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DIGITAL ACTIVISM: SOCIAL MEDIA USE OF UNIONIST WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Internet that has created radical changes in our personal lifestyle turned consumer users into content creators with the introduction of social media. Such change not only restricted with individuals has also transformed organizational and institutional communication methods. When Arab Spring, Gezi Park protest cases were investigated, it is possible to see that social media plays an important role in social movements with communication and organization dimensions. Social media emerges as an environment that needs to be used effectively for social movements, union struggles and activist attempts. Intense use of new communication technologies in social movements revealed digital activism concept. In this study, social media use of unions which are at the same time activist individual formation is analyzed in terms of female members. Quantitative research is conducted with the participation of 238 unionist women. Findings show that unionist women actively use social media and share union events on social media although they are not managers. Facebook is the most frequently used environment by participants for union purpose. Participants prefer to follow union agenda on social media platforms rather than union corporate website or internet news sites. Unionist women use social media between one hour and three hours on average per day. Unionist women with high average social media usage time per day care more about the number of their own followers. As membership duration of participants to union increase, there social media union share state increases as well. It is believed that unionist women are effective for union communication of social media.

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STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

Today, social media movements are managed not by single leaders but by voluntary activists with equal management right. These initiatives that has different discourse and action than conventional social movements are called activism and their actors are called activists (Sert, 2015:21). Activists try to create public opinion, attract attention of the society in that direction and influence decision makers in various topics by using different tools and methods. Expansion speed of internet and mobile technologies eliminates geographical borders and enables individuals to support international activism movements as well as local and regional movements which opens the way to inform the world about these actions. Activists that organize by communicating on internet and mobile technologies give a new dimension to social movements and activism and introduce digital activism concept.

Main purpose of this study was to reflect unionist women's social media use for union communication and activism context. For this purpose, research hypothesis was identified as follows.

H1: There was statistically significant difference between union duty of unionist women and union related social media sharing.

H2: There was statistically significant difference between union membership duration of unionist women and union related social media sharing.

H3: There was statistically significant difference between platform that unionist women followed the union agenda and participation to online petitions.

H4: There was statistically significant difference between platform that unionist women followed the union agenda and thinking that social media is an effective tool for union communication.

H5: There was statistically significant difference between unionist women social media usage duration and care about their follower numbers.

Survey universe consisted of unionist women in Turkey. Since it was impossible to reach complete research universe due to time and financial factor constrains, unionist women with different socio-demographic properties were selected with stratified sampling method. In this study, survey method was adopted as data collection method and participants were asked to complete a 29-question survey form. Pilot survey study was conducted with 30 participants and Cronbach Alpha value was found as 0.894. Possible problems during this study were considered and survey acceptance was limited with 250 surveys and error-free surveys of 238 participants were analyzed. Data obtained as a result of this study were analyzed and investigated with SPSS 24.0 statistics program. Descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency distribution and ANOVA and t-test were used to analyze the data.

Internet and social media development triggered structural changes in various processes ranging between social movements and union protests. Organization of digital era occurs on digital platforms. Currently, information propagates faster as it is independent of time and space. Actions, protests, civil disorder attempts strengthened with digital

opportunities and these opportunities made these open to large mass participation. Local level activist protest can find supporters from all over the world. Social movements with challenging participations due to social roles and safety risks in different geographies around the world turned into digital right claims and online petitions with the effect of technology. Such transformation created a ground especially for women to participate activism movements in an easier fashion. Female members of unions as an activist formation uses social media platforms in terms of union communication and activism. In addition to traditional participations methods, unionist women used interactions methods such as likes, comments, shares and petition. According to research results conducted with participation of unionist women, social media was actively used by female union members. Majority of unionist women used social media on average of 1-3 hours per day. Unionist women with high average social media usage time per day cared more about the number of their own followers compared to women with less usage time. It was found that Facebook was the most commonly used platform by unionist women. Twitter ranked the second following Facebook. Unionist women share union posts on social media. It was found that women with older union membership were more willing to share union posts on social media compared to new members. Unionist women mainly follow union agenda on social media. After social media, online news sites and union websites are other spaces where unionist women follow the agenda. Unionist women support online petitions. Online petition participation status of unionist women who follow the union agenda on social media was higher than participant women who follow the union agenda from other environments. Internet and social media platforms offer new opportunities for right-based protest organizations such as unions, associations and activists. One of the ways to raise national and international level awareness is to effectively use these platforms. Especially choosing digitalized organization, communication and action methods rather than traditional participation methods both facilitates and strengthens female activist participation.

