitative and verbal working areas. According to results of the study, academicians, in addition to using the internet to access e-mail, frequently visit social sharing sites. Some of the most important results encountered in the study are; Twitter affects/influences opinions more than Facebook and Twitter is more frequently used by academicians whose study area are verbal disciplines. These and other evaluations show that Twitter and Facebook are defined differently in means of perception. Yet, another important result encountered is that communication on social sharing sites is not seen as important as face to face communication.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Sharing Sites, Participation

SOSYAL PAYLAŞIM SİTELERİ VE KATILIM: İSTANBUL'DAKİ AKADEMİSYENLER ÜZERİNE BİR İNCELEME

Öz

İnternet içinde milyonlarca kullanıcısı olan ve her saniye yeni paylaşımlar gerçekleştirilebilen sosyal paylaşım siteleri, kullanım yoğunluğu göz önüne alındığında büyük bir öneme sahiptir. Sosyal paylaşım siteleriyle ilgili yapılan araştırmalar içerisinde üst eğitim seviyesine sahip kişilerin sosyal paylaşım sitelerini nasıl algıladıkları ve nasıl kullandıkları konusunda yeterli çalışma yapılmadığı gözlemlenmektedir. Bu amaçla çalışma, akademik personel hedef alınarak hazırlanmış ve akademik personelin interneti ve sosyal paylaşım sitelerini nasıl değerlendirdikleri ve nasıl kullandıkları belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır. 150 akademisyen üzerinde gerçekleştirilen anket çalışmasında devlet ve vakıf üniversiteleri ve sayısal ve sözel çalışma alanları noktasında birbirine yakın bir dağılım hedeflenmiştir. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre akademisyenler interneti genellikle e-posta amacıyla kullanmakla birlikte, sosyal paylaşım sitelerini de sıklıkla ziyaret etmektedirler. Araştırmada karşılaşılan önemli sonuçlardan bazıları; Twitter'ın fikirleri Facebook'a nazaran daha fazla etkilediği ve Twitter'ın çalışma alanı sözel disiplinler olan akademisyenler tarafından daha fazla kullanıldığı yönündedir. Bu ve benzeri tespitler Twitter ve Facebook'un algısal olarak farklı tanımlandığını göstermektedir. Yine karşılaşılan önemli bir sonuç sosyal paylaşım sitelerindeki iletişimin yüzyüze iletişim kadar değerli görülmediğidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Medya, Sosyal Paylaşım Siteleri, Katılım

* Araş. Gör. Dr., İstanbul Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Halkla İlişkiler ve Tanıtım Bölümü, bonay@istanbul.edu.tr, betulonay@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The use of the Internet has gained popularity since the British Queen sent the first e-mail in 1976 (ntvmsnbc, 2013). As well as significantly changing people's social lives, the Internet has been influential on social structures. It functions as a bridge for us to the external world in addition to providing access to information or sharing it, buying or selling any product, watching TV, meeting friends or making new ones, entertainment, or political activism (Correa et al., 2010; 247). The Internet has not only removed the limits of time and space, it has also mostly cleared the obstacles in the way of information sharing. All features listed above make it desirable to have Internet. As anywhere else in the world, access and use of the Internet is rapidly increasing in Turkey.

According to the Use of Informatics in Households Research conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute in April 2012, 47,2% of households has Internet access at home. The same research indicates that the Internet use is 47,4% for people between the ages of 16 to 74. Among those who have Internet access, 37,8% declared that they used the Internet almost every day or at least once week during the first quarter of 2012. 72,5% of the Internet users in the first quarter of 2012 (January to March 2012) used the Internet for online news, newspapers, magazines, or downloading news, while 66,8% used it for sending and receiving e-mails, 61,3% used it for finding information about goods and services, and 49,1% used it for downloading and playing games, music, movies, and images (tuik, 2013). According to another research conducted in 2000, 12,3% of all households had a computer and only 7% had Internet access. The Internet usage was allocated to e-mail with 23%, information seeking with 22,3%, and chatting with friends with 16,5% (tubitak, 2013). As seen from the numbers, the rise in the access to Internet has increased seven times during the last 12 years. This increase in access and the development of the Internet itself caused changes in the usage of Internet as well. One of the prominent points is that 38% out of 47% declared they use the Internet every day. This shows a subtle difference between having access and effective usage. The technological developments and increase in the market share of smart phone applications will obviously increase the access to Internet. The quantitative increase of the use of Internet has caused a variation of the uses of the Internet as well. This in return affected the ways of participation in that participation can vary in terms of levels and modes with respect to relevant interests. New topics started emerging in terms of use of Internet such as who uses which sites, the relationship between access and active engagement, and the relationship between the virtual and real world. Overall, participation affects all the studies regarding the Internet. Some relevant topics are the level of participation, where it is centered, how much the websites provide facilities for participation, and finally under which conditions participation is possible and what its effects are.

