BEHAVIORAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE THIRD-PERSON EFFECT ON TURKISH VOTERS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCES
IN
THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

FEBRUARY 2008

Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

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February 2008, 78 pages

The third-person effect is the tendency of individuals to believe that others are more susceptible to media influence than themselves and this perception causes them to act accordingly. This study aimed to reveal the relationship between the third-person effect and voting intentions. After reading one of the two versions of a vignette about a media discussion of possible election results, both of which claimed only two major parties could pass the election threshold, Turkish university students (N=285) first evaluated the impact of the message on self and on others and then reported whether they would vote for the same party they supported or they would choose another one. Results supported the perceptual component of the third-person effect, indicating that participants believed they were less influenced by the message compared to the others. Although it was predicted that this perception would increase when the message was assumed as negative, findings did not support this hypothesis. Furthermore, the hypothesis suggesting that the third-person effect would cause behavioral consequences

(change in voting intentions) was not supported. However, content analysis made a valuable contribution to interpret the findings. Possible explanations for the findings and directions for future studies about the third-person effect on voting intentions were discussed.

Keywords: Third-person effect; voting

ÖZ

TÜRK SEÇMENLERİ ÜZERİNDE ÜÇÜNCÜ ŞAHIS ETKİSİNİN DAVRANIŞSAL SONUÇLARI

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Şubat 2008, 78 sayfa

Üçüncü şahıs etkisi, bireylerin, kendilerine oranla, başkalarının medya etkisine daha fazla hassas olduklarına inanma eğilimleri olup, bu algılamaları, onların bu doğrultuda hareket etmelerine neden olmaktadır. Bu çalışma, üçüncü şahıs etkisi ile oy verme niyetleri arasındaki ilişkiyi ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Türk üniversite öğrencileri (N=285), olası seçim sonuçlarına ilişkin bir medya tartışmasına dair haberin, her ikisi de sadece iki büyük partinin seçim barajını geçebileceğini ileri süren iki versiyonundan birisini okuduktan sonra, önce mesajın kendileri üzerindeki etkisini değerlendirmiş, sonra da destekledikleri partiye mi oy vereceklerini yoksa başka bir partiyi mi seçeceklerini belirtmişlerdir. Sonuçlar katılımcıların, başkalarıyla kıyaslandığında, mesajdan daha az etkilendiklerine inandıklarını göstererek, üçüncü şahıs etkisinin algısal bileşenini desteklemiştir. Mesaj olumsuz olarak kabul edildiğinde bu algının artacağı ön görülmüşse de, sonuçlar bu hipotezi desteklememiştir. Ayrıca, üçüncü şahıs etkisinin davranışsal sonuçlara (oy verme niyetinde değişiklik) yol açacağı hipotezi de desteklenmemiştir. Ancak içerik analizleri, bulguların yorumlanmasına önemli bir

katkı yapmıştır. Sonuçların olası nedenleri ve oy verme niyetleri üzerinde üçüncü şahıs etkisi konusunda gelecekte yapılacak çalışmalar için yönlendirmeler tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Üçüncü şahıs etkisi, Oy verme

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INTRODUCTION

Mass media are one of the most important components of the contemporary world, which diffuse information throughout the society and have influence on many aspects of social, political and economic life, including public opinion. As media have a power on shaping people's attitudes and behaviors, since Hovland (1954)'s studies on attitude change, both researchers and practitioners especially from the political field, focused on the effects of media on people's perceptions and actions.

As a matter of fact, how people process the information they receive from mass media is not yet clear. In the earlier times of media research, it was accepted that media was an all-powerful tool (e.g. 'magic bullet' or 'hypodermic needle' theories) (see Alemdar and Erdoğan, 1990) which *directly* influenced the audience by its content. However recent studies emphasize on the active-audience phenomenon (Miller and Philo, 2001), which indicates a *limited* or *indirect* (Kepplinger, 2007) media effect. As Kepplinger (2007) notes "Media subjects are … inclined to speculate about the effects of reports on friends, neighbors, or even the population in general. These speculations strengthen, weaken or otherwise alter the direct effects of reports" (p.7). People do not simply *accept* the messages; instead, they put them in a process either by using simple heuristics or by systematically analyzing the message, according to the personal and environmental conditions (Chaiken, 1987).

Whatever method is preferred, attitude theories in general, emphasize that people may or may not change their attitudes and behaviors when they receive a message. Davison (1983) makes a contribution to understanding the effects of media on people's perceptions and behaviors, suggesting the third-person effect hypothesis, which depends on the idea that people perceive less influence of a message on self

compared to the others. Because of this perception, people take the others' reactions into account when they act. So, even they do not think they are influenced by a message; their behaviors may still be changed in line with that message, if they perceive the others are influenced and will act according to the message.

Depending on the third-person effect hypothesis, this study aims to reveal how people's perceptions about the influence of a message on self and on others affect their behaviors.

1.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The third-person effect (TPE)[1] is explained as the individuals' tendency to perceive others as more strongly influenced by communications than themselves (Davison, 1983).

As Davison noted "In the view of those trying to evaluate the effects of a communication, its greatest impact will not be on 'me' or on 'you', but on 'them'- the third persons" (p.3).

Third person effect is accepted to be a robust phenomenon (Duck, Hogg, and Terry, 1995; Perloff, 1999) which is confirmed in a number of studies (see Paul, Salwen and Dupagne, 2000; Perloff, 1999; Salwen, 1998).

In his pioneering article, Davison (1983) discussed two of his personal experiences which have led him to think deliberately about whom, was affected by a message as a real target. One of them is a case about a US Army service unit, which was on

[1] A number of scholars (e.g. Huge, Glynn and Jeong, 2006; Perloff 1993; Wei, Lo and Lu, 2007) preferred to use "third-person perception" instead of "third-person effect". Davison (1996) admitted that this 'label' was better than his 'original label' to desribe the phenomenon (p.115). However the majority of the studies continued to use the term "third-person effect". Therefore, in order to ensure consistency, "third-person effect" is used throughout the text, except for the quotations.

duty during World War II and located in Iwo Jima Island in the Pacific. This unit was consisted of African-American soldiers and white commanders. The Japanese, with whom the United States was in war, prepared some propaganda leaflets, targeting the African-American soldiers, telling them it was not their war and asking them to desert. The next day, that unit was withdrawn despite there was no evidence that the African-American soldiers were influenced by Japanese propaganda. Davison argues that the reason of withdrawal was the effect of the message on white commanders, who feared their troops would desert (Salwen and Driscoll, 1997).

In the second case, Davison, investigating the role of the West German press in the formation of Germany's foreign policy, made interviews with a number of journalists about the influence of newspaper editorials and found out that many of them believed that the ordinary people were influenced by these editorials. They, for sure, mentioned that the effect was quite little for them (Davison, 1983).This perception later becomes the pinstone of Davison's third-person effect hypothesis.

In both cases, it is apparent that those people *perceived* an influence which effected the others more than themselves. These kind of experiences led Davison to suggest the third-person effect hypothesis, emphasizing that the third-person effect is not simply related to the direct impacts of the messages, but rather to the *perceptions* of people who predict the possible reactions of others (Perloff, 1999).

> "In its broadest formulation, this hypothesis predicts that people will tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on the attitudes and behavior of others. More specifically, individuals who are members of an audience that is exposed to a persuasive communication (whether or not this communication is intended to be persuasive) will expect the communication to have a greater effect on others than on themselves. And whether or not these individuals are among the *ostensible* audience for the message, the impact that they expect this communication to have on others may lead them to take some action. Any effect that the communication achieves may thus be due not to reaction of the ostensible audience but rather to the behavior of those who anticipate, or think they perceive, some reaction on the part of others"(Davison, 1983; p.3).

In line with this assumption, when there is no ostensible audience then one will probably tend to imagine others who are susceptible to media effect (White and Dillon, 2000).

Davison suggested that the third-person effect was not limited by perception; rather he believed that this perception had a connection with behaviors (Davison, 1983).

Since Davison first suggested his hypothesis, the third-person effect researchers have focused on these two major components: perceptual and behavioral (e.g. DeLorme, Huh and Reid, 2006; Jensen and Hurley, 2005; Lee and Tamborini, 2005; for a review see Perloff, 1999). Perceptual component, as mentioned above, refers to people's tendency to *perceive* greater influence on others than on themselves and behavioral component predicts that people *act* according to this perception.

1.1.1. Perceptual Component of the Third-Person Effect

Perceptual component of the third-person effect is based on the idea that when people receive a message, they believe that they are less influenced by that message than others.

The perceptual component of the third-person effect has been confirmed in various studies including advertisements (e.g. Chapin, 2001; DeLorme et al., 2006), political campaigns (e.g. Rucinski and Salmon, 1990), public service announcements (e.g. Chapin, 2001; Henriksen and Flora, 1999; White and Dillon 2000), public relations (e.g. Park and Salmon, 2005), school violence (e.g. Chapin, 2002), television violence (e.g. Hoffner, Plotkin, Buchanan, Anderson, Kamigaki, Hubbs, Kowalczyk, Silberg and Pastorek, 2001), television viewing behavior (e.g. Peiser and Peter, 2000; 2001), news coverage (e.g. Haridakis and Rubin, 2005), defamatory news stories (e.g. Cohen, Mutz, Price and Gunther, 1988) and rap lyrics (e.g. Eveland and McLeod, 1999). Perloff (1996) reported that 15 of 16

studies confirmed the third-person effect hypothesis (cited in Eveland and McLeod, 1999; Gilkins, 2007), whereas Paul et al. (2000), in their meta-analysis of perceptual hypothesis of third-person effect with 32 published and unpublished studies, mentioned that the overall effect size between estimated media effects on self and others was r=.50, which is moderate (Reid and Hogg, 2005). "…third person effect's perceptual hypothesis is a moderate to robust finding, not only in terms of the consistency of findings but also the overall effect size" (Paul et al., 2000; p.80).

