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ABSTRACT

This working paper sheds light on digital feminist activism in Turkey. The opportunities and limitations brought by digital media to feminist movements have been analysed at three levels: *visibility*, *solidarity*, and *awareness-raising*. Based on online observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews with the digital media moderators from nine feminist movements, the qualitative analysis shows that digital platforms have created counter-public spheres, alternative media for feminist movements, and reinforced women solidarity and feminist awareness-raising in Turkey. However, these affordances are limited by several global and local factors such as platforms' logic challenging the visibility of social movements (commercialisation, temporality, rules of platforms, etc.), digital divide limiting women's participation, limited organisational resources of feminist groups, political repression and surveillance, and the rise of online misogyny.

INTRODUCTION

Communication has always played a crucial role in social movements. Both traditional media and new media play a central role in the formation of social movements, the dissemination of dissident messages, the mobilisation of masses, the formation and strengthening of political identities conceived and owned by activists, and the struggle for seeking rights and justice. Communication networks are essential for the emergence of social movements, the organisation of activists, making their voices heard by politicians and the public, and thus ensuring social change. Activists use various media forms as their 'repertoires of communication' (Mattoni, 2013), and develop complex and hybrid 'information ecologies', using old and new media together, to fight against injustices (Treré, 2012; Treré, 2019).

Digital media have radically changed the ways social movements communicate, organise and take action; and there is a large body of literature on digital activism. Digital media, especially social media, have enabled a new participatory culture and new activism practices. Today's activists, who engage instantly and permanently in online social networks, create globally and horizontally self-organised movements (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2014: 365-378). Activists use traditional and new communication technologies in hybrid and creative ways in order to expose injustices, create agendas, put pressure on politicians, mobilise citizens, organise and maintain solidarity. Cammaerts analyses communicative affordances of social media for social movements putting activist 'self-mediation logics' under six categories: dissemination of protests movements' discourses through a variety of channels, mobilisation and recruitment for online and offline direct actions, internal organisation, coordination of direct actions, self-recording protest events and archiving (2015a: 91). However, technological opportunities of new media may be constrained by "techno-political orientations" that determine how a certain technology is conceived of and utilised." (Gerbaudo, 2017: 484).

This research project aims to examine the role of digital media in feminist movements in Turkey. This study seeks to address the following questions: What impact do digital media have on feminist activism in Turkey? What are the opportunities and limitations of digital media for feminist movements? Which digital tactics do feminist activists use in digital platforms to challenge patriarchy? Digital practices of feminist activists are analysed at three levels, which are interrelated:

1- **Visibility:** the potential and limits of digital media to create counter-public spheres and alternative media for feminist movements.
2- **Solidarity:** the potential and limits of digital media for solidarity among women and organisation of feminist movements.
3- **Awareness-raising:** the potential and limits of digital media to produce feminist subjectivities and to create social change.

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AFFORDANCES OF DIGITAL FEMINIST ACTIVISM

Cyberfeminism dates back to early Internet scholarship, to the late 1980s and the early 1990s. These earlier studies have drawn attention to the potential of the Internet as a new public sphere for women (Schulte, 2011, p. 731). Nowadays, some authors argue that the fourth-wave feminism (Baumgardner, 2011; Martin & Valenti, 2012; Munro, 2013; Bertrand, 2018) has emerged with the proliferation of Web 2.0 technologies through which feminists are engaged in challenging sexism and misogyny, fostering a collective call-out culture (Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, 2019: 24), creating alternative media, and empowering global solidarity among women. However, others suggest that the combination of feminism and the Internet does not itself constitute a shift from third-wave to fourth-wave feminism (Bromley, 2012, cit. by Risam 2015). Korn and Kneese (2015: 707) note, furthermore, that feminist approaches to social media encompass a variety of strategies analysing online feminist practices in light of many concerns such as identity, ethnicity, sexuality, class, infrastructure, design, algorithms, etc.

Women are not only combatting patriarchy offline but also online, using various tools and techniques. Digital feminist tactics comprise of hashtag campaigns, disclosure of sexual harassment or abuse on social media, agenda-setting, online feminist call-out culture, video activism, digital archiving, data activism, etc. The digital labour of feminist activists includes a variety of tasks: digital content production and moderation, organising volunteers and "rota systems", offline training initiatives, engaging in public talks and events, blogging, engaging, designing apps/interface and websites for their campaigns (Mendes *et al.*, 2019: 134-135), writing and updating media guidelines, submitting complaints to formal media regulatory bodies (Gleeson, 2016: 5), attempting to forge affective connections and solidarities among readers (Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, 2019: 91). Due to a lack of institutional solutions, feminist activists are pushing back via "digilantism", DIY justice online (Jane, 2017a: 11).

The purpose of this study is to explore the possibilities and limitations of digital activism for feminist movements through three main interrelated concepts: *visibility, solidarity*, and *awareness-raising*. Media visibility is always essential for social movements and activists to achieve public recognition and expose their causes (Cammaerts *et al.*, 2013:10). Both individuals and women's organisations use effectively digital media to create *counter-public spheres* (Fraser, 1990) and *alternative media*. Based on critics of the Habermasian idealised bourgeois public sphere, counter-public spheres bring together people who are excluded or who disagree with the dominant organisation of the public sphere, and who often build their own media and networks of communication and with them their counter-publics (Calhoun, 2011: 14). The globalisation of modernity, the crisis of dominant public spheres (Fenton & Downey, 2002: 22), the digitalisation of society, and the rise of networked communication have

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paved the way to the proliferation of counter-public spheres and alternative media. From an agonistic perspective, "the Internet is a site of political struggle and conflict, a contested terrain, supporting marginalised discourses to develop their own deliberative spaces, to link up with other excluded voices in developing representative, strategically effective counter-discourses and subsequently to contest those meanings and practices dominating mainstream public sphere(s)." (Dahlgren, 2007: 134). Digital public spheres are fragmented areas that appear around events, whose borders are blurred, where the street and the virtual world intertwine and complement each other, where struggles appear and disappear depending on the flow of information.

In neoliberal societies, feminist digital activism is dependent on the economy of visibility, and feminist activists are keen to be visible by having a continuous editorial production on their digital media and by appropriating the codes of the digital culture (Jouët, 2017). This struggle for visibility requires intense productivity and online presence, and also user unpaid labour (Fotopoulou, 2016: 54). The Internet enables feminist activists to make room for criticising patriarchal and mainstream media narratives and creating their own narratives and feminist media. Several tactics have been developed to challenge sexist discourses in online social networks: Feminists regularly reveal, intervene, and report sexist and misogynist discourses. Digital discursive struggle includes the revelation of sexist discursive strategies of the hegemonic media, the intervention on sexist discourses in online platforms, the formation of a new feminist lexicon against sexist expressions. Blogs, newspaper and magazine sites, Facebook pages, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube profiles curated by feminists stand out as alternative media where women make voices and build their own language. Moreover, the work of visibility done by feminist activists aims to have an impact on the mainstream agenda. Wang & Driscoll highlight the role of social media in Chinese feminism. In addition to articulating a specific online presence, Chinese feminists also attempt to build relationships with mainstream media to encourage them for a more gender-conscious reporting (2018: 1).

