

## **Digital Citizenship and Redefining Political Participation in Turkey: The Case of Change.org**

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The developments in the communication technologies along with the Internet have brought numerous changes to almost all aspects of social and political life. Internet access has reduced the limitations of time, space and communication to a great extent, and introduced new practices into daily life as well as unorthodox perceptions to traditional concepts in a variety of areas, one of them being politics. Recent studies indicate that increasing amount of time spent in virtual environment, as a result of the prevalent use of Internet, has led to an observable shift in the political preferences and behaviors of the citizens in different parts the world. While citizenship studies have been enriched with the introduction of such terms as actualizing, democratic or digital citizenship, political participation has found new areas of action through online, unconventional or illegal paths, thus both bringing along new issues to be dealt by the political authorities as well as a dispute over the forms and boundaries of citizenship and political participation for today's global politics. The present study aims to explore the political behaviors the citizens have displayed in online and offline forms through, the worldwide used petition website, the change.org, in Turkey and how online petitioning transforms political participation and citizenship. Based on semi-structured interviews conducted with 18 petition campaign starters on change.org in Turkey, this paper aims to explore the notion of digital citizenship, an understudied terrain in political science literature in Turkey, and discuss whether citizenship and political participation in Turkey are going through a digital shift that has significant implications for traditional politics.

**Keywords:** citizenship, digital citizenship, political participation, change.org, petition, online petition campaigns

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the last few decades, the world has witnessed great developments and fundamental changes in terms of the political participation and civic engagement of the public. Though they can also be attributed to numerous dynamics such as historical or generational factors, one of the most outstanding factors behind is undoubtedly the improvements in technology, especially with its online tools. The opinions of the people regarding participation and citizenship have evolved with the introduction of these digital facilities, thus bringing about new perspectives, practices and issues to be discussed.

Along with the prevalent use of Internet and increasing amount of time spent in this virtual environment, the world has encountered new concepts like digital citizen and citizenship, which are characterized by distinct perceptions and novel forms of political behaviors. While such newborn concepts emerged partly with the official initiations of states through digital applications including e-government, e-petition or e-voting; they mainly took their roots from successful online start-ups like forums, blogs, social media tools or platforms like Change.org that empower people to express their opinions. Though not being legally recognized by authorities since they do not bear such an official mission, they -as a megaphone for the public- have helped to shape domestic as well as international politics and constituted good examples for government applications to be used by states. Therefore, this study examines the changing perspectives and repertoire of Turkish people in terms of political participation and citizenship with specific to Change.org.

### **The Impacts of Digital Facilities on Political Participation and Citizenship**

The effects of the Internet on political participation is numerous. It is argued that Internet users subject to political arguments more (Mossberger et al. 52) and therefore, have more chance to achieve information about politics (Mossberger et al. 65; Gil de Zúñiga and Valenzuela 414) to participate in political discussions (Mossberger et al. 56-64, Fink and Črnič, 1288; Castells 10; Yamamoto et al 892), to organize collective action (Castells 10; Gil de Zúñiga et al. 563, Yılmaz et al. 489) and to show participation more (Fink and Črnič 1285; Yamamoto et al. 892; Kim et al 13). Internet has also been found to positively affect voting, civic engagement (Mossberger et al. 2) and civic participation (Zhang et. al. 75).

Another significant result of the developments in technological means is complicating the concept of citizenship and participation since “being an active citizen today is not limited to traditional (offline) forms of participation but it must also include – theoretically and empirically – the question of active online participation” (Fink and Črnič 1285-1286). Besides, the restraints of space have been overcome and “social space” and political distance have been minimized, thus making it easier for citizens to follow and contact with the political representatives in the virtual world (Coleman and Blumler 81). Likewise, digital media, according to Theocharis, introduced “creative and non-political ways to engage in social and political life that not only often appear to form the basis of political participation but also, in a plethora of everyday contexts, seem to become embedded into what eventually evolves to become a politically meaningful act.” and digitally networked political participation having emerged as a type of political participation, would create impacts greater than the usually applied traditional ones (1).

The current research generally revealed positive results in terms of the advantages of the Internet for citizens and the first question of the present study aims to answer “What are the

attitudes of the citizens toward the Internet as a medium for showing political participation and exercising citizenship?” and estimates to find out “Citizens have a positive attitude towards the Internet as a medium for showing political participation and exercising citizenship.”

## **Citizenship and Political Participation in the Digital Era**

Along with the digital opportunities for exercising participation and citizenship, politics has evolved to include new concerns and power relations. Bennett mentions an “era of personalized politics” which has been initiated by “social fragmentation and the decline of group loyalties” in societies (20). While political practices centered on groups continue to persist like identity politics; currently, movements, addressing issues such as “personal lifestyle values” including environment, the rights of man and workers as well as economic rights, have been observed (20). Similarly, Falk contends that citizenship, in modern understanding, is pronounced with rights or entitlements (5). It is also believed that the identity relationship between citizens and states has been negatively affected also by the decline of the state autonomy and new domains of power and decision showing up out of state’s authority, especially in the Western societies in the new era (5).

Considering that citizenship is a “dynamic”, “reproducible” and “definable” concept, bound to “historical”, “discursive” and “institutional” factors, it may undergo some changes in time (Dönmez 1). Therefore, there have been put forward a variety of views, trying to redefine the current citizenship trend in the world, especially in the countries with democratic regime. Coleman and Blumler (4-5) present “democratic citizenship” as a model as opposed to other traditional state-driven citizenship types, which are “legal-judicial citizenship”, “political citizenship” and “affective citizenship”. Similarly, according to Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu, citizenship is taken “as both the opportunity and the responsibility for political participation in modern democratic societies”, which can also be considered as “democratic citizenship”, and this type of citizenship is concerned about trusting the political agents and other members of the society as well as having the feeling of the power to individually perform an action when necessary (2). Secondly, Falk states that citizenship has cut across the classical borders of nation and state by reaching a global domain and mentions five perceptions for “global citizenship” of modern life, each of which stresses different topics such as political centralization, environmental issues, political economy in the world, regional politics or transnational activism (131-140). Thirdly, Bennett argues that there is a shift in political behaviors and citizenship preferences with the development of the digital age in the post-industrial democracies. Young citizens in the global and digital age differ from older generations and display different paradigms of citizenship (14). He maintains that the new generation is moving to the “actualizing citizen” model from the “dutiful citizen” model of the older generations (Bennett 14). As for the features of “dutiful citizenship”, individuals are required to show participation in formal politics, get informed via mass media organs, go to the polls, become members of civil society organizations and resort to political parties for political expression (Bennett 14). On the contrary, “actualizing citizenship” of the new era is characterized by a weaker government obligation as opposed to stronger personal purpose; more individualized political acts like “consumerism, community volunteering, or transnational activism”; skeptical approach to media and politicians; and the interest in loosely networked community actions through their immediate circle as well as thin social ties facilitated thanks to technology (14). Bennett et al. argue that younger citizens are more into “actualizing citizenship” co-occurring with peer content sharing and social media than “dutiful citizenship” characterized by unidirectional interaction controlled top down (835).