1.1.2. Behavioral Component of the Third-Person Effect

Behavioral component of the third-person effect is based on the idea that when people perceive less influence of a message on self compared to the others (third-person effect), then they may act in a way considering others' reactions to that message. In other words, people may believe that they are not influenced by that message but still that may shape their behaviors. For example, one can deny that violent TV content has influence on self but he/she may support censorship because he/she thinks the others are more susceptible to the effects of these kinds of contents.

Studies testing the behavioral component of the third-person effect are not only less in number compared to the ones testing the perceptual component but also they yield mixed results (see Jensen and Hurley, 2005). But in recent years, more researchers focused on behavioral component (e.g. Lee and Tamborini 2005; McLeod Eveland and Nathanson, 1997). McLeod et al. (1997) argued that perceptual component "becomes more meaningful if it is linked with real-world consequences as hypothesized by Davison"(p.154).

In one of the studies testing the behavioral component, Rojas, Shah and Faber (1996) concluded that there was a significant relationship between the third-person effect perception and support for censorship of media.

McLeod et al (1997) confirmed this finding in their study on certain types of rap music (violent and misogynic), reporting that the third-person effect perception was associated with support for censorship. Salwen (1998), in his study on political campaigns in 1996 US presidential election, indicated that the third-person effect was a predictor of support for restrictions. However, in similar context, in a study about the 1988 US presidential campaign, Rucinski and Salmon (1990) did not report support for an independent commission to regulate political communication.

Shah, Faber and Youn (1999) reported significant support for behavioral component of the third-person effect in their study on advertising of liquor, cigarettes and gambling, indicating that there was a relationship between the third-person effect and support for censorship of advertisements.

McLeod, Detenber and Eveland (2001) revealed a positive relationship between the third-person effect and support for censorship, emphasizing paternalistic attitudes as the strongest predictor of support for censorship.

Beyond the association between the third-person effect and *support for censorhip*, some studies revealed a significant relationship between the third-person effect and behaviors. For example, Griswold (1994; cited in Salwen and Driscoll, 1997), in his study on voting intentions, reported that the participants who believed that the political parties' economic messages had more influence on others, were more likely to vote.

In a similar vein, Gunter and Storey (2003) found strong association between the third-person effect and behavior in their study on maternal health campaign in Nepal, stating that perceived impact on target population had a significant mediating effect for the health program to affect attitudes and behaviors.

Tewksbury, Moy and Weis (2004) reported that people who believed others would be more influenced by Y2K bug (also known as millenium bug or Year 2000

problem related to the computer systems) intended to stock some items like food, gasoline and cash.

Lee and Tamborini (2005) reported that, consistent with previous findings, if people's perceived influence of Internet pornography on others was higher than the influence on themselves, they were more likely to support censorship.

DeLorme et al.(2006) reported that if people believed that the others were more influenced by a direct-to-consumer (DTC) prescribed drug advertisement[2], they were less likely to behave in a way prompted in that ad.

Although there are a number of studies confirming a relationship between the third-person effect and behaviors, the results in general are mixed and not sufficient enough to conclude a significant association between them. For example, Salwen and Driscoll (1997) reported that the third-person effect is a fruitful but complex predictor of support for press restrictions. They mentioned that people's perceptions of issues as legitimate or illegitimate determined their willingness to support press restrictions and revealed a strong association between the third-person effect and support for censorship, except in the case of news content.

Price, Huang and Tewskbury (1998) found that not the third-person effect per se but the perceived effect on *self* influenced the participants' decisions to print a Holocaust-denial advertisement in a school newspaper.

Haridakis and Rubin (2005) did not report a direct link between the third-person effect and support for policies aimed at combating terrorism. They explained this finding by suggesting that it might be an easy choice to support restrictions or

[2] Direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising is the promotion of prescription drugs through newspaper, magazine, television and internet marketing. Currently DTC is legal only in the United States and New Zealand and it is banned in many countries because of concerns related to any side-effects of drugs and etc.

censorship on harmfully perceived media content but in case of combating terrorism policies, people might elaborate the consequences rather than simply relying on the third-person effect.

Jensen and Hurley (2005) summarized the possible factors underlying these mixed results:

> "There are at least three possible explanations for these mixed findings. First censorship might be a unique behavior with a framework favorable to behavioral hypothesis. Second and somewhat related to the first, the behavioral hypothesis might be true only for certain behaviors or in certain contexts. Finally it is possible that current third-person effect research practices are, in some way, inadequate. At present the last explanation seems most plausible and practical because past research has suggested third-person effect measurements have potential weaknesses and pursuing this explanation affords researchers the opportunity to collect data relevant to the first two as well" (p.244).

Neuwirth and Frederick (2002) confirmed the third-person effect in their study on news coverage about racial issues despite it had little effect on intended behaviors. They discussed this finding emphasizing that not third, but second-person effect was a better predictor for intended behaviors as perceptions of shared influence but not perceptions of differential influence has a key role on behavoirs. Second-person effect is conceptualized as people's perception that both themselves and the others are influenced equally.

Huh, DeLorme and Reid (2006) also confirmed these findings and reported that not third but second-person effect was a better predictor for support for banning of DTC ads. On the other hand, they did not find a significant relationship between third (or second) person effect and support for prevetting the ads. They discussed these confounding findings mentioning that prevetting was acceptable while banning is not a desirable method so it had a stronger association with second-person effect, indicating that people were more likely to support banning when they perceive negative influence on themselves and the others. Overall they noted "Consumers are not only affected to behave in particular ways by DTC ads but

influenced to act in specific ways based on their effect perceptions to protect others from the effects of DTC advertising" (p.112; italics added).

1.1.3. Theoretical Explanations for the Third-Person Effect

A variety of explanations were suggested in order to understand the rationales underlying the third-person effect (see Perloff, 1999). It has generally been argued that the third-person effect is a consequence of self-serving bias (Gunter and Mundy, 1993), in other words, people's tendency to perceive themselves in a more positive light than others (Peiser and Peter, 2000).

1.1.3.1. Attributional Explanation

Rucinski and Salmon (1990) suggested an attributional explanation for the third-person effect, arguing that the people may attribute behaviors in a way which flatters them. According to their suggestion, people's attributions depend on whether the situation is threatening or flattering and when they face a less threatening or more flattering situation, they tend to ascribe their behaviors to internal factors and vice versa is true for the others (Hoorens and Ruiter, 1996).

Gunter (1991) expanded the attributional explanation for the third-person effect, emphasizing the fundamental attribution error (FAE). Attribution theory states that people tend to attribute others' behaviors internally (focusing on dispositions) and their own behaviors externally (focusing on situational factors). This phenomenon is called as fundamental attribution error or actor-observer effect (Fiske and Taylor, 1991).

According to this explanation, others are more influenced because they are more vulnerable. On the contrary, self is accepted as capable of analyzing the message and therefore is not as easily influenced as others. However, discussions on the attributional explanation emphasize a problem: if the idea that others are less

situationally dependent is correct, then they are expected to be less influenced by the messages as the messages themselves are a part of situational clues (Hoorens and Ruiter, 1996). Furthermore, as Perloff (1999) stated, Fundamental Attribution Error Hypothesis has difficulty in explaining why people sometimes acknowledge being influenced especially when they perceive the message in a positive manner. Reid and Hogg (2005) also pointed this problem by mentioning the situations that self is perceived to be more influenced. "Others are still gullible and should still be influenced more" (p. 130).

1.1.3.2. Self Enhancement Explanation

Criticizing the attributional explanation, Hoorens and Ruiter (1996) suggested self enhancement explanation, emphasizing people's tendency to bolster their self-esteem by thinking self as more resistant to persuasion, which was considered as a result of being smarter and better than others.

Hoorens and Ruiter (1996) noted that "…people tend to perceive a superior response to the media by themselves than by others" (p.609).

Peiser and Peter (2001) criticized this approach, stating although there was much reason to believe that the third-person effect was mainly driven by the need for self-enhancement, people were inevitably influenced by their circumstances. In other words, the reality affects people's perceptions. They noted "Although self-enhancement motivation would explain *why* an individual tends to third-person perception, the actual *strength* of this perception probably also depends on the individual's cognitions, particularly about the self" (p.175).

1.1.3.3. Optimistic Bias (Unrealistic Optimism)

Another explanation for the third-person effect which is related to self-enhancement is the optimistic bias (Weinstein, 1980; cited in Lee and Tamborini,

2005), the belief that others are more likely to experience negative, undesirable events. Brosius and Engel (1996), in their study comparing some possible reason for the third-person effect to occur (namely, unrealistic optimism [or optimistic bias], impersonal impact and generalized negative attitudes towards media effects [or 'hostile media' phenomenon]) reported that unrealistic optimism was "responsible for the emergence of a third-person effect" (p.159).

In the third-person effect framework, this idea depends on the assumption that individuals may distinguish between self level and other level effects which causes a perceptual discrepancy between self and others. People's tendency to see themselves in a more positive light and better than the others may be an explanation for the discrepancy between self and other perceptions and this can be explained by the people's motivation to reinforce their self-esteem by perceiving themselves better than the others (Gunter and Mundy, 1993).

The influence of the optimistic bias depends on the perception of a message (beneficial or not) and if it is perceived as harmful, the magnitude of optimistic bias becomes greater whereas a beneficial message may not make a significant difference (Brosius and Engel, 1996; Gunter and Mundy, 1993; Lee and Tamborini, 2005).

Three studies tested the relationship between optimistic bias and the third-person effect:

Chapin (2002) tested the likelihood of having HIV and the effects of media on self and others. Bivariate correlation between optimistic bias and the third-person effect was not significant.

Salwen and Dupagne (2003), in their study on Y2K (media coverage and likelihood of being hit by Y2K bugs) confirmed the previous finding and stated that optimistic bias "concerns the likelihood of experiencing an event" whereas

third-person effect is related to "susceptibility to media message influence about an event" (p.72).

Recently, Wei, Lo and Lu (2007) tested the relationship between the third-person effect and optimistic bias in the context of bird flu outbreaks in Taiwan and reported that although both the third-person effect and optimistic bias was found to be robust, they were unrelated, concluding that optimistic bias was not a "root cause of the third-person perception" (p.680).

