THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM IN NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The discussion on the relation between internet use and citizens' civic and political engagement is conducted over two major paradigms. On the one hand, the optimistic viewpoint claims that the internet has been radically transforming political participation allowing for low-cost mass mobilization which would result in overall increased levels of political participation. On the other hand, the skeptical approach evaluates virtual actions like signing e-petitions, joining social networking sites' groups, publishing and sharing campaign content, participating in short–term boycotts as ineffective and frivolous attempts.

This article aims to evaluate political participation opportunities offered by social networking sites, namely "social media activism", in the context of new social movements; and to interrogate the functionality of such activism and its limitations comparatively. Apart from this framework, the fundamental differences which distinguishes new social movements from universalist and class- based social movements, called as "old" will be insisted in the first part of this short study. Afterwards, an understanding that attribute a meaning to social media activism in terms of democratization

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and political participation and affirm this form of participation in the face of the conventional media channels; and another understanding which emphasizes the restricted framework of the former approach will be presented with their essential arguments in the second part of the study. In the conclusion, the dichotomy between positive and negative approach will be discussed.

Keywords: Social Media Activism, Political Participation, New Social Movements, Political Mobilization, Slacktivism.

YENİ SOSYAL HAREKETLER BAĞLAMINDA SOSYAL MEDYA AKTİVİZMİNİN ROLÜ: FIRSATLAR VE SINIRLAMALAR

ÖZ

İnternet kullanımı ve vatandaşların siyasal hayata katılımı arasındaki ilişki üzerine yürütülen tartışma iki ana yaklaşımdan beslenmektedir. Bir yanda, iyimser yaklaşımlar, sunduğu imkanlarla birlikte siyasal katılım biçimlerini dönüştüren internetin, kitle mobilizasyonu yoluyla da siyasal katılım oranını genel düzeyde arttırdığını savunurken; öte yandan, e-imza kampanyalarına, sosyal paylaşım sitelerinde örgütlenen gruplara va düzenlenen siyasal içerikli kampanyalara, kısa süreli boykotlara katılım gibi sanal faaliyetleri etkisiz ve ehemmiyetsiz eylemler olarak yorumlayan şüpheci bir yaklaşım söz konusudur.

Bu makale, sosyal paylaşım siteleri tarafından sağlanan siyasal katılım olanaklarını, bir başka deyişle, sosyal medya aktivizmini yeni sosyal hareketler çerçevesinde değerlendirmeyi; bu yeni siyasal katılım biçiminin işlevselliğini, sağladığı olanakları ve sınırlılıklarını karşılaştırarak sorgulamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu noktadan hareketle, çalışmanın ilk bölümünde, yeni sosyal hareketler ile 1960'ların sonuna kadar toplumsal ve siyasal hayatın önemli bir aktörü olan, evrensellik idddiasına sahip, sınıfsallık temeline dayanan "eski" sosyal hareketler arasındaki temel yapısal ve ilkesel farklılıklar üzerinde durulacaktır. Çalışmanın devamında, sosyal medya aktivizmine demokratikleşme ve siyasal katılım bakımından olumlu bir anlam yükleyen ve bu yeni siyasal katılım formunun geleneksel kitle iletişim araçları karşısında daha işlevsel olduğunu savunan "iyimser" anlayış ve bu anlayışın sınırlı çerçevesini eleştirerek, sosyal medya aktivizmini siyasal katılımı güçlendiren bir unsur olarak görmenin sakıncalarına dikkat çeken "şüpheci" yaklaşım anlatılacaktır. Sosyal medya aktivizmi ve siyasal katılım arasındaki ilişkiye dair birbirine tamamen zıt değerlendirmeler getiren bu iki farklı anlayış arasındaki dikotomi, çalışmanın sonuç bölümünde tartışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Medya Aktivizmi, Siyasal Katılım, Siyasal Mobilizasyon, Yeni Sosyal Hareketler, Pasif Eylemcilik.

INTRODUCTION

What is the role of social media activism in the forms of social organizations that emphasizes individual belongings such as sex, ethnicity and social status in contrast the class identities and, include environmentalism, anti-globalization and gender? Should social media be interpreted as a tool of political participation that makes accessible social movements channels for everyone, in this term democratize the battle ground? On the contrary, does social media activism appear as a daily practice which standardizes social movements and weakens their transformative power? When we take into account the multipartite and identity- based structure of social movements, what can be the contributions and the limitations of participation to these movements which is provided through social media? Briefly what kind of relationship between these two current study fields of social sciences is concerned?

