

# New directions for women's political development in Turkey: Exploring the implications of the internet for Ka-der

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**Abstract.** Underrepresentation of women in Turkish politics is well documented. This is evident in the numbers of women in key decision-making positions, including the Parliament. The role of women's NGOs is significant in educating, motivating and mobilizing women to participate in politics. These organizations increasingly use the Internet for mobilization, opinion formation, recruitment, networking, lobbying and fundraising. The paper explores the extent to which and the ways in which Ka-der as a WNGOs is affected by the Internet, both in terms of its structure and operation, including its relationships with members and adherents and in the way Ka-der communicates with external actors, such as similar organizations, potential members, politicians and the media. We argue that different functions of WNGOs are supported asymmetrically by the Internet. While the e-mail group is mostly used for internal purposes, the website and the use of social media serve to enhance links with the outside environment.

Keywords: Internet and civil society, internet and women's NGOs, internet and NGOs, Ka-Der, Turkey

## 1. Introduction

This paper is an empirical analysis of the use of the Internet by women's organizations to increase women's representation and participation in politics in the Turkish context. Although there have been some studies on the subject of the Internet and politics in Turkey, there has been little systematic research addressing the question of how Turkish WNGOs use the Internet to achieve their mission and goals. This paper aims to fill this gap. More specifically, we explore the potential of the Internet has for supporting the internal organization of WNGOs as well as their external relations, including information dissemination, mobilization, networking, lobbying, fund-raising and all forms of advocacy work.

The paper is based on a case study of Ka-der (Association for the Support of Women Candidates). We conducted eighteen semi-structured in-depth interviews with members of Ka-der. As well as drawing on interview data, the paper also benefits from the analysis of all Internet and social media platforms of Ka-der. These consist of the official website, e-mail group, Facebook page and Twitter account.

The first part of the paper discusses the potential of the Internet for promoting civil society and democracy. The second part sets out the state of civil society in Turkey with specific reference to women's movement and locates Ka-der within this movement. The third part explains our methodological approach in detail. The fourth part presents the plethora of Internet tools used by Ka-der and analyzes their

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contribution to its different functions: information dissemination, opinion formation, support and training, mobilization, lobbying, recruitment, fund-raising and networking. In the conclusion, we discuss the implications of our findings for WNGOs in particular and civil society in general. We demonstrate that different functions of WNGOs are supported asymmetrically by the Internet. While the e-mail group is mostly used for internal purposes, the website and the use of social media serve to enhance links with the outside environment.

## **2. The internet, civil society and democracy**

Civil society is one of the indispensable components of democratic regimes. Several functions that civil society performs for democracy have been identified. They range from increased governmental accountability and capacity-building to providing opportunities for participation and lobbying. The Internet may raise the efficacy of civil society due to its capacity for reaching more people rapidly and inexpensively. It may create for these organizations a new area where they can make their demands more visible. Furthermore, the Internet may bolster the capacity of grassroots groups to gather information, organize political action and guide policy-making. The Internet provides the opportunity to become a publisher, to narrowcast to specific groups and to stay anonymous. The possibilities can be exploited by civil society organizations, which have limited resources and sometimes have to operate in non-democratic environments.

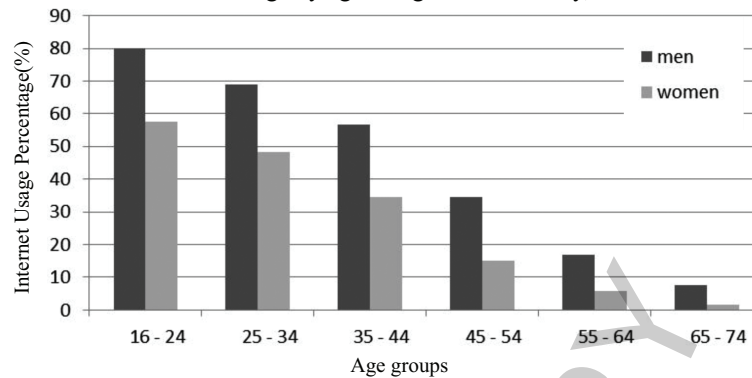
Regarding the use of the Internet by civil society organizations, there has been some useful historical and theoretical work and a large quantity of empirical research done on individual members of organizations, but little on the organizations themselves [29]. The use of new technologies within civil society ranges from tools for participation, protest and mobilization [25] to political blogging [20] and campaigning [6,9]. The Internet also offers civil society organizations opportunities to amplify their voice with the help of networking to make up for their relative lack of financial and organizational resources vis-à-vis other actors [6, p. 2]. Citizen groups and social movements, as is the case with many other organizations and institutions, are likely to reach a new level in the ways in which they mobilize, build coalitions, inform, lobby, communicate, and campaign [11][25, p. 1].

Many women's groups and feminist activists have approached the Internet as an international platform for such diverse goals as creating support networks, challenging sexual harassment, discussing feminist politics, creating spaces for sexual self-expression, and rallying against social injustices [27, p. 267]. The Internet has the potential to increase the volume of women's voices, initiatives and activities without relying exclusively on traditional media. It may also encourage women to think about new ways to establish professional relations, forge alliances, and broaden the scope of their interventions [21].

