

The view of political knowledge gap among social media users in Türkiye*

Siyasal bilgi açığı: Sosyal medya kullanıcıları arasındaki siyasi bilgi açığının Türkiye'deki görünümü

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Abstract

This study primarily focuses on the relationship between social media use and the political knowledge gap in Türkiye. Regarding political issues, the work in this focus axis is built on questioning and researching the political knowledge gap among individuals categorized at different levels regarding socio-economic status, education level, motivation, and social media use variables. Based on the problem, the differentiation in education and socio-economic level is at the center. Gender, motivation, and social media use are other investigated variables. The research examines whether the effect of social media environments, which are today's most common usage area, on the level of political knowledge reveals a meaningful differentiation and reveals at what points information gaps arise. For this purpose, field research was carried out in Türkiye with 1.076 people. The study has a quantitative design based on the fact that its original value is in its being the first research in this field in the country. The data obtained from the documents showed that education level and gender variables are no longer determining factors in the knowledge gap hypothesis research.

Keywords: Knowledge gap hypothesis, political knowledge gap, social media use, socio-economic status, motivation.

Öz

Bu çalışmada, Türkiye'de sosyal medya kullanımı ile siyasi bilgi açığı ilişkisine birincil olarak odaklanılmaktadır. Bu odak ekseninde çalışma, siyasi konular söz konusu olduğunda; sosyoekonomik statü, eğitim düzeyi, motivasyon, sosyal medya kullanımı değişkenleri kıstasında farklı düzeylerde kategorize olan bireyler arasındaki siyasi bilgi açığını sorgulama ve araştırma amacı üzerine inşa edilmektedir. Söz konusu sorunsalıktan hareketle, başat olarak eğitim düzeyi ve sosyoekonomik düzeydeki farklılaşma merkeze alınmaktadır. Cinsiyet, motivasyon ve sosyal medya kullanımı araştırılan diğer değişkenlerdir. Araştırma, günümüzün en yaygın kullanım alanına sahip olan sosyal medya ortamlarının, belirlenen kıstaslar çerçevesinde ayrı ayrı kategorize olan bireyler arasındaki siyasi bilgi düzeyine dair etkisinin anlamlı bir farklılaşmanın öncüsü olup

olmadığını incelemekte ve bilgi açıklarının hangi noktalarda doğduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu amaçla, 1076 kişi ile Türkiye geneli bir saha araştırması yapılmaktadır. Özgün değerinin bu alana dönük ülkemizdeki ilk araştırma olmasına dayanan nicel desendeki çalışmada sahadan edinilen veriler, eğitim düzeyi ve cinsiyet değişkenlerinin bilgi açığı hipotezi araştırmalarında birer belirleyen olmaktan çıktığını belgelemektedir. Sosyo ekonomik statü

ve motivasyon, hala belirleyen konumundadır. Siyasal bilgi açığının Türkiye'deki görünümünü en güncel şekliyle sunan bu çalışma, söz konusu teoremin değişen ve dönüşen medya ortamları ile paralel şekilde revizyona uğradığını da belgelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bilgi açığı hipotezi, siyasal bilgi açığı, sosyal medya kullanımı, sosyoekonomik statü, motivasyon

Introduction

The knowledge gap hypothesis, which Tichenor, Donohue and Olien first mentioned as a theorem in 1970 and followed in the footsteps of subsequent researchers, basically focuses on the knowledge gap that is assumed to occur between segments with high education levels and those with low education levels. The main starting point is the question of how the differences in education and economic levels within the society affect the formation of the knowledge gap (Tichenor et al., 1970). Results revealing the existence of a significant knowledge gap among lower groups (Beka-lu & Eggemont, 2013; Cho & Mcload, 2007; Eveland et al., 2000; Fredinet et al., 1994; Grif-fin, 1990; Moore, 1987; Salter et al, 2009) support Tichenor et al. The reason for this is that early research shows that reading newspapers requires skill and that these environments appeal more to people with higher education levels (Donohue, 1986; Speight, 1999; Tichenor et al., 1790; Tichenor et al., 1975). Television, on the other hand, is positioned as environments that equalize knowledge (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Graber, 1990; Graber, 2004; Kim, 2008). Some studies conducted after the 2000s, after new technologies had definitively entered human life, reveal the existence of an increasing knowledge gap between individuals in the lower and upper status categories in terms of education level (Anduza et al.), 2009; Cho & Mcload, 2007; Gaziano, 2014; Jeffery & Anderson, 2004; Pereira et al., 2014; Yanık, 2015). The argument put forward based on the results of the said research is that the use of new technologies and the internet environments they carry with them requires a certain knowledge and skill, just like newspapers; It is the comment that people with low education levels have limited access to these environments. A similar idea also applies to the socio-economic level. Most research reveals that there are large differences in using communication skills between those with higher and lower socio-economic status (Tokgöz, 2015, p. 295). This main result also has a sub-result: the individual with a high socio-economic and educational level already has a broad background due to their advanced levels of economics and education, and therefore, it is inevitable that there will be a positive difference from the other group in terms of knowledge reception (Eastin et al., 2013; Kim, 2007; Wei & Hindman, 2011).

The study presented by summarizing the focus so far, when it comes to specific issues such as politics in a holistic sense, becomes problematic by questioning and researching the political knowledge gap between individuals at different levels in terms of socio-economics, education, motivation and social media usage variables. Based on

this problematic, the focus is primarily on the education and socio-economic level differentiation. Gender, motivation and social media use are other variables investigated. Depending on the structure of individuals who are categorized and differentiated in the individual context, social media environments, which are the most widely used today, it aims to examine whether the effect on the level of political knowledge reveals a meaningful differentiation and to reveal at what points the knowledge gaps arise.