1.1.3.4. Social Comparison

Park and Salmon (2005) emphasized Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison, which suggests that people, when they are not certain about their opinions and abilities, try to evaluate themselves in the light of objective information and if this information lacks they evaluate themselves by comparing themselves with others. Social comparison seems to occur in a *self-serving* manner. Although people generally compare themselves with similar ones, they may both compare themselves with superiors (upward comparison) and with inferiors (downward comparison) in a way which they assume to be appropriate for the situation and their goals (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, VanYperen and Dakof, 1990).

Applying this framework to the third-person effect, people have a tendency to believe they are less susceptible to negative messages while more open to positive ones than others.

In general, social comparison theory has been associated with ego-enhancement, which has been accepted to be one of the major reasons of the third-person effect (Duck, Terry and Hogg, 1995; Hoorens and Ruiter, 1996). As Duck, Terry and Hogg (1995) noted:

> "People make comparisons with others in ways that put themselves in the best light, thus reinforcing and maintaining their self-esteem. When it is deemed preferable to resist persuasion, people see themselves as highly resistant and others as less so. In contrast, when it is acceptable to think of oneself as influenced, people see themselves as quite yielding and others as less so" (p. 323).

Gilkins (2007) argued that the "typical model of data collection of the third-person effects invites social comparison" (p. 13) which is inevitable, when people are asked to evaluate the impact of a message on themselves and on others.

1.1.3.5. Media Schema Explanation

Media schema explanation suggested by Perloff (1999) underlines the general belief that media are more powerful for the others so they are more vulnerable to messages than oneself. "To the degree that individuals believe the average person is susceptible to media or that the media are all-powerful,[3] they can logically infer the others are more vulnerable to media than themselves" (p.362).

In a similar vein, generalized negative attitudes towards media, which is associated with 'hostile media' phenomenon, was suggested to be a reason for the third-person effect. (Perloff, 1989) This phenomenon is based on the idea that when people's ego-involvement is high and when they have extreme attitudes, they perceive a media message opposing to their views, which in fact is neutral, as hostile and unfairly biased and they believe that media influence the others in general (Duck, Hogg and Terry, 1995; Vallone, Ross and Lepper, 1985). According to social judgement theory (Sherif and Sherif, 1967), people's acceptance or rejection of a message is related to their own positions, in other words, to their ego involvement. People reject the messages which fall in their latitudes of rejection (contrast effect) whereas they accept the messages which fall

[3] This phenomenon is referred as "magic bullet" or "hypodermic needle" in the framework of media theories literature (see Alemdar and Erdogan, 1990), suggesting an all-powerful media which have direct impact on audience. According to this approach, emerged from the Frankfurt School, which was affected by Nazism during the World War II, the message is accepted completely by the receivers *passively* without much elaboration. As a result, this model is not widely accepted by scholars who suggest the theory of active audience, emphasizing that people actively construct their own interpretations (see Miller and Philo, 2001).

in their latitudes of acceptance (assimilation effect) and when their ego involvement is high then the assimilation or contrast effect increases. Brosius and Engel (1996) tested the relationship with generalized negative attitudes towards media and the third-person effect, depending on the idea that people who believed in hostile media would perceive even neutral messages as negative and the third-person effect would be higher for those. However, they did not report a significant relationship between people's belief in strong and negative media effect and the third-person effect.

Heuristic systematic model (Chaiken, 1987) may be a good basis to explain the relationship between hostile media phenomenon and the third-person effect. When people believe that media in nature have a negative image, then they will use this heuristic rather than systematically process the message given and simply perceive less influence on themselves compared to others, in a self-serving manner.

Although in some studies (e.g. Eveland, Nathanson, Detenber and McLeod, 1999), negative media schema was suggested as an important reason for the third-person effect, McLeod et al. (2001) argued that media schema was an effective factor of people's estimation of the impact of a message on *others*. In other words, people believed an all-powerful media when they considered the effect on others. On the other hand, when people evaluate the impact of a message on self, they did not simply rely on the schema and took the conditions into account. McLeod et al. (2001) referred to the Fundamental Attribution Error Hypothesis and described this difference in terms of actor-observer effect.

1.1.3.6. Psychoanalytic Explanation

A final note, discussed by Perloff (1999) is a more psychoanalytic explanation (looking-glass self), which mentiones "people project negative effects onto others" (p.362). However this explanation did not draw much attention probably because of the difficulty to test. Furthermore the same criticism for the attributional explanation is valid here, it is insufficient to explain why sometimes people

perceive themselves more influenced compared to the others (Perloff, 1999) especially when the message is favorable.

It should be noted that, to date, theoretical work on the third-person effect is not sufficient enough as it is a relatively new area (Lee and Tamborini 2005). Still, Perloff (1999) notes that "There is enough support for self-enhancement to suggest that a motive to perceive oneself in the best possible light operates when people make comparisons about media effects on self and others" (p.362-363).

Among all explanations one point is commonly emphasized. The likelihood of occurrence of the third-person effect is related to the message itself.

1.1.4. Influence of Message Desirability on the Third-Person Effect

Message desirability is consisted of two main dimensions. One of them is related to the message topic, which is considered as positive or negative. The other is the perceived desirability of message, which indicates people's perceptions about the desirability of being influenced by the message. As these two dimensions are intertwined, both of them are taken into account simultaneously below.

Many studies revealed a relationship between the third-person effect and how the message is perceived (e.g. Duck and Mullin, 1995; Duck, Hogg and Terry, 1998; Park and Salmon, 2005). Since the early studies on the third-person effect (e.g Duck and Mullin, 1995; Hoorens and Ruiter, 1996), it has been revealed that people tend to believe they are less influenced by a negative message compared to the others and if they perceive the message in a positive manner then they state that the influence is stronger for themselves than for others. In other words, the third-person effect occurs if the message is perceived as negative (unbeneficial, hostile etc) and socially undesirable. In that case, as being influenced by a negative message is undesirable, people tend to believe that they are less influenced than others.

On the contrary, when the message is desirable, individuals may believe that they are more influenced than others. This phenomenon is called a reverse third-person effect or first person effect (FPE) (Chapin, 2005; Perloff, 1999).

Perloff (1999) in his review of forty-five third-person effect studies, mentions six studies, which compared the magnitude of the third-person effect for desirable and undesirable messages and concludes that undesirable messages caused more third-person effect compared to desirable ones. In line with this, a number of studies (e.g. Duck, Terry and Hogg, 1995; White and Dillon 2000), reported a first person effect for pro-social messages.

On the other hand, Park and Salmon (2005) did not report a significant difference in the magnitude of the third-person effect depending on how message was perceived (negative vs. positive). Still they explained this finding by suggesting that the negative message stimulus might not be "sufficiently negative to elicit a more pronounced third-person perception" (p.34). In a similar vein, Eveland and McLeod (1999) reviewed a number of studies testing anti-social vs. pro-social messages and concluded that even in pro-social (positive) message condition, significant first person effect was rare, stating "…no clear conclusion on presence or absence of reverse third-person perceptions may be drawn from the literature at this time" (p.322). Their study also did not yield a significant reverse third-person effect for the pro-social message, which they discussed might be a consequence of the pro-social message's being not desirable enough.

Desirability is not the only dimension of a message. Duck, Terry and Hogg (1995), in their study on AIDS advertising, reported that people's perceptions about a message's influence on themselves and on the others depended on whether the ads were low or high in quality. Furthermore, the type of message is considered to be influential in the third-person effect perception. In general, people are supposed to perceive Public Service Announcements (PSAs), news and etc. in a more positive manner compared to advertisement (Brosius and Engel, 1996; Duck and Mullin, 1995). However, Chapin (1999) reported no difference in the magnitude of the

third-person effect whether the message was a PSA or advertisement. Chapin noted that "Although numerous studies found variation in third-person perception by message type, differences between advertisements and PSAs disappeared with more precise control in this study" (1999; p.171).

Interestingly, in a meta-analysis testing the perceptual component of the third-person effect (Paul et al. 2000), it was concluded that message desirability was *surprisingly* not a significant moderator for the third-person effect. They suggested that this may be due to the possibility that the desirable messages might not be perceived as desirable indeed. "In fact, measurement of perceptions of messages as desirable or undesirable is problematic because message desirability is usually assumed without obtaining respondents' opinions" (p.79). On the other hand, they did not suggest to underestimate the effect of social desirability in the third-person effect by emphasizing the problems in conceptualizations and operalizations of social desirability. "Desirability is still an important variable worth studying, although more creative ways of studying this variable are needed" (p.80).

Before concluding the effects of message desirability, it should be noted that the third-person effect originally, as Davison (1983) stated, depends on the *intention* or *attempt to persuade*, not on the desirability of the message. Indeed, these two concepts are not controversial as desirability to be influenced by a message is closely related to the perception about a message's aim to persuade people.

1.1.5. Influence of Social Distance on the Third-Person Effect

Another important dimension for the third-person effect is the social distance corollary (Perloff, 1999). Evidence suggests that the magnitude of the third-person effect depends on who the others are (Duck, Hogg and Terry, 1995). "Although social distance is not a necessary condition for the TPE to occur, increasing the social distance (and presumably dissimilarity) between self and hypothetical others makes the TPE larger and probably more socially meaningful" (Perloff, 1999; p.370).

The third-person effect increases as the social distance between self and other increases (Duck and Mullin, 1995; Gibbon and Durkin, 1995; Hoffner et al. 2001). Therefore the third-person effect is greater for the "average person" compared to a close friend, a member of the family etc. Duck, Hogg and Terry (1995) emphasize that self-serving tendencies in the third-person effect may extend to similar others by referring attitude literature, which mentions that attitude similarity causes attraction. In that case, as group-based similarity may also moderate the self-other perceptions, both self and in-group members are perceived to be less influenced by negative messages.