The process of transformation in social movements which started in the 1960s and the 1970s necessitates the transformation of form of participation inevitably. When this process is considered with the technological developments and the Internet revolution, a possibility that social media activism respond to a contextual need become a current issue.

The student movement in Europe in the 1960s was a breaking point in terms of sociological theories that intend to explain social movements. In the industrial era, following a Marxist conceptualization, social movements were considered to be centered in the working class. The labor movement that is organized in trade unions and around political parties aimed to the redistribution of economic power and to extend citizenship rights. In addition to this, it is not possible to say that the movement paid attention to the presence and interests of different identities apart from class identity. From this framework, the classical social movements theory claimed that social movements emerge due to the structural tension, economic crisis and the reaction against modernization. In this viewpoint, the actors of the social movement, with the exception of labor movement, were marginal, irrational individuals who could not be integrated into the system. On the other hand, the structural functionalist approach, the dominant paradigm in the United Stated up until the 1960s, evaluated social movements as the symptom and manifestation of a sick society. According to this

approach, a healthy society does not have social movements. The supporters of this approach considered social movements as semi-rational responses to exceptional conditions of structural stress between the societal institutions.

On the other hand, new social movements separated themselves from the idea of control State power and aim to transform the civil relationships in society. These new movement has shaped by diversifying subjects of political area in the 1960s and the 1970s. In this framework, it can be argued that new theories which focus on both micro historical and macro historical elements of social movements were emerged as a result of the larger socio-political environment.

The disappearance of borders between political spheres and social life, changing shape and form of protest in contemporary times plays an important role in the emerging of new theories in social movements. In this new understanding of social movements, dichotomy of state and civil society is interrogated. Additionally, this new understanding necessitates new participation channels which facilitate to communicate between different groups, to mobilize people sitting at table, and provide to overcome the limitations of time and space pursuant to the atomized structure of new social movements. The aim of this study is to evaluate political participation opportunities offered by social networking sites, namely "social media activism", in the context of new social movements; and to interrogate the functionality of such activism and its limitations comparatively. Apart from this framework, I am going to insist on the fundamental differences which distinguishes new social movements from universalist and class-based social movements, called as "old" in the first part of this short study. Afterwards, an understanding that attribute a meaning to social media activism in terms of democratization and political participation and affirm this form of participation in the face of the conventional media channels; and another understanding which emphasizes the restricted framework of the former approach are going to be presented with their essential arguments in the second part of the study. In the conclusion, the dichotomy between positive and negative approach is going to be discussed.

1. NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Charles Tilly defines social movements as "a sustained series of interactions between power holders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with public demonstrations of support" (Tilly, 1984: 306). Similarly, for Diani and Bison, social movements are "networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups, or associations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity" (Diani, Bison, 2004: 282).

In comparison with the "old" labor movement in terms of their objects, social bases and organizational structures, the civil right movement, the student movement and the women's movement in the 1960's were seen as "new" (Nash, 2000: 88). In contrast to Marxism that evaluates society over-deterministically in the framework of struggle and conflict, this new viewpoint pretends to have a potential for explain the possibilities of radical change at the micro-political level sociologically (Nash, 2000: 87). On the other hand, in contrast to the functionalist approach that focuses on the State and societal structures, new social movements perspective adopts an identity-oriented viewpoint. According to Touraine, new social movements are based on the struggle of social actors on the structure of civil society. In this context, he points out that the structure of social classes has changed in the late 1960s. In the face of the vanguard role of working class, different identities came into prominence in different struggles. In this way, Touraine emphasizes the rising horizontal relations based on the political participation in decision-making process.

The theorists of New Social Movements Paradigm highlight socio-cultural dimension of social movements in contrast to its socio-political aspect which aims to realize a change in political sphere. Alain Touraine, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Claus Offe are among the most important intellectuals who have contributed to the development of the theory. In this paradigm, new social movements are considered as a leading battleground for collective action in civil society or the cultural field instead of being the arena of instrumental action in the state.