On the other hand, there are some studies, which focus on the political behaviors and preferences of citizens in the digital age. Çubukçu and Bayzan (148) argue that being a good citizen has been evolving to being a good digital citizen, since the communication and information transfer have been realized online. There are also several studies that focus on digital citizenship (Ribble and Bailey 2007; Çubukçu and Bayzan 2013; Kaya and Kaya, 2014), however they focus more on the pedagogical aspect of digital citizenship. However, the definition and scope of digital citizenship within these studies fall short in providing a thorough picture of the participation aspect citizenship online.

Therefore, this study adopt the digital citizenship definition broader in scope by Mossberger and colleagues, who define it as “the ability to participate in society online” and digital citizens as “those who use the Internet regularly and effectively – that is, on a daily basis” and as “those who use technology frequently, who use technology for political information to fulfil their civic duty, and who use technology at work for economic gain (1-2). It will focus more on the political aspect of the digital citizenship and try to find an answer to “How does the Internet affect political participation and citizenship attitudes and behaviors of the citizens? It is hypothesized that “The Internet use has positively contributed to political participation and citizenship attitudes and behaviors of citizens.”

### **The Condition of Political Participation**

Political participation was defined as “those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take” (Verba and Nie 2). Participation variables generally accepted were provided by Verba and Nie (47), which include campaign activities (“(to) persuade others how to vote, actively work for a party or candidate, attend political meeting or rally, contribute money to party or candidate, membership in political clubs”), voting, cooperative activity (“(to) work with others on local problem, form a group to work on local problems, active membership in community problem solving organizations”) and contacting (“(to) contact local officials, contact state and national officials). In this work, the political activities above were utilized as conventional participation variables, but the three voting behaviors provided were reduced to one item as “having voted in elections”. Secondly, since political participation also includes unconventional forms of actions and this work also aimed to find out whether the participants have realized them, the unconventional modes of participation determined by Barnes et al. (552) were also included in the research questions. These activities include “petitions”, “lawful demonstrations”, “boycotts”, “strikes”, “occupying buildings”, “blocking traffic”, “painting slogans”, “damaging property”, and “personal violence”.

As opposed to observed increase in online political opportunities, political participation in traditional sense is claimed to show decline in the final decades of the previous century in democracies in different parts of the world (Ünsal 18; Erdoğan 8, Norris 1-2; Coleman and Blumler 157; Ontaş et al. 249; Fink and Črnič, 1291). Ünsal notes that people show less interest and participation in politics and public life today and masses have been depoliticized especially in America and Europe (18). Similarly, Norris (1-2) and Bennett (1) mention a prevalent “apathy” and “alienation” of people in the last decades, especially of young citizens, in terms of traditional modes of political participation in representative democracies. However, Norris states that young citizens’ being disenchanting and alienated from the political participation and representative democracy and reasons that it may be partly because some conventional political

participation activities are obsolete to be a part of the modern politics (16). Likewise, Coleman and Blumler argue that it is not a complete alienation since though the formal participation has decreased, “informal”, “non-governmental” or “sporadic” participation has showed an increase (157). Additionally, Enneli mentions some alterations in the welfare state following the neo-liberalism practices and characterized by new conceptualization of citizenship which favors active political participation the young by aiding the people in need, voicing the demands, and casting a vote in elections (257). Moreover, some studies found out that while traditional participation activities have started to fall into disfavor, some online political activities have gained popularity especially among the young generation (Erdoğan 8; Oser et al. 93-94, Fink and Črnič 1291). To present a clearer picture of political participation forms developed in time, Fink and Črnič (1288) make a distinction between “conventional” and “unconventional” forms of political participation, as well as “general/traditional” and “digital/online” mediums to realize these forms of political participation. Conventional forms of participation are associated with institutional framework and regular, formal acts such as voting or contacting politicians; whereas unconventional forms of participation are connected with civic framework, and sporadic, informal acts including protesting, political consumerism and mobilizations, in the general/traditional sense. As for the digital online versions, conventional and unconventional acts are applied to online forms or communication and digital media, such as e-voting for conventional forms and online protest for unconventional one.

Therefore, it is critical to understand whether there is an alienation from politics or the way political participation and citizenship practices are exercised have started to change. The third question of the study is “Do citizens show apathy towards political participation?” and it is hypothesized that “Citizens have not become apathetic to political participation but prefer unconventional ways of political participation in addition to conventional ones.”

### **Change.org**

It is believed that the participatory democracy practiced in the ancient Greek sites and idealized by Arendt is being revived in today’s world (Paktin 2). Arendt, inspired by the antique Greek philosophy, imagines as citizenship in the modern world is based on a participatory democracy in which human beings responsibly, actively and freely engage in and contribute to politics with their actions and speech in a collective and public life without being prevented by the necessities of human life or the pressure of tyrant (The Human Condition 1958). Only in this way, human beings become free, express themselves, learn from others, socialize, create “miracles”, reborn and realize themselves as human beings. Giving the success stories from Change.org as examples, Paktin -as an earlier campaign expert of Change.org Turkey office- argues that though a change would occur radically and necessitate one to sacrifice himself to his case in the past, nowadays even a single person has the opportunity to realize his demands by himself through digital communication technologies (2).

With the developments in technology and increase in the online opportunities for communication, countries have started to take steps for digital citizenship and to adopt online applications for the services of public institutions and agencies. Turkey has also started to launch websites or added new sections to the present ones for public services. Nowadays, almost all public institutions have online services and it is easier to access them for demands and complaints. Among the most popular and effective services are BİMER (Prime Ministry Communications Center), CİMER (Communications Center of the Presidency), the website of the committee of petition of Grand National Assembly of Turkey and e-government.