The study, which is designed for this purpose, and consists of two parts. In the first part of the study, there is a comprehensive literature review in order to make the theorem in question more understandable. The second part, which is created in the reference of this part, where the theoretical foundations are laid, presents the empirical part of the study. This section, which aims to seek answers to the questions of where social media environments stand at the point of formation of the political knowledge gap and what effect they have on the formation of the knowledge gap between individuals, is shaped in a quantitative pattern and covers the part where field research is included. After this section, in which the details of the field research carried out with the hybrid method are shared with 1.076 people whose universe is pointed out by all of Türkiye within the determined sample, and comments on the findings obtained from the field are included, the study is finally completed by presenting the current situation. The study, whose original value is based on the fact that it is the first research in Türkiye in this field, also reveals differences that differ from the findings of other studies based on the knowledge gap hypothesis conducted in the world to date, and especially documents that the variable of education level is no longer a determinant.

The birth of the knowledge gap hypothesis and a first look at the subject

When this theory first started to be discussed in America in the 1970s, Europe both continued the trace of the critical movement and add different perspectives to it, and focused on associating the holistic way of life, which it described as cultural studies within the media. While Stuart Hall was writing his article titled "*Coding-Decoding*" in 1973, he worked particularly on the ideological roles of the media and the nature of ideology. According to Hall, the process along the lines of "sender-message-receiver" is insufficient to understand communication (Özçetin, 2018, p. 189). Because according to him, this line misses the point of how media texts are received and denies that the viewer/reader actually has the opportunity to make a choice when receiving media

texts. At this point, Hall ignores media ownership and control (Yaylagül, 2013, p. 131). He emphasizes the idea that the education level, social stratum, mentality, motivation and most of all the cultural structure of the audience groups, which he categorizes as dominant, oppositional and argumentative, are decisive in terms of content consumption (Hall, 2005, p. 96, 97). The thinker, who is among the recent pioneers of Europe's critical movement tradition, persistently opposes the idea that people have a completely passive structure.

As a result of the empirical method being influenced by the critical approach, the knowledge gap hypothesis, which was put forward in 1970, appeared simultaneously in America (Şeker, 2005, p. 16). On the one hand, it is obvious that it refers to the concrete difference in society and that it takes the aforementioned European schools as a reference. On the other hand, it continues to follow the American empirical trajectory in that it is the theory of the message-receiver paradigm that developed in an American school. In this context, for the theory, which focuses on the central role of media and media use, the difference in the degree of knowledge that occurs as a result of the differentiation in the level of economy and education between people at the point of knowledge acquisition is the first subject of research on this theory. Tichenor, Donohue and Olien did the first studies on the knowledge gap, in their research titled *Mass Communication Flow and Growth Differences in knowledge* (1970). When the amount and variety of knowledge disseminated through media tools in the social system increases, they reveal the judgment that individuals with a high socio-economic level receive knowledge more quickly and consciously than individuals with a low socio-economic level. According to them, in such a situation; The formation of a knowledge gap between two different segments of society is inevitable (Tichenor et al., 1970, p. 161).

With reference to the studies of the researchers who conducted their first research, different factors are listed as to the reason for the formation of the knowledge gap hypothesis in subsequent studies. In the first studies, in addition to the factors that directly linked the reason for the knowledge gap to being included in a lower or higher status and educational status, subsequent studies began to talk about the existence of different variables among the reasons for the formation of the gap. As a matter of fact, Donohue et al. emphasize the idea that individuals who apply to the same media environment have different reasons for applying, and that individuals can turn to different contents of the same media according to their interests. He emphasizes the

idea that this difference may cause a knowledge gap (1973, p. 659-660). So much so that the researchers who conducted this study on newspaper readers reveal that readers turn to news content on different topics according to their different interests.

Robinson emphasizes that different media environments can cause knowledge gaps among individuals. In particular, he defends the idea that print media increases the knowledge gap compared to television (1990, p. 133).

Donohue and his colleagues also state that closing the knowledge gap may vary depending on the sensitivity of the mass media and the nature of the individuals who have the knowledge. For example, while the knowledge gap between individuals is less in subjects that are within a general area of interest and known by all segments of society, such as sports and housework; the knowledge gap between individuals can be much greater on issues related to a specific field such as science and politics (1970, p. 158). In parallel, Donohue and his friends, based on the differences arising from these individual characteristics, raise a question of theoretical and social importance: Under what conditions can the knowledge gap be reduced or eliminated? In order to find an answer to this question, it is emphasized that the majority structure of society should be defined correctly and it should be understood whether it has a homogeneous pattern (1975).

Brantgarde explains the existence of knowledge gap between different social layers. It relates to having knowledge and equipment regarding international, national and regional news (1983, p. 362). According to him, individuals with low socio-economic levels have less knowledge about national or international issues than the other segment, which reveals the existence of a concrete knowledge gap. While starting their research with a similar starting point, Frail and Gomez reiterate that having or not having prior knowledge of political news increases the knowledge gap between individuals, and find that the gender factor is also included as a potential variable at this point (2015). According to what researchers have learned, there is a significant political knowledge gap between men and women, regardless of their pre-existing knowledge. Men are more knowledgeable than women. And even the knowledge gap among women is increasing regarding women-friendly policies and discourses or the charismatic will of leaders (Frail & Gomez, 2015, pp. 98, 102).

