#ChallengeAccepted – Hashtag activism against femicide in Turkey

A Content Analysis of the comments made under a post by the Instagram page 'stopfemicides'

Media and Culture Bachelor Thesis

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Abstract

Social media platforms and the appropriation of hashtags to reach and mobilize people globally around a cause has been a tool and practise used for the formation of many online activist movements throughout the years. Thus, the role of hashtags in online activism has been a topic of debate by many scholars. This research will focus on the characteristics of hashtag activism as a news source, allowing counterpublics to emerge, and enabling collective action. The broader academic debate around hashtag activism recognises social media's potential to allow for an accessible platform for its users, where hashtags can be used to spread awareness and organise movements around a cause. Using content analysis, a post made under the #ChallengeAccepted by the Instagram page 'stopfemicides' will be analysed in regards to how the comments made under the post suggest the characteristics of hashtag activism mentioned above and slacktivism based on the user's participation. For this study, 20 comments have been sampled and will be analysed throughout chapter 3 to 5 concerning the research question. The results show how the type of participation of the users determine and is essential to what extent they perform hashtag activism. While characteristics of hashtag activism are recognised, some comments suggest it's contra perspective slacktivism, a term coined to describe the appropriation of hashtags for online activism as lazy participation. Thus, this research aims to demonstrate how comments can fulfil and show forms of hashtag activism to support the movement and spread awareness of the hashtag's message. Hence, the significance of this study is to demonstrate ways to employ hashtags to perform online activism.

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Introduction

Social media has become one of the greatest ways for social movement organisations to spread awareness and distribute knowledge regarding issues such as feminism. One tool used to do so is hashtags. The more a certain hashtag is used, shared, or posted, the more viral the issue gets, which may increase the possibility for a larger number of people all over the world to see and get confronted with the issue concerned with it. The successful formation of various online, as well as physical movements trying to achieve real-life changes, was possible through the ability to reach and mobilize people through the use of hashtags. As the movement gathers prominent media coverage and generates widespread social media chatter, several Social Movement Organisations began to play a crucial role in the online mobilization of socially conscious publics as shown in the #MeToo movement.[1] Thus, social media have attracted much attention in the academic debate around hashtag activism and its potential in political involvement.

Femicide is understood as the crime of killing a woman or women and is an ongoing issue caused by the unequal gender relations of patriarchy. The brutal murder of the 27-year-old student Pinar Gültekin by her former partner sparked a lot of attention in Turkey and shed light on the issue of a growing rate of femicides within the country. After her murder, more women started to protest online as well as in the streets for further actions. Moreover, the videos of the demonstrations went viral, which enabled not only Turkish citizens to become aware of the scope of femicide in Turkey but also lead to more awareness concerning the issue around the world. It didn't take long until social media platforms were filled with the reappearing #ChallengeAccepted. The hashtag was used for various causes throughout the years. The original challenge started in 2016 to raise awareness for cancer and was used as a form for women to show support for other women. This year the hashtag reappeared and was formed into an awareness campaign to spread awareness of femicide in Turkey. Participants of the hashtag are expected to post a black and white picture to symbolically represent the victims of femicide and to show that they stand in solidarity with them as well as with Turkish women. Instagram was essential to the global distribution of the hashtag.

The Instagram page 'stopfemicides' presents the base for this research and was created a few days after the death of Pinar Gültekin. The post was chosen and is particularly important to the movement due to its appropriation of a different technique of the hashtag than regular posts. Compared to other posts made under the #ChallengeAccepted, the post by 'stopfemicides' doesn't present a b/w picture but instead a full description of the hashtag's cause and the overall issue of femicide in Turkey. Thus, when searching for the hashtag on Instagram, this post stood up from all the other posts due to employing a different way of posting about the hashtag than the norm. This different

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[1] Ying Xiong, Moonhee Cho, Brandon Boatwright, "Hashtag activism and message frames among social movement organizations: Semantic network analysis and thematic analysis of Twitter during the #MeToo," *Public Relations Review* Volume 45, Issue 1, (March 2019), 10-11.

technique allows the post by the page 'stopfemicides' to attract the attention of users who are searching for the hashtag. Moreover, its detailed explanation of the cause of the hashtag then enables all of the people the post has reached to get informed about it and thus allows to spread awareness of its movement. This appropriation for a different technique for hashtag activism on Instagram is also supported by Zulli who argues that hashtags are limited by the digital and social construction of liveness, and are too easily appropriated.[2] In her research, she emphasises that the visual composition of an image is more important on Instagram to engagement than the corresponding caption or hashtag.[3] Thus, she suggests that Instagram, compared to platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, may require different discursive and technological strategies.[4] The post by 'stopfemicides' suggests this different strategy by explaining the hashtag and the purpose behind it in the post instead of using a b/w picture of her/himself to support the movement.
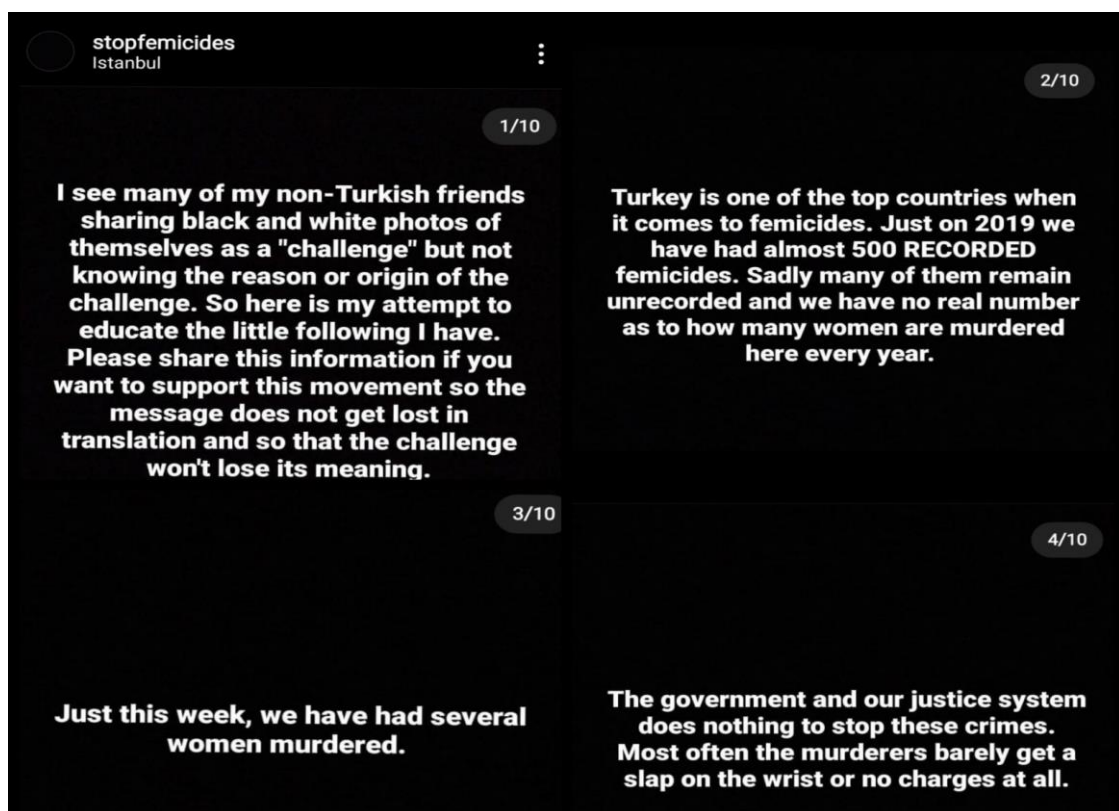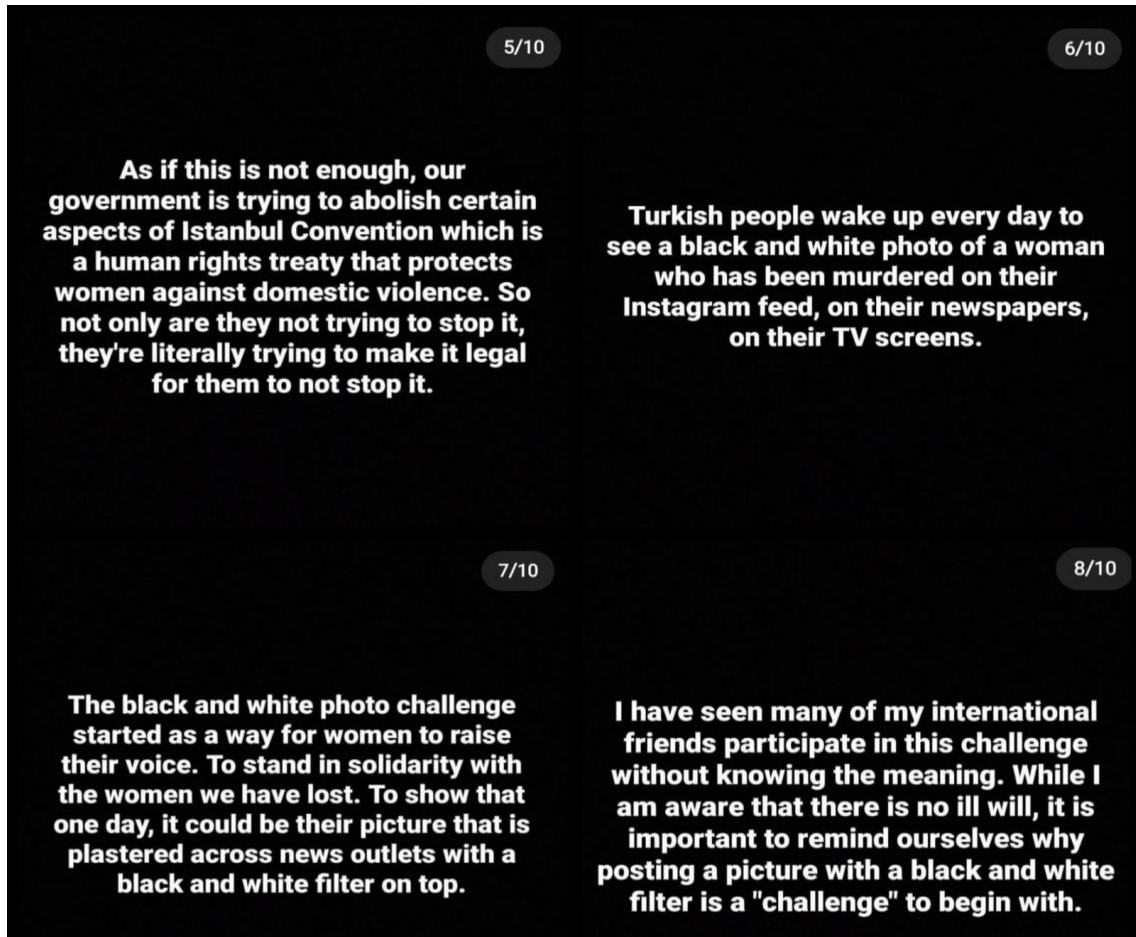