Change.org is among the novel but rather popular tools citizens utilize to show political participation and exercise citizenship rights, nowadays. Though it is not an official platform provided or recognized by any government or the petitions do not have any political or legal sanctions, Change.org constitutes a good example for electronic practices to be initiated for digital citizenship. It is a huge site with more than 100 million users from 196 countries (Change.org, <https://www.change.org/about>) as well as an open platform where the content of each petition campaign is prepared by its users (Change.org, <https://www.change.org/about>). Its business model is explained as a social enterprise and a certified B-corporation, so the platform get financial help from subscribers, promoted petitions, sponsored campaigns and investors (Change.org, <https://www.change.org/about/business-model>) Originally, being launched in 2007 by Ben Rattray, it was intended to be a new form of “crowdfunding” and enable fund-raising, donation, volunteerism, and various practices of cause-related engagement and, interestingly, creating petitions was not much highlighted among other functions of the site (Beato). One of the milestones for the company was when a lesbian rape victim from South Africa started a petition campaign against corrective rape to “cure” people with such sexual orientation and gathered 170.000 signatures worldwide which eventually led the South African authorities to take legal action against this practice one year later, in 2012. This is the event when the founders of the site decides to turn their energy completely to petitions (Özesmi).

Seemingly, the site has already set its sights on beyond petitions as Rattray, the founder of the site, clearly puts that “signing a petition is the first step” and “it is the way of aggregating the largest audience of people who are potentially interested in an issue. But we are not building a petition site. We are building an empowerment company” (Beato, Stanford Social Innovation Review). Hence, the potential of the platform in terms of its service and sphere of influence is worthy of consideration.

Bearing in mind the current success and wide popularity of Change.org all around the world, the present study aims to find out “What are the opinions of the citizens regarding online petition campaigns and Change.org?” and expect to reveal that “Citizens have positive attitudes toward online petition campaigns and Change.org.”

## **Socioeconomic Status and Political Participation of Citizens**

Understanding the factors behind the change in political participation attitudes and behaviors is also of quite importance. Though there are numerous dynamics behind participation, socioeconomic factors are among the most emphasized ones. It is argued that political participation is considered as a way of eliminating the socio economic related gap between different groups and enabling the ones from lower strata influence government, nevertheless there has been found higher participation rates for ones from upper strata of society (with “higher income”, “higher education”, or “higher status occupations”) when compared to the ones from lower counterpart of it, which indicates that individuals have unequal amount of resources to invest in political participation and therefore have unequal impact on politics (Verba and Nie 5-12; Verba et al. 1). Coleman and Blumler (158) argue “socioeconomic status”, “the extent of interpersonal networks”, “sense of efficacy”, “beliefs about civic duty” and “patterns of media use” are the most important factors at the individual level; and feeling a duty for participation; being more talkative, wealthier, and better-educated; as well as having higher-sense of efficacy and broader social network may also increase the likelihood of participation, too.

Some studies handle the problem focusing on the age factor and believe it has to do with young generation's preferences (Norris 1-32). Other factors examined by researchers is the environmental forces affecting the political participation of individuals (Verba and Nie 229; Milbrath 113-114; Verba et al. 269). Milbrath mentions central-peripheral dimensions, which includes some variables such as socio-economic factors (SES), "length of time at a given time", "amount of group activity", "urban-rural residence", and "integration into the community" (111). It is important to note here that being on the central or peripheral dimensions in question here convey not only physical but also psychological perception. On the other hand, Verba and Nie (231) use two models to explain the urban-rural dichotomy in participation: the mobilization model and the decline of community model. In addition to the all the factors aforementioned, the Internet has arisen as an important factor that would play a critical role in participation and, therefore, be likely to change the present balance of participation and variables considering that it constitutes a rather practical, fast and cheap means to realize participation by citizens from all walks of life. Hence, it is also important to find out whether the Internet has surpassed the traditional limitations in front of participation in the society.

Accordingly, the present study deals with the question "Do the citizens who show high levels of participation already have high levels of SES (income, education level, occupation and place of residence)?" and anticipates to find that "Citizens do not have necessarily high levels of SES to display high levels of participation."

### **Political Participation, Citizenship and Petitioning in Turkey**

When it comes to the history of political participation in Turkey, it dates back to the second half of the 19th century of the Ottoman Empire (Kalaycıoğlu and Çarkoğlu 20). That century is considered as the first period when concrete steps for secularization and social cohesion between different "millets" were taken, and mass political participation was bred through Tanzimat Reforms, the establishment of representative institutions and the foundation of ethnic and political organizations (8-10). As of this period, citizens – the subjects of the Sultan – were let join associations, take part in local and national elections to some extent, and display political contacting behavior for individual cases with "Arz-ı Hal (presentation of one's state of affairs)", which enlarged the functions of communal petitions called "imdatname (pleas for help)" and replaced them (10). Consequently, these developments initiated both conventional and unconventional participation at the same time (10).

The first centuries of the Turkish Republic were characterized with the emphasis on secular regime and conventional political participation and increased the rights of women like participating in elections (12-13). The democratization process went on with the starting of the multi-party period in 1946, as of then citizens were provided with "a real and free choice" for elections along with "campaigns, demonstrations, meetings by political parties, political party membership and work", except the three undemocratic interventions of the coups in 1960, 1971 and 1980 (13-14). Meanwhile, Turkey witnessed some unconventional political behaviors such as "university student activism", "interest group activities" and "protest movements" by "less powerful groups and interests" which led way to some protesting strategies later on such as "traffic blockages, boycotts, building occupations, demonstrations and rallies" (Kalaycıoğlu and Çarkoğlu 16).

Noting that political participation displayed a rather dynamic and vigorous nature in Turkish political history, Kalaycıoğlu and Çarkoğlu maintain that conventional participation acts such as "voting, campaigning, debating, discussing and deliberating political issues with the intent of finding solutions for them, contacting political authorities" were widely applied in more than

a century (125). On the other hand, though protesting behaviors varied in terms of repertoire and frequency in time, as of 1990s “petitions, boycotts, legal demonstrations, and wildcat strikes” have increased their popularity, whereas “potentially violent acts” have showed decline (215).

On the other hand, Enneli divides the political participation trends of the young citizens in Turkey into three periods (257-270). The first period starts with the foundation of the republic and lasts until the 1980 military coup, when the youth was given the mission to disseminate the republican ideals and their political activities were supported while being under the tight control of the state (262). The second period witnessed a reverse attitude which discouraged political activities of the youth, thus channeling them into defying the system and eventually excluding them from the system (265). The final period as of 2000s, however, have exhibited an attitude, supporting the active participation of the young and more willing to hear their demands, with the contribution of the accession talks carried on with the European Union (270).