The paper is an attempt to explore the extent to which and the ways in which WNGOs are affected by the Internet, both in terms of their structure and operation, including their relationships with members and adherents and in the way they communicate with external actors, such as similar organizations, potential members, politicians and the media. The questions to be answered, therefore, are how is the use of the Internet reshaping the organizational structure of WNGOs in Turkey and what impact do these changes have on the capacity of these organizations to articulate women's problems, to mobilize support and to influence the political agenda.

Analyzing the use of the Internet by WNGOs in Turkey highlights a double gender gap. In addition to the well-known gap in women's representation and participation, there is also an information and communication technology (ICT) gender gap which is less known [23, p. 18]. Many studies of the digital divide in other countries have demonstrated that the gender gap in Internet access and use is

Table 1  
Internet usage by age and gender in Turkey, 2013



Source: [24].

closing [26]. However, in Turkey by 2013 only 38.7% of women, as opposed to 59.3% of men, are regular Internet users. What is more alarming is that the percentage of women using the Internet lags behind the percentage of men using Internet across all age groups.

This is in contrast to the expectation that the gender gap should have closed in the younger age groups. It is possible to argue that in the absence of specific policies targeting the divide, the gender gap in Turkey will remain an issue for future generations. Although analyzing the digital gender gap is not the priority of this article, we aim to highlight this double gender gap and analyze the extent to which WNGOs are benefiting from the Internet in escaping from this vicious circle.

### 3. Civil society and WNGOs in Turkey

Since the 1990s, the concept of civil society has become almost a buzz-word, both in academic and public discourse in Turkey. Despite this increasing interest in civil society, the implications of the Internet for civil society have largely been ignored. The Internet may potentially facilitate the existing activities and functions of civil society organizations as well as introduce new capacities, functions and meanings. However, this role should not be overstated since a more vibrant civil society is not possible without other political and societal changes.

Significant progress has been made since the 1980s regarding women's organizations. After the 1980 coup d'état, women – mainly from the leftist organizations of the 1970s – started to voice their demands from an independent feminist perspective. "The movement did not merely give more women the opportunity to participate in politics through grassroots organizations, but also helped create the political milieu conducive to the establishment of a political democracy. The movement extended the political space allotted to civil society" [1, p. 241]. Since then, women have not only become more active in civil society organizations in general but have also established women's organizations working on women's issues. Although their number is still very low, they have become more visible in recent years [12].

Ka-der was established within this context in 1997 with the specific aim of increasing the number of women in important elected and appointed positions. It is currently registered as a membership-based association. Ka-der has secured funds for specific projects from certain EU representations and European NGOs in Turkey. Another financial resource comes from membership fees. It is an organization that works both at the national and international levels; supports vital projects in the political area; perceives

Table 2  
Percentage of woman representatives in the parliament since 1935

Election year	Total number of representatives in the parliament	Number of woman representatives in the parliament	Percentage of woman representatives
1935	395	18	4.6
1943	435	16	3.7
1950	487	3	0.6
1957	610	8	1.3
1965	450	8	1.8
1973	450	6	1.3
1991	450	8	1.8
1999	550	22	4.2
2002	550	24	4.4
2007	550	50	9.1
2011	550	79	14.3

Source: [17].

women's issues as a political problem and cooperates with other women's organizations. Ka-der has conducted some very influential public campaigns in the media and has been successful in raising awareness about political participation and representation of women. It is one of the most well-established WNGOs, having a great deal of experience and approximately 1200 members. Ka-der can be regarded as the most recent stage of the long female suffrage movement in Turkey, which began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of its main objectives is increasing the proportion of elected women representatives in the Parliament to 50% from the current 14%.

Many of Ka-der campaigns have been organized before election periods in order to raise awareness about women's underrepresentation. However, Ka-der perceives women's issues from a holistic perspective and assesses women's underrepresentation as part of a bigger women's issue in Turkey. Therefore, it has been active in areas as far flung as women's employment and education to domestic violence and gendered local government budgets. Ka-der is organized around a headquarters located in İstanbul, eight branches and ten representations and initiative groups in various parts of the country.

#### 4. Research methodology

The current research is based on a meso-level approach analyzing Ka-der as an institution. The Internet is believed to offer new possibilities for increased participation and representation due to its capacity for information provision and communication. In the Turkish context, women are one of the most disadvantaged groups in terms of political participation and representation [2]. There is potential for the Internet to be a remedy for the shortcomings in women's participation and representation. However, we do not think the Internet is an automatic panacea. It cannot solve structural problems that act as barriers to women's participation and representation. There is a need for certain mobilization channels and opportunity structures which would help women to become active in politics [28]. Therefore, we believe that institutions like Ka-der are important. Obviously, the role of the Internet can be studied at the macro and micro levels, too. However, in this research we are interested in the role of WNGOs, in this case Ka-der, as institutions which are benefiting from the Internet to increase women's participation and representation and to carry women's issues to the agenda. This meso-level analysis also allows a non-deterministic perspective since it does not accept the qualities of the Internet as 'given' and investigates the ways in which the Internet is being "enacted" [8]. This also makes it possible to focus on the role of political opportunity structures and mobilization channels in engendering participation and

representation. There is a role and scope for WNGOs to affect women's participation and representation. If these organizations are not willing or able to exploit the new technologies, it is not important whether those technologies provide the most democratic tools.