(1) Post by the Instagram page 'stopfemicides' pages 1-4

[2] Diana Zulli, "Evaluating Hashtag Activism: Examining the Theoretical Challenges and Opportunities of #BlackLivesMatter," *Purdue University* 17, no. 1 (May 2020), 197.
[3] Zulli, "Evaluating Hashtag Activism: Examining the Theoretical Challenges and Opportunities of #BlackLivesMatter," 211.
[4] *Ibid.*

As if this is not enough, our government is trying to abolish certain aspects of Istanbul Convention which is a human rights treaty that protects women against domestic violence. So not only are they not trying to stop it, they're literally trying to make it legal for them to not stop it.

Turkish people wake up every day to see a black and white photo of a woman who has been murdered on their Instagram feed, on their newspapers, on their TV screens.

The black and white photo challenge started as a way for women to raise their voice. To stand in solidarity with the women we have lost. To show that one day, it could be their picture that is plastered across news outlets with a black and white filter on top.

I have seen many of my international friends participate in this challenge without knowing the meaning. While I am aware that there is no ill will, it is important to remind ourselves why posting a picture with a black and white filter is a "challenge" to begin with.

(2) Post by the Instagram page 'stopfemicides' pages 5-8

For more information on the matter you can follow pages like @auturkishculturalclub

To all my international friends who are standing in solidarity with Turkish women: thank you.

(3) Post by the Instagram page 'stopfemicides' pages 9 & 10

By employing this different approach, the post becomes interesting to analyse in regards to how it shows characteristics of hashtag activism and slacktivism, after Zulli's claim of Instagram rather showing limitations towards hashtag activism compared to other social media platforms.[5]

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[5] Zulli, "Evaluating Hashtag Activism: Examining the Theoretical Challenges and Opportunities of #BlackLivesMatter," 211.

The following research question will guide me through this research: "How do the comments made under the post by the Instagram page 'stopfemicides' under the #ChallengeAccepted show characteristics of hashtag activism to spread awareness of femicide in Turkey and slacktivism?"

Each chapter of the analysis will focus on a different characteristic ascribed to hashtag activism, including the characteristics of hashtag activism as a news source, allowing for counterpublics, and collective action. The first characteristic is associated with the argument that hashtags allow us to inform the masses, and, thus, can function as a news source like mainstream news channels. The characteristic of counterpublics, a term coined by Nancy Fraser to refer to a public that is subordinate and thus marginalised to a dominant public, is described as hashtags allowing for a virtual space where marginalised groups can emerge and raise their voice to be heard by the broader public.[6] Lastly, collective action represents the idea of hashtags enabling individuals to virtually stand together behind a shared cause by supporting the hashtag and building the reach of its movement through participation.

The following subquestions will guide me through the analysis:

- How do the comments that state that the users were unaware of the hashtag's cause before seeing the post by 'stopfemicides' suggest the characteristic of hashtag activism to work as a source of news?"

- "How does the #ChallengeAccepted show the characteristic of hashtag activism to allow for counterpublics to emerge and be represented?"

- "How does the participation in the comment section of the post by 'stopfemicides' show the characteristic of hashtag activism to allow for collective action?"

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

To build a framework for analysing how the comment shows characteristics of hashtag activism, it is necessary to elaborate on the already existing academic debate surrounding hashtag activism, the characteristics analysed in this research, and its contra perspective slacktivism. This research focuses on the three characteristics of hashtag activism as a news source, counterpublics, and collective action because they seemed to be reoccurring themes in the literature around hashtag activism and thus important to be acknowledged and applied in this research. The broader academic debate recognises social media's potential to allow for an accessible platform for its users, where hashtags can be used to

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[6] Nancy Fraser and Kate Nash, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere," (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2014). 4-6.

spread awareness and organise movements around a cause. Therefore, these characteristics will be employed in this research to investigate how they are reflected in the comments made by other users under the post by 'stopfemicides'.