One of the most important contributions of digital platforms for women is that they have turned into a "hotline" where women can apply to for their problems, and share their feelings and thoughts, and get stronger by coming together with other women who have similar experiences with them. The Internet has enabled networks of solidarity for survivors of violence beyond geographic barriers, provided a forum for consciousness-raising and storytelling (Jackson, Bailey & Welles, 2020: 3). Digital technologies have enabled the creation of a collective identity among women who are geographically dispersed (Desborough, 2018:347). Social media provide a promising milieu for political conversations leading to the proliferation of communities and collectives (Cammaerts, 2015b). Citing Tilly, Mattoni and Treré (2014:253) note that 'social movements are said to "take place as conversations" in which

activists interact with "multiple audiences"'. These conversations help the collective to reflect on and revise its identity and self-understanding. Feminist rhetorical practices in digital spaces are based on two key values: community against masculinist notions of isolation and control, and personal experiences as expressed through (Davis, 2019: 138). Community building in digital platforms includes the tasks related to the internal and external communication of the movement: organisation and coordination of activists within the movement (roles and tasks of activists, financial resources, collaborative work, internal communication and decision-taking processes), creating publics and forging communities through networked communication at local, national and international levels, creating affective support groups for survivors of domestic violence, informing women on their rights and bring together women in need of help and experts, recruiting new members for direct actions, articulation of online and offline activism.

Beyond time and space boundaries, the Internet has connected women from different geographical areas, enlarged solidarity, and facilitated collective action. The feminist struggles at the local, national and international levels are linked through social media. A hashtag is a popular tool for creating feminist publics and building activist networks. In her analysis on the #Metoo movement, Clark-Parsons argues that hashtag feminism is a contentious performance through which activists make the personal political and bridge the individual the collective to speak out against sexual violence and illustrate the systemic nature of social injustice (2019: 1-16). Certainly, the #MeToo movement has had a global impact, going beyond Hollywood, leading to the revelation of sexual harassment and assaults committed by many famous and/or powerful men in various sectors.

Women have been aware for a long time that social media can be used as a weapon against patriarchy; and anti-harassment campaigns are held in many countries. In 2015, the murder of Özgecan Arslan, who was a psychology student from Çağ University in Mersin (Turkey) and killed while resisting attempted rape, caused nationwide outrage and protests across the country. On the following days, a hashtag campaign was organised on social media using the label #sendeanlat (#youtoo). The hashtag invited thousands of women to share their sexual harassment stories in digital platforms and showed how Turkish women and girls suffer from harassment or assaults in their everyday lives. The Twitter hashtag functions as a site of collective identity for participants who use it to "share personal stories, to index and encode feminist analysis, to critique oppressive practices, and to create and struggle over boundaries of identity" (Barker-Plumer & Barker-Plumer, 2017: 107). By articulating individual stories of injustice with collective experiences of structural inequality, hashtag feminism highlights the interplay of the individual and the collective (Baer, 2016: 29). Hashtag campaigns may have several functions for digital feminist activism such as challenging the popular misconceptions and victim-blaming, providing support and solidarity among survivors of abuse, recruiting

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new allies to participate in feminist movement, raising awareness (Storer and Rodriguez, 2020: 166). Although hashtag activism seems to be one of the most popular forms of activism today, digital feminist activism goes beyond that: comments made on a mom blog (Steiner and Bronstein, 2017), women's Whatsapp groups, or women's page on Facebook, for instance, any online group that enables women to get together and share their experiences can be considered as a space for everyday digital feminist activism.

Thus, the micro-interactions of women on the Internet have paved the way for the formation of feminist subjects. The digital labour of feminists on social media makes women's issues visible and raises awareness among social media users. In particular, young women who spend more time on social media are introduced to feminist ideas, campaigns, and organisations via online social networks. Keller (2011: 1) notes that teenage girls are actively reframing what it means to participate in feminist politics through the practice of blogging and providing new understandings of community, activism, and even feminism itself. In this sense, online social networks can be conceived as awareness-raising platforms (Mendes *et al.*, 2019: 4), and educational spaces for women.

Inherited from the revolutionary feminist consciousness-raising groups that have emphasized the importance of learning about patriarchy, male domination and sexism expressed in everyday life creating awareness among women (Hooks, 2015: 11), online feminist networks provide pedagogical spaces for many women. Puotinen and Falcon (2012: 74) defines virtual consciousness-raising as a process that involves "recognizing how the personal is political" and "making deep and meaningful connections with others through the sharing of stories and focused critical reflection on oppression and promoting wide-spread critical awareness and social transformation". Gleeson (2016) considers online feminist campaigns as a form of affective labour through which feminists perform a style of digital consciousness-raising. Feminist community-building in online platforms involves sharing personal stories, making alliances through comments, raising awareness about solutions, and questioning gender stereotypes (Jenkins and Wolfgang, 2018: 253). In digital feminist groups, various tactics against sexism are discussed, an anti-sexist lexicon is created and circulated, and feminism is experienced as a mutual learning process. Feminist subjects are built with these micro-interactions in online social networks. Strategies learned on social media platforms may deepen institutional knowledge and influence policy decisions (Korn and Kneese, 2015: 708).

CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL FEMINIST ACTIVISM

However, digital media also have limits and risks for social movements, and feminist movements, in particular. The socio-technical configuration of digital platforms, the political regime in which the social movement operates, online misogyny, existing social inequalities, personalised and affect-based digital action are among the factors constraining today's digital activism.

Visibility can be restrained by various factors such as commercialization and tabloidization of digital platforms, "filter bubbles" and "echo chambers" caused by algorithms of digital platforms, state surveillance, and censorship. Even though digital platforms have led to the proliferation of counter-public spheres and alternative information channels for social movements, mainstream politics, and popular culture also tend to colonialise social media and digital news; political elites and media professionals actively manage political and media messages (Schroder, 2018: 35). With the commercialisation of popular social media platforms, a distinction between a dominant public sphere fostered by traditional mainstream media and counter-public spheres fostered by social media would be problematic (Uldam & Vestergaard, 2015: 7). Rather, digital platforms pave the way for one-dimensional, superficial, tabloid, post-truth politics (Fuchs, 2018: 705-6). Digital politics are based on the logic of spectacularisation, which might be imitated by social movements as well. The social media reporting practices of protesters tend to mirror much-criticized mainstream reporting by focusing on the violence and spectacle (Poell and van Dijck, 2015: 530). Another factor to take into consideration is the political regime in which feminist movements operate. In several countries in the World, ruled by authoritarian regimes, feminism is still considered a taboo, and feminist activists are stigmatised and criminalised by the State, the media, and other social actors. Hou's study on feminism in China elucidates how the State surveils and silences feminist activists in online spaces, and the mainstream media still hold "feminist phobia" (Hou, 2020: 342). Through her work on digital feminist activism in Saudi Arabia, Alsahi (2018: 317) demonstrates the importance of digital feminist activism in a country in which the mobilisation of women is restricted by laws, sociopolitical culture and unfavorable general perception toward feminism seen as a threat to society loosening morals and threatening family cohesion. In their global study on the #MeToo hashtag, Lee and Murdie (2020: 24-5) have revealed that individuals living in open political systems, in which political and civil rights and civil liberties are protected better, engage more in the #MeToo movement, and they have concluded that domestic political structures are a key factor in online activism.