In studies on the knowledge gap hypothesis, the point is constantly repeated that the emphasis is on two distinctions to define society, namely the segment included in the high socio-economic level and the segment included in the low socio-economic level (McQuail & Windahl, 1997, p. 156). The theory focuses on the idea that the knowledge levels of individuals belonging to these two different segments also differ directly. Because every segment of society can obtain knowledge, however, individuals with a higher level of education can obtain knowledge faster and thus become more knowledgeable (Yaylagül, 2013, p. 84). The highly educated segment, which can also be described as the upper layer has a greater stake in what is happening in both the economy and politics. This situation carries with it the preparation of most of the media content for the segment with a high socio-economic level. The reason for this is that it can be interpreted that this segment is characterized as consumers by those who prepare media content (Kim, 2008). Ultimately, the difference in the use of media content results in an increasing gap in knowledge. Novak described the phenomenon in question as knowledge gaps. He emphasizes the idea of closing the inevitably existing knowledge gap by suggesting that the stratum that has material power in the social sense offers practical solutions to the other layer through communication activities (1997). Because, according to him, the acquisition of knowledge is a necessity, and the substrate should not be deprived of this need.

Adding the motivation variable to the knowledge gap hypothesis, Lovrich and Piers conduct field research in a region where water resources management policy is carried out. Researchers show that as individuals' personal interest and motivation for the subject increase, they have at least as much knowledge as individuals with a high level of education (1984, p. 427-433). In research aimed at measuring the knowledge gap, the researchers who reveal that the motivation factor is also a basic determinant at the point of knowledge acquisition argue that if individuals with a low socio-economic level are motivated, they will close the existing knowledge gap between them and individuals with a high socio-economic level (1984, p. 433).

If it aims to better understand and summarize the important issues that cause the formation of a knowledge gap and have an impact on this theorem from a broad perspective, it is necessary to evaluate the issue beyond individual differences. In this context, it is important to underline that the developments in the media system are directly related to the knowledge gap hypothesis. Marshall Poe, while writing his *History of Communication*, explains the developments in the field of technology by referring

to Plato's Allegory of the Cave analogy. According to him, in Plato's cave, no one can see the truth. Poe unites today's individual and his cave people on the same denominator by saying that no one actually knows much in Plato's cave, just like those of us who think we know and see everything now (2019, p. 301). In the new century, the individual who builds a vast cave with media technologies is aware that he is between electronic walls, unlike Plato's cave man. This awareness makes it possible to be aware of having an environment that is entertaining, enjoyable, informative and beneficial in terms of providing satisfaction and virtual satisfaction for the individual. However, with the beginning of the process in which how the individual will behave is shaped along with technological developments, the idea that all the knowledge gaps that people have previously demanded will be closed and disappear. At this point, the idea that media tools (Poe, p. 132), which are seen as an accessibility tool, do not serve to meet expectations, contrary to what is actually thought, explains the main reason for the difference between individuals created by the knowledge gap.

Another point is the existence of knowledge gap formation according to the type of social structure and how the distribution of power, in other words, the distribution of knowledge, is affected by the changing media system (Yanık, 2015, p. 12) because the information gap hypothesis is directly related to the unbalanced distribution of knowledge resources and becomes more evident with the development of technology. However, if everyone has the opportunity to use technology to the same degree, the knowledge gap is less. When every innovation in technology spreads in society, a democratization is achieved in terms of knowledge, and the knowledge gap disappears according to the prediction. However, the truth is that technology that advances without slowing down leaves the economically backward segment even further behind.

It is also an important point that the problematic of who is in control of the production and dissemination of knowledge in parts of the social system has been brought to the agenda again with the knowledge gap hypothesis (Gaziano, 2013, p. 117). This means that, on the one hand, there is a segment that uses technology in the best way in every aspect, and on the other hand, there is another segment that has not had the opportunity to meet technology. Today, in the modern world where advanced technology is used, there is a significant population that has never met computers and the internet. The segment with technology - which is defined as the segment with a high socio-economic level, while being able to add knowledge to one's knowledge by using all the opportunities of the knowledge age and having all the benefits of the modern world. Those who

have low socio-economic levels, are hindered in education, and are left out of all development and change are falling further behind in the face of the speed and continuity of development. This increases the gap in the knowledge gap. This being the case, the part of the world that is developing economically, and therefore, able to benefit from educational opportunities is experiencing the knowledge age. It is obvious that a part of the world is still doomed to remain underdeveloped due to inadequate economic and educational conditions.

At the same time, according to the knowledge gap hypothesis, the creation of large differences in knowledge in societies can have profound effects and this can be a central factor in future social change. When the more highly educated are at the vanguard of technological change, the rapid acquisition of knowledge can benefit that society, but at the same time, differences in knowledge can also cause tension within the social system (Yüksel, 2013, p. 125). This approach, which is based on an absolute and objective concept of knowledge as a standard, actually means a communication gap and a special difficulty in solving social problems.

Knowledge gap hypothesis, politics and social media relationship

Only in the last 15 years, social media has started a whole new revolution in human life. It is not just for the social; a new area of interest and inquiry for the academic world has been born with social media environments. Therefore, researchers who believe that the reason for the adoption and use of social media, as well as the necessity of investigating its effects, state that social media environments cover a very diverse research area. It also takes it upon itself to ask how the theories are shaped here and what kind of conceptual frameworks they offer for the research to be carried out (Morozov, 2018, p. 25; Ngai et al., 2015, p. 34). On the one hand, studies claiming that social media plays a dynamic role and is a field of activism. On the other hand, studies that reveal that these environments feed political visibility, and on the other hand, other studies that argue that social media is the first source of reference that comes to mind at the point of knowledge or entertainment. It deepens the multi-layered structure of research in this field. However, it is observed that studies that establish a direct relationship between this environment, which has such a wide field of inquiry, and aim to illuminate the effect of social media on the formation of knowledge gap, remain at a limited level in the world and in Türkiye.