According to Alain Touraine, these movements are new, because they are separated from themselves from the idea of control state power and aim to transform the civil relationships in society. He builds on his original work on postindustrial society and develops his view of social movements in opposition to the structural determinism of Marxism and structural functionalism dominant in American sociology until the 1970s. With Touraine's own words, "In Europe, where Marxist theories of social movements dominated, Marxist theorists were unable to provide a convincing explanation for why students had become the vanguard of protest and why movement demands centered around quality of life rather than redistributive issues" (Touraine, 1971). According to him, the aim of an ongoing struggle between classes defined by relations of domination is "the control of historicity" (Touraine 1992). In postindustrial society, these classes take the form of social movements as they enter into this struggle. The key field of conflict for these classes is culture, and the central challenge concerns "who will control society's growing capacity for self-management" (Buechler, 1995). In his formulation, Touraine evaluates new social movements as a battleground between the system that seeks to maximize production and subjects who aims to defend and expand their individuality (Touraine, 1992).

Furthermore, according to Alberto Melucci, there is a relation between the plurality and fluidity of identities in the postmodern era and in its social movements and the structures of such movements (Melucci, 1980). He argues that the postmodern world brings new forms of social control, conformity pressures, and information processing to which new social movements respond (Melucci, 1985). In his view, the plurality of memberships plays an important role in weakening traditional points of reference and sources of identity. This means that individuals' tendency to take part in collective action is related to their capacity to define an identity (Nash, 2000: 88). In this sense, the social construction of collective identity is both a precondition and an ability of the new social movement.

In conclusion, instead of universalist concerns and protesting, identity- based social movements refers to the direct interests of particular social groups (Nash, 2000: 88). Cultural features, different lifestyles and active participation in protest have a central place in the new social movements (Nash, 2000: 88). In this context it is important to note that these movements are organized around specific issues

rather than offering general solutions (Nash, 2000: 90). In the theory, the actors of these new social movements have concrete aims rather utopian ideals and rational strategies. Instead of changes in the law and social policy, consequences of these changes in civil society are the focus point of their activities (Nash, 2000: 91). In other words, this new approach concentrates on civil society rather than the state.

At this point, it is important to emphasize that new social movements that are arranged in more flexible and informal ways are distinguished from labor movements in terms of their organizational structures. Respectively, this nature of new social movements necessitates more fragmented, atomized and multipartite participation and activism forms. In this sense, social media activism performed via social networking sites has emerged one of the most significant and newest participation channels in the movements. Therefore, a new way has been added to the action repertoire of social movements with the technological developments.

2. SHORT HISTORY OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM

Social networking sites refers to "web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd, Ellison, 2008: 210). SixDegrees.com is launched in 1997 as the first noticeable social networking site which allows users to create profiles and list their friends. Despite of the fact that each of these features existed in some form before Six Degrees, it was the first to combine these all features.

With the rise of the Internet in the early 1990s, the networked population all over the world has grown strikingly. In the same period, social media have become the realm of existence for civil society organizations including many different actors such as regular citizens or activists (Shirky, 2011: 1).

The features of many social networking sites include "groups" and "events", each with a home page displaying descriptions, pictures, and a message board. Groups can be open to all members of the site; it

may be required a special invitation to join the group. Group administrators can send out messages to all members of a group. The members can invite others to participate in activities such as parties, meetings or demonstration by the way of "event" feature. Both "group" and "event" functions allow the users to come together for a common motivation, interest or understanding (Westling, 2007: 838). Therefore, online social networks become a useful platform for politically and socially engaged organizations in order to reach a larger audience (Kuebler, 2011). In this sense, popular social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are seen the available platforms by these groups or organizations (Kuebler, 2011).

Today, in Facebook, one of the biggest social networking sites, many users join activist, political and social groups. In this way, they get an opportunity to express their feelings and ideas about social and political subjects. Facebook's features make it an excellent tool for informing, mobilizing, and organizing political supporters. In this context, internet activism, also known as digital activism, social media activism or cyber activism is a form of participation in social movements via electronic communication technologies such as social media, especially Facebook, Twitter or Youtube. Such form of activism form permits faster communication between citizens and the transmission of information to a large audience.

3. SLACTIVISM OR AN EFFECTIVE FORM OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION?

It is an undeniable fact that social networking has become an integral part of daily life in the current years. Besides making communication easier and more efficient, the Internet becomes a place where the people who shared common interests, sensibilities and political views get together. Therefore, this form of communication also offers a new political platform for activists. In this context, the role of the Internet in the participation to social movements and its efficiency has been an ongoing debate in the last decade. There are two different paradigms in this issue.