Keywords: Activism, Digital Activism, Activist, Unionist Women, Social Media

DİJİTAL AKTİVİZM: SENDİKACI KADINLARIN SOSYAL MEDYA KULLANIMI

ÖZ

Bireysel yaşam biçimimizde köklü değişiklikler meydana getiren internet, sosyal medya gelişmesi ile birlikte tüketici olan kullanıcıları aynı zamanda birer içerik üreticisi haline getirmiştir. Yalnızca bireylerle sınırlı kalmayan bu değişim, örgütlerin ve kurumların iletişim yöntemlerini de dönüştürmüştür. Arap Baharı, Gezi Olayları gibi örnekler incelendiğinde, sosyal medyanın iletişim ve örgütlenme boyutuyla toplumsal hareketlerde önemli bir rol oynadığı görülmektedir. Toplumsal hareketler, sendikal mücadeleler ve aktivist girişimler için sosyal medya etkin kullanılması gereken bir mecra olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır.

Toplumsal hareketlerde yeni iletişim teknolojilerinin yoğun kullanımı dijital aktivizm kavramını ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu çalışma kapsamında, aynı zamanda aktivist birer oluşum olan sendikaların sosyal medya kullanım boyutları kadın üyeler özelinde incelenmiştir. 238 sendikacı kadın katılımcı ile nicel bir araştırma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bulgulara göre; sendikacı kadınlar sosyal medyayı aktif olarak kullanmakta ve yönetici olmasalar dahi sosyal medyada sendikal paylaşımlarda bulunmaktadır. Katılımcıların sendikal amaçlı en sık kullandıkları mecra Facebook'tur. Katılımcılar sendikal gündemi sendikanın kurumsal internet sitesi ya da internet haber siteleri yerine sosyal medya platformları üzerinden takip etmeyi tercih etmektedir. Sendikacı kadınlar sosyal medyayı günlük ortalama bir ile üç saat arasında kullanmaktadır. Günlük ortalama sosyal medya kullanım süresi fazla olan sendikacı kadınlar, kendilerinin takipçi sayılarını daha çok önemsemektedir. Katılımcıların sendikalarına olan üyelik süreleri arttıkça sosyal medyada sendikal paylaşım yapma durumları artmaktadır. Sendikacı kadınlar, sosyal medyanın sendikal iletişim için etkili olduğunu düşünmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aktivizm, Dijital Aktivizm, Aktivist, Sendikacı Kadınlar, Sosyal Medya

Introduction

Today, social media movements are managed not by single leaders but by voluntary activists with equal management right. These initiatives that has different discourse and action than conventional social movements are called activism and their actors are called activists (Sert, 2015:21). Activists try to create public opinion, attract attention of the society in that direction and influence decision makers in various topics by using different tools and methods.

Protests, strikes, sit-ins, boycotts by consumers, civil disorder are activism activities at the hearth of social change. However, activism might not always be directly related with action. Lobbying activities which are initiatives to influence law-makers and administrators within political and legal mechanism is a type of activism activity. (Cammaerts, 2007:217). Open dictionary Wikipedia defines activism as "conscious act to create social change or political change" (Wikipedia, 2019).