Cohen et al (1988) study, which had Stanford University students as participants, was the first one revealing that the magnitude of third-person effect was greater when the 'other' referred to the the public at large compared to the closer 'other' in which respectively other Californians or other Stanford students were referred to. Perloff (1999) mentioned that ten studies tested effects of social distance in the magnitude of the third-person effect, eight of which confirmed it, whereas the two did not. However, the failure in one case (McLeod et al.,1997) might be because the more distant group (youth from New York and Los Angeles) were believed to have more exposure to rap music and therefore more susceptible. McLeod et al. (1997) argued that perceived likelihood of exposure to media content was a better predictor of the third-person effect than the perceived social distance. Similarly, in another study (Jensen and Hurley, 2005) results did not yield a significant social distance effect in the third-person effect, which was discussed by researchers emphasizing that the issue relevance moderated the impact of social distance.

In a similar vein, Duck and Mullin (1995) mentioned that the perceived self-others differences might be related not only to others' being socially distant but also to the comparative contexts.

As a conclusion, social distance is not a *simple* cue for the magnitude of the third-person effect regardless of the perceptions of who "the other" is. Indeed recent studies are conducted by taking this in account.

Some studies (Duck, Hogg and Terry, 1995; Reid and Hogg 2005) emphasize on self-categorization theory which assumes that when a group membership and shared social identity are psychologically salient, individuals tend to categorize themselves and others referring to their in-group. The effect is strengthened when there is a strong social identity and in that case people perceive less influence on their in-group.

> "To the extent that comparison others are judged as outgroup members, they would be contrasted to the perceiver's identity, evaluated negatively and represented unfavourably- as relatively vulnerable to media influence. In contrast, to the extent that comparison others are judged as ingroup members, they would be assimilated to the perceiver's identity, evaluated positively and represented favourably, like the self-as relatively invulnerable to influence" (Duck, Hogg and Terry, 1995; p.198).

Reid and Hogg (2005) extended the self-enhancement explanation for the third-person effect, arguing that self-enhancement is related to the social categories. "…media are self-enhancing to the extent that being influenced by that media is normative for a group with which one identifies" (p.156).

Duck and Mullin (1995), referring to negative life events literature, suggested that people believed not only themselves but also their in-group members were not vulnerable. One might think this as a way of protecting self and in-group or it might be a consequence of relative easiness to visualize the vague others as prototypical victim of negative life events.

In a similar vein, people may perceive socially distant others as less socially competent than self, so they may believe that the others are more vulnerable to negative influence of a message and they can not elaborate the message properly (Hoffner et al. 1999).

Duck, Hogg and Terry (1995) in their study on political identification, suggested that impact of social distance depended on whether a message favored the in-group or out-group. Elder, Douglas and Sutton (2006) criticized Duck, Hogg and Terry (1995) study, by emphasizing some methodological problems; Labor and Liberal-National supporters, who were determined as participant groups in that study were formed by virtue of their opinion. They note:

> "…for these and other opinion-based groups, opinions may be temporally and causally prior to group membership. It is therefore plausible that participants' beliefs about the prior opinions of other message recipients, rather than recipients' group membership per se, drove third person perceptions" (p.355).

In spite of this criticism, Elder et al. (2006) replicated Duck, Hogg and Terry (1995) findings to some extent, concluding that when a message is pro-out-group, social distance effect is high for the third-person effect and when a message is pro-group, this time, the third-person effect increased for "in-group others". Although early framework for social distance in the third-person effect was based on the idea that the more distant others were perceived as more influenced, these findings are compatible with the group schemas. As people generally believe the out-groups are more homogenous and in-groups are more heterogeneous, it is not surprising that they differentiated themselves from in-group members when there was a message favoring their group.

Therefore, Elder et al. (2006) studied the social distance effect by considering message cues and reported an interaction between target and message bias, which fully qualified the main effect for social distance. A similar result was reported by Reid and Hogg (2005), emphasizing that social distance per se was not sufficient enough to understand the third-person effect, rather "it is social distance on dimensions of comparison that are normatively fitting." (p.150). In a similar vein, perceived likelihood of media exposure was suggested as a better predictor than

social distance for the third-person effect on different groups (Eveland et al., 1999).

Perloff (1999), in his review, criticized the social distance corollary as it was generally *assumed* rather than *assessed*. Furthermore, he emphasized that social distance was not a necessary factor for the occurrence of the third-person effect. Some other factors, like perceived likelihood of media exposure, might have important effects on perception of social distance, suggesting that when people thought the distant others had less exposure to a specific content, then they might conclude that the distant others would be less influenced compared to the closer others. Finally, he referred to Duck, Hogg and Terry (1995) study as an example of people's tendency to perceive themselves less influenced than closer others, which could not be explained by social distance corollary *per se*.

In one of the recent studies, Tsfati and Cohen (2004) suggested that when the subject of the message was relevant, the third-person effect decreased no matter if the others were socially distant or not. In other words, people believed that the ones who were close to the topic but distant from self were less influenced than the ones who were closer to self but far from the topic.

As a result, the studies, which focused on the interaction between social desirability of the message and social distance between self and others, reveal the importance of the message and bring the idea of reconsidering the social distance corollary.

1.1.6. Other Possible Factors Related to the Third-Person Effect

In addition to message desirability and social distance, some other factors have been suggested to play a role in the third-person effect although the results related to these factors are mixed.

One of these factors is the effect of age, which was mentioned in a number of studies (e.g. Brosius and Engel, 1996; Henriksen and Flora, 1999; Lambe and McLeod, 2005; Huh et al., 2006), indicating that older respondents perceived more influence on others compared to themselves. On the contrary, Salwen and Driscoll (1997) and Rucinski and Salmon (1990) did not report a significant effect of age. Peiser and Peter (2001) reported a partial support for the effect of age, noting that the effect was significant in some cases, based on the respondents' positions related to the issue tested.

Another demographic characteristic which is, to some extent, related to age is education. In general, level of education was associated with higher levels of third-person effect (e.g. Rucinski and Salmon, 1990; Peiser and Peter, 2000; Johansson, 2002) although there are studies which reported no effect of education (e.g. Innes and Zeitz, 1988) or even an opposite effect meaning that lower levels of education resulted in higher third-person effect (e.g. Brosius and Engel, 1996).

It is also true for knowledge. Although the relationship between knowledge and the third-person effect was positive in some studies (e.g. Salwen and Driscoll, 1997; Lasorsa 1989), some did not report a significant knowledge effect (e.g. Chapin, 2002; McLeod et al., 1997).

The main problem underlying the confounding results for both education and knowledge is the discrepancy between actual and perceived levels and the difficulties in measuring the perceived education or knowledge (Perloff, 1999).

Despite the mixed results of the above factors, ego-involvement was reported as a significant predictor of the third-person effect (Perloff, 1999). A number of studies (e.g. Price, Huang and Tewksbury, 1997; Price, Tewksbury and Huang, 1998) revealed a relationship between the respondents' position and the third-person effect.

The effect of gender is more complicated on the third-person effect (Johansson 2002; Lewis, Watson and Tay, 2005; Lo and Wei, 2000; McLeod et al., 1997; Reid and Hogg, 2005). Results of the studies, which included gender as a factor on the third-person effect, indicated that gender stereotypes relevant to the message topic affected the third-person effect. Especially for the Internet pornography (Lo and Wei, 2000) and violent content (McLeod et al., 1997), women were reported to be more supportive for censorship. Reid and Hogg (2005) reported that both men and women believed that men are more influenced by pornography as men in general are perceived more likely to be interested in this kind of media content. However these results can not be interpreted as effects of gender. As a matter of fact, in these examples, women generally perceived themselves as less influenced than males, which may account for social distance rather than gender effect. In other words, gender is not an absolutely independent variable for the third-person effect. Rather, it must be considered in line with other context-related factors like ego-involvement.

Beyond these, media use was tested as a factor affecting the third-person perception. Rucinski and Salmon (1990) reported that exposure to newspapers was positively related to the third-person effect. Innes and Zeith (1988) reported an association between the amount of television viewing and the third-person effect. Peiser and Peter (2001) also found that people's own viewing behaviors affected the magnitude of the third-person effect, the ones who were in a less favorable position perceived weaker third-person effect than others.

1.1.7. Some Methodological Issues

1.1.7.1. Surveys vs. Experiments

The third-person effect was tested by surveys (e.g. Chapin, 2001; Salwen and Dupagne, 1999) and by experiments (e.g. Duck, Hogg and Terry, 1995; Price and Tewksbury, 1996) both of which yielded similar results indicating a third-person effect. While it was asked to evaluate the impact of certain types of media

messages on self and on others in surveys, in experiments a certain message was presented and the participants were asked to estimate the influence of that message on themselves and on others. In general, results confirmed the third-person effect regardless of the method used to test it.

1.1.7.2. Impact of Question Order

The studies on the third-person effect traditionally used a couplet of questions since this was first proposed in Davison's original article (1983). One of these questions is related to self: participants are asked to evaluate the message's influence on *them*. The other is related to the others: respondents are asked to evaluate the message's influence on *others*. In some studies, which tested the social distance as a factor affecting the third-person effect, there may be more than one question about others; each assesses the third-person effect according to the distance from self. In one of the earliest studies testing the relationship between social distance and the third-person effect, Cohen et al. (1988) asked a series of questions to the participants to evaluate the influence of defamatory newspaper articles on other Stanford University students, other Californians and public opinion at large.

Price and Tewksbury (1996) were the first who shed light on the possible impacts of question order in the third-person effect studies. They tested the third-person effect regarding to news coverage and designed four experimental conditions (self-only, others-only, self-then-others, others-then-self). Results indicated a third-person effect in all conditions without any exceptions.

Perloff (1999) explained the rationale that underlied the concern about question order in the third-person studies, a primacy effect shaped by the question order might affect the third-person effect. According to this perception, the first question is a sort of anchor which influences the answer for the second question and the magnitude of the third-person effect increases in case 'others question' is asked

initially. Dupagne, Salwen and Paul (1999) emphasized that this effect was known as ‘consistency’ or ‘carryover’ effect (p.335).

Perloff (1999), however, stated that several studies which counterbalanced the questions or tested for order still found a third-person effect (see also Dupagne et al., 1999). Besides the studies in which the order of questions was alternated, some studies (e.g. David, Liu and Meiser, 2004) used a between-subject design and still reported a significant third-person effect in self-only, friends-only and typical student-only conditions.