Today, as communication environments continue to change, some of the few researchers who address this problem, especially in terms of the density and availability of media channels and content, are concentrating on re-examining how knowledge gaps occur in this new knowledge society. Chen, who conducted one of the limited studies on establishing the relationship between the knowledge gap and social media, attributes the use of social media to personal motivation that differs between individuals. According to him, every individual who develops interest and motivation in a subject and turns to the content of the media in question is relatively more knowledgeable than other individuals who do not develop the motivation (2013, p. 13). In the study, which measures the effect of a social media environment called Guokr, which is widespread in China, on individuals when it comes to information about science and technology, it is concluded that the reason for the knowledge gap is due to the difference in the level of interest and motivation developed by individuals rather than the use of social media. In the study, Guokr is described as a weak environment in terms of knowledge. The researcher, who attributes the reason for this to the fact that users do not turn to this environment for knowledge, emphasizes that social media environments do not carry a reliable image in the eyes of the user, especially on issues that require more seriousness in science, technology and politics (Chen, 2013, p. 24).

Emphasizing the importance of questioning how individuals benefit from these resources with the transition from traditional news media to social media, Shehata and Stramback state that traditional media environments, especially some of them, increase the knowledge gap. In addition, it investigates whether this knowledge gap can be compensated with social media, which has emerged as an alternative to the traditional one today (2018). Researchers who set out to work with the assumption that social media equalizes individuals at different socio-economic levels reach the conclusion that when some individuals need knowledge about politics, they turn directly to social media environments, contrary to what Chen (2013) found, rather than traditional media environments or websites. However, the point that is especially emphasized in the study is that individuals who turn to social media for political knowledge do not have as much knowledge as individuals who follow the news from traditional media. In this context, it is concluded that the knowledge obtained from social media environments is at a weak level compared to the knowledge obtained from traditional media environments and the knowledge gap between the two media mediums is increasing. In terms of a diverse and comprehensive knowledge on politics, it is also stated that social media environments do not compensate for the knowledge gap created by

traditional media environments (Shehata & Stramback, 2018). Ferrin and friends argue that even if the individual leads a life integrated with social media, the individual benefits from television environments the most in the learning process, and television has the biggest effect on encouraging learning (2019, p. 327).

Especially when it comes to issues related to politics, when compared to other members of society, women with low education levels turn to the television environment. It is noteworthy that they reduce the knowledge gap between them and men, which has been revealed by different studies that they have much more political knowledge than women. (Ferrin et al., 2019, p. 329). However, researchers who emphasize the weakness of social media use in providing knowledge on political issues, just like Shehata and Stramback, they say that television media close the gap in political knowledge, while social media is inadequate in terms of providing accurate knowledge. Tran also agrees with the idea that social media use does not contribute to political knowledge (2013). With all of these; that social media use causes a knowledge gap among individuals at different socio-economic levels, it is underlined that groups with higher education levels increase the knowledge gap due to the fact that they already have more knowledge than groups with lower education levels (Ferrin et al., 2019; Shehata & Stramback, 2018; Tran, 2013).

The process that media environments go through is parallel to political communication studies. Considering the transformation of the media and the area of influence it has reached, politicians who want to reach the public must actively use newspapers, radio, television and internet media because today's society, on which symbols and visuals are claimed to be more effective (Lilleker, 2013, p. 80), can easily be informed in short ways through social media, which is blended with the constantly transforming and unfixed nature of truth, occupies an important place for political dynamics. Here, social media appears as a field where the professionalism of political communication is tested. While it also makes possible the existence of a society that is not homogeneous and includes multiple identities, it reminds us that studies in this field will be useful.

The basis for establishing the relationship between social media environments and knowledge gap is based on the idea that the fragmentation of knowledge occurs faster in these environments (Gaziano, 2017, p. 9). Everything related to cultural, political, ideological, religious, and social life is located in different capacities between individuals. Different groups attribute meaning to the social media content they turn to in proportion to the

logical consistency offered by their belief frameworks. This increases the knowledge gap between social groups. The vast majority of studies on the subject result in the finding that the gaps arising from these differences are further fed by the mass media, and that some environments, especially the knowledge gap, are reinforced (Güz & Yanık, 2017, p. 11). In this case, an answer is sought to the question of the extent to which social media environments, which are thought to be the answer to our need for knowledge in daily life, direct the knowledge gap between individuals, especially when it comes to issues related to politics.

Aim and methodology

It is known that the United States (USA) is mostly at the starting point of research on media effects. Examining and analyzing what is happening in other countries can help us understand how knowledge is shaped. On the other hand, if the results are similar in different environments, this finding may strengthen the validity of theoretical arguments. The study focuses on the knowledge gap hypothesis, the existence of which mainly depends on the variation in socio-economic level and educational level between individuals. It has been documented by some researchers conducted to date that the knowledge gap, which is thought to already exist among individuals, is further reinforced by the use of different media environments. There are also opposite findings. Based on different perspectives, the study is based on the problematic of to what extent social media environments, which have a wide range of usage areas and purposes today, shape the knowledge gap between individuals with heterogeneous characteristics. Based on this problem, the research aims to measure the knowledge levels and the estimated knowledge gap between different segments of society in social media environments, which are within the scope of the internet, which is the most widely used network among mass media today, based on the knowledge gap hypothesis. When it comes to political knowledge, propaganda and campaigns, which are frequently encountered in social media contents that contain unlimited knowledge, it reveals the political knowledge gap between recipients who differ in socio-demographic (education, socio-economics, gender) and psychological (interest and motivation) aspects. The field research conducted to determine the results revealed important findings.