Online solidarity among women may be constrained by several factors: neoliberal individualism, the rise of popular misogyny in digital media, the digital divide that keeps

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women from participating online, the reproduction of existing power relations and inequalities among women in cyberspace, and the fact that digital media do not always guarantee the building of strong ties among feminist movements and women. Positing digital feminist activism in a neoliberal context, Baer claims that individualisation and privatisation of politics have led to commodified private micro-rebellions rather than collective resistance (2016:30). She argues that online feminist protests are process-based political actions searching for a new political paradigm and combating the neoliberal reduction of the political to the personal rather than emancipation and social change (Baer, 2016: 30).

Digital collective action is based on a more individualist functioning, and feminist groups are now appropriating advertising and marketing strategies to manage their presence and activity on web" (Jouët *et al.*, 2017: 52). Linabary, et al. (2020: 1841) found that hashtag activism can be both liberatory and oppressive while it can create solidarity and empower victims/survivors, it can also lead to revictimisation, reinforcement of dominant discourses including victim-blaming, and placement of the responsibility on the individual rather than on structural dynamics. Schradie (2014) points out the role of ideology, hierarchy and inequality in digital activism. She found that social movement organisational differences have an impact on their Internet use. Opposing the argument that digital activism leads to non-hierarchical groups, she has revealed that groups that are more hierarchical and bureaucratic possess the infrastructure to develop and maintain online engagement (ibid: 1). In addition, Schradie draws attention to a phenomenon she called the "digital activism gap" emphasising the role of digital labour, resources and class issues within social movements.

Digital activism may become problematic for groups with fewer resources and more working-class members (Schradie, 2018: 71). Further, digital technologies may be used by men as new tools of surveillance and domination to control and restrict women's social relationships and technology use and result in new forms of hegemonic masculinity. Online harassment, stalking, control of the partner's social media accounts, recording and sharing her images or voice without her consent, manipulating her images, capturing and publishing her personal information, forcing to sex, revenge porn, defamation, humiliation, hacking, misogynistic and homophobic hate speech are among common forms of gendered digital violence. As a result, gendered digital violence creates toxic areas for women, as misogynist, homophobic, transphobic hate speech, supported by algorithmic bias, are rapidly going viral on social media. Parallel to popular feminism's visibility, popular misogyny, as a structural force, is networked, expressed, and practiced on multiple platforms, attracting other like-minded groups and individuals (Banet-Weiser, 2018: 13).

Digital media may lead to the normalisation of sexist and homophobic hate speech and the reproduction of everyday sexism. Albeit symbolic, digital violence has severe consequences that deeply affect the lives of individuals, leading to psychological problems, traumas, even

deaths. According to a study conducted by Amnesty International in 2017, 41% of women are subjected to online violence or harassment at least once in their lives. Gendered e-bile could cause self-censoring, writing anonymously or under pseudonyms, or withdrawing from online domains altogether to avoid abuse (Jane, 2014a; cit. Jane 2017b). Another constraint to digital feminist activism can be the fact that networked communication is based on 'weak ties' that cannot translate into long-term political projects. Barassi (2015: 171) reminds that activism still depends on the action on the ground, face-to-face interaction, discussion, deliberation, and confrontation for stronger ties and concrete political projects.

The immediacy and temporality of online communication, poor political discussions, affective communication may limit awareness-raising for the feminist movement. Accelerating information sharing tends to simplify complex political discussions and creates a kind of political participation based on weak affinities and strong emotions rather than shared political identities (Barassi, 2015: 148-9). Papacharissi (2014: 2-3) interprets Twitter messages as soft structures of feeling that create a sense of belonging for users beyond rational thought and deliberation, however she suggests that these affect mini-worlds generate a publicness that is "politically sensitised yet generally dismissive of normatively defined political consciousness". Community and 'togetherness' are ephemeral due to the technological architectures and business models of social media, favouring personalisation, real-timeness and virality (Poell and Van Dijck, 2015: 534), and affective communication dominates social media. Unlike face-to-face consciousness-raising groups, social media do not guarantee the formation of collective identity and may work as self-help mechanism for users. Lack of time for discussion, lack of attention time, and lack of time for preparation interviewing and production in online communication constitute other factors having negative impacts on digital activism (Fuchs, 2018: 691-692).

TURKISH CONTEXT

The feminist movement in Turkey has produced its alternative media since the 19th century (Çakır, 2016). From the first feminists in the Ottoman Empire to the second-wave feminists in the 1980s, feminist media activism was based on print media: 44 women's magazines and newspapers were published between 1980-90, and 63 between 1990-96 in Turkey (Diner and Toktaş, 2010: 46). In the 90s, feminist movements have started using different communication tools (internet sites, blogs, film festival, radio and TV programmes, digital archives, etc.) due to the diversification of feminist movements (in that period, socialist, Kurdish, Alevi, Islamist conservative and other feminist groups have appeared) and to the diffusion of the Internet. Some feminist journals and newspapers have shifted to the Internet (İlhan, 2014: 6). Founded

in 1990 in Istanbul, Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi (the Library of Women's Works) aims at collecting, archiving documents on gender studies and transferring them to future generations. Established in 1996, Uçan Süpürge (Flying Broom) has created a network of local women reporters and served as the coordination and communication centre for different women's movements allowing them to communicate, share experiences and produce common policies (Kardam and Ecevit, 2002: 93). The institutionalisation of feminist movements, the inauguration of gender and women's work centres and graduate programmes within universities contributed to the development of the third-wave feminism in Turkey. Eslen-Ziya (2013: 868) draws attention to the increasing role of social media in the Turkish women's movement, and she indicates that women are now participating in debates in social media and social networking groups, creating networks and organising protests.

Digital platforms have added a new dimension to women's struggle in Turkey. Over the last years, feminist social media accounts and blogs have flourished in Turkey. Most of them are focused on the struggle to stop femicide and violence against women. Feminist digital activists expose male violence, advocate for women who are subjected to violence and harassment, are in solidarity with families who lost their daughters/mothers due to domestic violence, profit from social media to put pressure on the judicial process. Besides femicide, everyday sexism, misogynist discourses produced by Turkish politicians and media, education, Islamisation, headscarf, abortion, political participation of women, labour rights are the main topics of the feminist agenda.

Undoubtedly, the popularity of feminism in Turkey cannot be explained only by the social media factor. Repressive policies of the political Islamist government towards women and the increasing numbers of femicide have driven women to take action in advocacy groups for women's rights. According to *Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu* (Platform to Stop the Murders of Women), 3,185 women have been killed by men between 2008-2019 in Turkey, and most of the perpetrators are the former spouses or partners[2]. Every year, thousands of women attend the Feminist Night March, which is held in Istanbul's Taksim Square on March 8th, and they appeal to the government to take legal measures against femicide and gendered discrimination. Dozens of platforms have been created in recent years to prevent murders of women, and feminist movements use social media effectively for mobilisation. In particular, social media serve as an emergency line for women in need of help against harassment in Turkey. Some of the efforts to stop femicide are hashtag campaigns, Anıt Sayaç project (a

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[2] http://kadincinayetlerinidurduracagiz.net/veriler/2889/kadin-cinayetlerini-durduracagiz-platformu-2019-raporu, Accessed on 16th July 2020.