Price and Tewksbury (1996), although the results of their research did not yield a significant question order effect, suggested an explanation for a possible effect:

> “Presumably the first question in the series provides a judgmental anchor against which the second estimate is then made. If this is so, then a judgment of relatively *great* impact on others may provide a stronger anchor for a self-serving (i.e. lower) estimate of impact on oneself, while an estimate of modest impact on oneself fails to provide a comparably strong anchor for a subsequent self-serving (i.e.higher) estimate of impact on others. In support of this view, the magnitude of the third person effect was always largest (albeit not significantly so) in those experimental conditions where the 'others' question was completed first—possibly because a more extreme initial estimate of impact is generated here than when the 'self question’ comes first” (p.138).

Dupagne et al. (1999) tested the effect of question order on not only the perceptual but also the behavioral component of the third-person effect. They conducted a survey about message restriction (for televised violence, televised trials and negative political advertising), extending the Price and Tewksbury (1996) study’s condition by adding the behavioral component: support for message restriction. The conditions were restrictions-others-self, restrictions-self -others, others- self - restrictions and self –others-restrictions. Results indicated a strong support for the perceptual component of the third-person person effect, but not for the behavioral component.

In recent studies; question order issue has been either addressed by randomizing (e.g. Douglas and Sutton, 2004; Elder et al., 2006) or separating 'self' and 'others' conditions (Huh et al., 2006). In other studies (e.g. Joslyn, 2003; Jensen and Hurley, 2005; Lambe and McLeod, 2005), however, question order is not regarded as a problem, consistent with the previous findings, and the same order is used for all participants.

1.1.8. The Third-Person Effect Research on Politics

The impact or consequence of the third-person effect on political issues drew attention since Davison (1983) suggested his hypothesis. Davison, himself, was the first one who suggested a relationship between these two:

> "Throughout history, heretical doctrines and political dissidence have aroused concern, sometimes terror, among priests and potentates. How much of this apprehension and the resulting repression was due to the third-person effect?" (p. 14).

Rucinski and Salmon (1990) studied the 1988 US presidential campaign and reported that people perceived greater influence of certain types of messages (news, political ads, negative political ads, debates and polls) on others than on themselves, supporting the perceptual component of the third-person effect.

Salwen (1998) confirmed these results in his study on political campaigns in 1996 presidential election.

Although both studies tested the behavioral component, Salwen (1998) reported that the third-person effect was a predictor of support for restrictions, while Rucinski and Salmon (1990) did not find a significant third-person effect on support for an independent commission to regulate political communication and suggested that not the third-person effect per se, but *perceived harm* had a significant impact on support for external control of media content. The

confounding results were explained (Perloff, 1999) in the general framework of the problems related to the behavioral hypothesis:

> "…the research raises methodological and theoretical issues. First, causal order has not been convincingly established. It is certainly possible that willingness to censor causes third-person perceptions, or another variable influences both… Secondly, none of the studies examined actual behavior… Thirdly, although the TPE has increased the size of R^2, variance accounted for has not always been large, leading one to wonder whether the messages in question are perceived as sufficiently offensive and worthy of censorship to allow meaningful effects of third-person perceptions" (p.368).

Duck, Hogg and Terry (1995) studied the 1993 Australian federal elections and focused on self-categorization and social identity theories in order to reveal the difference in perceived effect on self and others. The respondents high in political identification, perceived less influence of a pro-out-group message both on themselves and on their political in-group than out-group. In pro-in-group condition, however, perceived effects on self was significantly less than on in-group members. They explained this unexpected finding by emphasizing that high political identification resulted in increased differentiation between self and others within the group.

Griswold (1994; cited in Salwen and Driscoll, 1997) focused on voting intentions in 1992 Georgia presidential primary election and reported that the participants who believed that the political parties' economic messages had more influence on others were more likely to vote, suggesting this consequence might be related to people's feelings of futility in overcoming the majority opinion contrary to their own opinions.

Banning (2006) also tested the third-person effect in election context. Participants were first asked to what extent they perceive influence of media in general on self and on others and then asked whether they participated in the previous elections (2004 presidential election). Results indicated a significant negative association between having voted and a high third-person effect. Still, the study did not test

the likelihood of voting in future, which may be a better context to investigate the influence of the third-person effect on voting behaviors.

Johansson (2005) studied the influence of the third-person effect and personal experience on shaping the political attitudes in Sweden. Results revealed that people tended to believe that *their* political attitudes were more dependent on their *personal experience*. On the other hand, when they evaluated others' political attitudes, they emphasized more on the third-person effect.

1.2. The frame of this study

Although Davison (1983) emphasized the behavioral consequences of the third-person effect, studies are generally interested in the perceptual component. Davison cites Noelle-Neumann's 1980 study on spiral of silence, mentioning that in 1965 and 1972 elections in West Germany, expectations about which party would win the elections affected the undecided voters and as much as 15 percent shift occurred in favor of the party which was believed to be the winner. Davison notes:

> "The reasoning of at least some of these late deciders was probably along the following lines: I don't find much difference between the parties, but the fact that others seem to be persuaded by the arguments or image of Party A probably means that this is the better party." (Davison, 1983; p.13)

This study aims to examine the behavioral consequences of the third-person effect on Turkish voters.

The first hypothesis predicts that

H1: Respondents will perceive themselves to be less likely influenced by a political message than others.

According to the literature, people tend to perceive less impact on themselves than others in general. Previous studies revealed that political messages generally caused higher levels of third-person effect. Therefore, Turkish voters are expected to have a tendency of believing that the impact of the message is less on themselves compared to others.

The second hypothesis predicts that

H2: Respondents will report that they are less affected than others if they perceive the message in negative manner.

A number of studies reported a strong relationship between a negative message and the third-person effect. It is even suggested that when the message is accepted to be positive, a reversed third-person effect or first person effect is likely to occur.

The third hypothesis aims to examine the behavioral component of political attitudes regarding the third-person effect and predicts that

H3: If the message claims that their party will not win the election, then respondents will tend to vote for the party closer to themselves among the ones which are supposed to win the election. In other words, they will change their voting intentions when they perceive more impact on others than on self.

The basic assumption of the third-person effect theory is people's perception of being less influenced by communication than others. Davison (1983) suggests that, in line with this perception, people expect others will take some actions as a result of this impact. Therefore people may reshape their behaviors considering the possible results of others' behaviors. Jensen and Hurley (2005) mention that people are pragmatic and make cost-benefit analysis when they are making their decisions. They cite Downs' book published in 1957, which emphasized that citizens aimed to maximize gains and reduce costs. People behave rationally considering others will act and they realize that only gathering information and staying informed cause few gains and large costs. If the third-person effect causes individuals to behave considering the others' behaviors, as Davison claims, it may

be suggested that people may change their initial decisions and behave in a different manner in order to maximize their gains.

Some articles published in Turkish newspapers referred to Turkish voters' tendency of voting the party, which they believed that the others would support, rather than the party they, themselves supported. One of the leading columnists from Hürriyet (a Turkish newspaper), Fatih Altaylı, on April 14th 1999, criticized this tendency "Why should I vote for a party in order to prevent others's mistake, instead of acting according to my own idea?". Another columnist, Enis Berberoğlu, in Radikal (another Turkish newspaper), on September 30th 2002, mentioned about past elections and discussed the voters' tendency to vote for the party which they believed to gain more votes.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

2.1. Participants

Participants were undergraduate students[4] (N=287) from five different universities, Middle East Technical University (Ankara), Ankara University (Ankara), Gazi University (Ankara), Selçuk University (Konya) and Süleyman Demirel University (Isparta). The final sample consisted of 285. Two students were dropped because they did not answer the questions related to the third-person effect.

One hundred forthy four participants were women (50,5%) and 141 were men (49,5 %). The age of the participants varied between 17 and 28. One hundred forthy of them lived in metropolitans (49,1%), 127 lived in smaller cities (44,6%), 7 lived in towns (2,5%) and 11 lived in villages (3,9%). Eighty of them were from Selçuk University (28,1%), 77 from Süleyman Demirel University (27%), 47 from Ankara University (16,5%), 48 from Gazi University (16,8%) and 33 from Middle East Technical University (11,6%).

2.2. Materials

Two versions of a vignette, prepared as decipher of a TV program about the election were used in this study. Although the text was same in both versions, one was pro-CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi- Republican People's Party[5]) and the other

[4] Although using student sample in third-person studies has been criticized as this may exaggerate the third person effect because students tend to believe they are more educated and smarter than others (Paul et al.2000) it was preferred to use a student sample in this study in order to ensure that all groups were from the same population.

[5] CHP is a political party, founded in 1923, which is defined as social-democrat and laic and which was the second party in the previous parliamentary elections by 19.4%.

was pro-AKP. (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi- Justice and Development Party[6]). In pro-CHP condition, it was claimed that CHP would be the first party in the election and AKP was claimed as the first party in pro-AKP condition. (See Appendix A)

2.3. Procedure

The questionnaires were applied in the first half of May 2007[7], two months before the parliamentary elections were held in Turkey.

In the first step, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire (See Appendix B), reporting demographics (age, gender, the place which they spent most time in their lives: metropol, city, town or village), media use (whether they regularly read newspaper, watched TV, listened to the radio, surfed the Internet or not), amount of media use (how many newspapers they read, for how long they watched TV, listened to the radio and surfed the Internet) and in which topics they were interested in media coverage. Last questions of this first step were which party they supported[8] and which party they evaluated as closer to themselves between two leading parties (AKP and CHP). Items related to closeness to AKP or CHP was measured seperately on a 7-point scale (1'very distant' to 7'very close').

In the second step, participants were randomly given one of the two vignettes, either pro-CHP or pro-AKP.

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[6] AKP is a political party, founded in 2001, which is defined as conservative (especially about the issues related to religion) and which was the first party in the previous parliamentary elections by 34.3%.