This paper draws upon eighteen semi-structured interviews undertaken mostly with former and current members of Ka-der. The average age of the interviewees was about 45–50 reflecting the average of Ka-der members. Given the differing opinions about and different levels of engagement with technology, a semi-structured approach was useful in enabling us to explore various views on the benefit of the Internet. As suggested strongly within the feminist literature, interviews also let us emphasize the meanings and interpretations of participants, thus providing the means through which the voice and experience of women are valued [4,14,15]. One interview was conducted through e-mail correspondence due to travel limitations. Except for two, all interviewees were female. Interviews took 45 minutes on average and were conducted between November 2012 and April 2013. In selecting the interviewees we paid attention to including ordinary members as well as members of the advisory and executive boards. One interview was made with a non-member who is the head of the advertising and PR agency executing Ka-der campaigns as a social responsibility project. Another was a professional working full-time as the media and PR official of Ka-der.

Interviews were transcribed and coded thematically for the analysis. Despite the existence of many software programs available for this purpose, we did not use any for this analysis. Although we are aware of the benefits of using software, we were more interested in revealing implied meanings which depend on events in the background. As Denscombe [5, p. 220] argues, "computer programs are extending and exaggerating a potential hazard facing any procedure which seeks to analyze the data through a systematic chunking and coding." Therefore, we chose to conduct our analysis manually to avoid missing the general context of each interview. The involvement of two authors in this process increased the reliability of our analysis.

As Braun and Clarke [3] argue thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method. We followed their six-stage process including transcribing, reading and re-reading, noting down initial ideas, coding interesting features of data, collating codes into potential themes and refining the themes. For example, during the interviews we noticed that many interviewees raising concerns about not reaching out to everyone through the Internet. We coded and collated words/concepts such as 'accessibility', 'digital equality', 'people without access', 'digital illiteracy', 'lack of confidence to use computers' across our dataset (interview transcripts). These extracts from interviews formed the basis of the 'digital divide' theme. In other words, 'concern about digital divide' emerged as a theme from our dataset. "A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" [3, p. 82].

A detailed analysis of the e-mail group is beyond the limits of this study. We thought that analyzing the contents of the e-mails would have created both access and ethical issues. In fact, a previous study which aimed to conduct such an analysis changed direction after realizing these difficulties [10]. Instead, we rely on the interviewees' comments about the e-mail group. Several themes emerged from these interviews with regard to the e-mail group, its benefits and problems. In fact, there are several e-mail groups, some of which belong to the executive board or the advisory board, while others are open to members of certain branches. The main e-mail group, however, is the general one where subscription is automatic after becoming member of Ka-der. This was first established in 1997 as a Yahoo group, initially with few members. Interviewees remember the establishment of the e-mail group as a novelty due to the relatively older average age of Ka-der members and the common prejudice against technology.

Although subscription to the e-mail group is automatic after membership, only half of the members are currently subscribed to the group due to such reasons as lack of skills or confidence in using the Internet.

As well as drawing on interview data, the paper also uses data from the analysis of the website, Facebook page and the Twitter account of Ka-der. This has been a methodological challenge since there is a very limited literature on how to analyze data from these kind of sources. Many studies focusing on the use of the Internet by political and/or civil society organizations have concentrated on an analysis of the websites of relevant organizations and, to a lesser extent, on their e-mail groups. Analysis of social media platforms is still very rare in political science literature. This is an example for how the rapid development of new technology applications constantly challenges the research agenda. Our analysis of these social media platforms also included finding patterns and repeated themes.

By combining different data collection techniques we were able to collect richer data from various sources. As Nielsen [16, p. 760] suggests, “whereas website analysis is a central and necessary component of the wider Internet politics research agenda, it remains a media-centric method, which should be supplemented by observational data when one wants to analyze the role of Internet elements in situated socio-technical practices”. Carrying out interviews provided us the opportunity to explore such situated socio-technical practices.

## 5. Research findings

Our study is based on data collected through interviews and the analysis of the association's official website, Facebook and Twitter pages. We analyzed these social media applications by looking at their duration (how long since when they have been online), extent of participation (number of members, followers, “likes,” retweets, and instances of sharing) and distribution and frequency of topics. This part presents the plethora of Internet tools used by Ka-der and analyzes their contribution to its different functions: information dissemination, opinion formation, support and training, mobilization, lobbying, recruitment, fund-raising and networking. The organization of these categories is both grounded in the literature and informed by the collected data.

### 5.1. Information dissemination

The Internet enables the rapid and cheap dissemination of a high volume of information. It also allows users to send the information to multiple users at no extra cost. Hence, every information consumer is also an information producer on the Internet [19]. In this research, information dissemination is revealed to be the most important and widespread function of Internet platforms. Here, we are talking about providing, sharing, dissemination of information, among members through e-mail groups, and also to the general public through its website and Facebook and Twitter accounts. The most open channel is the website, which does not require any subscription, membership or following mechanism. The most common use of websites is providing information, which they do very easily. Since the beginning, not only civil society organizations but other political organizations such as political parties as well have used their websites to provide information about the organization and their aims and activities. The early generation of websites looked more like online catalogues based on one-way communication from the organization to the visitors. In line with this general trend, our analysis reveals that the website of Ka-der is mostly used for information provision. Information provided through the website includes news bulletins, women-related statistics, previous campaigns and projects, Ka-der publications, activities of other WNGOs, materials about Ka-der political schools, contact information and activities of female

politicians at the national and local level; it also contains various national and international documents. Indeed, the Chair of Ka-der stated that they established the website in the first place to share their publications with interested parties and the general public.