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digital project which visualises the names and stories of victims of femicide)[3], online and offline campaigns held by feminist groups. Other initiatives working on specific women issues such as the controversial headscarf issue, equal pay for equal work, women's political participation, and women's empowerment launch campaigns on social media. Under the authoritarian Islamist regime, which promotes patriarchy and traditional gender roles in society, social media represents a crucial communication tool for feminist resistance and women solidarity.

Moreover, young women, especially university students, who are not a member of a feminist group or an organisation, support women's struggle over social networks; and girls who previously did not identify themselves with feminism, start to engage in feminist actions (Bolliger, 2015: 19). The digital work of young generations, called digital natives, helps feminist movements to reach a wider audience. Online feminism is particularly attractive to a younger generation who grew up in a digital environment and whose bonds with traditional (second wave) feminism were unfavoured by cultural, digital, and generational gaps (Nathansohn, 2013: 28). Kaya (2018: 570) reminds us that the intergenerational differences in women's access to the Internet and social media should be taken into consideration while studying feminist movements. To conclude, women from different classes, ethnic, and religious identities and age groups benefit from digital media to resist both men, who subject them to violence in their private relations, and the political power's discriminative discourses and policies towards women in Turkey.

The preliminary academic work on feminist media in Turkey began in the early 1990s: Saktanber's article (1990), "Türkiye'de Medyada Kadın: Serbest, Müsait veya iyi Eş, Fedakar Anne" (Women in Media in Turkey: Free Available Woman or a Good Wife, Devoted Mother), Aziz and Köker's book (1994) "Medya, Şiddet ve Kadın" (Media, Violence and Women), Timisi's book (1996) "Medyada Cinsiyetçilik" (Sexism in the Media). Between 2007-2017, 95 master and doctoral theses on women and media were published (Atay, 2018:1414). Some NGOs and alternative media also contribute to women studies literature publishing regular reports: MEDİZ (Media Monitoring Centre), founded in 2007, conducts studies to monitor and report sexism in mainstream media. Hrant Dink Vakfı (Hrant Dink Foundation) regularly publishes the Hate Speech Reports on Turkish media and examines the representation of women in media. Independent media organisation BİANET and Cinsel Şiddetle Mücadele

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[3] http://anitsayac.com/, Accessed on 16th July 2020.

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Derneği (The Association for Struggle) against Sexual Violence have recently issued manuals for journalists on gender issues.

According to Şener, *et al.* (2016), theoretical frameworks related to gender and media studies in Turkey can be divided into four categories:

1- Studies on the representation of gender roles in media, especially in television and advertisements.
2- The role of the media in the identity construction of different forms of femininity and masculinity
3- Media use or media consumption by women and men
4- Political economy approach which analyses sexism in the media industry and news production.

In recent years, the scholarship on digital feminist activism in Turkey is also growing. Two main approaches can be distinguished in these studies:

1- The analysis of sexist discourses on social media platforms
2- The analysis of digital feminist media (blogs, websites, social media pages, etc.).

The majority of these studies have adopted content or critical discourse analysis techniques to analyse sexist discourses or alternative discourses produced by feminists groups (Terkan, 2010). Only a few studies have used in-depth interview research techniques, and to reveal the motivations of feminists using social media.

Aslantürk and Turgut have identified six-sexist categories on *Ekşisözlük* (Sour Dictionary), one of Turkey's most popular social media platform: women as an inadequate/ incomplete individual, normative female image, misogyny, objectification of women, exclusion, and other (2015: 64). Şimşek also examines the discourses on women shared on the website *İtiraf.com*, and finds that the discourse on the traditional role of women in society dominated the platform, but also many female users objected to this (2012: 60). Kanlı and Dikmen (2013) examine the representation of women in social media pages of *Ala Loca* magazine, which broadcasts for conservative women, and they state that conservative women are exposed to consumer culture and commodification of their bodies. In his analysis of #*sendeanlat* hashtag, Özdemir (2015) reveals that some women, who share their experiences of harassment in *Ekşisözlük*, adopt a male dominant discourse and reproduce sexist rhetoric. Latif and Karkış (2018) examine the representation of women in social media advertising suggesting that sexist discourses in traditional media were reproduced in new media. On the contrary, Karabacak

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and Sezgin prove that social media advertisement can challenge the mainstream representation of the female body and make different body representations possible (2016).

On the other hand, the studies on digital feminist activism (Tekvar, 2017; Karagöz, 2017; Şen & Kök, 2017; Acıyan, 2018; Özkan, 2018; Aliefendioğlu, 2019) highlight the functions of social media for women's movement. In these studies, social media is conceived as an alternative public sphere and an agenda-setting tool for women issues. Two studies focus on the role of digital media in the construction of feminist identity. Akyılmaz and Köksalan (2016) argue that a new and dynamic conservative feminist identity has emerged through blogs. Göker analysed three feminist blogs *5Harfliler, Çatlak Zemin and Recel-blog*, and she claims that these websites serve as a platform for the negotiation of feminist identities and feminist memory work (Göker, 2019: 313). Based on interviews with feminist organisations, Aksu (2017: 155) observes that social media offer faster, cheaper and easier communication tools for women's associations enabling them to reach a wider audience. These studies generally focus on the analysis of texts circulated on social media; and practices of digital feminist activists are understudied in Turkey, except for two studies (Eslen-Ziya, 2013; Aksu, 2017). However, in today's networked societies, analysing digital practices merits particular attention to understand the motivations and behaviours of Internet users, as "prosumers" of Web 2.0 create the content of social media. There is constant and instantaneous interaction between offline and online mobilisations, and social media is not an alternative, instead of a complementary space to the physical world, a new tool for getting closer and maintaining face-to-face communication (Gerbaudo, 2012: 21-3).

METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach taken in this study is mainly based on qualitative research techniques. This study adopted online ethnography and semi-structured in-depth interview technique. As the first step in this study, I created a list on my own Twitter account in October 2019, and I started to follow the Twitter accounts of several feminist organisations from Turkey by adding them to my list. Similarly, I started following the accounts of feminist organisations on Facebook and Instagram regularly. Online observation helped me to get more familiar with feminist issues in Turkey, to understand various ways feminist organisations use digital platforms, and also to learn about the similarities and differences between feminist

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organisations, controversial issues, language, and jargon they use. The online observation also helped me to formulate in-depth interview questions.

The main reason for choosing the in-depth interview technique is to try to understand the motivations and challenges behind the practices and performances of feminist organisations on digital platforms as online observation gives limited insight into the research object and the use of digital platforms by activists. Semi-structured interviews with nine digital media moderators of feminist groups were conducted online via Whatsapp and Skype between February-March 2020. Since I live in England, I planned the fieldwork both online and offline. I was thinking to start the in-depth interviews online, then go to Turkey to continue offline in March. However, due to the pandemic situation followed by a national lockdown, I could not travel to Turkey, and I had to carry out all the interviews online. Unfortunately, lockdown has affected my psychology badly, like millions of people. I was able to return to work again after two months with poor concentration and anxiety.