Social movements that experienced today show structural differences compared to social movements in the past. One of the important fundamental reasons for such transformation in social movements is technological developments. In addition to expansion of mobile technologies and easier internet access, social media provided wider freedom and movement area to individuals compared to real life. According to Digital in 2019 report, 4.4 million of 7.6 million world population has internet access (Wearesocial, 2019). Social movements and political participation in the information age intensely uses personal communication tools to influence public opinion and mass communication tools (Castells, 2007, 249). Expansion speed of internet and mobile technologies eliminates geographical borders and enables individuals to support international activism movements as well as local and regional movements which opens the way to inform the world about these actions. Activists that organize by communicating on internet and mobile technologies give a new dimension to social movements and activism and introduce digital activism concept.

Digital Activism

Digital activism is related both with digital technologies used in certain activism activities and social, political and economic factors where this technological usage happens. While combination of technologic infrastructure, devices, networks, applications and codes are the starting point of digital activism, it certainly isn't an end point. Changes in social, political and economic factors are effective

on technology use practices of activists (Joyce, 2010:2). According to Sivitanides and Shah (2011) digital activism studies mainly focus on more technical properties. Activism concept is missed. Regardless of organization by face-to-face, on phone or on social media, challenges in group protests are also valid for digital activism protests. Answer to questions such as inclusion of people, how to coordinate these protests, how to fulfil the purpose and who is the main target of these protests is not the technology. While technology facilitates certain things in some activist actions, it can also complicate things in others.

Figure 1: Basic Perspectives to Digital Activism

Source: Mutsvairo, (2016).

Mutsvairo, (2016: 4) explain digital activism concept with three fundamental perspectives as optimists, pessimists and persistents:

Optimists: Optimist perspective suggested by researchers such as Yochai Benkler, Clay Shirky and Graeme Kirkpatrick is based on two fundamental principles. First, digital world has a different and alternative network structure than traditional hierarchical power structures. This structure eliminates traditional hierarchical relationship and permits acting. Second, digital world is built as social. This approach means users to select and use the technology, platform and content. Optimism argues that digital activism will change existing political hierarchy and strengthen citizens.

Pessimists: Pessimists emphasize anti-democratic control of technology. Pessimists like Morozov remark that digital technology offers a new control, surveillance and torment method to oppressive government and strengthen disruptive actions of ill-willed organizations such as terrorists. Pessimist believe that government can subject access barrier to contents and monitor online actions of citizens. According to pessimists, technology endangers them rather than helping.

Persistents: Persistents believe that internet has changed activism practices. According to persistents, offline processes such as mobilizing, organization and message propagation are more effective with technology. Persistents focus on the fact that digital tools facilitate slower activities with high costs. Persistents accept that technology only potentially improves existing conditions and argues that radical changes and emergence of different activism types are not possible.

When internet is used in constructive form when supported especially with traditional media cooperation and face-to-face meetings with politicians, it can be an effective tool for activism. Internet networks consolidate both small groups and well-financed large enterprises. Activities such as educating public and media, collecting charity, creating transnational cooperation, collecting petitions, announcing protests, planning and managing regional and global scale activities are easier with internet networks. (Denning, 2001: 287). Researchers show that activists who use internet more frequently participated to

protest and demonstrations more compared to activists who use internet less (Breuer, Landman and Farguhar, 2014: 780). Internet that gained a new dimension with development of Web 2.0 became an environment where more content is circulated. Social media platforms that were introduced with Web 2.0 provides new opportunities to activists.

Social media is gaining more active role in communication of activist acts. Intense use of social media develops visual aspect of activist acts. Social media enables circulation of large number of photographs and videos. (Poell, 2014: 728). In addition to social networks like Twitter and Facebook, instant messaging applications like WhatsApp have become important spaces in terms of self-reflection of individuals with opposing ideas and impacting mainstream agenda (Mutsvairo, 2016: 6). Arab Spring has a historical importance where digital environments were intensely used for protestors to communicate among them, organize their protests and to collect international level support towards these protests. Digital media forms an infrastructure for rooted communication connection between activist groups before large protests and offers organization practices. With civil leaders, large public mass was impelled to support protest via digital networks (Castells, 2013: 101). Social media networks that can be easily accessed by participants of all age turned into a strategic tool for social movements as national and global support to protests via these networks increased.