On the axis of this purpose, the study is built on two separate parts. The first part of the study is the section where a comprehensive literature review is made and the theoretical foundations are laid. The second part is presented on the empirical section, which includes field research based on theoretical foundations. 1.076 people participated

in the field research designed in a quantitative pattern. The field research was mainly conducted online. However, some handicaps of the online field research were also taken into consideration. As the biggest handicap, it was thought that it was difficult to deliver the online questionnaire to individuals who were included in the lower class at the level of education and socio-economy. Therefore, it was decided that the survey should also be supported by a telephone interview. The main thing in the research on the knowledge gap hypothesis is to determine the difference in the level of knowledge between individuals in the lower and upper status categories of the society. In this sense, it was decided to carry out the field research in a hybrid manner. 90% of the study was conducted online and 10% by phone interview. The ethics committee approval required for the research was also obtained before the field research began.

The research questions of the study are as follows:

- Is there a significant political knowledge gap among participants with different statuses based on education level?
- Is there a significant political knowledge gap among participants with different statuses based on socio-economic level?
- Is there a significant political knowledge gap among participants in terms of interest and motivation levels regarding political issues?
- Is there a significant political knowledge gap among participants of different genders?
- Is there a significant political knowledge gap between participants who use social media and those who do not use social media?

Application of the research and sample selection

The universe of the study is Türkiye, and the sample that is supposed to represent the universe is represented by 1.076 people determined from 12 different provinces. TurkStat data were used in order to approximate the universe values of the interviewees. Through Quota Sampling, which is a non-random sampling method; 53 people from Adana, 142 from Ankara, 80 from Bursa, 30 from Erzurum, 47 from Gaziantep, 412 from Istanbul, 124 from Izmir, 39 from Kayseri, 52 from Kocaeli, 30 from Malatya, 37 from Samsun and 30 from Trabzon were reached. A total of 1.076 people, who are assumed to represent the universe, were surveyed throughout Türkiye with the hybrid method. All participants are over the age of 18. While determining the sample, it should be emphasized that

quotas are made by creating a distribution according to the representative age, gender and province-based population numbers of Türkiye. The data obtained from the sample were generalized for the whole of Türkiye.

While determining the sample, the Statistical Classification of Regional Units (SCRU) was taken as reference. SCRU is a geocoding system that started in Europe in the 1970s. The main purpose of these regional units is to collect regional-based statistics, conduct socio-economic analyses and create the framework of regional policies for society.

SCRU, which was created according to the similar characteristics of the regions in order to create a single database throughout the European Union (EU), to standardize regional statistics and to create a comparable picture while doing this, was accepted as an exemplary regional unit application in Türkiye and was completed in 2002 by the State Planning Organization (SPO) with the support of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat).

In the SCRU classification, the provinces are defined as 'Level 3;' neighboring provinces, which are similar economically, socially and geographically, were grouped as 'Level 1' and 'Level 2', taking into account their regional development plans and population sizes, and a hierarchical SCRU was made.

Within the scope of Level 3, each province has defined a Statistical Regional Unit, a total of 81. Level 2 Statistical Regional Units are defined as a grouping of neighboring provinces within the scope of Level 3, and there are 26 of them. Level 1 Statistical Regional Units, on the other hand, are defined as a result of the grouping of 'Level 2' Statistical Regional Units, and there are 12 of them, and all region-based studies in the public domain are now based on SCRU studies.

On the other hand, in this research, a sample was created by using statistical science to predict the universe. While creating the samples, the confidence interval and margins of error affect the number of interviews in the samples. In the research that is the subject of the study and in all other Market and Public Opinion Surveys, confidence intervals are generally divided into 2. These are the 90% and 95% confidence intervals. The preference of this research is to create a sample with a 95% confidence interval. In addition to this, there is also a margin of error. In the study, the max-candle is studied with a margin of error of $5.0\pm$. Above this margin of error, it negatively affects the reliability and validity of the research.

Therefore, in the research subject to the study, the confidence interval was taken as 95%, the margin of error was determined as ± 3.0 at maximum and the sample size was determined as 1.076. The determined sample size enabled both estimation of Türkiye and statistical analysis in sub-breakdowns.

Limitation of the research; it is framed by the level of informing individuals of political knowledge, propaganda and campaigns on *YouTube* (92% usage rate), *Instagram* (83%), *Facebook* (76%) and *Twitter* (61%) applications. For the field research conducted, the period between 16 APRIL - 7 MAY 2021 was considered as a temporal limitation.

Data collection tools

The research was provided by the participants answering the questionnaire containing a total of 78 questions. The questionnaire that the participants were expected to answer was easy to understand and had been designed with reference to previously tested measurement tools. In the scale of goals and attitudes towards social media use, there were other questions that sought answers about the purposes of using social media, attitudes towards social media, political knowledge methods, and whether Türkiye's political agenda was followed (Anduza, Gallego & Jorba, 2009; Balci, 2016; Balci & Saritaş, 2019; Sugar, 2004; Burn, 2015). On the scale of interest in political issues, it was investigated to what extent the participants found the communication tools and methods effective in the political knowledge process. Cronbach's $\alpha \geq$ is defined as 0.872. The knowledge level test on the political agenda was a multiple-choice part that aimed to open the key points of the study and included questions consisting of the political agenda of Türkiye. This last part was prepared by us and was a 20-question exam on the current political events of Türkiye. In the analysis phase of the research, the data obtained from the last part were positioned as the main determinants. This test, which enabled those who score between 0 and 25 points to be categorized as uninformed, those between 26 and 50 points as less knowledgeable, those between 51 and 75 points as knowledgeable, and those between 76 and 100 points as very knowledgeable, tested the arguments defended by this study. At the end of the questionnaire, there were questions to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Findings

Before seeking answers to research questions, it is important to summarize some data obtained from the field. Field research findings showed that the social media usage

rate was 96%. 4.0% of the participants stated that they never used social media. Additionally, the average time spent on social media was found to be 4 hours. 55% of the participants spend 5 hours or more on social media a day. 69.0% of the participants who use social media think that social media environments are very important and useful.