To have a clearer picture of the situation of political participation and citizenship in Turkey, it would be useful to examine the findings of recent studies. A research from Turkey was conducted to reveal the opinions of the people utilizing virtual environment about citizenship in this sphere, if these opinions differ according to gender, age and the virtual media platforms they utilize or not and to which citizenship type, traditional or modern, they are relatively closer to (Özmen and Er 204-216). The values related to modern citizenship were observed to be accepted together with the traditional citizenship and even the concepts of the modern citizenship were discovered to be more embraced, thus implying that the Turkish society has internalized modern citizenship values in the virtual environment, yet still is in favor of keeping the ones related to the traditional citizenship as well (213-214). In addition, while females were inclined to the values of modern citizenship more than their male counterparts, vice versa was the matter when it comes to traditional citizenship (213). Özmen and Er interpret that as a result of the patriarchal family structure prevalent in the Turkish society where males generally adopt conservative values more than females, whereas females welcome modern values more than males (213).

Secondly, as a part of their project to find out the participation level of the young people in Turkey, STRATEJİ|MORI, IRI (International Republican Institute) and ARI movement realized a survey study with a sample representative of the Turkish youth in 1999. Emre Erdoğan replicated the study three years after in 2003 utilizing the same sampling framework in order to compare and contrast the results of these two studies as well as to comment on the changes in this age group (16-28). He found that all kinds of political participation declined in four years except for internet based protest activities. Arguing that Turkish youth has a participation problem, he draws attention to the results of the new study, which shows that this problem still persists since the political participation inclinations of Turkish youth did not show a significant alteration between 1999 and 2003. Erdoğan (2003) notes Turkish youth has lower levels of turnout in the elections compared to older generation and comments that it can exhibit a kind of political attitude, by remarking that “non-voting is the cheapest of all kinds of political protest”.

One of the research with the largest scale on citizenship in Turkey was conducted through the survey with 1509 Turkish citizens from 58 cities, over age of 18 in 2015 in order to find out citizens’ understanding of good citizenship, loyalty to the government and the political community they are members of, tolerance and attitudes towards other ethnical and religious identities as well as the social trust present in the country (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu). The findings revealed the presence of an “ideal” citizenship perception in Turkey which stresses casting a vote in elections, following the deeds of the government, working for social and



political organizations, emphasizing with different opinions and ethical values, shopping responsibly and helping ones in need (6-7). On the other hand, the participants were less tolerant against the public meetings or demonstrations by radical religionist groups, groups which aim to overthrow the government by force, or biased groups against any race or ethnicity (17). As for writing a petition, participating in a petition campaign for protest, boycotting for a political, ethical or environmental reason, participating or having a wish to participate in a demonstration, having contacted or having a wish to contact with a political agent, donating money for any political or social activity, contacting media organs, and expressing opinions on the Internet, the Turkish citizens were found to have rather low levels of participation when compared with the findings from the states with long tradition of democracy (21-22).

It would be also useful to examine the Turkey part of the findings of the international project “World Values Survey” (WVS), which was realized with the participation of Turkish citizens at the age of 18 or over and two gender groups (male and female) between the years 1990-1994, 1995-1998, 1999-2004, 2005-2009 and 2010-2014. When it comes to the findings related to political participation behaviors (signing a petition, joining boycotts, attending lawful demonstrations, joining unofficial strikes, occupying buildings or other political actions), signing a petition was the most practiced action in all the surveys, with the percentages around 10, while occupying buildings was the least practiced one in the surveys it was asked, with the percentages around 1. All the percentages showing each participation act was realized by the participants once in life were below 10 percent, except for petition, and more interestingly the percentages for the option “would never do” for these acts were above 50 percent. Moreover, females opted “would never do” choice more than their male counterparts and “have done” option less than males for almost all the cases. It indicates that Turkish citizens do not favor to express their opinions, act for their demands or affect politics much in other ways than casting a vote, which is well known to be the most popular participation behavior in this society, and males may be relatively bolder or have more opportunities to take part in the participation activities.

## **The Present Study**

Considering the issues aforementioned, the current study aimed to discover how different the political participation preferences and citizenship practices of Turkish citizens are depending on digital facilities when compared to the past. Considering that the developments in the information and communication technologies have contributed to shape the conditions and the practices of political participation and citizenship in Turkey, it was intended to find out how and to what degree such a shift occurred, by examining it within the scope of a digital platform for online petitioning, namely Change.org. Though participation and citizenship have been broadly studied in Turkey, there has not been much research on digital citizenship along with political participation. Another contribution of the study will be examining these topics by focusing on Change.org as a case. This study will also add to the existing data by presenting the attitudes and behaviors of Change.org petition campaigners with regard to the issues aforementioned. Therefore, this group of campaigners will constitute the population of the study. Among them, 11 male and 7 female Turkish campaigners constitute the sample and the semi-structured interviews carried out with them provided the data of this study. The focus of these semi-structured interviews were the participants’ opinions and experiences regarding their campaigning process as well as political participation and citizenship.

To find the answers of these questions necessitates a comprehensive study of the opinions and activities of campaigners with regard to political participation, citizenship, the Internet. It also requires to learn the campaigning processes each participant has experienced. Therefore, a

qualitative method, semi-structured interview technique was preferred so as to gain better vision of the participants' opinions and experiences regarding their campaigning process as well as political participation and citizenship. While determining the sample of the study, it was paid attention to choose the campaigners from both genders and with different backgrounds and ages in order to have a heterogeneous group and make conclusions about the effects socio-economic factors. Besides, the campaigners who have initiated petitions on different topics were preferred in order to find out whether the petitioning processes show difference according to the topics and the campaign addressees.

Upon deciding to hold interviews with the campaign starters, a few strategies were utilized ranging from asking the Turkish representatives of Change.org and the people in the inner circle of the researcher whether they could help to reach a campaigner via their contacts to communicating with the campaigners via their blogs or websites if they provided this information on the campaign page. To be able to reach enough number of campaigners, the researcher also checked social media and tried to match the numerous user profiles there with the limited information about the campaigners on the platform. Facebook, as a social media tool, was the tool that enabled the researcher to reach most of the interviewees (14) of this study. The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to two hours and were carried out between the dates of 22.02.2017 and 24.08.2017 with 18 campaign starters, all being Turkish citizens.

The sample in this study initiated petition campaigns related to their jobs, personal interests, values, public or personal problems such as media, moral values, health, martyrs, sports, right to city, public transportation, economic justice, national values, education, immigrants, sexual abuse, environment and the rights of, women, animals and workers. 11 out of 18 participants initiated just one campaign so far, while 4 participants had two initiations, 2 participants had three initiations and finally one of them had four initiations when the interviews were conducted. After the campaign one participant initiated his/her third initiation and another started his/her fourth one. Among all the petitions initiated 12 of them ended up with victory, while the rest still continues or is closed.