Social media based social movements first started in Arab world and later, similar protests were seen in various European countries and the US (Castells, 2013: 18). Public who moved on the streets for various protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Turkey and the US communicated over social media. Announcing these protests to masses and to the world was again via social media.

Unionist Women and Digital Activism

Priority of post-1980 female movement was to raise awareness to domestic violence and to create public opinion on this subject. Main purpose was to discuss domestic violence at public setting and to create social transformation (Yılmaz, 2014: 551). According to Toksöz and Erdoğan (1998: 17), women's movement in Turkey started in 1980s. Although there were female prioritizing studies in pre-1990 period unions, women's movement in unions started in 1990s. In this period, union reform movements related with women around the world influenced Turkish context and triggered unionist women to organize and raise their voice.

At the same time, 90s is marked as expansion of the internet. In this period, internet significantly contributed to activities by unions and civil society organizations. Organizational struggles and protests were expanded to large masses with websites. During 2000s and in later periods, popularity of social media platforms significantly influenced states, political parties, unions and associations. Currently, in addition to corporate websites of civil social organization, it has become mandatory to have corporate social media accounts.

Result of a study on unionist women shows three important findings. First, union social media accounts have limited influence on communication within the union. Second, members who actively follow union social media accounts believe that interaction of these platforms with union should be improved. Union members with active followers prefer social media to be informed about rights, campaigns and various topics. Third, unionist women show more interest to certain topics on social media accounts than male members. Historically, when it is considered that female members showed less interest to unions than male members, female member participation on social media platforms consolidates union participation (Thorntwaite, Balnace and Barnes, 2018: 414).

According to another study that analyzed social movements of female associations in Turkey in terms of social media use found that Facebook was the most commonly used platform by female associations. Female associations cannot effectively use their own websites. Fast communication and free sharing properties of social media is emphasized in female association usage preferences. Main

reason for female associations to use social media is expressed as reaching to more individuals (Aksu, 2017: 156).

Social media and digital technologies not only facilitate information access of activist women, but also enabled them to communicate at an unprecedented larger scale with new methods. Social media compared activist women with various alternative narrative and perspective in addition to personal perspective (Brimacombe, Kant, Finau, Tarai, 2018: 5). Numerous studies show that women experience technical challenges and risks when using technology (Goswami and Dutta, 2015: 56). Social media platforms that enable faster, easier and more sharing of users is a platform especially for female who struggle with technology to self-express easily. Increased internet access opportunities and multilanguage support of social media platforms laid the ground for women's participation to political and activist actions (Sreberny, 2015: 357).

Internet and social media platforms enabled supporting protests independent of the protest venue. As female activists support existing protest via internet and social media, their digital activism movement planning is facilitated. Numerous Arab women played an active role in protests and riots in their countries. Women are frequently emphasized in protests that voice demands such as reform and democratization. For example, vlogs broadcasted by Esma Mufahiz ignited the sparks of Egyptian revolution. Numerous young-old women like Esma Muhafiz were in Tahrir square with their children. (Castells, 2013: 74).

Unionist Women's Union Related Social Media Use Research

Methodology

Main purpose of this study was to reflect unionist women's social media use for union communication and activism context.

For this purpose, research hypothesis was identified as follows.

H₁: There was statistically significant difference between union duty of unionist women and union related social media sharing.

H₂: There was statistically significant difference between union membership duration of unionist women and union related social media sharing.

H₃: There was statistically significant difference between platform that unionist women followed the union agenda and participation to online petitions.