The first chapter of the analysis "hashtags as a news source" employs the perspective of scholars such as Russell, Zizi Papacharissi and Maria de Fatima Oliveira, and Aday et al. who claim social media to show characteristics of journalism and allow digital technology to function as an activism tool by attracting external attention of the public to an ongoing issue. According to Russell, social media makes the blurring of the lines that once separated participants, reporters, activists, and networked publics evident.[7] She views social media not only as a tool for the broader public to get informed about the news around the world which aren't broadcasted on mainstream news channels but also as a way for journalists to get objective information for the news.[8] Thus, social media plays an important role in terms of news coverage for journalists and news channels. This perspective is supported by Zizi Papacharissi and Maria de Fatima Oliveira, who claim that social media shows the characteristics of working as a news source by providing the public with information left out or not been covered yet by mainstream news channels.[9]

Aday et al.'s claim agrees with this perspective by highlighting digital technology to enable the public to learn about social movements happening around the world.[10] Thus, they argue that media allows for the recognition of political issues to increase and thereby showing characterises of working as a news source.[11] This perspective of social media playing an essential role in news distribution and as a source of news for journalists and mainstream news channels to get objective information about events happening around the world will guide me through the analysis of the first category of comments. The comments which state that they were unaware of the issue of femicide in Turkey and the current cause of the hashtag being about femicide in Turkey present how the post by 'stopfemicides' functioned as a way for these users to get informed about it. Thus, it agrees with the perspective of social media and hashtags to allow for news distribution. However, the comments simultaneously suggest hashtag activisms contra perspective, slacktivism, by showing how the users were confronted with other posts under the #ChallengeAccepted yet didn't know about its cause and message until having seen the post by 'stopfemicides'. This poor performance of hashtag activism by other participants of the challenge is supported with the perspective of Dadas, Harlow, Glenn, and

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[7] Adrienne Russell, "Innovation in Hybrid Spaces: 2011 UN Climate Summit and the Expanding Journalism Landscape," *Journalism* 14, no. 7 (2013), 904.
[8] Russell, "Innovation in Hybrid Spaces: 2011 UN Climate Summit and the Expanding Journalism Landscape," 905.
[9] Zizi Papacharissi and Maria de Fatima Oliveira, "Affective News and Networked Publics: The Rhythms of News Storytelling on #Egypt," *Journal of Communication* 62 (2012), 266-267.
[10] Sean Aday and Henry Farrell, "Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics," (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2010), 3-27.
[11] Aday and Farrell, "Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics," 27.

Morozov who all claim the circulation of hashtags to be limited in its activism if not employed with certain standards. Dadas highlights the importance of background information to hashtag activism.[12] Similarly, Glenn emphasises both elements, awareness, and action, to be essential to hashtag activism.[13] This is supported by Morozov who argues hashtag participation to be viewed as "dangerous" because it "makes online activists feel useful and important while having preciously little political impact."[14] Harlow agrees by stating that social media can help to bring attention to an issue but simultaneously presents a risk of the attention being shifted towards the spectacle rather than the issue per se.[15]

The second chapter of the analysis "Counterpublics" analyses supportive comments towards the post by 'stopfemicides' and the #ChallengeAccepted with the appropriation of the research by the scholars Mendes et al., Zulli, Holm, and Kuo. The term counterpublics was first coined by Nancy Fraser in her critique of Habermas's concept of the public sphere. Different than Habermas, Fraser expands the idea of the public sphere to a 'transnational public sphere', which not only involves citizens of the nation-state but rather looks from a global perspective.[16] According to her, globalization requires attention to precisely who it is that makes up the relevant political community, emphasising the role subaltern counterpublics play to critical communication flows as a political force.[17] Concerning the accessibility of Instagram to all of its users, it will thus be argued that the supportive comments under the post show a collective consciousness towards femicide. Besides, it offers a space to allow for comments where users share their experience with gender-based violence to emphasise the issue of femicide and support the movement. Mendes et al. claim that solidarity often transforms hashtag participants into shared feminist consciousness.[18] It will be argued that the comment section allows for a virtual space where like-minded people can gather together and share personal experiences with femicides and gender-based violence. Thus, hashtag activism allows for counterpublics to emerge, raise their voices towards femicide, and be heard by the broader public. This claim will be supported with Holm's argument of "one important prerequisite for the emergence of counterpublics to be the existence of alternative public arenas that provide a possibility for groups that

[12] Caroline Dadas, 'Hashtag Activism: The Promise And Risk Of 'Attention', *Social Writing/Social Media: Publics, Presentations, Pedagogies*, 2017, 18.

[13] Cerise L. Glenn, "Activism or 'Slacktivism?': Digital Media and Organizing for Social Change," *Communication Teacher* 29, no. 2 (February 2015), 81-85.

[14] Evgeny Morozov, "Why the Internet is failing Iran's activists". *Prospect*. (January 5, 2010), https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/why-the-internet-is-failing-irans-activists.

[15] Summer Harlow and Lei Guo, "Will the Revolution Be Tweeted or Facebooked? Using Digital Communication Tools in Immigrant Activism∗," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 19 (2014), 463-478.

[16] Fraser and Nash, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere," 4-6.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Kaitlynn Mendes, Ringrose Jessica, and Keller Jessalynn. "#MeToo and the Promise and Pitfalls of Challenging Rape Culture through Digital Feminist Activism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 25, no. 2 (2018), 236–246.

are marginalized in mainstream venues to come together and formulate their interests and needs."[19]

Lastly, the chapter "Collective Action" will investigate those comments that show forms of user participation. It will be claimed that the comment section under the post allows for participation that suggests forms of collective action towards the hashtag's activism. For this the definition by Brunsting and Postmes will be employed which refers to collective action as the "actions undertaken by individuals or groups for a collective purpose, such as the advancement of a particular ideology or idea or the political struggle with another group."[20] In the case of #ChallengeAccepted it will thus be analysed how the participation of distributing the hashtag shows forms of collective action towards the struggle of femicide in Turkey. This argument is supported by Moscato who emphasises the practise of reposting, posting, or commenting to be essential to the distributing of the hashtag and thereby the support of the movement by expanding its reach.[21] Meaning, the participation by posting, reposting, or tagging another person to allow for collective action towards the distribution and thereby the support of the movement.

The argument of this chapter that online activist organisations allow for collective action frames for participants that share common group-based identities, the critique of Kim et al. will be acknowledged.[22] According to them, hashtag activism fosters bias due to this collective consciousness allowing for the tendency of networking only with like-minded users or paying attention only to posts with similar viewpoints.[23] However, the accessibility for user participation also allows for contra productivity towards the movement as suggested by hate comments, comments showing ignorance towards women and femicide, but also reflect misogyny and islamophobia. As highlighted by Lindgren, these examples show the act of hijacking the hashtag to reach large audiences and thus emphasises a range of different opinions to be present through the appropriation of hashtags than fostering bias.[24] This is supported by Mundt et al. who acknowledges the challenges and risks of hashtag activism by emphasising social media platforms to not only provide the possibility to strengthen a movement but at the same time offering opportunities for broadening the movement's

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[19] Malin Holm, "The Rise of Online Counterpublics?: The Limits of Inclusion in a Digital Age," (Uppsala: Department of Government, 2019), 12.

[20] Suzanne Brunsting and Tom Postmes, "SOCIAL MOVEMENT PARTICIPATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE Predicting Offline and Online Collective Action," *SMALL GROUP RESEARCH* 33, no. 5 (October 2002) 525-554.

[21] Derek Moscato, "Media Portrayals of Hashtag Activism: A Framing Analysis of Canada's #Idlenomore Movement," *Media and Communication* 4, no. 2 (April 26, 2016) 2-13.

[22] Sheetal D. Agarwal., W. Lance Bennett, Courtney N. Johnson, and Shawn Walker, "A Model of Crowd Enabled Organization: Theory and Methods for Understanding the Role of Twitter in the Occupy Protests," *International Journal of Communication*, (2014), 646-672.