[7] Initially the elections were scheduled to be held in Nowember 2007. However a crisis occured in the election of the president of the republic. Great public opposition was aroused against the candidate of the government (country's foreign minister, Abdullah Gul, who was accused by his opponents of hiding an Islamist agenda) and the Constitutional Court annulled the parliamentary vote in support of him. As a result, the government rescheduled the election to June 2007.

[8] Party names were listed in alphabetical order.

In the next step, to assess perceived influence, participants were asked to rate the impact of the vignette on themselves and on others (1 'no influence at all' to 7 'a large influence'). Impact on self was assessed by the question "Does this news affect which party you are going to vote for?" and impact on others was assessed by asking "Does this news affect which party the others are going to vote for?". The order of questions was changed in order to eliminate any possible question-order effects. After completing these questions, participants were asked to rate their opinion about political news (1 'not objective at all' to 7 'very objective').

Then participants were asked to report which party they would vote for: CHP, AKP or another party (if they checked another party option, they were asked to define which party it was) and whether the party they reported they would vote for was the same with the party they supported. Finally an open-ended question was added in case that they reported they would vote for a party other than they supported, asking to explain the reason of that.

For further details, a sample questionnaire is presented in Appendix B.

2.4. Design

A 3 (voting: vote for the party supported, vote for another party, will not vote) X 2 (message: negative, positive) X 2 (target: on self, on others) mixed design ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor was used to test:

a. perceived influence on self and on others
b. impact of the message on the third-person effect
c. impact of the message and the third-person effect on voting intentions.

The perceived effect on self, the perceived effect on others, valence of the message and voting intentions were used in the analysis. Message valence is *assumed* according to which vignette (pro-AKP or pro-CHP) was given to the participant. First, a 'closeness' score was calculated by subtracting AKP score from CHP.

Negative scores indicated more closeness to AKP, whereas positive scores indicated more closeness to CHP. Accordingly, when a participant read a message favoring the party he/she was closer, then that message was assumed as positive and vice versa.

For further analysis, a third-person effect score was calculated in line with previous research (e.g. Duck and Mullin, 1995) by subtracting the effect on others from the effect on self, where negative scores (-6 to -1) indicated a third-person effect, positive (1 to 6) scores indicated a reversed third-person effect and "0" indicated an equal effect on both self and others. Finally these scores were categorized into three categories: more influence on self, equal influence on self and others and more influence on others.

Analysis was run by using SPSS 15.0 for Windows Evaluation Version. The .05 alpha level was accepted as a criterion for statistical significance for the analysis.

Beyond statistical analysis, a content analysis was also used to investigate, if any, reasons for change in voting intention.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

3.1. Data Screening

Prior to analyses, data were examined for accuracy of data entry and missing values. For the variables, influence on self, influence on others and change in voting intention, univariate outliers were checked according to z scores and multivariate outliers were checked by using a p<.001 criterion for Mahalonobis distance[9]. No outliers were detected. Although the assumptions of normality of distributions and linearity were not met, it was assumed as satisfactory because of the structure of the variables and as assumption of homogeneity of variance was satisfactory[10], it was decided to continue to the analysis.

3.2. Descriptive Analysis

In the first step of the analysis, differences related to gender, to the location where the participant spent most time in his/her life, to the party which the participant supported and to media use on perceived effect on self and others and voting intentions were explored. Details are displayed in the Tables 1:8.

[9] χ^2=16.27, df=3, p<.001
[10] Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices was insignificant.

Table 1.

Gender Differences on Perceived Influence on Self and on Others

	Perceived Influence	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	more influence on self	5	3.5	3.5
	equal influence on self and others	30	21.3	24.8
	more influence on others	106	75.2	100
	Total	141	100	
Female	more influence on self	2	1.4	1.4
	equal influence on self and others	32	22.2	23.6
	more influence on others	110	76.4	100
	Total	144	100	

Table 2.

Gender Differences on Voting Intentions

	Voting Intention	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	vote for the party supported	109	77.3	77.3
	vote for another party	16	11.3	88.7
	will not vote	16	11.3	100
	Total	141	100	
Female	vote for the party supported	104	72.2	72.2
	vote for another party	19	13.2	85.4
	will not vote	21	14.6	100
	Total	144	100	

Table 3.

Differences on Perceived Influence on Self and on Others Related to the Location the Participant Spent Most Time in His/Her Life

	Perceived Influence	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Metropol	more influence on self	5	3.6	3.6
	equal influence on self and others	35	25	28.6
	more influence on others	100	71.4	100
	Total	140	100	
City	more influence on self	1	0.8	0.8
	equal influence on self and others	22	17.3	18.1
	more influence on others	104	104	100
	Total	127	100	
Town	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	1	14.3	14.3
	more influence on others	6	85.7	100
	Total	7	100	
Village	more influence on self	1	9.1	9.1
	equal influence on self and others	4	36.4	45.5
	more influence on others	6	54.5	100
	Total	11	100	

Table 4.

Differences on Voting Intentions Related to the Location the Participant Spent Most Time in His/Her Life

	Voting Intentions	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Metropol	vote for the party supported	107	76.4	76.4
	vote for another party	19	13.6	90
	will not vote	14	10	100
	Total	140	100	
City	vote for the party supported	94	74	74
	vote for another party	15	11.8	85.8
	will not vote	18	14.2	100
	Total	127	100	
Town	vote for the party supported	4	57.1	57.1
	vote for another party	1	14.3	71.4
	will not vote	2	28.6	100
	Total	7	100	
Village	vote for the party supported	8	72.7	72.7
	vote for another party	-	-	72.7
	will not vote	3	27.3	100
	Total	11	100	

Table 5.

Differences on Perceived Influence on Self and on Others Related to the Party Supported

	Perceived Influence	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
AKP	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	16	26.2	26.2
	more influence on others	45	73.8	100
	Total	61	100	
ANAP	more influence on self	1	7.1	7.1
	equal influence on self and others	2	14.3	21.4
	more influence on others	11	78.6	100
	Total	14	100	
BBP	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	-	-	-
	more influence on others	2	100	100
	Total	2	100	100
CHP	more influence on self	2	2.3	2.3
	equal influence on self and others	25	28.4	30.7
	more influence on others	61	69.3	100
	Total	88	100	
DSP	more influence on self	2	12.5	12.5
	equal influence on self and others	2	12.5	25.0
	more influence on others	12	75.0	100
	Total	16	100	

Table 5. (continued)

	Perceived Influence	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
DYP	more influence on self	1	8.3	8.3
	equal influence on self and others	1	8.3	16.7
	more influence on others	10	83.3	100
	Total	12	100	
DTP	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	1	16.7	16.7
	more influence on others	5	83.3	100
	Total	6	100	
EMEP	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	-	-	-
	more influence on others	3	100	100
	Total	3	100	100
GP	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	-	-	-
	more influence on others	5	100	100
	Total	5	100	100
HYP	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	-	-	-
	more influence on others	1	100	100
	Total	1	100	100
İP	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	-	-	-
	more influence on others	1	100	100
	Total	1	100	100

Table 5. (continued)

	Perceived Influence	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
LDP	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	-	-	-
	more influence on others	2	100	100
	Total	2	100	100
MHP	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	5	22.7	22.7
	more influence on others	17	77.3	100
	Total	22	100	
MP	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	-	-	-
	more influence on others	1	100	100
	Total	1	100	100
ÖDP	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	1	33.3	33.3
	more influence on others	2	66.7	100
	Total	3	100	
SAGDUYU	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	-	-	-
	more influence on others	2	100	100
	Total	2	100	100
SHP	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	-	-	-
	more influence on others	3	100	100
	Total	3	100	100

Table 5. (continued)

	Perceived Influence	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
SP	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	1	20	20
	more influence on others	4	80	100
	Total	5	100	
TKP	more influence on self	-	-	-
	equal influence on self and others	-	-	-
	more influence on others	1	100	100
	Total	1	100	100
None	more influence on self	1	2.7	2.7
	equal influence on self and others	8	21.6	24.3
	more influence on others	28	75.7	100
	Total	37	100	

Table 6.

Differences on Voting Intentions Related to the Party Supported

	Voting Intentions	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
AKP	vote for the party supported	59	96.7	96.7
	vote for another party	-	-	-
	will not vote	2	3.3	100
	Total	61	100	
ANAP	vote for the party supported	12	85.7	85.7
	vote for another party	2	14.3	100
	will not vote	-	-	
	Total	14	100	
BBP	vote for the party supported	2	100	100
	vote for another party	-	-	-
	will not vote	-	-	-
	Total	2	100	100
CHP	vote for the party supported	83	94.3	94.3
	vote for another party	3	3.4	97.7
	will not vote	2	2.3	100
	Total	88	100	
DSP	vote for the party supported	4	25	25
	vote for another party	12	75	100
	will not vote	-	-	-
	Total	16	100	

Table 6. (continued)

	Voting Intentions	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
DYP	vote for the party supported	10	83.3	83.3
	vote for another party	2	16.7	100
	will not vote	-	-	-
	Total	12	100	
DTP	vote for the party supported	4	66.7	66.7
	vote for another party	2	33.3	100
	will not vote	-	-	-
	Total	6	100	
EMEP	vote for the party supported	6	100	
	vote for another party	-	-	-
	will not vote	-	-	-
	Total	6	100	
GP	vote for the party supported	5	100	
	vote for another party	-	-	-
	will not vote	-	-	-
	Total	5	100	
HYP	vote for the party supported	1	100	
	vote for another party	-	-	-
	will not vote	-	-	-
	Total	1	100	
İP	vote for the party supported	1	100	
	vote for another party	-	-	-
	will not vote	-	-	-
	Total	1	100	

Table 6. (continued)

	Voting Intentions	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
LDP	vote for the party supported	-	-	-
	vote for another party	2	100	
	will not vote	-	-	
	Total	2	100	
MHP	vote for the party supported	19	86.4	86.4
	vote for another party	3	13.6	100
	will not vote	-	-	-
	Total	22	100	
MP	vote for the party supported	-	-	-
	vote for another party	1	100	
	will not vote	-	-	-
	Total	1	100	
ÖDP	vote for the party supported	2	66.7	66.7
	vote for another party	1	33.3	100
	will not vote	-	-	-
	Total	3	100	
SAGDUYU	vote for the party supported	-	-	-
	vote for another party	-	-	-
	will not vote	2	100	
	Total	2	100	
SHP	vote for the party supported	1	33.3	33.3
	vote for another party	2	66.7	100
	will not vote	-	-	-
	Total	3	100	

Table 6. (continued)

	Voting Intentions	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
SP	vote for the party supported	5	100	
	vote for another party	-	-	-
	will not vote	-	-	-
	Total	5	100	
TKP	vote for the party supported	1	100	
	vote for another party	-	-	-
	will not vote	-	-	-
	Total	1	100	
None	vote for the party supported	1	2.7	2.7
	vote for another party	5	13.5	16.2
	will not vote	31	83.8	100
	Total	37	100	

Table 7.