In this study, before discussing participation in social sharing sites, first the conceptual framework regarding social media will be introduced. This way, main components of our matter of fact will be clarified.

Social Media and Social Discourse

All the contents developed by Web 2.0 and its users have led to the development of the Internet use and the emergence of social media. First used in 2004, Web 2.0 has provided people to construct Internet applications and their contents as well as online publishing. Since Web 2.0 is regarded as an ideological and technical creation, all User Generated Content can be thought as the combination of all the ways of using social media for individuals. User Generated Content has three main features. First, it enables people to publish either on websites open to public access or only open to a selected group of people. Second, it requires creativity from the users. Lastly, it needs to go beyond the professional routine and applications. Accordingly, social media is defined as a set of Internet based applications, which allows the creation and exchange of User Generated Content developed under the ideological and technical facilities of Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61). Having such a broad definition, it is quite difficult to make a systematic classification of social media. YouTube, Facebook, Wiki, virtual game sites, blogs, and news sites whose content is developed by users are some of the examples of social media sites.

Social media is capable of bringing together all other media platforms. It has an interactive nature as telephones or telegrams, whereas it also serves as a mass media communication tool such as the radio and television. The content and advertisements can rapidly reach millions of people through social media. With the increasing level of usage, the Internet, as a powerful and developed communication tool, is thought to have caused changes in social lives; however, there is no consensus on the content of this change. As well, research indicates that the increasing number of hours spent on the Internet caused the alienation of young people from their parents and friends, led them to loneliness and depression, and weakened their connection with the society (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). On the other hand, the aspects of the Internet such as being an online library, providing an online shopping center, and similar applications seem to have facilitated people's lives. Information sharing beyond time and place limits is the best advantage social media provides to its users. As a result, it can be said that social media brings change to the society, which in turn leads to changes in the social structure.

Most controversies about social media in the context of social capital conflict with respect to whether social media weakens social relationships or it facilitates their reinforcement. Previous studies on communication technologies provide evidence that the amount of time spent online replaced the amount of time spent on social and traditional media activities. For instance, the introduction of television in the U.S. rapidly affected the use of other media. The increase in the hours of watching TV is negatively correlated with the time spent on going to movies, listening to the radio, and reading books. Other research on television use implied these findings can be extended upon out-of-home social life, domestic work at home, and even upon the time spent for sleep. Considering television is even an interactive mass communication tool, one can expect the Internet with its interactive nature affect those areas of life rather seriously (DiMaggio et al. 2001; 315). The important point about the Internet is the fact that the increase in use of time is thought to increase the negative effects. That is why an analogy is drawn between Internet uses and gambling.

The Internet, in particular the social media, is an attractive area of research because it has the power of changing the social structure, as well as the technical and normative structure of the system. With the rapid increase across the globe, use of the Internet varies according to different social structures. This variation is determined by the possession of the necessary technology, economic development, traditions, level of education, the presence or absence of democratic structure, and political or cultural features. For instance, although in most societies the use of Twitter is increasing, societies under repression use Twitter as a platform for activism (Atikkan & Tunç, 2011; 69). The research conducted by the Freedom House in 2012 shows the societal differences in the use of the Internet. The research is concerned with the freedom of the Internet use in countries and three criteria is used for rankings, which are:

- Obstacles to access: infrastructural and economic barriers, governmental exertions toward particular applications or technologies, and legal, regulatory and ownership controls for Internet and mobile phone access providers.
- Limits on content: filtering and blocking of websites, both censorship and auto-censorship, manipulation of the content, diversity of online media, and use of digital media for social and political activism.
- Violation of user rights: measures about protection and limitation of online activities, privacy, surveillance, and reactions such as physical harassment, prosecution, and imprisonment for online activities (freedomhouse, 2013).

The research was conducted with data from 47 countries, and in terms of freedom of Internet use, Estonia, United States, Germany, Australia, and Hungary were ranked as the top five, whereas Uzbekistan, Syria, China, Cuba, and Iran were ranked at the bottom of the list. Among all the countries, Turkey was ranked 26th. This research not only provides information about how the Internet use is influenced by cultural and governmental bodies, but it also shows the problems about the Internet use with the criteria stated.

Although the use of Internet is kept under control with some limitations and forms of censorship, the access to Internet is getting easier with tablet computers, smart phones, and 3G applications. After authorizations were completed in Turkey in July 2009, 3G services have been in rapid increase. According to data from June 2010, approximately 11.4 million people had subscriptions to Internet services. During the second quarter of 2010, subscription to Internet services provided by cabled connection increased as well to 191,331 by 94% as compared to the second quarter of the past year (BTK, 2013). This increasing trend is also observable in the use of mobile Internet with a 22.8% increase in the second quarter of 2012 as compared to the first quarter of the same year (Smgconnected, 2013). Pew Internet and American Life Projects conducted a research about mobile Internet use (pewinternet.org). The research shows 88% of American adults have their own mobiles. Among those, 55% uses their mobiles for Internet connection. Again among those, 31% stated they only used their mobiles to connect to the Internet instead of any computers or laptops. The widespread use of smart phones is largely accountable for such increase. Another finding of the research is that 46% of mobile phone users in the U.S. use smart phones.