On the one hand, social media activism is considered as the most important initiator of the democratic transformation in the whole world, especially in the Arab countries. The defenders of this approach primarily attract attention on the power of social media to

mobilize masses and create the awareness on what is happening in the international public. Additionally, this new form of activism is evaluated as an alternative information source against the conventional media channels. On the other hand, a group of scholars develop a skeptical tendency against social media activism with a critical viewpoint. The sceptics interrogate the efficiency of social media activism in the basis of the "weak ties" and the "lack of collective identity" in social networking.

3.1. Cyber-utopianism

The cyber-utopians defend that there is an effective and transformative impact of the new social media tools on political outcomes. They focus on the role of these tools in democratization process in terms of their contributions to political communication, participation, mobilization and their expansionary power in public sphere.

According to the enthusiasts, social media refers to the democratization of battle ground for activists. In this perspective, the masses which are excluded from political process regard communication as a tool in order to be effective in political decisions. In other words, by the way of new communication tools, they seek to participate in political decision processes. The Internet provides them a platform to express their beliefs outside of established authority structures. However, the political actors who have the power seek to make decisions that prevent or limit the others from reaching to new communication tools. From the viewpoint of democracy, political communication, political participation and mobilization these new communication tools have a crucial responsibility to provide a pluralist mechanism in a society.

First of all, "mobilization" and "participation" might be accepted as the most important components of political development and democratization process of regimes. Political mobilization points out "the actors' attempt to influence the existing distribution of power" (Nedelmann, 1987: 181). Additionally, political participation may be defined as "actions of citizens by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics" (Milbrath, Goel, 1977:2).

Some scholars defend that the "groups" function social networking sites is most often utilized for creating a collective identity without concern with time and space. In this approach, politically engaged groups in social networking sites are presented as an important tool which strengthens political communication (Westling, 2007: 838). People have a chance to create their own politically oriented groups and invite others to join. Group members have the opportunities to express their opinions in public and organize to establish a political formation which represent their own voice if they think that no candidate yet speaks for their viewpoint (Westling, 2007: 839). Therefore political communication among group members strengthens. Another feature of social networking sites relevant to political discussion is the ability to "share" a news story, video, or a Web page with other members. Users can share many visual components such as images and videos about protests and demonstrations. Along with the link and a short summary, members can include comments. Other people can comment on the "share" and express their own ideas or provide supporting sources of information (Westling, 2007: 841). In this way, the visual and textual materials on protests and demonstrations shared by the members become effective in the shaping of collective memory. Thus, in addition to political participation, the rapid spread of information and visual components on demonstrations encourage and reinforce political mobilization.

Lance Bennett, Christiam Breunig and Terri Givens (2008) attract attention on the role of digital platforms in political participation and mobilization in the result of his study in which she analyzed the dynamics of mobilization of citizens in the protests against the Iraq war in the United States in 2003. According to the scholars, the activists who participated in the demonstrations largely were the members of different political networks. In addition to this, participation in these protests was largely provided through virtual networks (Bennett et. al., 2008). They alleges that the internet became important factor which reinforces traditional forms of political participation in terms of allowing activists to communicate with other participants and facilitating to organize events (Bennett, 2008). Along the same line, Robert J. Kletz who conducts a study on the role of the websites of the United States Senate candidates in promoting political participation during the 2004 election argues that online campaigns have an effect on political process (Klotz, 2007).

Additionally, according to the optimist approach, social network sites play a vital role in expanding of public sphere. Jurgen Habermas recognized three institutional criterias which act as the preconditions for a public; the disregards of the status, common concern and inclusivity (Habermas, 1989: 36). Today, social network sites are considered as a salient tool in order to achieve a larger public sphere. Over a million people who used these networking sites demonstrates its utility as an arena for communication, coordination and organization. It must be accepted that there is no other online community that connects members of real world's geographic, ideological, or other communities in such an effective way (Westling, 2007: 839). Thus, this situation plays a key role in the expansion of public sphere and the exceeding the frontier between public and private sphere (Micheletti, McFarland, 2011). Furthermore, social media makes possible horizontal organization without hierarchy. This is an area where masses that want to be subject of the politics can express themselves. This structural characteristic discusses the internet in terms of Habermas' conceptualization of public sphere which refers to "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed and access is guaranteed to all citizens" (Habermas, 2001: 102). As far as a community that encourages and assists political communication, they have the potential to really surpass Habermas's conceptualization of a public sphere and become a focal point for political action among group members (Westling, 2007: 847). According to Clark Shirky, who argues that social media can make history, "the networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action" (Shirky, 2011: 1). For this reason, according to the optimist approach, networked people represent a threat to all hierarchical institutions and contribute to the extension of public sphere in the context of democratization.

