Young Immigrants’ Internet Political Participation in Germany: Comparing German East Europeans and German Turks

Viktoria Spaiser, Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology, Bielefeld University, Bielefeld, Germany

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the results of research on young immigrants’ political participation on the Internet in Germany. The research focuses on young people from Turkish and East European backgrounds. The inter-relation between offline political activities and online political participation is explained and the differences between the two groups are examined. While young German Turks are particularly politically active Internet users, young German East Europeans are rather hesitant about using the Internet for political purposes. Statistical models show that young German Turks’ political Internet use is motivated by grievances, while young German East Europeans’ political Internet use is motivated by sentimental pessimism and world-weariness.

Keywords: E-Participation, Germany, Immigrants, Political Integration, Young People

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The Internet is highly political – a space for mobilization and political discourse. Books (e.g. Chadwick & Howard, 2009) have been written on the multidimensional relation between the Internet and politics. Many times the question has been discussed, whether the Internet contributes to political participation and usually it was the settled population, the majority that was of main interest. Meanwhile, Internet researchers increasingly investigate minorities’ (political) appropriation of the Internet. In this paper I want to build upon this research on immigrant minorities’ political Internet usage, providing a new perspective by comparing online political participation of two immigrant minority groups in Germany – German Turks and German East Europeans – instead of comparing (political) online behavior of immigrants with that of the majority. Internet political participation of these two focus groups will be researched in detail and explanatory models will be constructed for both groups to understand what factors influence Internet political participation and

DOI: 10.4018/jep.2013010101
to understand differences in political online participation between these two immigrant groups. More concretely, the paper discusses three questions: 1) How do young German Turks and German East Europeans participate politically on the Internet and are there any significant differences in their Internet political participation? 2) What factors account for an increase in Internet political participation and are the effect mechanisms the same for German Turks and German East Europeans? 3) Do the influencing factors explain the differences in online political participation among young German Turks and German East Europeans?

To answer these questions the paper provides statistical analyses on the basis of survey data collected among adolescents and young adults with – amongst others – East European and Turkish background. Young immigrants’ political online activities will be explored based on the sociological rational-choice theory and theoretical resource models, which have been adapted to explain political participation on the Internet. Statistical analyses will build upon these theoretical assumptions.

Several researchers like Elias and Lemish (2008), Hugger (2009) and Kissau (2008) have claimed that the Internet plays an important role in empowering immigrants. The Internet gives them opportunities, such as finding information and an (informal) education. It is part of their socialization environment and may ease the arrival of immigrants in their new country. The Internet enhances the economic chances of people from immigrant backgrounds, supports communication, and, therefore, makes it easier for them to socialize with other people, both immigrants and non-immigrants. Studies also show that the Internet helps immigrants to build and sustain their transnational identities. They build support networks on the Internet and acquire social capital (Elias & Lemish, 2008; Goel, 2007; Hugger, 2009; Kissau, 2008). Studies also show that the Internet helps immigrants to build and sustain their transnational identities (Gonzales & Castro, 2007; Navarrete & Huerta, 2006). This strengthening and empowerment contributes to integration in their new home country (Kissau, 2008). One important part of integration is political integration, which includes granting people from immigrant backgrounds civil rights as well as political participation. Indeed, the Internet may play an important role in political participation. Kissau and Hunger (2009) claim that the Internet helps minority groups to draw attention to their political niche agendas. This is considered to be important because minority agendas are usually ignored due to the fact that public agenda providers (mainly the mass media) only issue mainstream agendas. Additionally, according to Kissau and Hunger (2009), the Internet contributes to the pluralization of public debates, as it allows minority groups to participate in political discourses. Kissau and Hunger (2009) have found some empirical support for their assumptions. Immigrants have built new political public spheres on the Internet and seize the opportunity to get involved in debates (Kissau & Hunger, 2009). On the Internet they can challenge the mainstream images of immigrants and struggle to be accepted as citizens with a political voice (Kissau & Hunger, 2009). The paper builds upon these findings and refines them further as it goes beyond merely describing how and for what purposes (young) immigrants use the Internet (politically). The focus of this paper lies rather on factors that have positive or negative effects on the likelihood that the Internet is used for political purposes, comparing two immigrant groups.

In the next Section, theoretical assumptions on factors that influence young German Turks’ and German East Europeans’ political participation on the Internet will be provided first. The operationalization of the mentioned theoretical concepts is outlined in the endnotes. The data basis and statistical methods, used to answer the research questions based on specified theoretical considerations, will be briefly explained afterwards. Followed by different forms of young Germans Turks’ and German East Europeans’ Internet political participation will be discussed. Then statistical models derived from theoretical assumptions discussed previously, will be used to explain political
Children's Social Participation in Virtual Worlds
Terhi Tuukkanen, Terhi-Anna Wilska, Ahmer Iqbal and Marja Kankaanranta (2013). 
*International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking* (pp. 59-73).
www.igi-global.com/article/childrens-social-participation-in-virtual-worlds/110968?camid=4v1a