[23] Yunhwan Kim, Donghwi Song, and Yeon Ju Lee, "#Antivaccination on Instagram: A Computational Analysis of Hashtag Activism through Photos and Public Responses," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, (October 17, 2020), 1-2.

[24] Simon Lindgren, "Movement Mobilization in the Age of Hashtag Activism: Examining the Challenge of Noise, Hate, and Disengagement in the #MeToo Campaign," *Policy & Internet* 11, no. 4 (2019), 419-423.

reach, which enhances the accessibility for everybody.[25] Benford and Snow also agree with this perspective by highlighting the accessibility of social media platforms.[26] Thus, Instagram allows for all of its users to participate which allows not only for collective action but also contra-productive contributions.

Chapter 2: Method

Amongst the 128.000 posts under the #ChallengeAccepted, the post by the Instagram page "stopfemicides" was selected due to its prominence amongst the other posts made under the hashtag. The hashtag's challenge normally is supported and distributed by posting a b/w picture of the user, accompanied with the hashtag. However, different than the regular posts, the post by 'stopfemicides' depicts a full description of the cause of the hashtag and the issue of femicide in Turkey. Thus, while other posts may show the tendency of slacktivism, by not referring to or explaining the cause of the hashtag in their post or caption, the post by 'stopfemicides' employs a different strategy and hence appears to allow for hashtag activism. This is supported by Zulli's claim that Instagram may require different discursive and technological strategies to employ hashtags for the hashtag activism efficiency.[27] The difference of the post by 'stopfemicides' thus suggest this different strategy for hashtag activism, as emphasised by Zulli, and is interesting to analyse in regards to how the comments under the post suggest characteristics of activism and slacktivism.

To conduct this research a content analysis will be applied. According to Berger, content analysis "is a research technique that is based on measuring the amount of something (violence, negative portrayals of women, or whatever) in a representative sampling of some mass-mediated popular form of art."[28] Moreover, Neuman describes it as: "A technique for gathering and analysing the content of the text, where the 'content' refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated."[29] Besides, it is emphasised how "the 'text' is anything written, visual, or spoken that serves as a medium for communication."[30] As described by Lai and To, who investigate content analysis of social media, this methodology requires three phases to conduct

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[25] Marcia Mundt, Karen Ross, and Charla M Burnett, "Scaling Social Movements Through Social Media: The Case of Black Lives Matter," *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 4 (2018) 1-14.

[26] Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): pp. 611-639.

[27] Zulli, "Evaluating Hashtag Activism: Examining the Theoretical Challenges and Opportunities of #BlackLivesMatter, 211.

[28] Arthur Asa. Berger, "Media Research Techniques," (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publ., 1992). 2.

[29] William. Neuman, "Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches," (Place of publication not identified: Academic Internet, 2006), 272-273.

[30] Neuman, "Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches," 273.

research.[31]

Firstly, the goal and scope of the study need to be critically defined.[32] Meaning, the researcher has to decide on the goal wished to achieve with the study and the scope of it. Setting objectives is essential since a content analysis can become an unbounded study if the objectives of the investigation are unspecified.[33] The goal of this research is to investigate how the comments made under the post show characteristics of hashtag activism and slacktivism. It has been decided to focus on and analyse one specific post due to the limitations of words for this research and the scope of all posts made under the #ChallengeAccepted to be impossible to cover in one paper such as this. Moreover, keeping the scope of the research focused on one case, here the post made by 'stopfemicides', allows delving deeper and more detailed into the comments made and how they suggest the characteristics of hashtag activism mentioned above or its contra perspective slacktivism. Thus, the post functions as our case study for this research and allows seeing various ways Instagram users engage with the post and how their participation can suggest actions of hashtag activism or slacktivism based on their comment.

The second phase of content analysis revolves around the data collection to perform the prior defined goal and scope.[34] Here, the investigator can identify the criteria, including the sources and the number of webpages to be downloaded.[35] Moreover, the sources of webpages should be identified based on the scope of the study. As mentioned in the first phase, this study will revolve around the post by 'stopfemicides' and its comments. After identifying the sources of information available in social media, the next step is to determine the number of webpages to be downloaded for content analysis based on the study goal.[36] Since the goal of this research is to investigate the participation of the users in regards to hashtag activism and slacktivism, it has been decided to focus on 20 comments which will be used to illustrate various ways of participation possible on Instagram. As for the data collection of the comments and choosing the ones to analyse for this research, the method of systematic sampling was employed. Systematic sampling is used in research when a population is quite fluid, such as tweets posted or comments, and is therefore appropriate to use for the sampling of the comments.[37] The following formula for systematic sampling was employed.[38]

[31] Linda S.L. Lai and W. M. To, "Content Analysis Of Social Media: A Grounded Theory Approach," *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research* 12, no. 2 (2015), 138-152.

[32] Lai and To, "Content Analysis Of Social Media: A Grounded Theory Approach," 141-142.
[33] *Ibid.*

[34] Lai and To, "Content Analysis Of Social Media: A Grounded Theory Approach," 142.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] Lynne M. Webb and Yuanxin Wang, "Techniques for Sampling Online Text-Based Data Sets," in *Big Data Management, Technologies, and Applications* (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2014), 101- 102.

[38] *Ibid.*

$$K \text{ (sampling interval)} = N \text{ (population size)} / n \text{ (sampling size)}$$

The comments under the post by 'stopfemicides' will be assessed from July 2020, the moment the post was online, till January 2021, when this research was conducted. In between this timespan, 10.100 comments were made in total hence, N (10.110) was divided by n (20), our sampling size of 20 comments determined for this research. This allows getting the interval of comments which need to be considered and conducted for this study. Meaning, the interval showing the segments in which the comments need to be selected. The results show that every 505th comment needs to be selected to pick the comments according to the calculated interval. Thus, this research takes 0,002% of the comments made under the post by 'stopfemicides' into consideration. By reducing the scope to 20 comments amongst 10.000, the limitations of this research to cover hashtag activism of the #ChallengeAccepted under the post made by 'stopfemicides' is recognised. However, the aim of this study is not to represent the entire post by the page but rather show how characteristics of hashtag activism and slacktivism can be performed through the participation of users in the comments. Thus, the main focus of this research is not on the number of comments and posts made under the #ChallengeAccepted but rather the quality, meaning the content itself that the comments suggest. This way, the comments can illustrate how different responses to the post can reflect the different characteristics of hashtag activism or its contra perspective slacktivism.

The third phase involves data transformation, in which the data is interpreted by identifying underlying key attributes, factors, and themes.[39] After the 20 comments were manually chosen, they were investigated in regards to their themes and key attributes, meaning, the context of the comments. The results show that the comments suggest three different types of themes in response to the post by 'stopfemicides' and thus were categorised into three sections. The first theme and category include five of the 20 comments that stated that they didn't know about the hashtag's cause or the issue of femicide in Turkey and that the post informed them. This informative role of the post suggests the characteristic of hashtag activism as a news source and will be analysed in Chapter 3. The second theme which was recognised in five other comments was the shared support from the individual users. By stating that the users support this movement and stand in solidarity, reflects the idea of hashtags to allow for counterpublics to emerge, and will be further elaborated and analysed in Chapter 4. The last set of 10 comments show a common theme in terms of participation and action. While 5 of the comments show participation by tagging other people to see the post by 'stopfemicides' or share the post to spread further awareness, the other five suggest rather contra action to the movement by leaving hate comments, showing ignorance towards women and femicide, misogyny and

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[39] Lai and To, "Content Analysis Of Social Media: A Grounded Theory Approach," 142-143.

Islamophobia. This category will focus on the characteristic of hashtag activism as collective action in Chapter 5.