H₄: There was statistically significant difference between platform that unionist women followed the union agenda and thinking that social media is an effective tool for union communication.

H₅: There was statistically significant difference between unionist women social media usage duration and care about their follower numbers.

Survey universe consisted of unionist women in Turkey. Since it was impossible to reach complete research universe due to time and financial factor constrains, unionist women with different socio-demographic properties were selected with stratified sampling method. In this study, survey method was adopted as data collection method and participants were asked to complete a 29-question survey form. Pilot survey study was conducted with 30 participants and Cronbach Alpha value was found as 0.894.

Possible problems during this study were considered and survey acceptance was limited with 250 surveys and error-free surveys of 238 participants were analyzed. Data obtained as a result of this

study were analyzed and investigated with SPSS 24.0 statistics program. Descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency distribution and ANOVA and t-test were used to analyze the data.

Findings

Table 1: Demographic Properties of Participants

Property		Frequency	Percent
Age Groups	18-24	5	2,1%
	25-31	25	10,5%
	32-38	73	30,7%
	39-45	92	38,7%
	46-52	37	15,5%
	53 and Above	6	2,5%
	Total	238	%100
Education Status	Secondary Education	2	0,8%
	Associate	10	4,2%
	Undergraduate	180	75,6%
	Master	42	17,6%
	Doctorate	4	1,7%
	Total	238	%100

As seen from Table 1, majority of participant unionist women were between 39-45 years old with 38.7%. Lowest participating age ground was 18-24 years old unionist women with 2.1%. Majority of participant women completed undergraduate education (75.6%). Lowest participation in terms of education group was secondary school graduate unionist women (0.8%).

Table 2: Union Properties of Participants

Property		Frequency	Percent
Duty	Member	101	42,4%
	Manager	137	57,6%
	Total	238	%100
Union Membership Period	Less Than 5 Year	43	18,1%
	5-10 Years	125	52,5%
	More Than 10 Year	70	29,4%
	Total	238	%100
Union Agenda Follow-up platform	Newspapers	4	1,7%
	Televisions	5	2,1%
	Union Web Sites	39	16,4%
	News Web Sites	50	21%
	Social Media	140	58,8%
	Total	238	%100

As seen from Table 2, 42.4% of participant unionist women were members without management duty and 57.6% were members with active management duty. Majority of participations were a member of the union for 5-10 years. 29.4% of participants were a union member for more than 10 year. New members with less than 5 year membership were 18.1%.

Table 3: Social Media Usage Properties of Participants

Property		Frequency	Percent
Daily Social Media Use Period	Less Than 1 Hour	62	26,1%
	1-3 Hours	129	54,2%
	4-6 Hours	36	15,1%
	More Than 6 Hours	11	4,6%
	Total	238	%100
Commonly Used Social Media Media for Union Related	Facebook	117	49,2%
	Twitter	59	24,8%
	Youtube	3	1,3%
	Instagram	46	19,3%
	Others	13	5,5%
	Total	238	%100

As seen from Table 3, more than half of participant unionist women used social media 1-3 hours per day in average. (54.2%). Participants who used social media more than 6 hours per day were 4.6%. Participants who used social media less than 1 hours per day were 26.1%. Majority of participant unionist women expressed that they most commonly used Facebook for union purpose (49.2%). Facebook was followed by Twitter (24.8%). Instagram, popular photograph sharing network, was frequently used by unionist women (19.3%).

Table 4: Difference Between Union Duty and Union Related Social Media Sharing Status

Case	Position	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Union Related Social Media Sharing	Member	101	3,88	1,002	-1,794	0,074
	Manager	137	4,11	1,000		

As seen from Table 4, t-test results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between unionist women union duty and union related social media status. Accordingly, H_1 hypothesis was rejected ($p > 0,05$).