Similar to the website, the Facebook group and Twitter page are mostly used for sharing information. However, unlike the website, Ka-der's Facebook and Twitter pages require some kind of membership or following mechanism. Information dissemination is usually top-down from the management to the members and the general public. However, it also takes place in a more horizontal manner in these social media channels and the e-mail groups. During the interviews, the capacity of the e-mail groups to share news by all members was mentioned several times. Fifteen to 20 e-mails, depending on the topics on the agenda, are shared every day on the general list. However, this capacity is limited by the fact that half of the Ka-der members are not subscribed to the e-mail group.

The capacity of the Internet as an information-provision channel was emphasized many times in the interviews. For example, the Chair of Ka-der described their website as a "virtual library". A member of the Executive Board described the website as a "databank". She also added that the website is an information source like Bianet.<sup>1</sup>

The e-mail group is also believed to be very important in sharing news about events, activities of others, new legislation, and violence against women. Interviewees commented that this rapid sharing of news is especially important for NGOs like Ka-der, which have limited financial resources. A member of the Executive Board mentioned the role of the e-mail group in letting members know about their activities, upcoming events and training programs, and asking for their active support. Another member, from the Kadikoy branch, was especially keen to emphasize how she learns about what is going on not only in Ka-der but also in other civil society organizations as well through the group.

The speed at which news is shared was mentioned especially in relation to Twitter. The interviewees believe that Twitter is the best channel for sharing the latest news and is especially preferred by younger members. Although we do not have any data in relation to the age profile of Ka-der's Twitter followers, our analysis confirms that Twitter is mostly used by Ka-der for information dissemination purposes (see Fig. 1).

## 5.2. *Discussion, participation and opinion formation*

The capacity of the Internet to enable many-to-many communication has fuelled the expectations that it can provide a platform for online discussion and participation [19]. The most optimistic vision was of the realization of an online public sphere open to the contribution by all. These expectations have been heightened by the introduction of social media tools. Therefore, it is almost imperative to analyze the degree to which these Internet tools are used by Ka-der for discussion, participation and opinion formation purposes. Unlike traditional media like television and newspapers, the Internet goes beyond one-to-many communication and makes horizontal communication among multiple members possible. Initially, this capacity was used by some civil society and political organizations through online discussion forums and opinion polls. The introduction of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter provided ready-to-use platforms for participation purposes. For example, it became possible to open a new group, to invite members, to organize around an issue, to invite and to make comments on certain issues.

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<sup>1</sup>Bianet is an independent news agency focusing on news which are often ignored by the mainstream media including women's issues.

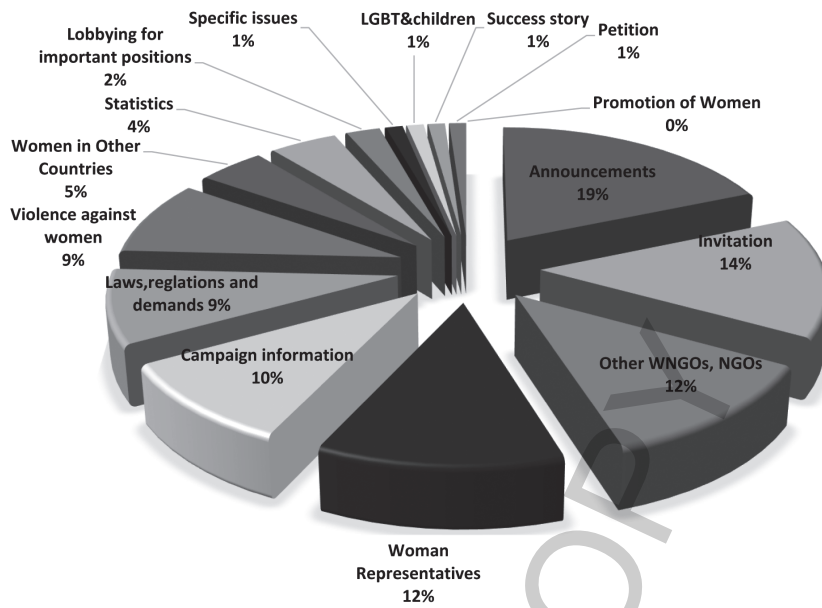


Fig. 1. Distribution of topics in Ka-der's Twitter account as of April 2013.