One of the most obvious reasons to connect to the Internet through mobile phones is their nature of being mobile. What makes mobile Internet use attractive can be listed as follows: the particular importance of 'the moment' in social media applications, rapid sharing of information and the same rapid level of forgetting, following the agenda, and creating one's own agenda. This way, it is possible to be part of virtual communities, by being their followers and contributing to their creation. Especially social media platforms provide ways to keep in contact with old friends as well as make new friends. Thus, these opportunities and the up-to-datedness of the shared content attract many users across the globe. Following of and participation in these platforms are facilitated by mobile Internet use.

Social media provides possibilities for sharing various types of content. The most striking of these contents are political ones. According to a research conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project on 2,253 adults with an age range of 18 years and above, in English and Spanish languages respectively, between January 20 and February 19 in 2012, 38% of the social media users stated they learnt their friends' political stance through websites to which they are subscribed. The same research found that 25% of the social media users stated that they always or generally agreed with their friends' political thoughts, whereas 73% said they rarely or never agree with their friends' political thoughts. On the other hand, 66% of the users stated that they disregarded their friends' statements about political issues (Pewinternet, 2013). Although these numbers show a majority of people express their political opinions through social media, interaction or discussion about those political thoughts are not always likely.

Social media caused the emergency of a different kind of community idea. Virtual communities are not dependent on the limits of time and space; they are rather built on conceptual spaces such as information technologies. Continuity is important for the creation of virtual communities. Whereas traditional communities require commonality of various areas of interest; for virtual communities it is enough to have a single common area of interest such as hobbies, music, or entertainment (Haberli, 2012). The different structure of virtual communities makes it possible to disregard the political thoughts of others. Unless people muster around some political reasons, the binding effect of other reasons might lead to the disregarding of political thoughts. As well, virtual communities satisfy the need for belongingness of the individuals. Being a part of a community, being able to express one's ideas, and accordingly, participating in the community is one of the best advantages of social communities.

Social sharing sites are one of the most important sharing platforms with the frequency of use, number of users, and social activism to highlight the features of social communities in terms of the continuity of the interaction. The diversity of content, in other words attracting different common areas of interest, is one of the reasons for social sharing sites to perpetually increase their number of users per day. Social sharing sites are defined as online services, which provide targets of diverse demographic features with: 1) creating a public or semi-public profiles in a predetermined system, 2) being able to list people with whom they are in contact within the network, 3) browsing and following other us-

ers' profiles (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social sharing sites are therefore defined as sites of 'socialization' with the features of listing and following.

The characteristics of social media can be listed as such (Mayfield, 2008: 5):

- Social media connects the target group and the media. This connection is a product of the content provided by the users and the feedback they receive.
- Almost all the services of social media are open to participation and feedback. It encourages voting, information sharing and commenting. There are little barriers to the access and use of the contents.
- Unlike in traditional media, it is possible to feel the interactive nature of social media.
- With its fast and effective nature of communication, social media makes it possible for individuals to share contents of their interest.
- Many social media sites can use other websites' links and sources to strengthen their content.

Social Sharing Sites and Participation

Dictionary definitions of participation in the daily Turkish language are the act of participating, partnership, sharing, joining, taking part, and agreeing on an idea (tdk, 2013). Similarly, the word participation in the English language has many definitions, from which participation and civic engagement are thought to be relevant for this study. Internet changed the concept of participation to different levels and made it possible to be thought of beyond boundaries of time and space.

Although participation is defined as 'being present somewhere physically', the Internet inverted this perception by showing it is possible to gather around a goal and create a social media platform.

The concept of participation was obviously observed in Ancient Athens. By constructing buildings and spaces for self-expression and interaction, Athenians showed how much they valued participation. There were academies beyond city borders providing young Athenians with opportunities to learn by discussion rather than by rote learning. Agora was itself a discussion and participation place together with a court hall that could accommodate five hundred people at once, a Council House where the leading five hundred citizens could discuss the political issues, a building named Tholos where a smaller group of fifty people could discuss daily issues. Besides Agora, there was the Pnyx, a natural rocky surface used for assemblies of the citizens (Sennet, 2008: 32). During the Roman times, Agora was converted into forums and used for similar purposes. The physical structures in the city that encourages participation still take effect in today's social structures. However, virtual structures where individuals create and control their own content are more preferred without the need for these physical structures.