Since most of the interviewees work or study, the dates and time of the interviews were arranged according to their schedules. Likewise, the venues were determined according to their preferences. Generally cafes and their offices were arranged. All the interviews were recorded via digital audio recorders after getting permission from the interviewees and assuring them about the confidentiality of the interview. The data gathered was transcribed on computer and analyzed via MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software. Considering the questions of this study and the emerging themes mostly expressed by the participants, the interview data was classified into related codes and themes to be discussed in findings and conclusion sections.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Political Participation Experiences and Preferences**

The first question of the study aimed to find out whether there is apathy toward political participation in Turkey as revealed out in various research in Turkey and in the world aforementioned. The Table 1 below includes information about the conventional and unconventional political participation activities the participants have realized then. Besides, three items labelled with asterisk (\*) were also included in the table as additional items since they were mostly mentioned by the participants as a part of their political participation acts.

It is clearly seen from the table that each participant has realized some political activities at least once. Except six participants (P2, P4, P5, P12, P13, P14) that stated to have practiced a

few political participation behaviors, all the others are highly active and have experienced a variety of participation activities. It shows that apathy toward participation is out of question at least for this group of interviewees.

Another point that attracts attention is that such unconventional political participation activities as boycotts, strikes, occupation, traffic blockage, damage to property and personal violence were not mentioned by any of the participants. On the contrary, conventional acts were stated more than unconventional ones, in general. It may partly because some of these unconventional activities are not accepted legal by the state and, therefore, counted as a crime, which makes it difficult for them to share with a stranger as the interviewer. This may also because Turkish society still prefer to exercise traditional political acts more and experience a transitional period from conventional participation to unconventional one. It also proves the argument by Kalaycıoğlu and Çarkoğlu that while petitions have become more popular, “potentially violent acts” have lost their popularity (2015, p.215). Though petition signing (18 participants) the mostly stated activity, thus proving the results of the Turkish leg of WVS in 1990-1994, 1995-1998, 1999-2004, 2005-2009 and 2010-2014, since the participants were intentionally chosen among the petitioners, this finding will not be representative. Other most popular activities of the participants were casting vote in elections (17) and membership of community problem solving organizations (13). Besides, membership to a non-governmental organization (11), contacting national (10) or state/national officials (10), and working for or contributing money to a non-governmental organization (10) were among the common activities practiced by the participants.

Upon asked whether they prefer online or offline participation more, nearly half of the participants made their choices in favor of the online one, thus displaying a different picture than the participation acts they have realized. While two participants favored offline participation over its online counterparts, four of them preferred both of them. On the other hand, online or offline participation were not different for a few participants who were hopeless about their ultimate effects in terms of solving problems.

First and foremost, the majority of the participants complain about not having enough time for offline participation, so they deem the Internet as a solution for their time problem. Besides, many participants accepted that online participation enable people to meet masses, or to freely express their opinions. In addition, such participation was noted to be easy, fast, free, effective or powerful by a few participants. In addition, it was deemed useful to put pressure on political agents, increase participation and reach more information. Though P3 does not consider online participation as “real”, she pointed out the potential that online participation acts will gain novel meanings, arguing

“Maybe all of these will change in time. Maybe concepts will change. Maybe nobody will protest on the street. Everybody will protest in this way, we do not know. Time will show”.

Another reason for favoring online participation is the issue of confidentiality. When one does not have to reveal his/her identity, the condition definitely makes it easier to reveal his opinions or side. Therefore, the obligation for declaration of identity in many bureaucratic procedures creates an anxiety for some citizens. P5 stated that he intentionally preferred to use a pseudonym instead of revealing his real name, contact details or picture on the Change.org, while P1 commented:

“A man feels himself freer on social media because he is not seen. He behaves in a more relaxed manner. He can lay bare his thoughts in a more relaxed manner. But it is not like this in the outside world.”

Although many participants pointed out that it is easier to express opinions on the keyboard, some of them were of the opinion that the success of a campaign needs more than just an online

initiation and should be supported by offline activities as well. The petitioning experiences of P11 would constitute a good example of it. P11, who run a rigorous campaign by resorting to almost all the authorities and legal means to achieve his goal before and during the petition process explains that campaigning requires going to any lengths by stating:

“What their (his acquaintances) prediction was partly that it is a balloon, it swells, but collapses in time. However, we were mentioned in four or five prime-time news bulletins after about one and a half or two months. I mean we did not deflate anything, but always kept it alive. It had an effect, too. It is not a process that happens by itself. ... I mean I think, as I said before, how much you want something is proportional to what you have done (for it). There are a lot of things that come to our attention, but we need to focus on solving them when we set to work. Otherwise we observe a lot of problems in our environment. We already (voice them) on social media through sharing in order that people become sensitive, aware, but it requires endeavour for solution. Otherwise, we should not just say let’s start a petition campaign and see what happens. ... I mean there is a cost of this action, too. When you do things, you do them by taking the risk of some things. ... I mean the cost can be material, moral. You have to renounce some things. I mean it took three months, but we worked day and night during three months.”

On the other hand, some participants favored offline participation over online form due to such issues as trust, effectiveness, or satisfaction from the results or the process as a whole. For instance, accepting that it is relatively easier to say things on the keyword, P8 argued that standing by one’s cause is different. Therefore, P8 stated to prefer experiencing things face to face since she feels herself more confident during offline participation and cannot know who the people on social media really are or what they really think. Besides, while attaching importance to the power of the Internet to make things widely known, P14 considers offline participation more rational if one wants to make “substantial” things. Moreover, P17 finds offline participation “more attractive”, “more exciting” and it makes him “more peaceful”. Besides, he maintained that it makes other people, who observe the ones doing things on the street at night, to believe the rightfulness of their cause. What is done at the street attracts people’s attention and gives them the chance to learn the aim of the activity. He explains it as follows:

“We say Internet is rather effective, but what is done outside is more, how can I say, people think like this ‘If these people went out at 3, at 4 at night and did this, then they believe this thing is right.’ I mean, what is done on the street is much more effective. Or I do not know, you cannot take part in a march on the Internet, but when you do it on the street, you can attract far too many people’s attention. They come and ask ‘What are you doing?’, ‘What is your purpose?’ and so on. You spray (on the wall), when you put your signature under it, I mean, when you put the signature of the non-governmental organization you belong to, they definitely find you, I mean the ones who share the same idea with you. Or the ones with opposing views become curious, I mean, about ‘Who are you?’, ‘What are you trying to do?’ Therefore, it is more effective than social media in that sense. ”

On the contrary, for some participants both types of participation were somehow similar. According to P2 and P5, there are no differences between online and offline participation in the current situation; it actually depends on the attitude of the relevant authority to answer your demand. Though they believe that there is no difference between participating online and offline in that point, they stressed that they used the Internet to show what they think and meet the others of the same idea. In addition, P18 considers both of them similar in being open to manipulation by some powerful groups, while P7 believes that both of them may lead to conflict between groups in time.