The last phase of the methodology includes the investigation of the results obtained in Phase 3 and if they are interpretable in regards to the goals and scope defined in Phase 1.[40] Here, the findings of the comments will be summarized and analysed in regards to how they reflect characteristics of hashtag activism or suggest slacktivism. The findings will be covered in detailed throughout the analysis from chapters 3 to 5.

Chapter 3: Hashtags as a news source

The first category of comments is representing those users who state that they didn't know about the current cause of the #ChallengeAccepted and got informed about the growing rate of femicide and femicide as a societal problem in Turkey. For instance, comments such as:
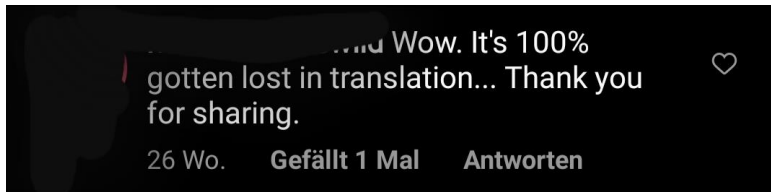

(Fig. 1)
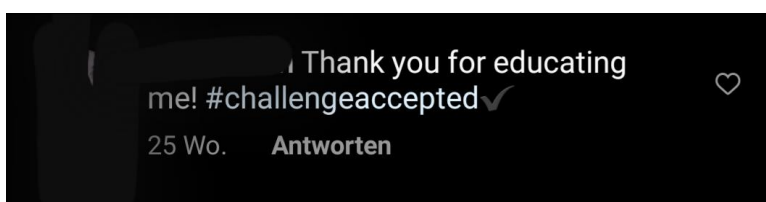
(Fig. 2)
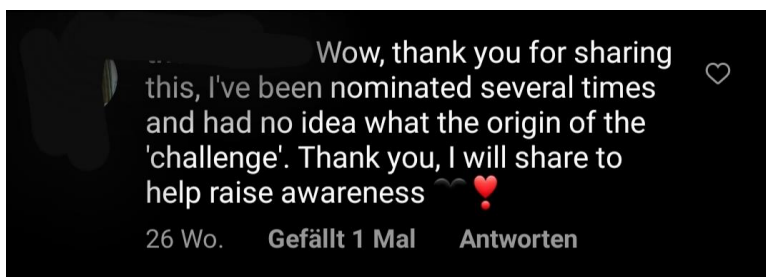
(Fig. 3)

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[40] Lai and To, "Content Analysis Of Social Media: A Grounded Theory Approach," 144.
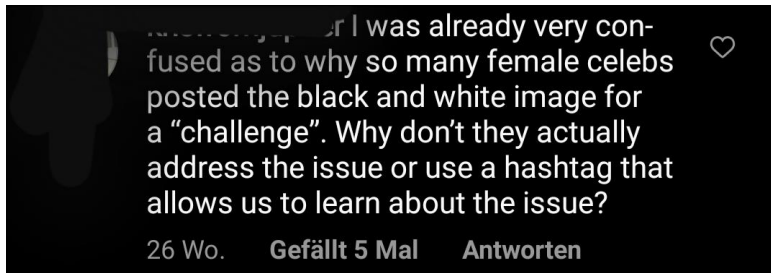
(Fig. 4)

(Fig. 5)

show that the post by the page 'stopfemicide' was the first one they saw that explained the purpose behind sharing and distributing the hashtag, which made the users aware of the issue of femicide in Turkey and the cause of the #ChallengeAccepted. This suggests the characteristic of hashtag activism to offer the possibility to function as a news reporting platform where Instagram users can get informed about the situations in different countries through social media by employing tools such as hashtags. According to Russell, social media makes the blurring of the lines that once separated participants, reporters, activists, and networked publics evident.[41] Moreover, she argues that there is overlapping between the way journalists get their information nowadays to provide the public with objective information and contemporary media activists who devised new ways to do some of the work traditionally ascribed to journalism.[42] She explains this by emphasising how journalism allows for an 'affective news flow' which can create more space for critical interpretation of news events and issues.[43] Thus, the participation of people online not only contributes to journalism and the news by shaping its context but simultaneously works as a news source itself. This is also argued by Zizi Papacharissi and Maria de Fatima Oliveira, who explore the use of Twitter as a news reporting mechanism during the Egyptian uprising. They argue that the rise of objectivity as a dominant value in professional journalism has and shows effects in the news due to the participation of individuals on social media and the rhythms of news storytelling on Twitter determining how events are depicted on the news.[44] Thus, social media shows characteristics of working as a source of news by providing the

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[41] Russell, "Innovation in Hybrid Spaces: 2011 UN Climate Summit and the Expanding Journalism Landscape," 904.

[42] Russell, "Innovation in Hybrid Spaces: 2011 UN Climate Summit and the Expanding Journalism Landscape," 905-908.

[43] Russell, "Innovation in Hybrid Spaces: 2011 UN Climate Summit and the Expanding Journalism Landscape," 908.

[44] Papacharissi and Oliveira, "Affective News and Networked Publics: The Rhythms of News Storytelling on #Egypt," 267-270.

public with the information normally broadcasted and explained by mainstream news channels.[45]

This argument can be linked to Russell's perspective where the characteristics of social media play a significant role in news distribution due to the technologies used on social media having the necessary values such as offering a collaborative, open, conversational, and social space.[46] Following this perspective, Fig. 1 to 5 show how the post by 'stopfemicides' under the #ChallengeAccepted allows Instagram users this virtual space where they can post hashtags that are related to certain causes in the real world, here femicide, to spread awareness and inform others who might be unaware of it. This is highlighted by Aday et al., who claim that digital technology shows the characteristics of functioning as an activism tool to attract external attention to the issue and extent of the movement.[47] They claim that digital technology can function to increase recognition of political issues which enables the public to learn about social movements happening around the world.[48] Fig. 1 and 2, by stating that the post was educational, reflect this idea that social media and the appropriation of hashtags can bring more recognition to political issues all around the world. Thus, the post by 'stopfemicides' shows how the #ChallengeAccepted allows spreading awareness regarding femicide or functions as a source of news for those users who were unaware of the hashtag's cause.

On the contrary, Fig. 1,3, 4, and 5 show how the challenge around the hashtag presents forms of slacktivism. By stating that the users were nominated by others who participated in the challenge, however, didn't know about the hashtag's cause until having seen this post shows that many participants are showing characteristics of slacktivism instead of fulfilling the role of hashtag activism. Dadas argues that merely the circulation of hashtags and bringing attention to its cause is often assumed by many participants to be more productive than it is.[49] She explains that the background information of a hashtag is a necessary element to understand the full scope of the hashtag and its cause.[50] In this case, the comments suggest that various participants of the #ChallengeAccepted are showing rather poor performance of hashtag activism due to their missing explanation of the hashtag's cause in the post itself or its caption. This poor performance then leads to other people seeing the post, however, not getting informed about femicide in Turkey. Thus, the characteristic of hashtag activism as a news source to not be fulfilled due to the missing distribution of its message. Instead, it suggests characteristics of its contra perspective slacktivism. According to Glenn "the term "slacktivism," a combination of the words "slacker" and "activism," has increasingly been used to describe the

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[45] Papacharissi and Oliveira, "Affective News and Networked Publics: The Rhythms of News Storytelling on #Egypt," 267-270.

[46] Russell, "Innovation in Hybrid Spaces: 2011 UN Climate Summit and the Expanding Journalism Landscape," 905.

[47] Aday and Farrell, "Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics," 9-11.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] Dadas, "Hashtag Activism: The Promise And Risk Of 'Attention," 17-19.