Various studies discuss how much of the public sphere in social media platforms overlap with Habermas' definition of public sphere. Van Dijk (2012) states the most effective

feature of social media on directing collective opinion is the availability of 'free spaces.' On the other hand, Habermas' public sphere is a structure which does not belong to the state and which is open to perpetual sharing and shared production. Considering the fact that the state is quite active in all social media platforms, especially in the Western world and only a few platforms as Wikipedia are free of state's control, it is possible to say these free spaces are insufficient. Thus, Van Dijk does not define social media platforms as a new public space; he rather defines it as a part of the existing public space that shapes the unofficial public opinion, as well as functioning as an instrument of communication to reformulate the norms of social relationships. Social media is not defined as new public space but rather defined as an instrument to shape it. At this point, it is worth exploring how social media influences public space in terms of participation. How do the reactions and attitudes in social media correspond to our daily life? These questions are extremely important in the evaluation of social media.

There is no common definition of participation, as the meaning varies according to the context. Participation in general is investigated with respect to aims approached. When participation is studied in terms of social structures and social media concept, four categories emerge in which participation is important. These four groups will be useful for a better understanding of the topic and drawing focus to our study. Participation in social media can be observed in political, ideological, economic, and entertainment areas.

Ideological participation can be regarded as an attempt to the concretization of ideology. The term ideology as proposed by its mastermind Karl Mannheim is used to express a predetermined and biased standpoint that defines how human nature, society, and life should be like. For example, in a societal analysis, a standpoint of socialist differs from a conservative's in interpretations and arguments with respect to income distribution, crime reasons, and corruption of family life (Slattery, 2011: 249). Similarly, ideological participation can be defined as being a part of an ideology or set of thought or help shape them. Mostly, ideological participation is focused on fighting against contrary arguments. Thus, it can be said Internet provides the facilities for the mustering of similar ideologies and the exposition of differing arguments.

The economic structure in social formation is interested in the production and consumption practices of people. Since Internet emerged as a different consumption space within the capitalist tradition, producers had to come up with ways of special marketing strategies useful for online platforms. New communication technologies and particularly the Internet have, therefore, been an attractive area of economic research, as they provide the ways for full online shopping experiences, by bringing together the sellers and costumers in the virtual world.

Politics is the most widely investigated area of research in society that accommodates all the nuances about economy and ideology. Economy is as well the leading online research area that is commonly practiced. The Dictionary of the Turkish Language Institution defines politics as the set of the fundamentals that regulate aims, methods, and contents of the state's activities (Tdkterim, 2013). The Sources of the states, governmental strategies and the quest for an ideal state are some of the topics of politics. On the other hand,

participation is mostly examined in terms of what kind of roles civil initiatives undertake within politics. This way, it is obvious that civil society is crucial in building the democratic structure.

Participation on social sharing sites can take place either by commenting or liking User Generated Contents (includes the participation in the social interaction), or by participating in groups or group activities in social sharing sites.

Most social media platforms enable users to form new groups or add new members to already existing groups. For instance, there are many smaller groups in LinkedIn such as alumni groups, corporate groups, conference groups, and professional groups. As well, members can form subgroups under these groups. For instance, Facebook, MySpace, and Flickr enable users to form three types of groups: 1) public, 2) public but accepted only via invitation, and 3) private groups, which mostly accept users with IDs or passwords. In addition, Facebook allows users to open 'pages' where other members can participate by being 'fans.' All the social media platform users, regardless of their creators or members, can be individuals, institutions, or governmental bodies (Kim et al., 2010). Our study focuses on the participation of individuals.

AIM AND METHOD

The discussion about social media and traditional communication tools mostly focuses on how virtual communication affects traditional communication, as well as the quality of virtual communication. Social media grows rapidly and compasses everyone regardless of gender, age or social status. In this context, the most differentiating feature of using social media is the effective usage. Thus, the target of this study is the academics as they are thought to be effective social media users and they have quality time online. Due to its rich nature in terms of both public and private universities, the population was determined as the academics in Istanbul.

Although a simple random sampling method was applied, similar numbers in terms of gender, universities, and working fields were attempted to be attained for a more effective use of the data. Before constructing the questionnaires, a focus group study was conducted with seven academics, so as to improve the quality of the questionnaires.

The topics emerged after the focus group study were the different uses of social sharing sites. For instance, Facebook is used for rather personal and entertainment reasons, whereas Twitter is used for the discussion of political issues. Moreover, the focus group study found Facebook and Twitter are the most commonly used social sharing sites. Another finding stated not only the frequency and the aims of participation in social sharing sites, but also aims of using general Internet use which can be influential in the use of social sharing sites. Lastly, the focus group study helped as well the verification of the reliability of the study questions in mind.

This study aims to answer the following two questions:

- How do the academics perceive the Internet and particularly social sharing sites?
- What are the ways of increasing the quality of academics' participation in social media?