For the sampling, feminist organisations specialised in a particular feminist cause, and umbrella organisations were listed. Only one of the many organisations working on similar issues was selected. To reflect the diversity of the feminist movement in Turkey, feminist groups from different political views were included in the study. I sent an invitation message to 21 feminist organisations via e-mail and social media accounts to take part in my study. While some organisations did not reply, some stated that they could not spare time for the interviews due to the 8 March work. Nine in-depth interviews were held in total.

The interviewees were asked about their feminist activism background, digital media use, and feminist tactics they use in digital media. The purpose of in-depth interviews is to understand the motivations behind the digital practices of feminists and the factors that may affect them. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half an hour. All interviews were audiotaped with the consent of the participants and then transcribed. To protect anonymity, the names of the participants and the feminist movements in which they participate, and their quotations were removed from the working paper; and pseudonyms have been used to replace real names. The data gathered from the interviews were analysed with NVivo, the qualitative data analysis software.

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RESEARCH FINDINGS

Feminist movements interviewed are relatively new; all were established after 2010; except one, which has existed since the 1990s. The emergence of new feminist movements is due to several factors such as the increase in violence against women and femicides, AKP's oppressive policies against women, the spread of social media, which has enabled new spaces for new feminist identities, and the impact of international feminism.

The size of the feminist groups is very diverse ranging from a three-author blog to a 1000-activist network. Three types of organisation can be distinguished: informal and mainly web-based small initiatives such as blogs or websites, large platforms and networks, which are mobilising both online and offline, and formal groups such as associations. Their agenda and activities differ according to their causes; whereas some of them are general-interest groups fighting for all women's causes, others are specialised in a certain issue such as sexual violence, femicide, women's rights, and sexist hate speech. The decision-making process within most feminist groups is based on face-to-face communication with regular weekly or monthly meetings. Whatsapp groups are the most used digital communication platforms among activists in everyday decision-making processes.

Only three feminist groups have no office, and they manage all activities and communication online; others have their own office, activity center, or a commonplace they share with other organisations. Although technological hardware varies from organisation to organisation, feminists often use their own laptop computers and mobile phones for activist purposes. Only two associations consider themselves as "advantageous" in terms of technological infrastructure compared to other NGOs, and they also have a special budget for digital media. Other organisations rely on volunteer work of their activists, donation, fundraising events, and EU funds for the NGOs, for any work, which requires a special budget such as the design of audiovisual materials, web hosting, video shooting and editing, sponsored content, and digital ads to enhance the visibility of the organisation on digital platforms.

The digital labour of feminist activists is invisible, immaterial, precarious, and highly affective (Mendes *et al.*, 2019: 145). Unpaid work, long and irregular hours of working, being exposed to images of violence and dealing with toxic users on a daily basis may lead to stress, burn-out syndrome and secondary trauma. The feminist activists interviewed are middle-class members, in their twenties or thirties, who have received a university education, working full time in a job, except two activists. One activist does not work because she is a university student, while the other states that she prefers to work part-time to devote more time to the feminist struggle. Many activists have been in feminist organisations or groups for more than seven years. While only two of the activists work as full-time staff in their organisation, others work voluntarily. The main tasks of activists are to create, edit and share digital media content (text, messages, slogans, visual materials), and maintaining communication between organisations, activists and their audience. The number of volunteers within the digital media teams of feminist movements can vary depending on the size of the organisation and the work

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to be done. While the digital media team of small organisations consists of at least three people, the team of a large organisation can rise up to 50 people. Apart from the full-time employees, feminist activists spend at least 2 hours a day for their organisations.

Apart from Ayşem whose background is in the advertising sector, activists are amateur users of social media, and they see themselves as good enough at digital media literacy. However, they ask for voluntary work from other activists or for outsourcing when their work requires more technical skills such as website design, video shooting, and editing. Some groups organise training programmes for activists on social media, focusing on the language of the content to be shared, rather than teaching how to use technology.

Digital work of feminist activists involves a lot of affective labour, which can sometimes lead to burnout syndrome. The massive circulation of images of violence on digital platforms may provoke burnout and secondary trauma amongst feminist activists. To deal with this, they practice self-care, by sharing their feelings regularly with other activists online or offline; or by working in rotation to ease their burden. Also, many activists say that they feel empowered despite all the negative news they are exposed to. Either they try to look from a professional perspective or they benefit from solidarity among women. Feminist groups also publish guides on how to report violence and train journalists.

In this section, the findings of the field research are presented under three subheadings following the main themes of the study: visibility, solidarity and awareness-raising in digital feminist activism. In each subtitle, the possibilities and limitations of digital activism for feminist movements are discussed in light of the findings from the interviews.

Politics of visibility: Digital media as feminist counter-public spheres

The way feminist organisations use digital platforms varies according to their audience, goals, budget, human resources, and digital skills. Twitter, Instagram and Facebook are three main platforms that feminist activists use most to distribute their messages. Twitter is seen as an alternative public space that is used both to follow the national agenda and to create an agenda on women's rights. Thanks to hashtag campaigns, retweets, and mention features of Twitter, it is faster for feminist messages to become widespread and set the agenda. In addition, Twitter is described as a tool that facilitates the access of women, who are survivors of violence, to feminist organisations, accelerates mobilisation, and increases solidarity among women. Also, Twitter is perceived by the activists as a "more political" place compared to other digital platforms.

Under the authoritarian regime where almost all of the traditional media is under government control, freedom of expression is threatened, street demonstrations are prevented, in brief, access to the dominant public sphere is restricted by the ruling party, social media and especially Twitter has become an important area and alternative public sphere for dissidents. Instagram is the second most preferred social media platform by feminist movements. Representatives feminist organisations say that they can interact more with a younger audience on Instagram than on any other digital platform. The fact that Instagram is predominantly based on visuality pushes activists to produce more images and videos. They

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mainly use Instagram to announce their events for larger publics. Since the target audience is older on Facebook, it is described as a "traditional social media". However, they think that it is still useful to reach senior women and women living in Anatolia.

Even though Youtube is very popular among Turkish youngsters, and most feminist organisations have Youtube channels, few organisations are active here. The activists state that the production of video content is problematic due to expertise, budget, and technical constraints, and they use this area as a visual archive of their activities. On the other hand, during the lockdown, this platform has been used by some organisations more actively as they broadcasted seminars, events, and training programmes live on Youtube. Almost all feminist groups use Whatsapp as a primary communication tool, and e-mail groups for their internal communication. While some organisations also use Signal and Telegram, another group uses Slack. None of them has started podcasting yet, but some groups are considering podcasting on Spotify in the near future.