[50] Dadas, "Hashtag Activism: The Promise And Risk Of 'Attention," 24-25.

disconnection between awareness and action through the use of social media."[51] This can be seen by the quotes above, where the user's ignorance towards the cause of the hashtag shows a gap between awareness of the cause of the hashtag and the action of spreading awareness about it. Meaning, the element of taking action is present, for instance, by people posting b/w pictures and using the #ChallengeAccpeted, however, it is missing the aspect of spreading awareness and thereby an essential element to hashtag activism.[52]

This is also emphasised by Morozov who argues that this form of hashtag participation can be viewed as "dangerous" because it "makes online activists feel useful and important while having a preciously little political impact."[53] Harlow agrees by stating that social media can help to bring attention to an issue but simultaneously presents a risk of the attention being shifted towards the spectacle rather than the issue per se.[54] "For these participants, the Internet is a mixed blessing: a way to enhance communication and make it easier to get their message out on one hand, and on the other a type of pacification that might lead people to believe they were making more of a difference than they really were."[55] In other words, there can be confusion by many users to believe to make a much greater difference by participating with the hashtag than they do. For instance, Fig. 5 stating how the purpose of the challenge got lost during the distribution of the challenge, shows how there are users who are participating but not contributing due to not spreading the actual message of the movement. Thus, these forms of participation are rather poor in regards to its activism and rather suggests forms of slacktivism.

The post by "stopfemicides" presents a great example of how to avoid such characteristics of slacktivism in regards to spreading awareness and working as a source of news. The detailed caption of the cause of the hashtag helps to spread the news of femicide as a significant issue in Turkey and thereby allow other users who might be unaware of it to get informed through the post, as shown by Fig. 1 to 5. This way the post shows characteristics of hashtag activism as a source of news by spreading awareness of femicide and thereby expanding the movement's reach.

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[51] Glenn, "Activism or 'Slacktivism?': Digital Media and Organizing for Social Change," 81-82.

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] Morozov, "Why the Internet Is Failing Iran's Activists"

[54] Harlow and Guo, "Will the Revolution Be Tweeted or Facebooked? Using Digital Communication Tools in Immigrant Activism∗," 473.

[55] Harlow and Guo, "Will the Revolution Be Tweeted or Facebooked? Using Digital Communication Tools in Immigrant Activism∗," 474.
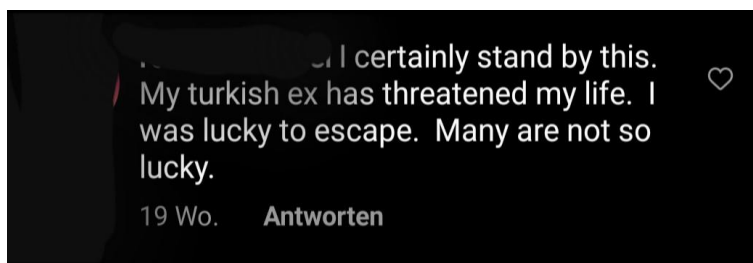
Chapter 4: Counterpublics

This chapter analyses those five comments amongst the 20 that show support towards the movement and will be analysed under the subquestion "How is the characteristic of counterpublics to hashtag activism reflected in the comments?"
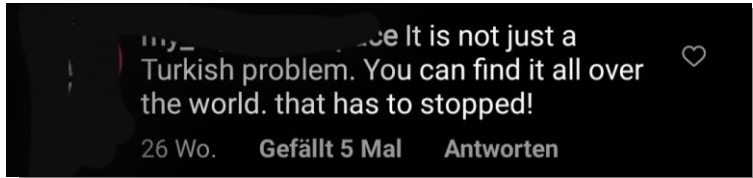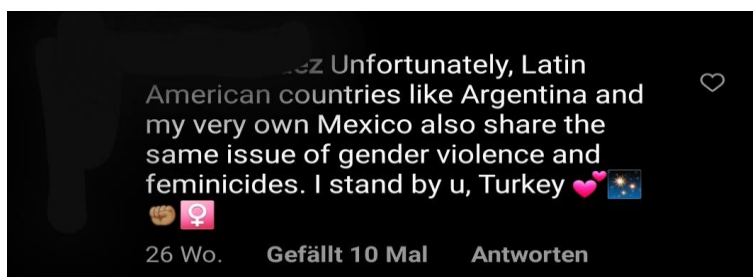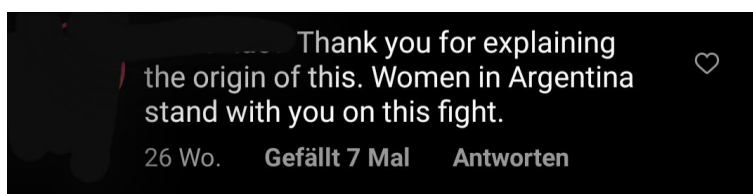

(Fig.6)

(Fig.7)

(Fig. 8)

(Fig. 9)

(Fig. 10)

Comments such as these show that the users stand in solidarity with all the women affected by femicide in Turkey and support the movement, which suggests the idea of a collective consciousness of the participants. Mendes et al. claim that solidarity often transforms into a feminist consciousness amongst hashtag participants.[56] By stating that they stand in solidarity and recognise femicide as a universal issue that needs to shop, Fig. 1 to 10 reflects this idea of shared feminist consciousness for femicide and the injustice caused to so many women around the world. The #ChallengeAccepted thus allows like-minded people who share a collective identity in regards to supporting women who are affected by femicide or their victims to find each other virtually. This helps to bring attention to the counterpublic of women who suffer from gender-based violence but aren't represented enough in mainstream media and to raise voice for the injustice caused to the victims of femicide. Thereby, the hashtags make it easier to reach this specific target group and enhance the likelihood of a collective consciousness amongst the participants.

This collective consciousness allows counterpublics to emerge, voice up by telling their personal experiences, and be heard by the public. Fig. 7 and 8 show the characteristics of hashtag activism to bring a voice to counterpublics by sharing their own experience with gender-based violence or femicide. Jackson et al. underline counterpublics to be central to the discourse around political activism because they seek to legitimize marginalized voices and challenge dominant knowledge structures often found in mainstream discourse.[57] The comments made by these women, talking about their own experience with violence, thus, suggests that the #ChallengeAccepted and the online sphere in the comment section on Instagram allows for counterpublics, in this case, women, to come together and share their experiences. Meaning, the hashtag and the ability to comment under a post, provide those women who suffer from similar experiences to tell their story and be heard. This action of counterpubics voicing up simultaneously strengthens the movement by showing how many women are affected by femicide or gender-based violence and thereby the issue's relevance to be addressed globally. This is also supported by Zulli who claims that the participation of sharing content allows expanding the reach of the hashtag by users sharing their own experiences as part of a larger social and political conversation.[58] Thus, it can be argued that sharing personal experiences of femicide and/or gender-based violence can expand the reach of the hashtag and simultaneously strengthen its movement.

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[56] Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller, "#MeToo and the Promise and Pitfalls of Challenging Rape Culture through Digital Feminist Activism." 239.

[57] Jackson, S. J., and Foucault Welles, B., "Hijacking #myNYPD: Social media dissent and networked counterpublics," Journal of Communication, 65(6), (2015), 932-935.

[58] Diana Zulli, "Evaluating Hashtag Activism: Examining the Theoretical Challenges and Opportunities of #BlackLivesMatter," 208-211.

According to Holm, "one important prerequisite for the emergence of counterpublics is the existence of alternative public arenas that provide a possibility for groups that are marginalized in mainstream venues to come together and formulate their interests and needs."[59] In this case, Instagram provides the platform for these women, where the #ChallengeAccepted is used as a tool to find each other more easily to come together collectively to stand in solidarity with Turkish women, support the movement, and/or raise their voices to spread further awareness. Additionally, Holm emphasises how "scholars have argued that the less costly and less time-consuming possibilities of organizing and participating in political activism online, and the lack of formal barriers to access, may provide such space for more egalitarian public discussions."[60] By taking this approach, Instagram and the #ChallengeAccepted fulfil these characteristics by allowing every user on Instagram to be able to employ and distribute the hashtag, making the movement inclusive to all of the platform's users.