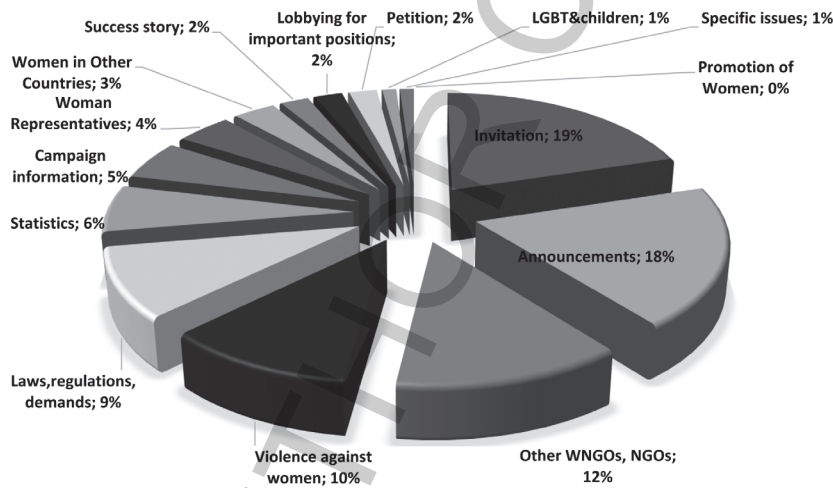


Fig. 2. Distribution of topics in Ka-der's Facebook page as of April 2013.

In investigating the capacity of the website to provide participation opportunities, we found only one case: a question asking visitors whether they would have become member of a women's organization if they had had the opportunity. In fact, lack of participation channels through the website may not be so surprising when we consider the capacity of the e-mail groups and social media platforms to generate discussion and participation. Ka-der's management perceives the website more as an information source than a deliberation platform. Therefore, it may make sense to focus on the capacity of the e-mail groups and social media platforms to provide participation and discussion opportunities. Since we did not have access to the e-mail groups, our analysis is limited by the information we obtained through the interviews regarding these groups. Almost half of Ka-der members are subscribed to the general list. Many members



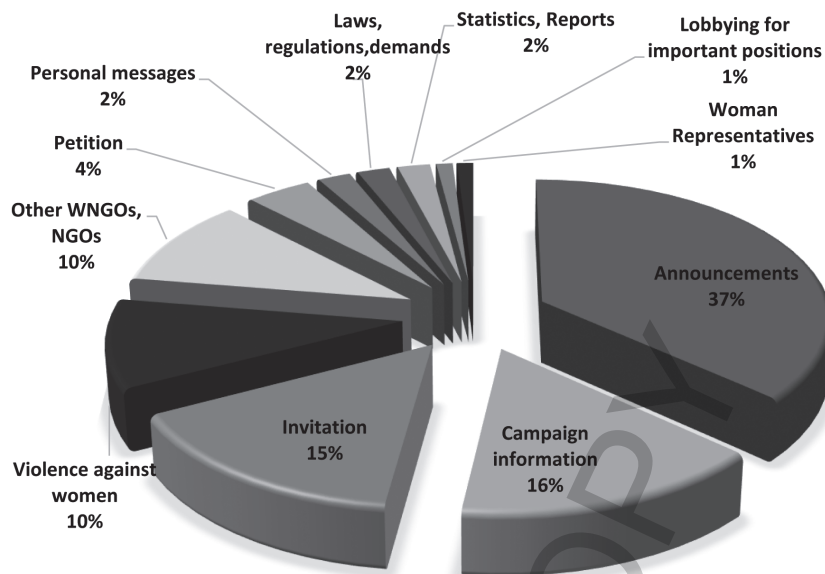


Fig. 3. Distribution of topics in Ka-der's Facebook group as of April 2013.

are subscribed to multiple e-mail groups depending on their branch or position within the organization. There are also umbrella lists which bring together different women's groups. The most significant one is the Women's Assembly (Kadın Kurultayı) bringing together more than 300 such groups. One of the former chairs of Ka-der told how this e-mail group was essential in the improvements made in Turkish Penal Code in 2004. More recently, it was used extensively against the government's policy on abortion. In general, the e-mail groups are valued by members due to their capacity for enabling more horizontal communication, formulating opinions and to a lesser extent deciding on Ka-der's position regarding certain issues. Advantages of anonymity and speed of the e-mail groups, especially in a city as crowded as Istanbul, was acknowledged during the interviews.

When asked about the most active members, the interviewees told us that the activity of members varied according to profession, topics and the political agenda. Lawyers, academics and those in the media, for instance, play a more active role in the e-mail group due to their expertise and the subjects in which they get involved as professionals. For example, lawyers play an important role in bringing to the agenda cases of violence against women. In addition, apart from their jobs, some members are more vocal than others but this is regarded as normal since participation in the offline world is also limited to the most active members.

This capacity of the e-mail group was acknowledged by many of our interviewees. A male member of Ka-der who has been active in Ka-der's Political School as an instructor described the e-mail group as a platform for brainstorming and policy development without any top-down moderation or coordination. The Chair of Ka-der also highlighted the capacity of the group to send signals to the management about the standing of members on certain issues. She was less enthusiastic in acknowledging the e-mail group's opinion-formation capacity. Rather, she said, the group is very useful in observing members' attitudes towards topics, the degree to which they differ and learning from other members. An experienced member of the Executive Board noted that not so much the general list but the email group of the Board serves for opinion formation among the board members. Another member from the Kadıköy branch highlighted the capacity of the e-mail group to get a topic placed on the agenda.