No matter, what form of political participation the participants prefer, the findings show that they generally have a broad range of political participation activities and show participation by utilizing both of them when they consider necessary. However, many of them favor online platforms and it definitely helps them to show participation more.



## **The Effects of the Internet on Political Participation and Citizenship**

The interviews generally showed that almost all the participants have a positive attitude toward and believe in the power of online practices with regard to political participation and citizenship in some ways.

The Internet allows its users with the freedom to voice their opinions and, when utilized appropriately, it would constitute a huge repository of public opinion for authorities to put attention and, thus, lead to participatory democracy. P9 noted that thanks to the Internet, the verbal culture is coming back after a period of a hundred years which passivized people and controlled the broadcasting. People have started to communicate face to face and hold dialogs by using a variety of tools. Likewise, P5 likened the writing on the Internet to the graffiti of 60s and 70s.

Several participants, in addition, noted that online services such as e-government, e-petition, e-school are replacing offline practices and that simplifies our lives. Specifically, P1, P5, P6 and P15 expressed their appreciation for the government service BIMER. It is considered to be relatively effective by some participants since the petitioner is regularly informed about the process and relevant authorities have to respond to the petition explaining what steps have been taken. It is, therefore, regarded to be faster and more transparent. P15 exemplified this situation like this:

“Writing to BIMER, the websites of the institutions is much more effective than Change.org. Why is it so? It is because there is a legal period. It responds, you can follow it. Let’s assume you write a petition right now, send it by post. What happened? Who did it reach? Did not it reach? Did it reach the address or not? ... But you write it to BIMER or CIMER, you enter e-government, (you see) who it reached, who it was directed. Finally, the answer is sent to you.”

Nevertheless, the online state services were criticized by some participants for not being comprehensive enough. For instance, P4 maintained that the tool was not technological since people cannot share what they have written on the platform on Facebook. Similarly, P12 comments:

“Fortunately, we can get our criminal record (from e-government) very easily. You are going to give something to the Directorate of Security, they want your criminal record from e-government. ... I mean, you give your criminal report to the Directorate of Security. It is an institution that can document everything with your ID if it wants, you give this (to this institution).”

Though some participants adopt a skeptical attitude towards the use of online practices, deeming it insufficient, virtual or as cutting corners without effort, a few participants support them referring to the era we live in.

Internet is appreciated to enable people to engage in politics in their own way in addition to offering a platform for communication and information circulation (Halupka, 2014). However, while the technology makes usability, connection and communication easy, it also simplifies the online political participation and engagement process. Hence, this advancement has lately been subject to a critical point of view, which takes the process rather pessimistically, going so far as to label it as “clicktivism” or “slacktivism”. P9 objected this view and explained her ideas on online participation as this

“I am not a person who believes that. I am not a person who says the online is an easy issue, people do it from where they are, it is clicktivism. I (think) that people have started to access much more information thanks to online, digital environment. I mean (the information that) they have not seen on the media, television and so on. They have started to be involved in online, some things and it has become the factor

that has increased the offline activism. I mean it is not that it (online) is different, the ones who does it (online) does not do that (offline). On the contrary, I consider them as things that feed into each other.”

Likewise, P2 defended online participation arguing:

“We are in the consumption age. Of course, it (participation) is from where you stay. Now, everything is from where you stay. From now on, activism can also be from where you stay.”

## **SES Factors and Political Participation**

Since several research aforementioned found that people who are in a more advantaged position in terms of SES such as income, occupation, education as well as place of residence, display more political participation or involvement than the less advantaged others in the society, this study aimed to examine whether the participants have high levels with regard to socio-economic status. Considering that this study includes a rather limited number of participants as sample, and sampling was not realized by random selection of the members representing each socioeconomic group, but purposefully done through the selection of the campaigners on Change.org, the comparison of them according to the SES factors would not yield representative results. Hence, bearing in mind that all the participants show somewhat active participation in politics and have led a rather serious political act as petition campaign, which is considered to require high amount of time, energy and engagement, it would be possible that they all have high level of SES. However, accepting that the Internet has introduced cheaper, faster and more practical means for participation and citizenship activities and therefore helped decrease the participation gap between the citizens with different SES, it is expected that the participants have different socioeconomic backgrounds and, therefore, as citizens who show high levels of political participation, they do not have necessarily high levels of SES.

The interviews revealed that while 16 of the participants are from 6 different cities of Turkey, but two of them live in two metropolitan cities in different countries in Europe. 4 out of the 6 cities in question, the interviewees reside in, currently have metropolitan status and the rest two are among the cities announced to achieve this status within 2017. Hence, it can be considered that all the participants are residents of urban areas.

The majority of the participants (15) have at least bachelor’s degree, while three of them stated to be high school graduates and currently study at university, and just one stated to continue high school education. Besides, among the university graduates, three of them expressed to attend their second university and one noted to study for his third university degree. Moreover, two of the participants did Master’s and one participant has achieved the title of Associate Professor. Considering their intellectual background, the petition campaigner profile indicates a well-educated group.

When it comes to their occupation status, two third of the participants are involved in active work life, while the rest comprise one retired participant and four students. Among the students, one of them has a part time job to work for her pocket money, and one other earns money by working a full time as well as from his start-up initiative. As for the working group, eight of them has one job, whereas five of them work two jobs at the same time. All of them have prestigious jobs such as teacher, veterinarian, author, business manager, doctor, social entrepreneur, product business developer, designer, blogger, public officer, activist/campaigner, politician, graphic designer, software developer, public accountant and interpreter. In addition to being jobs highly valued by the society, almost all of them have the potential to produce revenue above average in Turkey.

Finally, to find out the economic status of the participants, they were asked about the total household income and the number of people in the house. The number they provided were divided according to the number of the household, which yielded the equalized yearly income. The income they provided was grouped according to the quintiles determined by Income and Living Conditions Survey of Turkey Statistical Institute (2017). When evaluated according to the 2016 Turkish data, which categorizes the income groups into five quintiles starting from the first quintile which represents the bottom income group to the last quintile which represents the top income group in the society, the interviews revealed that most of the interviewees (12 participants) belong to the fourth quintile (6) and fifth quintile (6) of the income groups, which shows that they are among the financially rather advantaged citizens in the Turkish society. While the 22% of the participants (4) is from the third quintile, just 11% percent (2) is within the first and second quintile. It is important to note that the two participants from the first and second quintile are university students and do not have a regular job yet, therefore, they do not contribute to the family income and manage on the pocket money.