As a result, using the new technologies, people interested in political participation can establish comprehensive networks; and in this way they can organize political action with "a speed and on a scale never seen before" (Howard, 2011: 35-36). Group members should have an opportunity to voice their opinions and to express their demands on social and political issues. In this respect, these groups that facilitates good political communication allows citizens to organize, plan events, and form groups in order to give their opinions more weight

(Westling, 2007: 838). Therefore, digital media that plays a key role in the organization of street demonstration became the tool that allowed social movements to reach their aims (Howard, 2011: 36). From this point of view, these new tools which develop and expand political communication play an important role in the process of formation of an open and democratic system (Karaçor, 2009: 129).

3.2. Cyber-skepticism

While cyber utopians insist on the positive effects of social networking sites on political activism, on the other hand, yet another scholar group claims that the Internet has a negative impact on political activism. The major criticism directed against the enthusiasts is "slactivism". Slacktivism that combines the words "slacker" and "activism" is a term first coined by Dwight Ozard and Fred Clark in 1995 to characterize the participants who are involved in a social or political movement virtually and with a minimum personal effort to support it. The term also finds its expression in different pejorative descriptions like "clicktivism", "armchair activism" or "feelgood activism". Slacktivism is most commonly associated with virtual actions such as signing e- petitions, joining social networking sites' groups, publishing and sharing campaign content, participating in short–term boycotts and taking part in online discussions on politics (Morozov, 2012). The term generally points out activities that are performed with minimum personal effort, nevertheless considered more efficient in making the participants feel good about themselves than to achieve the stated political goals (Christensen, 2011). This negative approach which evaluates cyber activism as slacktivism focuses on the limitations and negative effects of this mode of activism on civic engagement and political participation. In addition to this, one of the most remarkable arguments of this group is that social media activism is replacing the more effective conventional forms of political activism. Therefore, according to this point of view, the effectiveness of political participation is declining (Christensen, 2011). The most known scholars who develop a skeptical approach to the efficaciousness of online political activities are Evgeny Morozov, Matthew Hindman, Stuart W. Shulman and Robert D.Putnam (Christensen, 2011) (Hindman, 2009) (Putnam, 2010).

To start with, the skeptical approach to social media activism concentrates on the lack of commitment of online activists. One of the

most significant arguments of skeptics is that the effect of social media activism on the real life is limited and weak. According to them, online activism has no effect on political participation beyond that of making participants feel good about themselves. In other words, the sceptics allege that such an activism only allows participants to feel good. Slacktivism critics argue that these activities are only for participant gratification because they lack engagement and commitment, and fail to produce any palpable effect, in terms of promoting a cause. In this context, according to them, the tools used by slacktivists and results of their actions are insufficient to reach political goals; because, the cyber activists who take a part in social movements organized on the Internet lack a heavy commitment. Thus, the claim of the cyber skeptical approach is that this form of activism corrupts and degenerates civic engagement and collective action.

Morozov analyzes the results of an experiment conducted in 2009 by a Danish psychologist, Anders- Colding Jorgensen through a Facebook group. The researcher, who creates a fake group with a fictitious issue, in order to protect the Stork Fountain in Copenhagen from being destroyed, invites 125 friends to join the group. The number of participants to this imaginary Facebook campaign reaches 27.500. According to Morozov, the result of this experiment shows that while offline activists and protesters put their lives on the line with an "authentic" commitment to their political causes, online activists make a "shallow" commitment and come together having "cursory interest in a given issue" (Morozov, 2012). In this perspective, the motivation of these online activists is to a desire to leave the impression that they take part in a group on their social environment. Therefore, in Morozov, it is the crucial question in online activism is the fact that it is not motivated by a true conviction" (Morozov, 2012).

Along the same line, Putnam argues that the Internet has a destructive influence on civic engagement; because it is a tool mainly used for entertainment purposes (Putnam, 2010). According to him, individuals who are interacting less socially become "lonely bowlers" who are reluctant to take part in political activities. The internet, like television, plays in important role in decreasing the opportunities for social interaction between people. In this way, to a large extent, it contributes to the unwillingness of citizens to participate in political matters (Putnam, 2010).