The questionnaire constructed after the focus group study has four parts. The first part is for demographic information, including gender, age, working area, and the affiliated university. The second part includes questions about aims and frequency of the Internet use. In the third part, there were questions about frequency and aims of participation in social sharing sites. In the final part, there were questions aiming to understand the perceptions of social sharing sites through descriptions and concepts of social sharing sites.

Although the aim of the research was the evaluation of the participation in social sharing sites, the general use of the Internet and the perception of social sharing sites were thought as well to contribute to the exploration of the aim.

The study was completed by 150 participants, but data from only 130 people could be used for analysis. The collected data was entered into SPSS 16.0 Version. First, frequency analysis conducted and overall mean charts were obtained. Afterwards, chi-square, correlation, and t-test were conducted for comparative analysis was made and the findings were interpreted accordingly.

FINDINGS

The questionnaires were sent to 150 academics in Istanbul; however, completed surveys were only returned by 130 academics. Among 130 participants, there were 68 females (52.3%) and 62 males (47.3%). The age range varied across the sample: 7.7% was between 20 to 25 years old ($n = 10$), 31.5% was between 26 to 30 years old ($n = 41$), 28.5% were between 31 to 35 years old ($n = 37$), 13.8% was between 36 to 40 years old ($n = 18$), 11.5% was between 41 to 45 years old ($n = 15$), 3.8% was between 46 to 50 years old ($n = 5$), and 3.1% was over 51 years old ($n = 4$).

Another frequency analysis showed the 61.5% of the participants ($n = 80$) were academics at verbal departments whereas 38.5% ($n = 50$) were academics at quantitative departments. Finally, 46.2% of the participants ($n = 60$) worked at public universities whereas 53.8% ($n = 70$) worked at private universities.

The participants were given five statements about the general use of Internet and they were asked to rank them from 1 (the least frequently used) to 5 (the most frequently used). The areas of Internet use in the questionnaire were: sending and receiving e-mails, political news/information search, educational information search, using social sharing sites, and shopping (books, clothes, and household items, etc.). First, the frequency tables for the areas of Internet use and the mean scores for the reasons to use them were obtained (Table 1 & 2: 78).

Social sharing sites were ranked as the 4th among the habits of use. Although there are

slight differences, these findings are rather parallel with the results of the research conducted by TUIK in Turkey about Internet habits. When participants were asked about on which social sharing sites they had accounts, 10.8% ($n = 14$) of the participants reported having no account at social sharing sites. Among the remaining 89.2% of the participants ($n = 116$), they had accounts in Facebook (37.2%), in Twitter (33.9%), in Friendfeed (0.8%), in Myspace (0.8%), in Hi5 (0.5%) and in LinkedIn (23%). 3.3% of those who used social sharing sites also reported that they had accounts in other social sharing sites such as Instagram and Xing. According these ratings, the most widely used social sharing network is Facebook followed by Twitter and LinkedIn respectively. When participants were asked about which social sharing network they used most frequently, a similar trend in results was observed. 52.3% used Facebook, 28.5% used Twitter, and 6.2% used LinkedIn. One of the striking points here is that most of the social sharing network users visit Facebook more often than the other networks, and although 23.6% of the participants have accounts in LinkedIn, the frequency of visit was as low as 6.2%.

When participants were asked about how often they used social sharing sites, 61.5% of the participants ($n = 80$) said everyday, 24.6% ($n = 32$) said twice or three times a week, and 2.3% said once or twice a month. The participants who have accounts in social sharing sites were found to use these networks quite often. When our findings for social sharing sites were compared to TUIK's findings about frequency of general Internet use, it is possible to say that this frequency is higher among academics.

The validity test before the application of the questionnaire confirmed that Facebook and Twitter were the most frequently used social sharing sites. Considering the differences Facebook and Twitter have in terms of usage and application, the questions about participation in social sharing sites were adjusted to both networks separately (for sample questions, see 84)

When participants were asked about how often they commented on or indicated whether they agree or disagree on daily personal statements shared on social media, 43.1% ($n = 56$) gave no response to this question with regard to Twitter. Among those who responded the questions, 22.3% ($n = 29$) indicated that they avoided commenting at all, 20.8% ($n = 27$) said that they commented on things they found very important, and finally 13.1% stated that they commented whenever they are on social sharing sites. When this question was answered with regard to Facebook, 33.8% ($n = 44$) indicated that they commented on things they found very important, 18.5% ($n = 24$) said that they commented whenever they used social sharing sites, 16.2% ($n = 21$) reported they avoided commenting at all, and finally 31.5% ($n = 41$) gave no response to the question. To sum up, the results showed that those who participate in social sharing sites have a tendency not to comment frequently. Those who prefer commenting seem to comment mostly on very important issues.