As mentioned above, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter can also be expected to serve this function of civil society organizations. For example, members can bring new issues to the agenda, open up new groups and comment on existing topics. Our analysis reveals that this capacity is not being fully used. A young member of the Executive Board made a distinction between the e-mail group, Facebook and Twitter in terms of their capacity for discussion and deliberation. She commented that compared to Facebook and Twitter messages, the messages shared in the e-mail group are much longer and thus provide an opportunity for better quality discussion and opinion formation. Whereas Facebook is more practical for making some announcements and sharing news, Twitter is more suitable for rapid communication of messages. On Facebook, there is only limited bottom-up dialogue and when it exists, it is mostly in the form of approving ('liking') an existing activity of the Ka-der management rather than making a new proposal. It is interesting to observe that the "comment" feature of Facebook is not used much. Nevertheless, these tools are regarded as very important to enabling the circulation of women's voices.

### 5.3. *Training and support of women candidates*

Training and support of women candidates has been the main mission of Ka-der since its foundation in 1997. In fact, this was the original name of the organization (The Association for the Support and Training of Women Candidates). However, in 2012 they decided to omit the word "training" due to concerns about sounding too didactic. Training is still an important function of the association, which becomes especially important during elections. Ka-der also works to support candidates for important appointed positions in the bureaucracy. During elections, the most concrete tool used by Ka-der is the organization of Political Schools throughout the country to provide support and training for women candidates in local or general elections.

Political Schools are coordinated by Ka-der with support from academics, politicians and experts from media and communications. They are intensive, residential schools organized in certain cities with the participation of candidates from various political parties and surrounding cities. The purpose of the schools is to provide instruction to female candidates about the political and party system of the country and to enable them to acquire a gender perspective. The schools also aim to assist candidates in building self-confidence.

In this research, we were interested in finding out how this function of Ka-der is being supported by the use of the Internet. In other words, is there potential for using the Internet to transform Political Schools? We were also interested in finding out other ways in which the Internet is being used to support the campaigns of women candidates. The interviewees were hesitant about the use of the Internet to support Political Schools. About the possibility of online training for example, they raised concerns about the lack of face-to-face interaction. They explained that education is not the only objective of the Political School and even more crucial is its role in bringing women together so that they can share experiences and in breaking barriers between women having different ideologies. They claimed that this could not be possible with any online training format. The interviewees were very keen to emphasize the role of group work in Ka-der, which they think is about building self-confidence in women and getting them to see that they are not alone.

We were also interested in analyzing the use of the Internet for campaigning during elections. The website offers campaign-related material, provides information about previous campaigns and their results, and shares statistics about women's status in Turkish politics. While the research period did not coincide with any elections, we analyzed the previous use of Facebook and Twitter during the general

election in 2011. These Internet platforms were used in a very limited way – mostly to provide biographies of female candidates, to share the links of Ka-der's campaign videos and to announce press meetings where female candidates would be introduced. One member who was a candidate at the neighborhood level told us how she had made use of e-mail lists during her campaign in Kadıköy. She explained the importance of a capillary-type of organization in reaching out to a wider audience through e-mail networks.

Some members demonstrated an awareness of the potential use of the Internet for campaign purposes, but they also shared their concerns. Since non-partisanship is one of the main principles of Ka-der, they were very careful to not promote particular candidates. Rather, they used their website and social media platforms to share the list and biographies of all female candidates from all political parties. A member of the Executive Board also stated that they do not have the financial resources to run online campaigns. Although we did not have access to the e-mail group, we were also informed that it is used from time to time to announce candidates for certain vacancies in the bureaucracy and to request support from members. Another concern about running online campaigns was related to the digital divide. A member noted that such campaigns would reach out to those who have access to the Internet. A member of the Executive Board stated that political culture in Turkey is more suitable for building face-to-face contacts. Ka-der members insisted during the interviews that they attach greater value to campaigning through face-to-face relations and the traditional media. They reminded that the most visible and memorable campaigns of Ka-der had been the ones that appeared on TV, newspapers and billboards.

Only one interviewee was very enthusiastic about organizing campaigns online. He stated that Ka-der could organize all women candidates around the country with a team of 5–10 professional people located in Istanbul. He also noted that the importance of face-to-face relations depends on the age profile and that the young people born in the Internet age would not be bothered that much by the loss of these kinds of relations. It is worth mentioning that he was not a member of Ka-der and was mostly speaking as a political communication expert voluntarily developing election campaigns for Ka-der during elections.

#### *5.4. Mobilization and lobbying*

For the purposes of this research, mobilization is understood as inviting people to take action in protests, meetings and campaigns. Lobbying is defined as any activity aimed at improving women's status, such as putting pressure on MPs and bringing women's issues to the agenda via media relations. Ka-der and similar organizations use lobbying to try to improve legislation that concerns women.

It seems that Ka-der's mobilization efforts mostly revolve around an issue such as the campaign against abolishing abortion. This is in line with the rise of issue-based politics in Western democracies. Ka-der extensively cooperates with other NGOs in these efforts, particularly through the use of common e-mail platforms. These e-mail groups enable the rapid organization of campaigns and mobilization of people without incurring great cost. Another previous example was the use of e-mail groups to get organized in relation to changes in the Penal Code in 2004. A former chair of Ka-der explained how various women's organizations established a network (Kadın Kurultayı email group) to get organized and to lobby the Parliament during the legislation process. Göker [10] in her research on Kadın Kurultayı email group also focuses on the benefits of the group in sharing information, generating discussion and providing rapid communication in relation to the changes in the Penal Code. The new law included more than 30 changes providing gender equality and protecting the bodily and sexual rights of women and children.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>For the detail of the changes made in the Penal Code, please see [7,13].