Practices of feminist activists in digital counter-public spheres include the exposure of male violence, sexist practices, sexist discourses and the structural patterns of the patriarchal system, the production and circulation of feminist information and discourses, online advocacy (via agenda-setting, hashtag activism, video activism, data activism, etc.) and online discussions on women issues. The agenda of feminist organisations in digital media covers a wide range of women's problems: femicide, suspicious women deaths, domestic violence, child abuse, the Istanbul Convention and Law No. 6284[4], discrimination in the workplace, sexuality, women's health, domestic labor, the rights of working women, women's place in politics, international feminist movements, stories of female role models, the announcement of events seminars and protests organised by organisations. Most feminist organisations' representatives state that they adhere to these ethical rules in content sharing: sharing the news after fact-checking from various resources or contacting subjects, avoiding violent images of women and children to prevent the second victimisation, not sharing the names and images of women without their consent, making visible the perpetrator of the violence, building a feminist language against victim-blaming and sexist discourses of the mainstream media, preventing sexist, slang, insulting content and sharing more egalitarian and non-hierarchical posts on social media. For these ethical rules to be implemented, some organisations state that they provide regular training to their members and discuss these issues.

Feminist activists use various tactics in social media to draw attention to women's rights, to increase their visibility, and to create agendas: hashtag campaigns, retweeting feminist content, mentioning related people and institutions, continuous content production, using

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[4] LAW TO PROTECT FAMILY AND PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, accepted on 8 March 2012 aim to protect women, children, family members who have been subjected to violence or who are at risk of violence. To read the law text, please visit http://www.lawsturkey.com/law/law-to-protect-family-and-prevent-violence-against-woman-6284

visual materials (GIF, video, pictures, graphics, etc.), getting support from social media users and celebrities, and sponsored content.

They believe that collective reactions, hashtag campaigns and agenda setting in social media have created significant public pressure on legal processes and court decisions. Feminist activists often refer to the case of Şule Çet[5], and they emphasise that the perpetrators would not have been arrested and sentenced without the efforts of certain women's organisations and a number of social media campaigns that were launched as a result. The prosecutor had to run a detailed investigation due to public pressure coming from social media users. Sibel told me the story of how they prevented a forced marriage by launching a hashtag campaign the day before the wedding. She said that police had not acted until the social media campaign attracted a high level of public interest, thereafter the groom and his father were arrested during the wedding night. Feminist activists struggle against the discontinuation of legal processes, and impunity, sentence reduction for femicide. They struggle to use social media to make visible women's issues and create public agenda for law enforcement. Aslı thinks that this digilantism also may constitute a disadvantage for women, who are seeking their rights, because it creates misperception about the power of social media. She says that women have started thinking that they will be unable to do anything if they do not shout and make their voices heard on social media, however they need to know that social media is not the only solution and other mechanisms also exist.

Moreover, agenda-setting on social media helps prevent legislators and politicians to restrict women's rights as any of their attempts can immediately get a huge reaction on social media, as many interviewees underline. For instance, since 2016 the government has been trying to present to the Parliament on many occasions, a resolution of an act of indemnity for child abusers; but they have to withdraw the bill every time they propose due to women's organisations campaigns and public pressure. A similar move to cancel alimony is objected to by feminist movements and social media users. Visibility and popularisation of women issues on social media certainly serve for preventing or slowing down the attacks of conservative politics against women's acquired rights. Feminist activists also agree that social media is not enough, and digital activism should always be supported with offline actions such as street protests and litigation.

Digital platforms constitute alternative public spheres as women call out male violence and create new spaces for questioning and discussing controversial issues, taboos, and traditional gender roles in society. One of the interviewees states that women do not remain silent anymore when they are exposed to male violence; they share their experiences and seek support through social media. Nurhayat says that they are receiving numerous articles from

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[5] In 2018, 22-year-old university student Şule Çet plunged to her death from the 20th floor of a plaza in Ankara. Çet's friends and relatives opened the account of @suleicinadalet (@justiceforsule) on Twitter to draw public attention to her unexpected death. During the trial process, it turned out that Şule did not commit suicide, and she was exposed to sexual violence by his boss, and she was thrown down by the window by him and his friend. Thanks to the campaigns of women's organisations, Çağatay Aksu was sentenced to life, and Berk Akand to 18 years and 9 months in prison.

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their audience against domestic violence, criticising family roles and parental pressure on girls, and questioning motherhood. Ayşem says that a message drawing attention to the problem of cervical cancer among trans men, which is an unspoken issue, received many likes on social media.

There is a hierarchy of the visibility of women's issues on social media platforms. Topics such as murders of women, VAWG (violence against women and girls) and child harassment are considered by the activists as the most visible issues on social media. They explain that this visibility is due to the increasing violence against women over the years and the adoption of call-out culture by women on digital platforms. One activist says that the images of female bodies that had been exposed to violence are rapidly circulated on social networks, and then forgotten. According to her, news about femicide spread very quickly, especially if they include images. But a lot of news about femicide and women's rights are not covered on social media, she adds.

According to interviewees, women issues that are less visible on social media are: LGBT rights, economic violence, gender-based discrimination in the workplace, equal pay for equal work, psychological violence, sexuality, abortion, working-class women's rights, women strike, women's political participation, domestic labour, and feminist movements' activities.

The interviewees also mention other obstacles to the visibility of women's issues on digital platforms. First of all, the rapidly changing political agenda in the country and in Twittersphere may decrease the visibility of women's issues. The logic of 'flux' of networked communication also imposes immediacy and the instantaneous flow of information. Counter-information may easily become invisible. Against this phenomenon, digital activists struggle to make their causes more visible and to set the agenda on digital platforms. Feminist activists interviewed say that they organise hashtag campaigns when the agenda is less intense or they relate it to other topics on the main agenda.

Secondly, social media algorithms favor commercial ads or sponsored content, and they may censor activist content. Feminist activists state that Facebook has become commercial, and visibility is reduced unless users buy sponsored content. Also, they suggest that digital platforms sometimes remove their content by claiming copyright. Ayşem says that once Facebook automatically removed their content, because the word "sexual" had been mentioned in their campaign, and the post became accessible again after they held a meeting with Facebook officials. Sibel tells that FEMEN's visuals and pictures related to women's health, especially showing women's breasts are banned by social media platforms. Activists tend to build their communication strategies around social platform's sharing mechanisms and orient these strategies towards the platform's algorithmic selection principles (Poell & van Dijck, 2015: 531). Thirdly, pro-government trolls control and manipulate the Twitter agenda in Turkey, especially after the Gezi Movement in 2013. Especially on Twitter, feminist activists interviewed stress that the intensity of fake bot accounts and trolls reduces the visibility of women's organisations. Finally, self-censorship, which is a common practice among social media users in Turkey over the last years, also affects the visibility of feminist activists. While some feminist activists interviewed state that they never censor themselves on social media,

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and that the women's movement can be silenced neither on the street nor on social media, others say that they need to self-censor sometimes. They follow several tactics to avoid state surveillance and possible legal investigations against them: emphasis on organisational identity, not on individual activists, using anonymous accounts, humorous language, a careful selection of words on social media, not sharing the names and images of those who participate in protests and activities.