Differences on Perceived Influence on Self and on Others Related to Media Use

		Perceived Influence	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Newspaper	read daily	more influence on self	6	4.1	4.1
		equal influence on self and others	27	18.5	22.6
		more influence on others	113	77.4	100
		Total	146	100	
	do not read daily	more influence on self	1	0.7	0.7
		equal influence on self and others	35	25.2	25.9
		more influence on others	103	74.1	100
		Total	139	100	
TV	watch daily	more influence on self	6	4.1	4.1
		equal influence on self and others	32	21.8	25.9
		more influence on others	109	74.1	100
		Total	147	100	
	do not watch daily	more influence on self	1	0.7	0.7
		equal influence on self and others	30	21.7	22.5
		more influence on others	107	77.5	100
		Total	138	100	

Table 7. (continued)

		Perceived Influence	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Radio	listen daily	more influence on self	1	1.2	1.2
		equal influence on self and others	19	22.9	24.1
		more influence on others	63	75.9	100
		Total	83	100	
	do not listen daily	more influence on self	6	3	3
		equal influence on self and others	43	21.3	24.3
		more influence on others	153	75.7	100
		Total	202	100	
Internet	surf daily	more influence on self	4	2.5	2.5
		equal influence on self and others	31	19.6	22.2
		more influence on others	123	77.8	100
		Total	158	100	
	do not surf daily	more influence on self	3	2.4	2.4
		equal influence on self and others	31	24.4	26.8
		more influence on others	93	73.2	100
		Total	127	100	

Table 8.

Differences on Voting Intentions Related to Media Use

		Voting Intention	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Newspaper	read daily	vote for the party supported	112	767	76.7
		vote for another party	20	13.7	90.4
		will not vote	14	9.6	100
		Total	146	100	
	do not read daily	vote for the party supported	101	72.7	72.7
		vote for another party	15	10.8	83.5
		will not vote	23	16.5	100
		Total	139	100	
TV	watch daily	vote for the party supported	114	77.6	77.6
		vote for another party	16	10.9	88.4
		will not vote	17	11.6	100
		Total	147	100	
	do not watch daily	vote for the party supported	99	71.7	71.7
		vote for another party	19	13.8	85.5
		will not vote	20	14.5	100
		Total	138	100	

Table 8. (continued)

		Voting Intention	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Radio	listen daily	vote for the party supported	60	72.3	72.3
		vote for another party	9	10.8	83.1
		will not vote	14	16.9	100
		Total	83	100	
	do not listen daily	vote for the party supported	153	75.7	75.7
		vote for another party	26	12.9	88.6
		will not vote	23	11.4	100
		Total	202	100	
Internet	surf daily	vote for the party supported	112	70.9	70.9
		vote for another party	24	15.2	86.1
		will not vote	22	13.9	100
		Total	158	100	
	do not surf daily	vote for the party supported	101	79.5	79.5
		vote for another party	11	8.7	88.2
		will not vote	15	11.8	100
		Total	127	100	

3.3. Results concerning the perceived effect on self and on others, and the impact of the third-person effect on voting intentions

A 3 (voting: vote for the party supported, vote for another party, will not vote) X 2 (message: negative, positive) X 2 (target: on self, on others) mixed design ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor indicated a main effect for target, $F(1, 279)=159.44$, $p<.001$). Participants perceived less impact on self ($M=2.65$) compared to the others($M=4.47$) Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Analysis of perceived influence on self and on others seperately, revealed that respondent's perceptions of influence on self was relatively low and their perceptions of influence on others was moderate. Table 9 displays the frequencies of perceived influence on self and on others.

Table 9.
Perceived Influence on Self and on Others

	Self			Others		
Perceived Influence	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Frequencies	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1 (no influence)	86	30.2	30.2	10	3.5	3.5
2	58	20.4	50.5	5	1.8	5.3
3	52	18.2	68.8	54	18.9	24.2
4	57	20	88.8	76	26.7	50.9
5	24	8.4	97.2	81	28.4	79.3
6	6	2.1	99.3	30	10.5	89.8
7 (large influence)	2	0.7	100	29	10.2	100
Total	285	100		285	100	

Hypothesis 2 predicted that in negative message condition, the third-person effect would increase. However no message and target interaction effect was found ($F(1,279)=1.22$, ns), indicating no difference on the third-person effect related to message valence. Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Furthermore, results did not indicate an interaction effect between target, message and voting intentions ($F(2,279)=.84$, ns). 213 participants reported that they would vote for the party they already supported (74.7%) while 35 participants reported they would vote for another party than they supported (12.3%). Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

The results of the repeated measures analysis of variance were displayed in Table 10.

Table 10.

The Results of the Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance Applied to the Influence on Self and on Others.

Source	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2	Observed Power
Between Subjects Intercept	2937.20	1	2937.20	996.14	.00	.78	1.00
MESSAGE	1.35	1	1.35	.45	.49	.002	.10
VOTING	6.95	2	3.47	1.17	.30	.008	.25
MESSAGE * VOTING	3.27	2	1.63	.55	.57	.004	.14
Error(between)	822.65	279	2.94				
Within Subjects Target (self,others)	189.35	1	189.35	159.43	.00	.36	1.00
Target * Message	1.44	1	1.44	1.22	.27	.004	.19
Target* Voting	5.70	2	2.85	2.40	.09	.017	.48
Target* Message* Voting	1.99	2	.98	.84	.43	.006	.19
Error (within)	331.36	279	1.18				

3.4. Content Analysis Related to Change in Voting Intentions

Content analysis was applied to investigate the answers given to the open-ended question, which asked the participants, in case that they reported they would vote for a party other than they supported, to explain the reason of that.

Although the mixed design ANOVA did not reveal a significant effect, these answers shed a light on the relationship between the third-person effect and voting intentions.

Among 35 participants who reported they would vote for another party rather than they supported, 15 filled in the open-ended question about the reason for that. 4 of them mentioned about the 10% election threshold, emphasizing that they did not believe the party they supported would pass that. One of them noted “I don’t think the party I support will pass the election threshold. I think another party, which shares the same ideology, will pass it and I don’t want my vote to be wasted.” The idea of wasting vote was also mentioned by two other participants.

Another related point was the aim to prevent the partition of votes between parties which share similar ideologies. One participant noted “I will reluctantly vote for CHP. In my opinion, it didn’t make a succesful opposition in the Parliament. Furthermore I don’t support Deniz Baykal either. However, I don’t want the votes to be parted and I don’t want AKP to be in power again.” In a similar manner, another participant stated “As I don’t want the votes to be parted, I am intending to vote for CHP, which, except AKP, will probably win most votes.”

The idea underlying the aim to prevent a party to win the election was pronounced by two more participants. One of them stated “I think AKP and CHP will get more votes than the other parties. As I don’t want AKP to be in power, I believe I can prevent this by voting for CHP.” The other also mentioned that, although she didn’t support any of the political parties, she would vote for CHP because she didn’t want AKP to win the election.

Some of the answers were strongly related to the hypothesis of this study, suggesting a third-person effect on voting. One of them replied “As I don’t believe DYP (Doğruyol Partisi-Truepath Party), the party I support will win the votes of nationalists, I will vote for MHP (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi-Nationalist Movement Party), the party which I believe will win the votes of nationalists.” Another noted “As it is more likely that CHP will get more votes than DSP (Demokratik Sol Parti-Democratic Left Party), I am intending to vote for CHP.” In a similar manner, another participant stated “I actually support DSP. However I am intending to vote for CHP because I think it will get more votes.”

Finally, one of the most interesting answers was from a participant who actually reported that he would vote for the party that he supported: “This question is absurd. Maybe it is normal for the leftists. Because they vote for CHP although they don’t like it.”

In sum, these answers revealed that, at least some of the respondents’ voting intention was shaped in line with their predictions or perceptions about the possible voting trends of *others*. They stressed that, although they did not support that specific party, they would vote for that because (a) they did not want their votes to be wasted (b) they did not want the votes to be parted between similar parties (c) they did not want the party which they opposed to win the election. All of these underlies that respondents thought pragmaticly and made cost-benefit analysis for their voting intentions. They made their decission by taking the possibility of a party to win the election into account, which indicated that they considered the *others’ behaviors* before they act.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to understand how people's perceptions about self and others influenced their behaviors when they encountered a media message.

Consistent with the previous literature, results provided strong evidence for the third-person effect, indicating that people perceive less influence on themselves compared to others. This finding confirms the robustness of the perceptual component of the third-person effect.

As a matter of fact, respondents reported relatively lower degrees of self influence and moderate degrees of others' influence, which in the end caused a significant third-person effect. As the degrees of influence on self and others were not explained in detail in most articles, it is hard to compare this finding with the previous studies. Still, we may argue that respondents did not perceive much message influence either on self or on others. The difference between the impact of a message on self and others, which indicates a third-person effect, may be a result of *underestimation* about the influence on self, rather than *overestimation* about the influence on others. Originally, Davison (1983) asked whether it was possible that people did not overestimate effects on others but underestimated the effects on self. Although this question was not generally addressed it the third-person studies, findings of the current one, shed a light on this possibility. In fact, whether it is related to underestimation of effect on self or overestimation of effect on others, the result does not change. In each case, people perceive they are less influenced than others, which supports the perceptual component of the third-person effect.