Interviewees pointed to the withdrawal of the anti-abortion legislation as a victory for the women's movement, in general, and Ka-der, in particular. Not only the e-mail platforms but also online petitioning sites such as [www.kurtajyasaklanamaz.com](http://www.kurtajyasaklanamaz.com)<sup>3</sup> played an important role in organizing women against the proposal. Another example of online mobilization during the research period was One Billion Rising campaign organized on 14 February 2013 at the global level to end violence against women. Ka-der was the leading organization in Turkey bringing together women in various locations to draw media attention to violence against women by dancing. Much of the organization of these events took place online.

Social media platforms also emerged as potential mobilization and lobbying channels. During the interviews, Twitter, in particular, was mentioned as a potential avenue for reaching out to the traditional media. Since its foundation, Ka-der has made regular visits to columnists in order to form media contacts that have a gender perspective. A member from the Kadıköy branch highlighted how social media is also a route to traditional media. She stated that traditional media use these platforms as news sources. Although it is not possible to reach out to every household through social media, it may still become a route to the traditional media, hence to larger audiences. A member of the advisory board who also works in the media sector explained how she uses her personal Facebook account as an avenue for advocacy.

Some interviewees raised their concerns about the limitations of and problems with online mobilization and lobbying. Ka-der does not regard itself as a radical group and values good relations with the media, women MPs from all parties, and the relevant Ministry. They often emphasize the importance of convincing men to expand women's rights. They believe that having face-to-face relations is important to maintaining these close relations. They claimed that talking to an MP directly on an issue is much more effective than using Twitter, for example. An academic member stated how culturally Turkish people rely more on face-to-face relations than on anonymous ones. A member from Kadıköy branch noted that she finds online petitions rather superficial, requiring very little effort. Another member raised a concern about the reliability of online petitions. He noted that the use of repetitive signatures or made-up names undermines their reliability and claimed that a real protest meeting with much fewer participants may be more influential than an online protest. He added that even then, e-mail technology and social media tools are important in organizing such real meetings and protests.

### 5.5. *Recruitment, networking, fundraising*

Recruitment and fundraising are vital functions of civil society organizations enabling them to obtain the human and financial resources they need to carry out their mission. Also important is networking, through which they can join forces with other like-minded organizations. Civil society organizations can potentially benefit from the Internet in improving these functions.

Regarding recruitment, for example, civil society organization can use their website to provide information about membership benefits, make membership forms available online, and inform potential volunteers about the ways in which they can contribute to the organization. Social media platforms can also make their activities more visible and potentially be effective in attracting new members. Our analysis revealed that recruitment-related features exist on the website. A separate section on "membership" provides two kinds of application forms, depending on whether a person is interested in becoming a member or contributing as a volunteer. This section does not say much about why one should join Ka-der. On a less important note, the website has no provision for online payment of membership fees. A

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<sup>3</sup>Literally means 'www.abortioncannotbebanned.com'.

member of Kadıköy branch noted the importance of the website in attracting new members. She explained that when a potential member asks about Ka-der, she sends the link of the website rather than trying to explain Ka-der's activities in detail. The Chair of Ka-der acknowledged that the weakest dimensions of the website are participation channels and recruitment opportunities. She added, however, that social media platforms help create awareness about Ka-der and indirectly contributes to recruitment of new members.

Networking is about providing links to other similar organizations, disseminating their activities and campaigns, and acting in concert with them to make a bigger impact. There are no explicit links on the Ka-der website to other women's organizations. However, the website does share information about the activities of other WNGOs. However, we believe that the website does not reflect the strong links that Ka-der has with other WNGOs. During the interviews, many Ka-der members emphasized the role of the e-mail networks in mobilizing women with respect to certain women-related legislation, such as changes in the penal code and the abortion issue. The e-mail group seems to be very effective for networking purposes at the national level. Ka-der also has strong international links. The English pages of the website partly aim at keeping these relations alive. For example, the Chair noted how WNGOs from European countries approach Ka-der as a potential project partner after having examined its website. Ka-der's Facebook and Twitter pages serve networking purposes. An analysis of the topics appearing on them reveals that one of the largest categories is news about other WNGOs' activities. Since the content of Twitter and Facebook messages are largely in Turkish, they serve networking purposes at the national level.

Fundraising is very important for civil society organizations for carrying out their mission. Ka-der funds its work through membership fees and specific project funding from EU institutions, foreign diplomatic representatives and associations in Turkey. For example, political schools organized during elections were initially funded by an association based in the Netherlands. We found out that fundraising takes place mostly through special relations and there is not much scope for the use of the Internet for this purpose. However, online mechanisms can be used for collecting membership fees. The Chair of Ka-der noted that they have thought about incorporating a payment mechanism into the website but have not yet been able to do so. Having said that, she stated that she doubted that it would lead to a large increase in funds. Another member of Kadıköy branch stated that she makes online contributions to other civil society organizations and she wonders why this is not available on the Ka-der website.