When participants were asked about how often they commented or indicated whether they agree or disagree on social issues (i.e., political, ideological, economic) shared in social media, 42.1% and 32% of the participants gave no response to this question with regard to Twitter and Facebook respectively. 26.2% ($n = 34$) of Facebook users and 29.2% ($n = 38$) of Twitter users stated they avoided commenting on social issues. Among those who

responded to the question, they reported to comment or share their agreements on issues they found very important with a frequency of 25.4% ($n = 33$) for Twitter and 33.8% ($n = 44$) for Facebook users. 4.6% ($n = 6$) of both Twitter and Facebook users were found to comment on social things every time they used the networks. In short, the frequencies of participation in social issues and important events were found to be similar for both Facebook and Twitter.

Participants were asked as well about how they would usually react when they encounter a statement about a social issue, which they found interesting. The following choices were presented to the participants: 'I would call my close friends to let them know,' 'I would tell about the event to the people that I meet that day,' 'I would do some search to get more information about the issue,' 'I would participate in such activities about the issue like marching, meeting, petitions,' 'I do not pay attention to the issues shared on social sharing sites,' and 'other.' Those who responded to the question with respect to Twitter, 0.8% ($n = 1$) chose 'I would call my close friends to let them know,' 16.9% ($n = 22$) chose 'I would tell about the event to the people that I meet that day,' 24.6% ($n = 32$) chose 'I would do some search to get more information about the issue,' 2.3% ($n = 3$) chose 'I would participate in activities about the issue,' 10% ($n = 13$) chose 'I do not pay attention to the issues shared on social sharing sites,' 0.8% ($n = 1$) chose 'I would let people know via e-mail.'

Those who responded to the question with respect to Facebook, 17.7% ($n = 23$) chose 'I would tell about the event to the people that I meet that day,' 27.7% ($n = 36$) chose 'I would do some search to get more information about the issue,' 10.8% ($n = 14$) chose 'I would participate in activities about the issue,' 10% ($n = 13$) chose 'I do not pay attention to the issues shared on social sharing sites.' Overall, 44.6% ($n = 58$) and 33.8% ($n = 44$) of the participants responded to the questions about Twitter and Facebook use respectively. It is likely to see possible reactions given to important life events seem to be valid for online issues too.

Another thing measured in this study was the possible reactions given to the ideological sharing of friends that are not liked to the participants themselves. This variable is thought to be one of the most important aspects of sharing and participation in social networks. Participants were given the following choices: 'I would unfriend/unfollow/unlist the person,' 'I would comment on his/her thoughts and deliver my thoughts,' 'I would not bother or care,' 'I would have a distanced relationship in my daily life,' and 'other.' Those who responded with respect to Twitter, 36.9% ($n = 48$) chose 'I would not bother or care,' 7.7% ($n = 10$) chose 'I would unfriend/unfollow/unlist the person,' 4.6% ($n = 6$) chose 'I would comment on his/her thoughts and deliver my thoughts,' and 2.3% ($n = 3$) chose 'I would have a distanced relationship in my daily life.' 2.3% ($n = 3$) of the participants reported that they did not follow those statements. Those who responded with respect to Facebook, 36.9% ($n = 48$) chose 'I would not bother or care,' 7.7% ($n = 10$) chose 'I would unfriend/unfollow/unlist the person,' 9.12% ($n = 10$) chose 'I would comment on his/her thoughts and deliver my thoughts,' and 2.3% ($n = 3$) chose 'I would have a distanced relationship in my daily life.' 6.9% ($n = 9$) of the participants chose the 'other' without stating any reasons.

Another question asked to the participants was whether it is necessary to follow the orga-

nizations in social sharing sites to which they have memberships. With respect to Twitter, 22.3% ($n = 29$) said that they only followed the very important organizations, 18.5% ($n = 24$) said 'definitely necessary,' 12.3% ($n = 16$) said 'not necessary,' 6.2% ($n = 8$) said that they would follow if they randomly see those pages online. With respect to Facebook, 23.1% ($n = 30$) said that they only followed the very important organizations, 21.5% ($n = 28$) said 'definitely necessary,' 12.3% ($n = 16$) said that they would follow if they randomly see those pages online, 10.8% ($n = 14$) said 'not necessary.' In both platforms, it can be seen that the leading answer is related to the importance of the organization. And it is followed by 'definitely necessary' again in both cases.

In order to understand how much they valued participation in social sharing sites, the participants were given six different statements and asked to rate them from 'totally agree' to 'totally disagree' in 5 point Likert scale with 'neither agree nor disagree' in the middle. The responses were evaluated separately for Facebook and Twitter. The statements are as follows: 'Social sharing sites users are the effective followers of the daily news/agenda,' 'Social sharing sites affect their users' ideas about other users,' 'Most users only browse at social sharing sites,' 'It is mostly enough for me to be in touch with my friends only through social sharing sites,' 'I do not regard communication in social sharing sites as virtual,' 'Participation in social sharing sites is as important as face-to-face interaction.' The frequencies corresponding the statements are given in Table 2. The highest score for Twitter users was at its effect on users' idea about other users. On the other hand, none of the participants chose 'totally disagree' that Twitter users are only browsing at social sharing sites. The highest score for Facebook users was at its effect on users' idea about other users with a percentage of 24.9. Similarly, Facebook users did not choose 'totally disagree' for Facebook users are only browsing at social sharing sites as well as they are the effective followers of daily news/agenda. Another striking finding for both users is neither group finds virtual communication as important as face-to-face interaction (Table 3: 81).