To conclude, these supportive comments show the #ChallengeAccepted on Instagram allows like-minded people to find each other and come together online to support and strengthen the movement. Thereby, this virtual sphere allows giving attention to counterpublics, where women, as a marginalised group, can share their stories with femicide or gender-based violence to emphasise the importance of the distribution of the hashtag and the recognition of its cause.

Chapter 5: Collective Action

This chapter takes a closer look at those comments which state that they will share the post by 'stopfemicides', tag another person to see the post or post about the hashtag themselves to spread further awareness. For this, the definition by Brunsting and Postmes will be employed which refers to collective action as the "actions undertaken by individuals or groups for a collective purpose, such as the advancement of a particular ideology or idea or the political struggle with another group."[61] In the case of #ChallengeAccepted, it will be investigated how the participation of distributing the hashtag shows forms of collective action towards the struggle of femicide in Turkey.

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[59] Holm, "The Rise of Online Counterpublics?: The Limits of Inclusion in a Digital Age," 12.

[60] *Ibid.*

[61] Brunsting and Postmes, "SOCIAL MOVEMENT PARTICIPATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE Predicting Offline and Online Collective Action," 527.

I came across your post when I was trying to find the origin of the black and white photo challenge. Hope you don't mind me translating this in Korean and sharing with my other friends.

25 Wo.   Antworten

(Fig. 11)

@j ... this is the purpose of the #challengeaccepted movement

26 Wo.   Gefällt 2 Mal   Antworten

(Fig. 12)

@hc I seen you asked about it on another post. I hope this helps. Stay safe 🙏

26 Wo.   Gefällt 1 Mal   Antworten

(Fig. 13)

Thanks a lot...it was a pity seeing majority of the females not even taking time to mention the purpose..I will share this maximum..it's the least I can do for them...it's a pity..when we think the world is gonna change for the god..I can't stop running away from these realities..

19 Wo.   Antworten

(Fig. 14)

I hope you don't mind me quoting you and naming you in the selfie. I didn't understand but I do now because of your explanation. I hope I don't offend anyone keeping it up.

26 Wo.   Gefällt 2 Mal   Antworten

(Fig. 15)

According to Brunsting and Postmes, the internet shows potential for collective action by being a socially isolating medium that can reinforce social unity.[62] They explain that even though the individuals using the internet are isolated from one another, it does not necessarily mean that the internet doesn't offers the chance for collective action.[63] By commenting, sharing, posting, or tagging other people to support the movement, Fig. 11 to 15, show how the users share a sense of common identity or common purpose. As highlighted by Brunsting and Postmes, this common identity towards the cause of the hashtag allows the internet to be used as an empowering platform for collective action.[64] Fig. 11, 14, and 15, show how this form of user participation by sharing the post shows collective action towards the distribution and support of the movement by creating a larger narrative around the #ChallengeAccepted. This collective action in form of distributing the hashtag to attract a broader reach is also highlighted by Moscato. According to him, "retweets, hashtagged or not, can empower the diffusion of information and help it spread well beyond the reach of the original tweet's followership."[65] Thus, by reposting the post by "stopfemicides", which entails a detailed explanation of the hashtag and is easy to understand, it allows people who might have not encountered this post yet to see it and learn about the message of the hashtag. "Technologies also open up the digital public sphere to more potential actors, allowing people to participate who otherwise might never get involved."[66] In other words, digital technology, such as hashtags can function as a tool to reach like-minded people who would normally not be involved with the movement and allow them to become part of it. This distribution of the hashtag then not only allows to expand the movement's reach but also allows to strengthen its activism. This is also highlighted by Yang who argues hashtags to encourage the participation of other users through tweeting, retweeting, replying, or posting personal tweets.[67]

Another way this collective action is represented can be seen in Fig. 11. As Glenn emphasises hashtags to allow its cause to be spread across geographical locations, this quote shows ways of distributing the hashtag's message to people who might not understand the post by 'stopfemicides' due

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[62] Brunsting and Postmes, "SOCIAL MOVEMENT PARTICIPATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE Predicting Offline and Online Collective Action," 528.

[63] Brunsting and Postmes, "SOCIAL MOVEMENT PARTICIPATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE Predicting Offline and Online Collective Action," 529-530.
[64] Ibid.

[65] Moscato, "Media Portrayals of Hashtag Activism: A Framing Analysis of Canada's #Idlenomore Movement," 5-6.

[66] Harlow and Guo, "Will the Revolution Be Tweeted or Facebooked? Using Digital Communication Tools in Immigrant Activism*," 474.

[67] Yang, "Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism: The Case of #BlackLivesMatter," 15.

to language barriers.[68] Thus, by translating the post, the user reaches more people and allows the hashtags message to be spread further. Additionally, Agarwal et al. highlight that online activist organisations are not only providing resources of information but simultaneously developing collective action frames for participants to share common group-based identities.[69] Concerning these comments it then suggests that, on the one hand, they show how hashtags can bring people with the same cause together. On the other hand, it emphasises how Instagram allows users to spread the #ChallengeAccepted to attract more people's attention to its cause and thereby strengthen its movement through its distribution, which reflects the idea of collective action.

However, this collective action based on the hashtags collective identity introduces the critique by Kim et al. who argue hashtag activism foster bias.[70] They emphasise how hashtags make it easy to find posts of interest, which may result in the tendency of networking only with like-minded users or paying attention only to posts with similar viewpoints.[71] The hashtag does help to find other people with the same interest and is strengthening the movement. However, this claim is only partly fulfilled due to the access to participation by every user on Instagram to also allow for the movement's contra-side to emerge. As depicted by the comments quoted below, the open access to all Instagram users allows for participation such as hate comments or ignorance towards women and femicide which argues against Kim et al.'s critique.
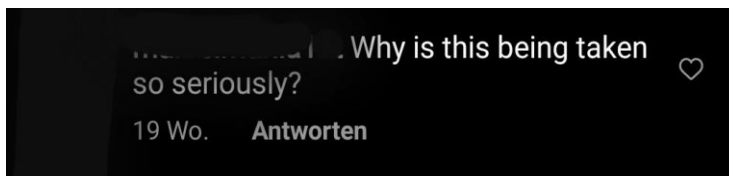
(Fig. 16)
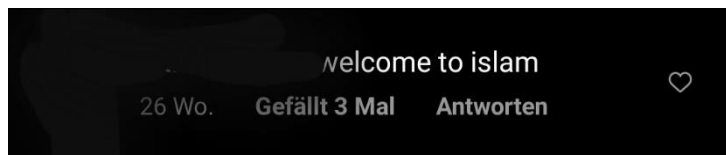
(Fig. 17)

[68] Glenn, "Activism or 'Slacktivism?': Digital Media and Organizing for Social Change," 82.

[69] Agarwal, Bennett, Johnson, and Walker, "A Model of Crowd Enabled Organization: Theory and Methods for Understanding the Role of Twitter in the Occupy Protests," 648-649.

[70] Kim, Song, and Lee, "#Antivaccination on Instagram: A Computational Analysis of Hashtag Activism through Photos and Public Responses," 2.