## 6. Conclusion

We have been interested in exploring the extent to which and the ways in which Ka-der is affected by the Internet, both in terms of its structure and operation, including its relationships with members and adherents and in the way Ka-der communicate with external actors, such as similar organizations, potential members, politicians and the media. We found that the biggest contribution of the Internet for Ka-der seems to be largely more effectiveness and efficiency in existing organization and action repertoires. We did not come across a completely new way of campaigning, lobbying or mobilization. Rather, it seems that the Internet has supported Ka-der in the dissemination and retrieval of information at a lower cost than was previously feasible, in the management of campaigns with other organizations, both at the national and international levels, and in the speed of political communication and mobilization.

The research demonstrates that Ka-der benefits from various online platforms for different purposes and that information dissemination is the most supported function being carried out on them. It is also

interesting to observe that the e-mail group, which is technologically the simplest application, is perceived as a much more important tool than the more advanced and recent applications, Facebook and Twitter. Although this is contrary to the high expectations from social media platforms in the literature, it supports Nielsen's [16, p. 764] point that "mundane Internet tools play an important part in mobilizing practices, easing some tasks, freeing up more time for others, being integral to almost all." Obviously, the extensive use of the e-mail groups may be related to the age profile of Ka-der members. We also saw that while the e-mail group is mostly used for internal purposes, the website and the use of social media serve to enhance links with the outside environment.

The research revealed a concern with finding the right balance between online and offline methods. The interviewees insisted that a combination of these methods is necessary to make a real impact. Ka-der has strong relations with the media and political parties and it is keen on keeping these relations alive through personal contacts. During the interviews, they mentioned the role of visiting Ankara, meeting MPs, and lobbying directly in the Parliament. Although they acknowledge the importance of the Internet, they were not convinced that the Internet can replace these existing methods. This is in line with the findings of previous research which suggests that "it doesn't make much sense to separate the virtual from the real world. Online activism's greatest strength lies in its ability to make offline activism more feasible and to support those who are already involved" [6, pp. 13–14].

The importance of face-to-face relations was also a recurring theme during the interviews. Ka-der members are aware of the importance of "personal touch" and they attribute great value to its activities bringing women together. The best examples are Ka-der Coffeehouse, which meets at the beginning of each month, and the Ka-der Political Schools, which provide candidates support and training during election periods in a residential setting. Apart from these, other conferences, branch meetings and gatherings provide women an opportunity to meet, to build confidence and capacity and to develop a "voice." The value of small group meetings in developing a collective women's voice was especially emphasized by Tekeli [22], a prominent feminist and Ka-der's founding chair. She added that civil society organizations have to learn how to benefit from the Internet in order to prevent the atomization of individuals. In her opinion, "online organization of events like One Billion Rising is important but women will continue to struggle for many years using traditional methods. The Internet can speed up the process but cannot replace the means through which democratic struggle is waged, which are based on an historical experience" [22]. The current Chair made a similar statement and noted that "online methods are part of the women's struggle but cannot replace the importance of being organized, knowing each other, developing a division of labor, and the ability of acting together. There has to be a partnership. Crowds that come together spontaneously do not have this ability. They may exert great pressure, but they cannot contribute to the development of long-term policies." She said that a good example of this was the Arab Spring, where women played an important role in Street protests in Egypt but were unable to continue to influence policy since they did not have an organized structure.

The interviewees also mentioned the significance of using multiple channels to establish contact with different groups. Traditional media, including television, newspapers and billboards, were regarded as vital to reaching out to larger audiences, even though they were more expensive channels. The Chair acknowledged that Ka-der does not have much presence on the radio and said that they planned to organize an Internet radio to promote female candidates in the upcoming elections. Using multiple channels was also related to an awareness of the digital divide. Ka-der members are conscious of the double gender gap in Turkey. Women are not only underrepresented in politics but also disadvantaged in the production and use of technology. Interviewees emphasized the importance of traditional media to reach out to these groups. The role of television was emphasized as the medium having the highest penetration in homes.

Ka-der has organized some information technology (IT) training for its members and other women in selected locations throughout the country with the support of sponsor companies. Being aware that even their members are not totally information technology (IT) literate, they use SMS to reach out to those who are not very comfortable with using the Internet. The Chair of Ka-der highlighted that some members who are part of the organization for more than ten years had never become members of the email group. According to her the only way to inform them about meetings, new publications, membership fees and so on is using SMS. Although this is seen as more costly and not preferable all the time, it is also regarded as a measure against the digital divide among the members particularly between the older and young generation.

The research demonstrates that Ka-der benefits from the Internet through introducing more efficiency and speed in communication, sharing information and news at a lower cost and reaching out to its members and adherents more easily via its website, email groups and social media channels. What impact do these changes have on the capacity of Ka-der and similar WNGOs to articulate women's problems, to mobilize support and to influence the political agenda is not so clear. Future research should look at more cases and benefit from different methodological approaches in order to answer these questions. In June 2013, the potential of the Internet to mobilize people have been proven during the anti-government demonstrations which started initially as an environmental protest to prevent the uprooting of trees at Gezi Park in İstanbul. Some feminist and women's rights organizations have been in the front lines of protests. Ka-der also used its website to announce its position on the matter and to criticize government policies. Although studying Gezi protests is beyond the scope of this research, we hope that our research will contribute to understanding of the role of the Internet in mobilizing people to participate in politics.

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