Moreover, the cyber skeptical approach focuses on the incapability of this new way of activism. Accordingly, Shulman claims that mass e-mail campaign, as a typical form of online activism, is an example of slacktivism (Shulman, 2009). In the result of his study which attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of mass-generated e–mail from MoveOn.org sent to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency it is shown that the content of a large part of these e-mails does not contain relevant information. This lack pushes individuals responsible toward deleting these e-mails without reading them; in this way, the online activists fail to reach expected outcome. Shulman considers this situation as a significant menace to the alleged efficacy of these campaigns (Shulman, 2009). According to this viewpoint, online activities that are performed with minimum personal effort cause the deterioration in the quality of participation (Christensen, 2011). People prefer this new way of activism for its availability instead of traditional ways of activism such as participating street demonstrations. In spite of the fact that these people believe that their activities are as effective as the traditional forms of activism to reach expected concrete goals, the results of the above-mentioned experiments indicate the opposite. In this context, although these online activities are considered as a way of political participation, they do not play a key role in achieving expected political outcomes. Similarly, Henrik Serup Christensen states that many activities organized via social networking sites are not able to turn into a mass social movement which has sufficient strength and public support for achieving concrete and sustainable gains in political platform (Christensen, 2011).

On the other side of the story, in the skeptical approach, one of the most important claims is that digital activism form damages the conventional activism. According to the scholars who attract attention on the negative effect of this new way of activism on overall levels of political participation, people who consider the campaigns organized via the internet as an adequate and satisfying political participation form, replace the traditional and more efficient ways of participation with these digital activities. Dietram Scheufele and Matthew Nisbet who conduct a study in order to compare the efficiency of traditional form of activism and online activism by the way of a telephone survey conclude that the effect of the internet in promoting political participation is limited (Dietram, Nisbet, 2002). In addition to this, the researchers insist on the primary role of traditional forms of media in

encouraging people in political participation (Dietram, Nisbet, 2002). In this sense, it becomes possible to say that the new form of activism has destructive effect on almost all degrees of political engagements (Christensen, 2011). For this reason, as stated by Christensen, the ineffectiveness of digital political and social activities on political decisions and the incapability of these activities to produce or promote other political activities are seen as two crucial points of criticisms against online activism (Christensen, 2011).

Cyber sceptics attract attention on unequal opportunities to access the Internet throughout the world. According to their approach, lack of Internet access, as the barrier in front of the social media's power in mobilization and political participation, should be considered as one of the most important limitations of this mode of activism (Gurevitch et. al., 2009). In this context, the online form activism reinforces participation inequalities. Along the same line, Hindman argues that while "the Internet has increased some forms of political participation and transformed the way interest groups and candidates organize, mobilize, and raise funds, elites still strongly shape how political material on the Web is presented and accessed" (Hindman, 2009). In this perspective, the belief that the internet allows more ordinary citizens to be active participants in the process and gives them more voice does not reflect the reality (Hindman, 2009). On the contrary, he states that the internet is just augments elite voices in political and social area rather than providing a space for different voices.

To sum up, as stated by Christensen, for the cyber sceptics "wearing badges is not enough, and neither is changing your profile picture on your Facebook account for a day, a week, or a month" (Christensen, 2011). The slacktivists who "are seen as unwilling to get their hands dirty" (Christensen, 2011) have not commitment as strong as traditional activists have. In this sense, the online activities performed with minimum effort are not capable for producing political outcomes as effectively as conventional forms of activism.

CONCLUSION

The discussion on the relation between internet use and citizens' civic and political engagement is conducted over two major paradigms. On the one hand, the optimistic viewpoint claims that the internet has been radically transforming political participation allowing for low-

cost mass mobilization which would result in overall increased levels of political participation. On the other hand, the skeptical approach evaluates virtual actions like signing e- petitions, joining social networking sites' groups, publishing and sharing campaign content, participating in short–term boycotts as ineffective and frivolous attempts. In general, their critics are shaped on the claim that effortless forms of internet activism are inadequate in achieving political goals in comparison to traditional forms of activism. The most important cause of this situation is the lack of heavy involvement in cyber activists who are seen as reluctant to build a stronger commitment to a given group and to be a part of traditional forms of activism.