These findings clearly indicate the presence of a rather advantaged group among participants in terms of place of residence, education, occupation and income, and hence parallel the present literature which indicates a correlation between higher SES and increased political participation. The findings display that citizens, more advantaged in terms of socioeconomic status, still dominate the group of citizens who show high levels of political participation and citizenship activities. On the other hand, the number of the participants in a less advantaged position in terms of SES – though being a few – may increase in time when digital citizenship is well learned and adopted in Turkey.

**Table 2. Participant Profile**

<b>Factors</b>		<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b><i>Place of residence</i></b>	<i>Urban</i>	18	100
	<i>Rural</i>	0	0
<b><i>Education</i></b>	<i>&lt;= Secondary</i>	1	5.5
	<i>High school</i>	3	17
	<i>Bachelor</i>	11	61
	<i>Master</i>	1	5.5
	<i>Doctorate</i>	2	11
<b><i>Monthly income</i></b>	*1.20%	1	5.5
	2.20%	1	5.5
	3.20%	4	22
	4.20%	6	33.5
	5.20%	6	33.5

\* The quintiles are determined according to the categorization of TurkStat, therefore, “When the individuals are sorted in ascending order by equalized household disposable income and divided into 5 parts, the bottom income group is defined as “the first quintile” and the top income group is defined as “the last quintile”. (Income and Living Conditions Survey 2006-2016, 2017).



## **Reasons to Use the Internet**

Considering that all the participants initiated their petitions online and led their campaigns, it is possible to reason that they somehow have Internet connection and skills to be able to utilize it. During the interview, all the participants have stated to have Internet connection and spend time on the Internet on daily basis. Hence, it is possible to deduce that the participants reflect the digital citizen profile defined by Mossberger et al. (1-2).

When asked about the reasons of Internet use, all of the interviewees stated to use it for social media. Though they have numerous reasons to go online and realize different activities, they generally have specific reasons to visit online websites on daily basis. Therefore, the researcher did not prefer to present them a list of activities to select from the list in the interview. What came to their mind at that moment was accepted as a part of their Internet use habits. More than half of the interviewees mentioned they follow local/international news (14 participants), make research or learn new things (11), or work (10) by using the Internet. Other reasons mentioned by the participants were following political sites (6), chatting (5), watching films/series (4), following online articles (3), learning different views (3), reaching/informing masses (2), reading cultural topics (2), sending/checking emails (2), following the sites of non-governmental organizations (2), listening to music (2), watching videos (2), sports (1), blogging (1), video sharing on YouTube (1), discussion/making comments (1), following groups (1) and shopping (1). In addition, they were also asked what kind of sites they mostly visit for political or civic reasons, the most stated answer was visiting e-government (14), which was followed by contacting local/national agencies (7), Internet banking (5), paying taxes (3), writing petitions (2), e-school (1) and central doctor appointment system (1). For now, the type of the activities they realize on the Internet especially for political and civic reasons seem more limited when compared to other activities realized online.

Though it is observed that they utilize online sources more for other reasons than political or civic ones for now, their positive attitudes toward the Internet and the increase in the number of online state services would be likely to change the citizenship and participation habits and attitudes of Turkish citizens.

## **Online Petition Campaigns and Change.org**

Upon questioning their petitioning experiences, the interviews revealed that it was not something totally new for them. Almost all of the participants stated to have had a petitioning experience beforehand. Six of the participants stated that they had already written individual petitions or initiated offline mass petition campaigns on their campaign issue or similar issues addressing the relevant authorities before they initiated their campaign on Change.org. Among them, three participants (P1, P9, P15) had already used other online petition campaign platforms before Change.org became popular.

When comparing online and offline petitions, almost all of the participants admitted to prefer online petitions, listing its advantages over offline petitions such as being more active, more confidential, more effective, more familiar, more practical faster, simpler, easier, cheaper, safer for both campaigners and petition signers, or reaching more number of people in a shorter time as well as providing a chance to organize other activities for the issues mentioned within the petition. The comment of P12 summarizes what generally participants mention on this topic:

“We are all people who wake up at 5 o’clock at the earliest, at 9 o’clock at the latest. I mean we are people who go to work in one way or the other. When all of us do not go to work for one day, the workload is hindered, some of them lose their jobs. Now this person does not even have time to write the petition and

post it to any government organization. There is still such as system as fax in this country! ... There has started a system as email. Even if you send it, the duration for examining the mail is not certain. Is it really checked? It is a mystery. Will you receive a responding message? So on and so forth. I think we have already forgotten them. I will send a petition, someone will read it – maybe one person or two people will look at it–, if it is suitable, he/she will send it to a higher authority, I do not know.”

Likewise, according to P15 there is no need to use paper and to submit the petitions in person since it is an unnecessary effort. He goes on to say:

“My father is 58 and has a Facebook (account). He signs if there is something that attracts his attention and shares it. If you can reach somebody at the age of 58, you cannot see people on the street like that anymore. If you open stand, people will not see it with their phones in their hands. They look at their phones, they do not look around.”

Taking into account that all of the participants have initiated at least one online petition campaign, it is important learn their knowledge about or opinions on Change.org. On being asked about what they know about Change.org, almost all of the participants noted that they do not know much about it or its history or how it works. They reported to have learned some basic information such as its international character and its fame as an effective platform with several victories, where people can voice their opinions, demands, problems or projects. While P4 has a realistic perspective and considers it as a successful start-up, P2 ascribes it a mission like defending freedoms that normally its users would do with their petitions. Likewise, P8 assumes that Change.org worked on a voluntary basis earlier, though it has newly started to demand money after its costs have increased. Besides, P14 considers the site reliable since he has seen it mentioned on news sites. On the other hand, P15 criticizes Change.org for not promoting the platform enough and finds its name difficult to understand. Among them, only P9, as an activist, has a comprehensive knowledge about Change.org including its history, working principles, business model or missions.

Most of the campaigners have positive attitude towards the company, find it reliable and trust its online platform, Change.org. P10 calls it as a credible organization and asserts that there are no forged signatures. P2 observes that people have confidence in Change.org since they have been familiar with for a long time and do not question or hesitate to sign the campaigns there when they encounter them. While P4 describes it as a successful start-up, P9, as an activist, regards it as the best platform she has ever encountered in terms of initiating and managing individual campaigns. Even though she has more than 50 campaign initiatives herself, she admits that she felt herself more involved in the campaign, established more sincere bonds with other petitioners and added more from herself. The comments of P18 on the company summarizes what the participants generally state about it:

“I think Change.org can stay objective. Perhaps I am mistaken. I think it is objective, non-commercial, or does not serve a government or a state. I think it does not direct people. It allows you to start a campaign freely on an issue you want, as if you were getting an email address. You start a campaign as you get a webmail, Gmail. It allows you this freedom. I mean, it does not say it is prohibited in your country to start this or make you focus on the conditions or boundaries of a country.”