Table 5: Difference Between Union Membership Duration and Union Related Social Media Sharing Status

Case	Membership Duration	N	Mean	F	p
Union Related Social Media Sharing	Less than 5 Year	43	3,74	6,935	0,001
	5-10 Years	125	3,91		
	More than 10 Year	70	4,37		

As seen from Table 5, ANOVA test results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between unionist women membership duration and union related social media status. Accordingly, H_2 hypothesis was accepted ($p < 0,05$). There was linear relationship between unionist women membership duration and union related social media sharing. As membership duration increased, social media sharing increased. Unionist women with more than 10-years membership shared more union related content on social media compared to other unionist women.

Table 6: Difference Between Agenda Following Platform and Online Petition Participation

Case	Platform	N	Mean	F	p
Online Petition Participation	Newspapers	4	4,00	3,077	0,017
	Televisions	5	3,20		
	Union Web Sites	39	3,36		
	News Web Sites	50	3,80		
	Social Media	140	3,98		

According to ANOVA test results on Table 6, there was statistically significant correlation between unionist women social media platform used for agenda following and participation to online petitions. Accordingly, H3 hypothesis was accepted ($p < 0,05$).

Table 7: Difference Between Union Agenda Following and Thinking That Social Media Is an Effective Tool for Union Communication

Case	Platform	N	Mean	F	p
Thinking That Social Media Is an Effective Tool for Union Communication	Newspapers	4	4,75	4,029	0,004
	Televisions	5	4,80		
	Union Web Sites	39	4,64		
	News Web Sites	50	4,12		
	Social Media	140	4,60		

As seen from Table 7, there was statistically significant difference between platform that unionist women followed the union agenda and thinking that social media is an effective tool for union communication. Based on ANOVA test results, H₄ hypothesis was accepted ($p < 0,05$).

Table 8: Difference Between Daily Average Social Media Usage Duration and Caring About Number of Social Media Followers

Case	Usage Duration	N	Mean	F	p
Caring About Number of Social Media Followers	Less Than 1 Hour	62	3,08	4,745	0,003
	1-3 Hours	129	3,50		
	4-6 Hours	36	3,86		
	More Than 6 Hour	11	4,18		

According to ANOVA test results on Table 8, there was statistically significant correlation between unionist women social media usage duration and care about their follower numbers. H₅ hypothesis was accepted ($p < 0,05$). Unionist women cared more about their follower numbers as their social media usage duration increased.

Results

Internet and social media development triggered structural changes in various processes ranging between social movements and union protests. Organization of digital era occurs on digital platforms. Currently, information propagates faster as it is independent of time and space. Actions, protests, civil disorder attempts strengthened with digital opportunities and these opportunities made these open to large mass participation. Local level activist protest can find supporters from all over the world. Social movements with challenging participations due to social roles and safety risks in different geographies around the world turned into digital right claims and online petitions with the effect of technology. Such transformation created a ground especially for women to participate activism movements in an easier fashion. Female members of unions as an activist formation uses social media platforms in terms of union communication and activism. In addition to traditional participations methods, unionist women used interactions methods such as likes, comments, shares and petition.

According to research results conducted with participation of unionist women, social media was actively used by female union members. Majority of unionist women used social media on average of 1-3 hours per day. Unionist women with high average social media usage time per day cared more about the number of their own followers compared to women with less usage time. It was found that Facebook was the most commonly used platform by unionist women. Twitter ranked the second following Facebook. Unionist women share union posts on social media. It was found that women with older union membership were more willing to share union posts on social media compared to new members. Unionist women mainly follow union agenda on social media. After social media, online news sites and union websites are other spaces where unionist women follow the agenda. Unionist women support online petitions. Online petition participation status of unionist women who follow the union agenda on social media was higher than participant women who follow the union agenda from other environments.

Internet and social media platforms offer new opportunities for right-based protest organizations such as unions, associations and activists. One of the ways to raise national and international level awareness is to effectively use these platforms. Especially choosing digitalized organization, communication and action methods rather than traditional participation methods both facilitates and strengthens female activist participation.

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