"You'll never walk alone": Building networks for women solidarity

The majority of feminist activists interviewed think that the Internet strengthens solidarity among women, connects rapidly women from different cities, ethnicity, socio-economic background, age groups, etc. and ease loneliness. "You'll never walk alone" has become the common slogan of various feminist groups in Turkey. Especially, in cases where public institutions are not sufficient to protect women or there are obstacles to women's access to these institutions, social media and especially Twitter function as a "hotline" where women get in touch with feminist movements and with other women to ask for help. For example, one of the women's organisations interviewed provides 24/7 hotline service for requests coming from women who have experienced violence, direct them to experts (lawyers, psychologists, social workers, etc.), and follow up legal processes.

Representatives of some organisations state that even if their areas of expertise are not violence against women, they may receive applications from their followers, and direct these applications to relevant associations, experts and institutions in the relevant city or town. Nurhayat affirms that many women can find more support on the Internet than they have from their families and friends in daily life, and this is not less effective than solidarity in physical space. According to Banu, women's storytelling on social media has an empowering effect on other women survivors of violence, as it creates a sense of togetherness. Hale thinks that social media provides continuity to solidarity among women, binding isolated women and stories constantly. Individual sexist experiences of particular social media users can be seen as a part of social structures; and social media platforms such as Twitter display these collective groups affected by gender inequality and violence (Drüeke and Zobl, 2016: 46). Feminist activists catalogue and connect these personal stories with structural problems such as gender inequalities, power relations and patriarchal patterns (Mendes *et al.*, 2019: 307), showing how "the personal is political", and they construct counter-publics against patriarchy.

According to the interviewees, the increasing visibility and solidarity of women's issues on social media lead to more offline action, the reactions of individual women on digital platforms can turn quickly into a collective online rebellion, and then online interactions move to the street protests. Sibel states that the effect of social media on street protests can be

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twofold. On the one hand, people's anger is consumed on social media, and this can weaken street movements. On the other hand, this anger can provoke bigger protests depending on the situation. Banu states that street activism has decreased over the past few years due to the "politics of fear" that dominates the country. Aslı says that they no longer make a press release because they cannot reach the mainstream media, press releases have shifted to digital.

Most of the interviewees believe that online communication is successful in creating a sense of "we" among women, a kind of "digital sisterhood". Özlem believes that even though we live apart from each other and we have different experiences as women, we can feel the same on social media. For her, this allows a great empathy among women. Networked communication allows women from all walks of life to connect, act with solidarity on local, national and global levels. Recently, Las Tesis video protest which originated from Chile's feminist movements, has become viral and been adapted by feminist activists in many countries. However, some activists interviewed are skeptical about how much "digital sisterhood" is translated into real life. Although digital platforms have an important role in establishing the first contacts between feminist organisations and women, many activists are suspicious about the transformation of these contacts into "strong ties" and regular relationships. Feminist activists often emphasise that social media constitute only one of their propaganda and communication tools and that online activism needs to be supported with offline activism and translated into long-term political projects for a broader social change. Likewise, Barassi (2015: 171) asserts that stronger ties and concrete political projects in social movements are based on face-to-face interaction, discussion, deliberation, and confrontation. Moreover, the progression from 'togetherness' to 'community' is uncertain as social media-dominated online environments are based on affective communication style, and processes of togetherness are always ephemeral (Poell and van Dijck, 2015: 534).

According to Aslı, social media feeds a sense of "me" rather than a sense of "we" as it is based on individualism and personal popularity. In particular, socialist feminists emphasize the importance of collective struggle recalling that neoliberalism is trying to commercialise and tame feminism. On the other hand, Hale does not see individualism as an obstacle to women's movements. She argues that women suffer because of the rules of collectivist society in Turkey. For her, individualisation is important for women who need to become a person, not to be taken into consideration as a sister of someone or a mother of someone. Similarly, Nurhayat claims that Muslim women are less experienced in the collective struggle than secular women and that individual narratives on digital platforms have opened the way for Muslim women's collective action. In this sense, digital platforms can be considered as places where women are freed from their traditional collective relationships and can discover their individuality. In her ethnographic research in South-Eastern Turkey, Costa (2016: 30) demonstrates how mobile phones have started to break the dominance of family-based communication and how social

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media have become liberating tools creating individual-based social relations (ibid: 5). Furthermore, Göker (2019: 325) shows how pro-feminist women's websites in Turkey "function as counter-publics where the personal and the political feminist identity are discussed and personal stories become sources of discussion and direction for feminist politics". From this point of view, digital media activism can have a modernising and taboo-breaking impact.

While some activists believe that social media make women closer to each other than ever before, some of them express that the existent barriers among them (socio-economic, aged-based, ethnic identity-based etc.) persist in online platforms. They list the main obstacles to women's participation and solidarity in digital platforms as follows: the digital divide, especially the digital divide based on age and geographic region, ethnic identity, political identity, celebrity culture that dominates social media.

Parallel to popular feminism's visibility, popular misogyny, as a structural force, is networked, expressed, and practiced on multiple platforms, attracting other like-minded groups and individuals (Banet-Weiser, 2018: 13). Anti-feminists, who feared and hated feminist thinking and feminist activists, always mobilise their collective forces (Hooks, 2015: 32). Today, anti-feminists are organising using digital media against women's solidarity. Most feminist activists say that they have been subjected to various forms of surveillance and they experience organised attacks on the Internet. Pro-government trolls, anonymous accounts, Islamist and nationalist conservative men are among the principal anti-feminist actors in digital platforms. Like white supremacist patriarchal groups on the Internet in the West, which launch organised attacks on women and feminists activists (Vickery, 2018: 39-40); mostly Islamist and/or nationalist conservative anti-feminist groups mobilise to silence and intimidate feminist activists in digital public spheres. The methods of these online anti-feminist groups also vary: stalking, threats and insults, digital lynching, opening fake accounts, hacking feminist profiles, reporting feminist accounts to digital platforms. Kim (2018: 163) contextualises the proliferation of online misogyny in South Korea within the wider economic and societal framework; and she argues that economic downturn, neoliberal policies and increased wealth gap have led to the crisis of hegemonic masculinity in the country. Similarly, Kandiyoti (2016: 109) claims that there is a crisis in the gender order in Turkey leading to a new phenomenon called "masculinist restoration". She argues that women's rising aspirations and male resistance in Turkey create "a perfect storm in the gender order", leading to more violence against women (Kandiyoti, 2016: 110). Feminist activist Cemile mentions that the more women are stronger in Turkey, the more they are exposed to violence. "Masculinist restoration" manifests itself on digital media platforms as anti-feminist discourses targeting women's rights and upholding men's privileges.

The major concerns of anti-feminists are the reflection of conservative discourses on family and traditional values. Especially since the state of emergency[6], there is a systematic criminalisation of feminist activists like other dissidents; feminist organisations and activists are often targeted and labeled as "terrorists" by political and social actors ranging from top politicians to conservative media and social media users. Feminist activists state that they receive many reactions on issues such as LGBTI rights, the Istanbul Convention, alimony; and they are labeled on social media as "members of the terrorist organisation", "enemy of men", "people who will destroy the Family". This devaluation of feminism attempts to undo gendered and/or raced power imbalances (Gruwell, 2020: 87).