When the purposes of social media usage were investigated, it was found that users mostly turned to social media to communicate. 73.2% of the participants use *YouTube* frequently. With a total of 35.8% positive values, the least preferred platform is *Twitter*.

When the participants' ability to obtain political knowledge in social media environments was investigated, it was found that 44.5% of the users were interested in Türkiye's political agenda, while 34% remained passive regarding the political agenda. It has also been found that internet news sites are among the communication tools and methods that affect people in the process of obtaining political knowledge. Social media and television broadcasts are also at similar levels.

The field research also provided knowledge that political content on social media environments is not directly trusted and that participants resort to different channels to confirm the accuracy of these contents. On the other hand, 66.1% of the participants described themselves as 'informed' on political issues, and 3.3% described themselves as 'uninformed.' In addition, 47.6% of social media users stated that they were knowledgeable about the political thought/worldview/ideology they advocated, while 33% stated that they remained passive regarding the political thought/worldview/ideology they defended. It was observed that the level of knowledge of the participants on political issues was at the 'informed' level with 65.2%.

Among the participants, the number of participants using social media was 1,033, and the number of participants not using social media was 43. While analyzing political knowledge questions, the number of social media users (1.033 people) was taken as basis.

Table 1: Central tendency statistics for political knowledge scores of participants using social media according to their educational status

	S	\bar{x}	SD.	95% Mean for Confidence Interval		Min.	Max.
				Lower Limit	Upper Limit		
Primary Education	178	66.29	19.267	63.44	69.14	15	100
High School	384	65.33	16.869	63.63	67.02	20	100
University	428	65,41	17.205	63.77	67.04	10	100
Graduate	43	66.86	19.610	60.83	72.90	30	100
TOTAL	1033	65.59	17.538	64.52	66.66	10	100

The evaluations in Table 1 present the categorization of the political knowledge scores of the participants using social media according to the variable of education level. The group with the highest knowledge score is the graduate group ($\bar{x}=66.86$), followed by the primary education group ($\bar{x}=66.29$). It seems surprising that the knowledge score among the participants, who were categorized into extreme groups in the criterion of education level, was very similar. The mean score value was almost equivalent between high school ($\bar{x}=65.33$) and university ($\bar{x}=65.41$) groups. Moreover, the group with the lowest political knowledge score among the participants is the university (min. = 10 points). People with a full score of 100, which is the highest, are available among all training groups. On the other hand, it should be emphasized that the lowest ($\bar{x}=60.83$) and the highest ($\bar{x}=72.90$) average knowledge score values belong to the graduate group, and the score difference within the group is more visible than other education groups.

Regardless of the education level, a large portion of social media users show that they are 'informed' on current political issues. This result is consistent with the answers of the participants regarding how they evaluated their level of knowledge regarding the political knowledge expected from them before measuring their knowledge. Participants evaluated themselves as 'knowledgeable.' As a matter of fact, the political knowledge score results also support these evaluations of the participants.

Table 2: Political knowledge gap among participants according to education level variable (ANOVA)

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean of squares	F	Sig.
Between the group	198,059	3	66,020	.214	.887
Within group	317241,728	1029	308,301		
TOTAL	317439,787	1032			

Table 2 shows that according to the results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test based on education level, it is noteworthy that there is no statistically significant difference between individuals categorized into separate levels in the education level variable ($F = 0.214$; $p = 0.887$ and $p > 0.05$). This result draws attention as a finding that contradicts the basic assumption of the knowledge gap hypothesis put forward by Tic-henor and friends, and the findings of subsequent studies conducted by different researchers. Thus, our first research question, which questions whether there is a political knowledge gap among participants who are categorized into different levels based on education level, is answered. It is documented that there is no political knowledge gap among participants with different education levels. This finding, which is contrary to what was predicted, reveals a result that contradicts the basic assumption of the knowledge gap hypothesis.

Table 3: Central tendency statistics for political knowledge scores of participants using social media according to their socio-economic status

	S	\bar{x}	SD.	95% Mean for Confidence Interval		Min.	Max.
				Lower Limit	Upper Limit		
AB	317	67.26	17.958	65.27	69.24	10	100
C1	278	68.27	17.841	66.17	70.38	30	100
C2	319	63.15	16.875	61.29	65.01	15	100
DE	119	61.43	15.933	58.54	64.32	25	95
Total	1033	65.59	17.538	64.52	66.66	10	100

Table 3 lists the political knowledge scores of the participants depending on their socio-economic status. Socio-economic level classification is determined by the matrix calculation used by the Turkish Researchers Association (TURA) in social and political research. EU status indicates the highest level, C1 and C2 indicate the upper middle and lower middle, and DE indicates the lowest level.

As can be seen, it is determined that the segment of the C1 socio-economic level has a higher score than other segments ($x=68.27$). Following the C1 group, the group belonging to the EU socio-economic level appears ($x=67.26$). The lowest average score belongs to the DE group, which indicates the lowest socio-economic status of the society ($x=61.43$). So much so that, in the scoring of knowledge regarding the political

agenda, the presence of individuals categorized as 'less knowledgeable' only in the DE group draws attention. Although all groups are determined to be 'knowledgeable' as a whole, the DE group is located at the lowest limit in the knowledge score and the C1 group is located at the upper limit.