Another question type was for 4 groups of opposite concepts to define Facebook and Twitter. These concepts were: simple vs. complicated, activist vs. apolitical, entertaining vs. serious, and free vs. restrictive. The answers given for Facebook and Twitter are separately presented in tables. Although there are no clusters for activist, simple, or free for Facebook, the participants agree that Facebook is an entertaining platform. Once all the responses are evaluated, Facebook can be described as simple, activist, entertaining, and free. On the other hand, although there are no clusters for Twitter in terms of the four opposite groups of concepts, simple, activist, entertaining, and free can also be attributed to Twitter (Table 4&5: 82).

The Chi-square test was conducted to see the relationship among the affiliated university, the working area, and how often the participants participated in daily personal information. For Facebook, there was not a significant difference between the affiliated university and working area. On the other hand, when the same analysis was conducted for Twitter, the effect reached significance at the level of $p < .05$ for both variables, namely affiliated university and working area.

Only 35.3% of academics working at public universities responded to the question 'I participate in daily personal information every time I use social networks,' while 64.7% of academics at private universities answered this question. 62.1% of the academics at public universities chose 'I prefer not to answer' choice for this question while this percentage was at 37.9 for academics at private universities. 82.4% of the academics whose working area is verbal said that they participated in daily personal information every time they use social networks, while this number dropped to 17.6% for those who works in a quantitative area.

Another Chi-square test was conducted to see the relationship among the affiliated university, the working area, and how often the participants participated in social information at social sharing sites. For Facebook, there was not a significant difference between the affiliated university and working area. However, the same analysis conducted for Twitter revealed that 83.3% of academics at private universities indicated they participated in social information every time they used social sharing sites while it was only 16.7% for academics at public universities. As for working area, those whose area is verbal participate at 66.7% while quantitative academics participate at 33.3%.

Another analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship among the affiliated universities, working area, and how the participants would react to something they found interesting on social sharing sites. The results indicated that there were no significant relationships between the variables. The same trend was observed for the question about possible reactions given to the ideological sharing of friends that are not liked by the participants themselves.

Lastly, another Chi-square test was conducted to investigate the relationship among affiliated university, working area, and the necessity of following the organizations that they are the members of in their daily life. The results indicated significant differences with respect to Twitter. Academics working at verbal areas were 70.8% whereas for those working in quantitative areas, the same number decreased to 29.8%.

During the analysis, age was recorded into two categories, namely between 20 to 35, and 36 and above. Considering the findings from the frequency analysis of four concept groups for Facebook and Twitter, the most particular distribution was observed in entertaining vs. the serious group. Thus, we wanted to understand the direction and the strength of the relationship between age and entertaining vs. serious concepts. First, a correlation analysis was conducted and the results showed no significant difference between the two social sharing sites and age. Entertaining vs. serious concepts was inquired in terms of affiliated university and working area by conducting a t-test. Independent samples of the t-test revealed significant differences between the groups with respect to the working area. While the academics working in verbal areas tend to find Facebook more entertaining, the academics working in quantitative areas find Twitter more entertaining, though the difference is small.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Internet is a rapidly changing and developing area for many professions. The most unique feature of the Internet is its unrestrainable nature and perpetual redefinition because of the rapid change. First used in 2004, Web 2.0 technology to date has brought many changes and novelties in applications, and creation and sharing of content. Social media brings various media channels together and provides a new perspective. Therefore, it is the most comprehensive area of study for researchers.

Increasing number of social media users has fostered the emergence of different areas of application. Some users prefer using social media for entertainment purposes, while others use it as a tool to access information about social issues. Yet the most important point is the fact that social media provides an infinite number of opportunities. Participation in social media can be achieved by adding videos, photos, links or similar things about anything shared on social sharing sites, or simply by 'liking' something someone likes. This kind of communication, which is performed virtually via Internet, is regarded as a reflection of traditional communication, a part of traditional communication, or even a replacement for it.

One of the major problems faced by social media is censorship and restrictions. Obstacles to access, limitations on content, and violation of user rights are largely encountered especially in non-democratic practices. Most of the time, social media users attempt to resolve these issues with the help of social media.

In today's world, computers get smaller in size, smart phones facilitate Internet access, and social media users can participate in all interactions on Web 2.0 without the limits of time and space.