Although results indicated a strong third-person effect, message valence (positive vs. negative) did not cause a significant change in the third-person effect. H2, predicted that, respondents would report more third-person effect if they perceived the message as negative. However this hypothesis was not supported.

There may be at least four explanations for this finding. First of all, in literature, there are a number of studies which suggest that the third-person effect occurs regardless of the message being perceived as positive or negative. (see Eveland and McLeod, 1999; Paul et al. 2000). David (2004) suggested that the third-person effect is a "robust persistent social judgement bias" (p.226) which occurred in both negative and positive message conditions indicating that whereas the first person effect has less support.

Secondly, in the third-person literature, political messages are generally treated as negative (Perloff, 1999). Therefore it may be argued that, participants, regardless of the message content, might have perceived the message as negative. Furthermore, as being influenced by a political message might be considered as undesirable, participants might have perceived the message negatively in both conditions.

Thirdly, unlike many western countries with two major parties, which indicate a political polarization, Turkish political system consists of a number of political parties. Despite the study focused on the two strongest parties (one from right, one from left wing), respondents reported support for other parties rather than those. As the message used in the study was either pro-CHP or pro-AKP, in each condition, it was emphasized that only these two parties would pass the election threshold and the rest would not succeed. The message was constructed in this way because this was the best way to stimulate the participants, who actually supported a party rather than these two and who were the real targets of the study as they may report a change in their voting intentions in favor of AKP or CHP. However this might have caused an obscurness about how respondents perceived the message, blurring the estimations about the valence of the message.

Fourth explanation is also related with this obscurness. In line with many previous studies, the valence of message was assumed in this study, rather than assessed. So we can not be absolutely sure about how respondents actually perceieved the message, which may affect the results related to message valence.

Therefore the finding, which indicates no message valence effect on the third-person effect, should be interpreted considering the possible explanations discussed above.

The main hypothesis of this study suggested that one would change his voting intention when he thinks that others would vote for a party which was different than he supported. However, results did not indicate a significant third-person effect on voting intentions.

As a matter of fact, in the third-person effect literature, in general, behavioral component of the third-person effect had less support compared to the perceptual component, similar to the present results. Still, a number of points should be taken into account in order to interprete this finding accurately.

First of all, the content analysis about the reason of voting for another party rather than the supported one, revealed that people's perceptions about how others would act had a visible impact on voting intentions of some of the participants. Those participants reported that, they would vote for another party rather than they supported either because they did not want their votes to be wasted or to be parted between similar parties or they did not want the party which they opposed to win the election.

Secondly, the questionnaires were delivered two months before the parliamentary elections in Turkey. So it is possible that, the respondents might have already processed a number of media messages about political issues and especially about the election until that time. One may argue that, in that period, they might have

already assessed the effects of those messages on themselves and on others, perceived a third-person effect and reconsidered their voting intentions taking the possible reactions of others into account. Few participants, who reported they would vote for the same party they supported, indeed checked more than one party. The vignette used in the study might be perceived as a message similar to many other messages the respondents encountered before. In short, we may think that third-person effect already took place and influenced the participants' decisions.

Thirdly, the participants of this study were university students, who are accepted to be more idealist in their political stand (Kışlalı,1990) and who perceive themselves as more educated and smarter than others (Paul et al.2000). Therefore, we may suggest that they reported a low level of change in their intentions because of this characteristics, which might have caused them to persist on their initial position even if they realized other people would act in another way. Indeed, they might have already *elaborated* media coverage about political issues and the election and this might have caused them to insist on their preference because they thought this was the right choice.

Fourthly, one might argue that the respondents' need for consistency influenced the results. As they were first asked which party they supported and then asked if they would vote for the same party, they might have tried to be consistent and answered the latter question, considering their answers to the former one. As a matter of fact, while designing the questionnaire, this possibility was taken into account and a number of questions –and also the vignette- were placed between these two in order to prevent any primacy effects. Still, in line with the results, a pre-test, post-test design might have been a better way to assess the change in voting intentions, an issue which future studies may deal with.

Taking all these together, we may discuss the limitations of this study. First limitation is related to the participants. As the main hypothesis of the study was not supported statistically, but content analysis indicated –at least for some

participants- third-person effect was the reason for the change in voting intentions, a larger sample size may contribute to support the hypothesis. Furthermore, the possible effects related to the participants' being students should be taken into account. So, this hypothesis should be tested again with a random and larger sample group. Finally, to prevent any possible influence of need for consistency, a pre-test/post-test design may be preferred, asking which party they supported in the pre-test and leaving the question if they would vote for the same party or not to the post-test phase.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

VIGNETTE (pro-CHP)

Last Friday night, in the discussion program "Söz Sizde" on TRT 1, it was suggested that CHP would be the first party in the coming election, which would be followed by AKP and neither of the other parties had a change to pass the 10% election threshold.

Besides politicians and academics, a number of people from different parts of society showed up in the program.

Cengiz Semer, the chairman of the Political Social Research Center (PSRC) stated that they interviewed 3.418 people, 28,7% of whom reported that they would vote for CHP and 24% reported they would vote for AKP. Semer mentioned that 6,8% of respondents stated that they would vote for DYP and 6,4% for MHP, adding the rest of the parties including ANAP and DSP had no change to pass the 10% election threshold.

VIGNETTE (pro-AKP)

Last Friday night, in the discussion program "Söz Sizde" on TRT 1, it was suggested that AKP would be the first party in the coming election, which would be followed by CHP and neither of the other parties had a change to pass the 10% election threshold.

Besides politicians and academics, a number of people from different parts of society showed up in the program.

Cengiz Semer, the chairman of the Political Social Research Center (PSRC) stated that they interviewed 3.418 people, 28,7% of whom reported that they would vote for CHP and 24% reported they would vote for AKP. Semer mentioned that 6,8% of respondents stated that they would vote for DYP and 6,4% for MHP, adding the rest of the parties including ANAP and DSP had no change to pass the 10% election threshold.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

This study aims to understand some of your feelings and thoughts. There is not a wrong or right answer. The important thing is to define your sincere thoughts. Writing down your name is not required. Please do not leave any unanswered question. Thanks for your contribution.

1. **Gender** .....:
2. **Age** .....:
3. **Department**.....:
4. **The location you spent most time in your life:**
   - Metropol (İstanbul/Ankara/İzmir).....☐
   - City .....☐
   - Town.....☐
   - Village .....☐
5. **Marital Status:**
   - Married .....☐
   - Single.....☐
6. **Do you read newspaper everyday?**
   - Yes.....☐
   - No.....☐
7. **If yes, please define the amount ..... ……**
8. **Do you watch TV everyday?**
   - Yes.....☐
   - No.....☐
9. **If yes, please define the amount……. .....**
10. **Do you listen to the radio everyday?**
    - Yes.....☐
    - No.....☐
11. **If yes, please define the amount …….. .....**

12. Do you surf the Internet everyday?

Yes.....☐

No.....☐

13. If yes, please define the amount .....

14. Which topics draw your intention most in the news sources mentioned above? (You can check more than one)

Current events.....☐

Politics.....☐

Economy.....☐

Foreign Affairs.....☐

Sports.....☐

Entertainment.....☐

Cultural issues.....☐

Other (Please define).....☐

16. Which political party do you support?

(Party names are listed in alphabetical order)

AKP - Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party) ☐

ANAP - Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party)..... ☐

ATP - Aydınlık Türkiye Partisi (Bright Turkey Party)..... ☐

BBP - Büyük Birlik Partisi (Great Union Party) ..... ☐

BCP - Bağımsız Cumhuriyet Partisi (Independent Republic Party)... ☐

BTP - Bağımsız Türkiye Partisi (Independent Turkey Party)..... ☐

CDP - Cumhuriyetçi Demokrasi Partisi (Republican Democracy Party).... ☐

CHP - Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)..... ☐

DSP -Demokratik Sol Parti (Democratic Left Party) ..... ☐

DYP -Doğru Yol Partisi (Truepath Party)..... ☐

DTP - Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Democratic Society Party)..... ☐

EMEP - Emeğin Partisi (Work Party)..... ☐

EP - Eşitlik Partisi (Equality Party) ..... ☐

GP - Genç Parti (Young Party)..... ☐

HAK-PAR Hak ve Özgürlükler Partisi (Rights and Freedoms Party) ☐

HÜRPARTİ - Hürriyet ve Değişim Partisi (Liberty and Alteration Party).. ☐

HYP - Halkın Yükselişi Partisi (People's Rise Party) ..... ☐

İP - İşçi Partisi (Labour Party)..... ☐

LDP - Liberal Demokrat Parti (Liberal Democrat Party) ..... ☐

LTP - Lider Türkiye Partisi (Leader Turkey Party)..... ☐

MHP - Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party)..... ☐

MP - Millet Partisi (Nation Party) ..... ☐

ÖDP - Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi (Freedom and Solidarity Party)..... ☐

Sağduyu Partisi (Common Sense Party) ..... ☐

SHP - Sosyaldemokrat Halk Partisi (Social-democrat People's Party)☐

SP - Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party) ..... ☐

TKP - Türkiye Komünist Partisi (Turkish Communist Party) ..... ☐

UMP - Ulusal Muhtariyet Partisi (National Autonomy Party) ..... ☐

YP - Yurt Partisi (Homeland Party)..... ☐

YTP - Yeni Türkiye Partisi (New Turkey Party)..... ☐

17. How much do you feel yourself as close to CHP?

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Very close Very distant

18. How much do you feel yourself as close to AKP?

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Very close Very distant

*** (The vignette was placed here)**

19. Does this news affect which party you are going to vote for?

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

a large influence **no influence at all**

20. Does this news affect which party the others are going to vote for?

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

a large influence **no influence at all**

21. What is your opinion about the political party news presented in media?

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

very objective **not objective at all**

22. Which party are you going to vote for?

AKP - Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party) ..... ☐

CHP - Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party) ..... ☐

Other ..... ☐

Please define .....

23. Is the party you are going to vote for same with the party you support?

Yes ..... ☐

No ..... ☐

24. If not, please define its reason.

……..

……..

……..

……..

……..