Table 4: Political knowledge gap among participants according to socio-economic status variable (ANOVA)

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean of squares	F	Sig.
Between the group	6840,341	3	2280,114	7,554	,000
Within group	310599,446	1029	301,846		
TOTAL	317439,787	1032			

Table 4 aims to understand the presence or absence of a knowledge gap among social media users on the basis of socio-economic variables. According to the results of the Anova test, there was a statistically significant difference on the basis of socio-economic status ($F=7.554$; $p=0.000$ and $p<0.05$). This indicates the existence of a growing political knowledge gap among segments of different social classes. There is a need to understand among which socio-economic segments the deficits arise.

Table 5: Differences in political knowledge levels depending on the socio-economic level variable (Tamhane's multiple comparison table)

Socio-economic status		Mean difference	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Limit	Upper Limit
AB	C2	4.105*	.018	.46	7.75
AB	DE	5.827*	.007	1.12	10.54
C1	C2	5.123*	.002	1.35	8.89
C1	DE	6.845*	.001	2.04	11.65

In Table 5, the status expressed with EU indicates the highest income group. C1 is the upper middle group and C2 is the lower middle group. DE constitutes the lowest income group. In the light of the knowledge obtained, it is seen that the knowledge level of people with EU socio-economic status differs positively from the knowledge level of people with C2 and DE socio-economic status regarding the said knowledge ($p=.018$ and $p=.007$). Moreover, the political knowledge level of people in C1 socio-economic status differs positively from the political knowledge level of people in C2 and DE socio-economic status ($p=.002$ and $p=.001$). It is seen that the level of knowledge about politics is higher in people with EU and C1 socio-economic status. In this case, it can be said that there is an increasing political knowledge gap between the privileged

group in the EU socio-economy, which constitutes the upper segments of society, and the C1 upper middle class group, and the DE segment, which is categorized in the lower segment of society. This result also answers our question, which investigates whether there is a significant political knowledge gap among individuals categorized in different statuses based on socio-economic level among the participants. It reveals a finding similar to the basic assumptions of the knowledge gap hypothesis.

Table 6: Central tendency statistics for political knowledge scores of participants using social media according to interest and motivation variables

Relevance	Number	\bar{x}	SD.	95% For Confidence Interval		Min.	Max.
				Lower Limit	Upper Limit		
1 Very disinterested	27	52.96	17.988	45.85	60.08	25	85
2	17	51.18	15.363	43.28	59.08	15	80
3	71	54.44	13.901	51.15	57.73	15	85
4	108	54.35	13.151	51.84	56.86	15	80
5	175	59.66	14.087	57.56	61.76	10	95
6	176	63.04	14.382	60.90	65.18	20	100
7	172	68.60	16.016	66.19	71.02	25	100
8	127	74.72	16.322	71.86	77.59	25	100
9	58	79.91	15.232	75.91	83.92	35	100
10 Very Interested	102	80.98	16.045	77.83	84.13	35	100

The first researchers who pointed out that the motivation element is a basic determinant at the point of knowledge acquisition, regardless of education and socio-economic level, argue that if individuals develop interest and motivation, the knowledge gap between them and other individuals will disappear (Ettema & Kline, 1977; Ettema, et al., 1983; Lovrich & Piers, 1984; Chew & Palmer, 1994). Table 6 shows the respondents who are expected to evaluate their knowledge of current political issues. It also presents the score of the level of political knowledge they have along with their level of interest. As shown, the political knowledge scores of the participants who define themselves as 'very interested' in political issues and give 1, 2, 3 points are behind the political knowledge scores of the participants who evaluate themselves as 'very interested' and give 10, 9, 8 points. Those with the highest average political knowledge score belonged to the participants who described themselves as 'very interested' (10 points) (\bar{x} =80.98). The people with the lowest average political knowledge score are the participants who

rated themselves as 'very disinterested' (1 and 2 points) ($\bar{x}=52.96$ and $\bar{x}=51.18$). Participants who developed the highest motivation for political issues were also included in the category of 'very knowledgeable' about political issues. The least motivated participants were positioned at the bottom end of the 'knowledgeable' category.

Table 7: Political knowledge gap among participants according to the variable of interest and motivation (ANOVA)

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean of squares	F	Sig.
Between the group	85833.109	9	9537.012	42.125	.000
Within group	231606.678	1023	226.399		
Total	317439.787	1032			

Table 7 also refers to the findings of the first studies on the subject. It shows that there is a statistically significant difference between individuals who differ in their interest and motivation levels, according to their interest (motivation) levels ($F=42.125$; $p=0.00$ and $p<0.05$). This points to the existence of a growing political knowledge gap.

Table 8: Correlation analysis findings for the relationship between the level of interest and motivation for political issues and the score of political knowledge (Pearson r)

Correlation Analysis	1.	2.
1. Interest and Motivation Level	1	
2. Political Knowledge Score	.506**	1

Increasing the number value from 1 to 10 means that the level of interest increases systematically. In scoring, if the participant marked a value close to 1, it is inferred that the level of interest is low, and if the participant marked a value close to 10, it is inferred that the level of interest is high. Descriptive statistics show that social media users' interest levels regarding political issues are above average ($\bar{x}=6.19$). The correlation analysis findings regarding the relationship between the level of interest (motivation) in political issues and the political knowledge score presented in Table 8 reveal the existence of a strong relationship between the level of interest and motivation and the political knowledge score ($r = .506$ and $p < .05$). This means that the political knowledge levels of participants who show interest in political issues also increase. This also answers our question, which investigates whether there is a significant political knowledge gap among participants based on the level of interest and motivation regarding political issues, and reveals that interest and motivation are important determinants of the formation of a political knowledge gap.

Table 9: Demographic tendency statistics for political knowledge scores of participants using social media according to gender variable

Gender	Number	\bar{x}	SD.
Woman	521	64.93	16.929
Man	512	66.26	18.130

Table 9 presents the central tendency towards political knowledge scores according to the gender of the participants using social media. As can be seen, the average political knowledge score between the female (\bar{x} =64.93) and male (\bar{x} =66.26) groups for knowledge on current political issues is similar. Both groups fall into the category of “knowledgeable” on current political issues.