However, despite all oppressive policies, women and LGBTI groups still form the strongest opposition against governmental regulatory actions in gender politics in Turkey (Kıvılcım, 2018). Feminists activists tackle digital harassment by using several tactics which include exposure of the perpetrator, deleting and reporting their offensive messages and comments, blocking perpetrators, suing them, undertaking roster shifts to monitor cyber-attacks (Gleeson, 2016: 4), and self-care etc. The most common tactics against digital attacks among the interviewees are reporting and blocking perpetrator and deleting his comments; the activists rarely sue perpetrators. They have adopted the motto "don't feed the troll". Nurhayat says that they also use humour to tackle these attackers.

Digital media as awareness-raising and pedagogical platforms

Women's storytelling on digital platforms and building communities based on women's problems work as awareness-raising groups and contribute to increasing awareness of women's rights among women and in society in general. Feminist activists agree with the idea that digital platforms raise people's awareness on issues of sexism, male violence, and gender-based discrimination. According to them, women in Turkey know better their rights, laws, and concepts about gender discrimination thanks to feminist information circulated on digital platforms. Cemile says that Law No. 6284 and Istanbul Convention are now known better due to their online campaigns.

The consciousness-raising groups enable communication and dialogue among women and provide a site of conversion to feminist politics (Hooks, 2015: 11). In an online space, geographically dispersed individuals can group and make argumentative discussions which leads to ground-level activism (Blevins, 2018: 105-6). Aslı states that thanks to social media, women's contacts with feminism have increased; more women have started to define

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[6] After the coup d'Etat attempt on 15th July 2016, the Turkish government declared the state of emergency, which lasted until 2018.

themselves as feminists, and many independent and individual women who are not members of any social movement support the feminist struggle. According to Cemile, women from different geographies and different lifestyles have begun to claim their rights, want to decide on their own lives and to live freely as they see on their mobile phones that there are other worlds; and they do not want to give up after gaining their rights. Similarly, Nurhayat says that even though women come from different lifestyles and political views, such as conservative and secular, and they never communicate directly with each other, their blogs function as a platform, which breaks down the prejudices between these two poles. Hale highlights that the negative perception of feminism in society is gradually turning into a positive one due to the increasing visibility of feminism on digital media; and people have started to understand that "feminism is for everybody".

The attitude towards violence against women has also changed due to digital feminist activism in Turkey. Feminist groups struggle online and offline against the normalisation of gender-based violence. Ayşem says that while a harassment or rape incident used to remain on the third page of newspapers in the past, it can now become a Trending Topic on Twitter. She claims that with this increased visibility and the popularisation of feminism, harassment is not seen anymore as acceptable and normal, and victim-blaming has decreased. Özlem thinks that sharing their experience on digital platforms produces a kind of "me too" effect for women, and she considers the increasing number of these digital stories as a sign of awareness. Digital platforms create a space where women learn from each other several tactics to tackle male violence.

Networked communication has also challenged and changed mainstream narratives about violence against women, and sexist discourses. Digital discursive struggle includes the revelation of sexist discursive strategies of the hegemonic institutions and the mainstream media, the intervention on sexist discourses in online platforms, the formation of a new feminist lexicon against sexist expressions. Blogs, newspapers and magazines' web sites, Facebook pages, Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube profiles curated by feminist activists stand out as alternative media where women build their own language. Cemile reminds that "honor killing" is replaced by "murders of women". Hale says that women learned to describe violence against women as "male violence". Some feminist groups hold workshops for the use of non-sexist language and publish guides of feminist terms.

According to feminist activists, the spread of feminist messages on digital platforms help to transform also men's minds and masculinities, but this change is very limited compared to women's transformation. They say that male social media users have started to pay more attention to the language they use, even they can apologise for their sexist expressions, and there are some men's organisations established to support women's movements. Nurhayat states that a lot of men follow their blog however, they do not interact with other readers much,

they prefer to remain silent. Still, feminist activists think that the transformation of masculinity is "very slow", and occurs "in small steps", rather the majority of men show resistance against women's struggles.

One of the most important factors that limit the potential of social media to increase social awareness is that these platforms are based on technological architectures and business models, which promote the viral dissemination of affective messages through personal networks (Poell & van Dijck, 2015: 533-534). Immediacy and temporality of online communication reduce political discussions and favour 'political participation' based on weak affinities and strong emotions (Barassi, 2015:148-149). The shared trauma on Twitter can lead to the creation of networks that offers cathartic release making unignorable the political and cultural demands of a still violently patriarchal society (Jackson, Bailey & Welles, 2020:3). Sibel agrees with this argument stating that social media have become a place for many people to show their anger, and as activists, they need to translate people's anger into real solidarity and mobilisation. According to feminist activists, anger is the leading emotion that dominates social media. Some activists state that the feeling of hopelessness prevails, while others think that women's struggle on social media raises hope.

CONCLUSION

Based on online observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews with digital media moderators of feminist organisations, I analysed digital feminist activism in Turkey at three levels: *visibility*, *solidarity* and *awareness-raising*. At the first level, digital media are conceived as counter-public spheres that enable women to raise their voices and pursuing discursive struggles against patriarchy. The digital work of feminist activists for visibility involves the disclosure of male violence and the systemic patterns of patriarchy, production and dissemination of feminist information (activist reporting), online advocacy (via agenda-setting, hashtag activism, video activism, data activism, etc.), moderation of misogynist, 'toxic' discourses. Digital campaigns have a significant impact on legal processes, forcing law enforcement and on the political process, such as preventing or slowing down the implementation of conservative biopolitics of the government. At the second level, the potential and the limits of digital media for building networks of solidarity are questioned. It seems that digital technologies have created a sense of togetherness, a collective identity for geographically dispersed women in Turkey. They serve as a "hotline" for women seeking help and advice, and have replaced official institutions that do not function properly. Feminist activists construct counter-publics in digital platforms against patriarchy by connecting personal stories to structural problems and political projects. At the third level, digital

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networks are considered as platforms for pedagogical spaces for awareness-raising on women's problems and gender issues. The circulation of feminist counter information and the micro-interactions between women and feminist organisations on the Internet has paved the way for raising awareness on everyday sexism, male violence, and gender-based discrimination, mutual learning, and the formation of new feminist subjectivities. The traditional narratives on violence against women and sexist discourses have also been challenged by digital feminist activism. Therefore, the affordances of digital feminist activism mentioned in the theoretical part of this paper are also prevalent for feminist activism in Turkey and reinforce the main argument that digital activism has an empowering role in today's feminist movements, and generate new repertoires of contention (Tilly, 2006) and new feminist subjectivities. However, these affordances are limited by several global and local factors such as platforms' logic challenging the visibility of social movements (commercialisation, temporality, rules of platforms, etc.), digital divide limiting women's participation, limited organisational resources of feminist groups, political repression and surveillance, and the rise of online misogyny.

This research has several limitations as it is based solely on online observation and nine in-depth interviews with representatives of feminist groups. For a more comprehensive analysis on the role of digital media in building communities and raising awareness in feminist movements, more studies are needed focusing on the activist practices of digital platform users. It is also worth remembering that the digital divide persists and feminist practices are not limited to digital media and continue to be performed both online and offline.

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