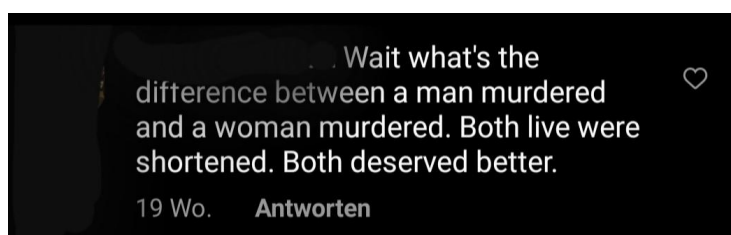[71] *Ibid.*

(Fig. 18)
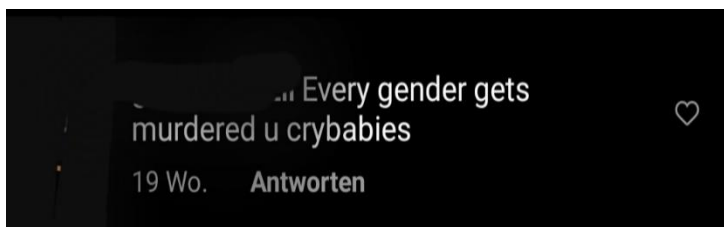
(Fig.19)

(Fig. 20)

Fig. 16 to 20 are showing how the users are not focusing on the message of the hashtag and the issue of femicide in Turkey but rather shifting off-topic and bringing different issues into the conversation. This challenges Kim et al.'s critique of hashtag activism fostering bias.[72] As for offline activisms, online activism allows for the emergence of counter perspectives. As highlighted by Lindgren, these examples show the act of hijacking the hashtag to reach large audiences.[73] In other words, people can take advantage of the hashtag to reach broader masses regarding personal opinions and other political issues which can distract from the actual purpose of the post and its movement. This can be seen as rather contra productive for the #ChallengeAccepted, on the one side, by attracting more people into their conversation which may result in conflict, and on the other, by distracting from the actual purpose of the post made by "stopfemicides" and thereby slowing down its activism.

Mundt et al. acknowledge the challenges and risks of hashtag activism by emphasising social media platforms to not only provide the possibility to strengthen a movement but at the same time offering opportunities for broadening the movement's reach, which enhances the accessibility for

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[72] Kim, Song, and Lee, "#Antivaccination on Instagram: A Computational Analysis of Hashtag Activism through Photos and Public Responses," 2.
[73] Lindgren, "Movement Mobilization in the Age of Hashtag Activism: Examining the Challenge of Noise, Hate, and Disengagement in the #MeToo Campaign," 419-423.

everybody.[74] This results in limited "possibilities for activists to fully control who is, or is not, part of the movement."[75] As shown by the comments from Fig.16 to 20, Instagram allows all of its users to participate with hashtags and their movements, which can result in comments unrelated to the discussed issue, whereby the movement cannot act against it. Since the hashtag is a universal tool, and the #ChallengeAccepted not lead by a specific group, organisation, or leader, it is rather difficult to navigate and control the direction of the movement based on other people's participation and contributions.

Thus, this accessibility of the hashtag and its movement allows for a space of contra-productive comments. As emphasized by Benford and Snow, contradictions may also affect the resonance of action frames and make mobilization more difficult.[76] These comments are contradictory to femicide and show patterns of misogyny, Islamophobia, and ignorance. Comments such as in Fig. 19 and 20, implying women and men to both be affected by murder, makes the mobilization and the activism of the hashtag more difficult. Due to individuals not understanding and being ignorant towards the hashtag and the discussed issue of femicide, they work contra-productive to the spreading of its relevance and danger its activism. By stating that both, men's and women's lives matter, which essentially is true, however, in combination and context with the #ChallengeAccepetd, destabilises the value and necessity of challenging the discourse around femicide and spreading awareness of its recognition as a societal issue. Moreover, it raises questions of the ability to have rational conversations and debates in the comments to form an activist movement due to Instagram and the use of hashtags to invite everyone's participation, including contra-productive participation. However, even though both forms of participation are possible on Instagram, the contra-productive comments don't seem to interrupt the collective action taking place by other participants towards the distribution of the hashtag. Thus, the claim that the page 'stopfemicides' shows the characteristic of hashtag activism to allow for collective action is still present and reflected by the comments from Fig. 11 to 15.

Conclusion

This research aimed to analyse how the comments made under the post by the Instagram page 'stopfemicides' show characteristics of hashtag activism and slacktivism. I have argued that the user participation in the comment section on Instagram reflects the idea of social media allowing for hashtag activism. This research focused on the characteristics of hashtag activism to function as a

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[74] Mundt, Ross, and Burnett, "Scaling Social Movements Through Social Media: The Case of Black Lives Matter," 10.

[75] *Ibid.*

[76] Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," 615- 617.

news source, allowing for counterpublics to emerge and be represented, and collective action to be performed.

Firstly, I analysed how the post functions as a source of news by informing other users about the cause of the hashtag. However, the analysis also highlights and recognises forms of slacktivism in the comments which state that they have encountered other posts made under the #ChallengeAccepted yet the post by 'stopfemicides' being the one that informed them about its cause. Thus, the participation of other users with the hashtag suggesting slacktivism due to their rather poor performance of hashtag activism. Secondly, 5 of the 20 comments, which all reflected support towards the movement, were analysed in regards to the characteristic of hashtag activism to allow for counterpublics to emerge. The results showed how the comments suggest a collective consciousness amongst the users which creates a sphere of like-minded people. Moreover, it is argued that this virtual sphere allows counterpublics, meaning marginalised groups such as women, to share their experience with gender-based violence and femicide to support the movement. Finally, chapter 5 deals with different forms of participation, including comments that suggest hashtag activism's characteristic of collective action on the one hand, and contra production action on the other. The results show how the participation of tagging, posting, and reposting reflects the idea of hashtags allowing for collective action towards the movement by the users distributing the hashtag. However, this accessibility of the comment section on Instagram to all of its users simultaneously introduces contra-productive participation such as hate comments.

The findings of this research reveal the possibilities of user participation to show forms of hashtag activism on Instagram. By analysing 20 different comments, various forms of participation were recognised and this research showed what forms of participation reflect a characteristic of hashtag activism and which don't. Thus, the significance of this research is to recognise the potential of hashtags to online activism if appropriated with certain guidelines such as having a detailed description of the hashtag's cause in the caption of the post. While other participants post b/w pictures to assess and participate with the #ChallengeAccepted and leave out the background information about the challenge itself, the post by 'stopfemicides' employs a different strategy. By having an explanation of the current purpose of the hashtag and its challenge in its post, the post allows other users to get informed and spread further awareness. This form of participation then suggests for further distribution of the hashtag which allows expanding the recognition of the issue of femicide not only in Turkey but globally. Besides, the distribution and participation with the hashtag allow users to show forms of collective action towards the movement, which adds to the recognition of the importance of challenging the discourse around femicide as a crucial issue around the world. Thus, hashtags can be used as a tool to spread awareness of issues that are not acknowledged enough in society by allowing users who were unaware of the issue to get informed about it and collective action towards the distribution of the movement's message.

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Appendix

(1) Post by the Instagram page 'stopfemicides' pages 1-4

(2) Post by the Instagram page 'stopfemicides' pages 5-8

(3) Post by the Instagram page 'stopfemicides' pages 9 & 10

(4) Fig. 1

(5) Fig. 2

(6) Fig. 3

(7) Fig. 4

(8) Fig. 5

(9) Fig. 6

(10) Fig. 7

(11) Fig. 8

(12) Fig. 9

(13) Fig. 10

(14) Fig. 11

(15) Fig. 12

(16) Fig. 13

(17) Fig. 14

(18) Fig. 15

(19) Fig. 16

(20) Fig. 17

(21) Fig. 18

(22) Fig. 19

(23) Fig. 20