Social sharing sites are the largest social media platforms by attracting diverse groups of people with no limits of location. Social sharing sites enable users to describe themselves by creating profiles as well, they allow the users to follow other users and list them, as they like. Social sharing sites are good sources for researchers to study their members according to their area of interest, ideological affiliations, and even more.

This study aimed to explore two questions simultaneously. Acknowledging the fact that participation in social sharing sites is related to the perception of those networks, this study aimed to see whether social sharing networks' users who freely deliver their thoughts to anyone they please on social media platforms continue to do the same beyond the social network platforms. Academics were assumed to be the conscious users of social sharing sites. Overall, the most striking finding revealed by the analysis is that although perception is variable depending on the structure of the social sharing network, participation was the same for Facebook and Twitter.

Academics indicated they used the Internet most frequently for sending and receiving e-mails; yet the majority reported they used social sharing sites everyday or at least twice or thrice a week. Among those, the most frequently used ones were Facebook and Twitter.

Overall, academics rated Facebook as more entertaining, and Twitter as more serious. They thought Twitter affects people's ideas more than Facebook, and interacting in Twitter is more satisfying than in Facebook. Although these differences were evident, responses given about personal and social issues for both Twitter and Facebook were rather similar. This indicates, although perception of Internet can vary, the use and participation of individuals can be similar to one another.

The ratings differed as well, according to the area of work for Twitter and Facebook, in terms of entertainment vs. serious concept. Academics in verbal areas rated Facebook more entertaining whereas academics in quantitative areas rated Twitter more entertaining.

When the relationship between participation in personal and social issues, affiliated university, and area of work were investigated, participation in Twitter was found to be more common at private universities. Similarly, participation was more common among academics in verbal areas than in quantitative areas.

As can be seen from the results, although areas of interest vary when evaluating the social sharing network, there was not much of a difference among responses about participation. Interaction on social sharing sites was not found to be as valuable as face-to-face interaction. The importance of following organizations was stated for people who are already members in actual life. The results also indicated that if participation started as a result of traditional communication forms, it continued to exist in social sharing sites. However, participation, which started as a result of the social sharing networks, was not found to continue in traditional communication means. Overall, the result of our study confirmed, as well, Van Dijk's definition of the social media platform not as a new public space but as being part of the existing public space functioning as an instrument of communication and helping to shape it.

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Sample Question:

Table 1:

%	5 (Most Frequently)	4	3	2	1 (Least Frequently)
Sending and receiving e-mails	73,1	20	3,1	8	3,1
Political news/information search	3,1	29,2	33,1	20	14,6
Educational information search	20	36,9	33,8	6,9	2,3
Using social sharing sites	3,8	10,8	23,8	40,8	20,8
Shopping (book, clothes, household items, etc.)	2,3	1,5	4,6	30	61,5

Table 2:

	Mean Scores
Sending and receiving e-mails	4,6
Political news /information search	2,9
Educational information search	3,7
Using social sharing sites	2,4
Shopping (book, clothes, household items, etc.)	1,5

Table 3:

	Twitter %					Facebook %				
	Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree	Totally Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
Social sharing sites users are the effective followers of the daily news/agenda.	15,4	18,5	23,1	8,5	6,2	1,5	2,3	4,6	2,3	0
Social sharing sites affect their users' ideas about other users.	9,2	34,6	13,1	10	3,8	6,9	26,9	10,8	9,2	0,8
Most users only browse at social sharing sites.	15,4	26,2	17,7	10	0	10,8	24,6	8,5	11,5	0
It is mostly enough for me to be in touch with my friends only through social sharing sites.	0,8	5,4	13,1	31,5	19,2	0,8	11,5	8,5	19,2	14,6
I do not regard communication in social sharing sites as virtual.	6,2	18,5	18,5	16,2	11,5	6,2	12,3	10,8	16,2	10
Participation in social sharing sites is as important as face-to-face interaction.	4,6	7,7	7,7	27,7	23,8	3,8	3,8	10	19,2	17,7

Table 4:

Facebook

	1	2	3	4	5	
Simple	7,7	10,8	28,5	11,5	1,5	Complicated
Activist	6,9	10	30,8	10,8	1,5	Apolitical
Entertaining	13,1	32,3	12,3	1,5	0,8	Serious
Free	10,8	15,4	25,4	7,7	0,8	Restrictive

Table 5:

Twitter

	1	2	3	4	5	
Simple	20,8	14,6	14,6	5,4	2,3	Complicated
Activist	12,3	14,6	23,8	4,6	1,5	Apolitical
Entertaining	9,2	10	14,6	16,9	6,2	Serious
Free	13,8	14,6	23,8	3,8	0,8	Restrictive

9. How often do you agree/disagree or comment on daily personal issues (i.e., like, retweet)?

	Twitter	Facebook	Other social sharing network you use frequently (please indicate the name)
Every time I use social sharing sites			
Only for important events (birth, death)			
I prefer not to comment			
Other