Although it is clear that the participants are somehow experienced in petitioning, many of them do use such sites as Change.org without doing enough research about them related to their goals, business model, working style, confidentiality. Besides, some participants also criticized some online petitions, which have not been well thought to have a reasonable cause or well-organized to clearly explain the situation. Consequently, these points leave question marks for the future of participation and digital citizenship.

## Emerging Issues on Digital Citizenship

Obviously, most of the participants have positive attitudes towards the use of the Internet for political participation and citizenship, there are some critical issues voiced by them that are worthy of consideration.

One important point voiced by some participants is that the government services should be digitalized in parallel with the technological developments to respond to the demands of citizens in a faster and more practical and effective way. For instance, P5 and P7 stated that they wished such a service by Change.org to be provided by the government itself. According to P5, it would also make the campaign process more transparent.

There are numerous digital initiations by governments and politicians around the world to improve the public services. It is observed that they also have already started to incorporate social media and other online platforms into the present fields of operation. This was one of the issues voiced by some participants. According to P10 and P18, the power of social media and online petitions should be taken more seriously by politicians to gain a clear understanding of public opinion and to develop more appropriate policies. On the other hand, P5 imagines a digital electoral system that could be realized via kiosk-like machines and enable the participation of the whole society and getting the opinion of the public in a faster way at more frequent intervals.

On the other hand, many participants believe that people have some hesitations to voice their complaints or demands no matter in online or offline forms due to their fears and workload. While many of the participants complained about the time consuming aspect of such bureaucratic operations, some of them were rather anxious about the expressing their political opinions or doing something online that would fall into the field of politics. A few participants (P2, P7, P18) articulated their unwillingness in drawing attention with their political acts in the present situation. One thing that can be easily inferred from their expressions was that they considered campaigns about politics somehow risky for their career and life in general.

In addition to them, some concerns related to online participation forms were mentioned, which include misuse or unconscious use of online facilities. Firstly, Internet is open to fraud through agitation and emotional exploitation as noted by P11. Secondly, confidentiality was a matter of concern. Some participants (P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P15, P17) were worried about the collection, use or disclosure of their personal information while using government applications or online platforms for requests or complaints which would lead to such problems as being blacklisted, abused, threatened, dismissed or brought into disrepute by the relevant authorities or other users. Therefore, the importance of creating the atmosphere of trust, especially for government applications, was among the list of expectations of the participating citizens. P5, for instance, mentioned the huge group of trolls in the virtual environment, who have decreased the reliability of the online content. He went on to maintain there is the danger that what one writes on the Internet can be cut and pasted in a different way to be published on some websites, thus making writing online or initiating a campaign rather difficult. Another group online, for him, constitutes young people most of whom are far from providing tangible, positive information. He mentioned one more online problem, by giving example from the platform. He argued that since the platform allows its users to make changes on the petition content, he changed his a few times after he initiated the campaign, but the signatures remained as they were. He commented:

“This security flaw still exists in most of the websites that have been newly established. I mean you can change your username on Twitter now. After reaching a certain number of users on Change.org, – I do not

know whether Change.org is aware of it or not – you can change your campaign, saying ‘I changed my mind about my campaign’s being like this, I want it to be like that’, which is what I did”.

Gregory Hladky claims that political scientists and activists, no matter how different ideologies they have, share the idea that e-petitions may go beyond the classical aim of expressing public opinion and influencing policies to a kind of political weapon (Hartford Advocate, 2011). P18 mentioned that people may use it to create public opinion with malicious intents such as trolling. Moreover, P13 emphasized the huge repository of emails the platform possesses at present which can be used to make money. Likewise, P10 reasons that it can be used for good as well as for bad purposes. It can be a research website, too. They can find out what the society reacts, who supports what.

Though having more opportunities in the online environment to show political participation and practice citizenship is highly welcomed in the modern world, it also brings about new norms of behavior to be adopted for emerging advantages and perils. It was clear that most of the participants of this study were highly skilled in utilizing the digital facilities and conscious about the issues in question. However, many of them noted that many citizens are not aware of how to smartly utilize the online platforms and facilities bearing in mind their purpose of use, codes of contacts and risks. For this reason, it was noted that citizens are in need of being educated for the utilization of the online services and media consumption.

## **CONCLUSION**

Technological developments, as in aspects fields of life, have been digitalizing the politics, by providing novel applications and services that not only simplify but also alter how people perceive and exercise political participation and citizenship in the modern world. These developments and alterations have been experienced in various activities citizens realize from most risky activities to simplest ones including elections, tax paying or petitions. Though there have still been present the fears about participation, or the problems experienced while utilizing online sources, these online practices are mostly welcomed. Change.org as an online platform for petitioning, despite having no binding power before laws and government, has claimed its place among successful online applications. However, time will show where the platform will be directed or what its long-term effects will be. For now, the platform is among the new start-ups of the digital life and its scope of influence for governments and electronic participation will be determined by how it will be utilized by its users and developed based on the political atmosphere.

The results of this study have shown that people have positive attitudes toward services on the Internet and are willing to exercise their political participation and citizenship rights online. They have already realized various activities in the offline and virtual environment for political participation and citizenship and mostly expect to have more number of online services and facilities to better voice their opinions and settle political affairs. It clearly shows us the presence of a citizen profile different from the one of the earlier generations.

This paper has been an attempt to explore the digital citizen and his/her political activities. What is also possible to observe is that they have some concerns about the political participation itself whether it be online or offline. Therefore, it may be concluded that the problem does not take its sources just from the way political participation is realized, but from how politics is perceived and exercised as well as security flows in both spheres overall. Instead of worrying that new generations become alienated from politics, it would be more helpful to understand their fears, expectations and favored ways of participation as Bennett suggests that it is not

enough just to prepare them for politics, but to improve politics for the citizens (Bennett 4). Taking into account that the new generation may experience politics and civic engagement in a different process, employing various media would be useful creating civic and political communities in today's politics since they would serve as "the tools of change" (p.9). Besides, it is suggested that politicians and academic researchers recognize the ways young citizens favor to communication and citizenship practices, while government agencies, foundations and non-governmental organizations improve the present online communities for engagement to have a wider network and be accessible for collaboration with the young (Bennett 12). Training them for improving their digital knowledge and skills will also be useful to prepare them as conscious digital citizens.

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