Table 10: Political knowledge gap among participants according to gender variable

t-value	Df	sig.	Average Difference	SD.	95% confidence interval	
					Lower limit	Upper limit
-1.215	1023.458	0.225	-1.327	1.092	-3.1469	.815

Table 10 is intended to test whether there is a significant knowledge gap between male and female groups whose scores are found to be at similar levels. Accordingly, no statistically significant difference was found in the knowledge score level according to gender (t =-1.215; p =0.225 and p >0.05). This result also suggests that the gender variable does not constitute a definitive criterion for the existence of a knowledge gap between individuals. In order to understand the political knowledge gap between genders. It is important to emphasize that factual and analytical areas of knowledge should also be taken into account. On the other hand, today, the visibility of women leaving the home and entering working life has increased, and this situation suggests that women have increased their activity in acquiring political knowledge and forming attitudes towards it. In such a case, the political knowledge gap between women and men is closed.

Table 11: Central tendency statistics for political knowledge levels of participants who use social media and participants who do not use social media

	Number	\bar{x}	SD.
Participants who use social media	1033	65.59	17.538
Participants who do not use social media	43	56.63	12.427

Among the 1.076 people who participated in the field research, only 43 said that they were not involved in any social media environment. People who do not use social media take up a very small part in the sample. Table 11 shows that social media users

($\bar{x}=65.59$) have a higher political knowledge score than participants who are not social media users ($\bar{x}=56.63$). According to the knowledge obtained, as social media use increases, the political knowledge score increases.

Table 12: Political knowledge gap between participants who use social media and participants who do not use social media (t test)

t-value	Df.	sig.	Average Difference	SD.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Limit	Upper Limit
4.545	49.240	0.000	8.963	1.972	5.000	12.925

Table 12 reveals that there is a significant difference in political knowledge score between people who use social media and people who do not use social media ($t=4.545$; $p=0.00$ and $p<0.05$). Thus, it is determined that there is an increasing political knowledge gap between individuals who use social media and individuals who do not use social media.

Discussion and conclusion

Different media environments, in different ways, with privilege, while it has the opportunity to present the same knowledge differently, it also increases the diversity in the knowledge rate of individuals using media environments (Tokgöz, 2015, p. 296). Today's most powerful communication environment, social media, blends visuals and text series. The first is potentially easier to interpret. However, the latter may be more difficult to decipher (Gaziano, 2017, p. 5; Niederdeppe and colleagues, 2010). In this case, even if access to the internet and its content is easy, the obstacles to gaining knowledge do not seem to have disappeared. In this sense, the complete increase in familiarity with social media may be disappointing in reducing the knowledge gap (Gaziano, 2017, p. 6).

Based on this idea, in the design phase of the study, focusing on the impact of the internet and the social media it brings with it, the rather optimistic perspectives (Ferrin et al., 2019; Fraile & Iyengar, 2014; Jerit et al., 2006; Shehata & Stramback, 2018; Tran, 2013) are approached with suspicion (Kim, 2008; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002). And then, considering that the easy-access structure of the internet and social media environments will not always provide the same positive effect. It is thought that optimism should be lost in matters related to knowledge and especially political knowledge because here

it is not just the structural media context, that is, the availability of knowledge (Curran et al., 2009; Kim, 2008). At the same time, the importance of media use and exposure to political knowledge is also noteworthy. Of course, it is estimated that the question of how social media defines problems and covers data has a direct impact on increasing or decreasing the knowledge gap (Jerit et al., 2006). Based on this idea, the comprehensive field research conducted provides important findings.

At the end of the research, contrary to what was thought at the design stage of the study, social media is positioned as an environment that eliminates doubts when evaluated on the basis of the basic variable of education level. Social media, which has emerged as an environment that equalizes political knowledge among users with different education levels in Türkiye, with this particular structure reveals a result that is contrary to the findings of most of the studies investigating the knowledge gap hypothesis in new media environments to date (Donohue, et al., 1986; Tichenor, et al., 1986; Anduza et al., 2009; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002; Yanık, 2015; Güz & Yanık, 2018; Ngai et al., 2015; Jerit & Barabas, 2017; Fraile & Gomez, 2017; Moro-zov, 2018; Ferrin et al., 2019). When it comes to current political knowledge, social media plays a leading role in closing the political knowledge gap among different educational segments of society. The point to be emphasized here is that the education level variable, which was the main determinant in the first period when the knowledge gap existed, lost its effect. This is attributed to the fact that everyone can easily access technology, regardless of their education level. Anyone with a mobile phone can easily obtain political knowledge and close the knowledge gap between them and others.

A similar situation applies to gender-based assessments. The gender variable is also in contrast to some studies that have found gender as one of the main variables to date (Donohue, et al., 1986; Tichenor, et al., 1986; Chen, 2013; Gaziano, 2013; Fraile & Gomez, 2017; Gaziano, 2017; Shehata & Stramback, 2018) is among the determinants that are thought to be involved in the formation of a political knowledge gap. Another finding that should be taken into account is that the variables of socio-economic status and motivation still maintain their importance on the first day. In this sense, the use of social media also draws attention as an important determinant. Respondents who use social media seem to be more knowledgeable about political issues than those who do not.

This study, which presents the appearance of the political knowledge gap in Türkiye in its most up-to-date form, reveals that the education level variable adds another dimension to the knowledge gap hypothesis, and that the level of education is no longer a determinant. It has also documented that the hypothesis in question has been revised in parallel with the changing and transforming media environments.

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