It is a fact that these two contrasting visions and the dichotomy between them direct us to confined viewpoint. In addition to this, this rigid division between optimists and pessimist constitutes a serious obstacle to analyze the role of digital activism in social movements. Whereas we should take into accounts both the power of social media in the issues which facilitate to organize and mobilize real world action and its detrimental effect on real life action and the formation of collective identity which is regarded as the backbone of social movements. In this context, the contribution of social media to the mass mobilization in terms of social movement and its power in the diminution of barriers of time and space should not be denied. The online activism campaigns and this new mobilization strategy has become a key part of new social movements. However, it is important to emphasize that digital activism cannot replace real-world action. Alternatively, it must be regarded as a way to coordinate it (Shirky, 2011: 6). In this context, social media activism should be considered as a tool that facilitates to bring masses together, mobilize them and pull them into social movements. As we saw in Gezi Parkı Protests in İstanbul in 2013 and the July 15 resistance against the coup attempt in Turkey, short time ago, such activism provides a legitimate ground for the rising reaction of squares. Cyber activists might be efficiency on decision making process when they combine with streets. Social media activism and street activism complete each other.

In conclusion, new and traditional forms of activism are not unquestionably considered as mutually exclusive forms of political participation. Online activism should be thought as supplementary to traditional forms of activism and as a form of participation which is

suitable for more flexible more fragmented, atomized nature of new social movements. It is important to emphasize that social media activism corresponds to the spirit of new social movements that underlines individualism and multi identities.

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ÖZET

İnternet kullanımı ve vatandaşların siyasal hayata katılımı arasındaki ilişki üzerine yürütülen tartışma iki ana yaklaşımdan beslenmektedir. Bir yanda, iyimser yaklaşımlar, sunduğu imkânlarla birlikte siyasal katılım biçimlerini dönüştüren internetin, kitle mobilizasyonu yoluyla da siyasal katılım oranını genel düzeyde arttırdığını savunurken; öte yandan, e-imza kampanyalarına, sosyal paylaşım sitelerinde örgütlenen gruplara, düzenlenen siyasal içerikli kampanyalara, kısa süreli boykotlara katılım gibi faaliyetleri etkisiz ve ehemmiyetsiz eylemler olarak yorumlayan şüpheci bir yaklaşım söz konusudur. Bu çalışma, sosyal paylaşım siteleri tarafından sağlanan siyasal katılım olanaklarını, bir başka deyişle, sosyal medya aktivizmini, yeni sosyal hareketler çerçevesinde değerlendirmeyi; bu yeni siyasal katılım biçiminin işlevselliğini, sağladığı olanakları ve sınırlılıklarını karşılaştırarak sorgulamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Yeni toplumsal hareketleri, 1960'ların sonuna kadar toplumsal ve siyasal hayatın önemli bir aktörü olan, evrensellik iddiasına sahip, sınıfsallık temeline dayanan "eski" sosyal hareketlerden ayıran bir takım yapısal ve ilkesel farklılıklar söz konusudur. Bu hareketler, devlet, kurumlar ve toplumsal yapıya odaklanan işlevselci yaklaşımın aksine, kimlik ve birey temelli, daha çok sosyal aktörleri dikkate alan bir bilincin ürünüdürler. Bu yaklaşıma göre, bireyin karar alma süreçlerindeki siyasal katılımı ve etkinliği yatay ilişkiler ve yapılar yoluyla gerçekleşmekte, kimlik temelli yeni toplumsal hareketler, belirli toplumsal grupların doğrudan çıkarları ve talepleri çerçevesinde şekillenmektedir. Toplumsal hareketlerin sosyokültürel boyutuna dikkat çeken bu paradigma, yeni toplumsal hareketleri sivil toplumdaki kolektif eylem için önemli bir mücadele alanı olarak tanımlamaktadır. Devlet gücünü kontrol etme iddiasının aksine, toplumsal ilişkilerin dönüşümünü amaçlayan bu hareketler, genel çözüm önerileri sunmak yerine belirli konular etrafında organize edilmektedir. Yeni toplumsal hareketlerin bu doğası daha parçalı, atomize ve çok taraflı katılım ve eylemcilik biçimlerini gerektirir. Bu anlamda, sosyal medya aktivizmi, daha esnek ve gayrı resmi olarak düzenlenen yeni toplumsal hareketlerin en önemli ve en yeni katılım kanallarından birisi haline gelmiş, teknolojik gelişmelerle birlikte toplumsal hareketlerin eylem repertuarına yeni bir yol eklenmiştir.

Siyasal katılımın yeni bir formu olarak karşımıza çıkan sosyal medya aktivizmine demokratikleşme, siyasal katılım, siyasal mobilizasyon ve kamusal alanın genişlemesi bakımından olumlu bir anlam yükleyen ve bu yeni siyasal katılım formunun geleneksel kitle iletişim araçları karşısında daha işlevsel olduğunu savunan "iyimser" anlayış, yeni teknolojileri kullanarak, insanların kapsamlı ağlar kurabileceğini ve böylece daha önce hiç görülmeyen bir hızla geniş ölçekli bir siyasi eylem organize edebileceğini savunmaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında siber- ütopyacılar olarak değerlendirilen

bu yaklaşımın temsilcilerine göre, sokak gösterilerinin düzenlenmesinde anahtar rol oynayan sosyal medya, siyasal iletişimi geliştirmek ve genişletmek suretiyle, açık ve demokratik bir sistemin oluşturulması sürecinde önemli bir rol oynamaktadır.

Öte yandan, siber- ütopyacı anlayışın sınırlı çerçevesini eleştirerek, sosyal medya aktivizmini siyasal katılımı güçlendiren bir unsur olarak görmenin sakıncalarına dikkat çeken "şüpheci" bir yaklaşım söz konusudur. Sosyal medya aktivizminin, gelenekselleşmiş siyasal katılım ve eylem formları üzerindeki olumsuz etkilerine dikkat çeken ve çalışmada siber- şüpheciler olarak ele alınan bu anlayış, sosyal medya aktivizmine en büyük eleştirisini "pasif eylemcilik" bağlamında yöneltmektedir. Bu terim genel olarak asgari kişisel gayretle gerçekleştirilen, ancak katılımcıların belirtilen politik hedeflere ulaşmaktan çok kendilerini iyi hissetmelerinde daha etkili olduklarını vurgulamak için kullanılmakta, e- dilekçe imzalama, sosyal paylaşım sitelerinin gruplarına katılma, kampanya içeriğini yayınlama ve paylaşma, kısa vadeli boykotlara katılma ve çevrimiçi tartışmalara katılma gibi sanal eylemlerle ilişkilendirilmektedir. Bunun yanı sıra, bu grubun en dikkat çeken argümanlarından birisi, sosyal medya aktivizminin, gerçek hayat üzerindeki etkisinin sınırlı ve zayıf olduğudur. Bu bakış açısına göre, masa başı konformizminden ödün vermeden gerçekleştirilen toplumsal etkinlikler, siyasal katılımın etkinliği azalmaktadır. Öte yandan, siber- şüpheciler, dünyadaki internet erişimi konusundaki eşitsizliklere dikkat çekmekte, bu durumu dijital aktivizmin en önemli sınırlılıklarından birisi olarak görmektedirler.

Sosyal medya aktivizmi ve siyasal katılım arasındaki ilişkiye yönelik bu iki farklı yaklaşım arasındaki dikotomi, dijital aktivizmin yeni toplumsal hareketler içerisindeki rolünü ve etkinliğini doğru analiz edebilmenin önünde ciddi bir engel teşkil etmektedir. Yeni ve geleneksel eylem biçimleri, karşılıklı olarak birbirini dışlayan mekanizmalar yerine, birbirini tamamlayan ve yeni sosyal hareketlerin hareket alanını ve kabiliyetini genişleten, ihtiyaçlarına cevap veren bir bütün olarak değerlendirilmelidir. Yeni bir mobilizasyon stratejisi olarak sosyal medyada yürütülen aktivizm kampanyaları, yeni toplumsal hareketlerin önemli bir parçası haline gelmiştir. Dolayısıyla, bu yeni eylem biçimini geleneksel eylem biçimlerinin yerini alan değil, bilakis onu tamamlayan bir aktivizm formu olarak değerlendirmek bahsi geçen dikotomiyi aşmak adına yerinde bir adım olacaktır. Bu bağlamda, sosyal medya aktivizmi, geleneksel eylem biçimlerine ek olarak ve yeni toplumsal hareketlerin esnek ve çok parçalı doğası için uygun bir katılım biçimi olarak değerlendirilmeli; kitlelerin bir araya gelmesini, taleplerini dillendirmesini ve bireylerin toplumsal hareketlere katılımını kolaylaştıran bir araç olarak düşünülmelidir. 2013'te İstanbul'daki Gezi Parkı Protestolarında ve 15 Temmuz'da Türkiye'de darbe girişimine karşı direnişte gördüğümüz gibi, bu türden bir eylem formu, meydanların artan tepkisi için meşru bir zemin

sunmakta, toplumsal hareketlerin belkemiğini oluşturan kolektif kimliğin oluşumunda, kitlesel eylemlerin koordinasyonunda, zaman ve mekân engellerinin aşılmasında önemli bir rol oynamaktadır.