Use of Social Media in the Struggle Surrounding Violence Against Turkish Women

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Increasingly large numbers of women in Turkey have suffered abuse or lost their lives through attacks by men. In 2019 alone, 474 women were killed by men. Based on theories of connective action and affective publics, this study examines online activism regarding violence against Turkish women through a qualitative content analysis of Twitter messages with popular hashtags. Posts addressing six different cases of violent crimes directed at women that took place between 2015 and 2019 constituted the sample. The results show that large numbers support women through postings and repostings of solidarity, emotional expressions, remembrance, and dissemination of information. Because of the government's authoritarian and repressive tactics in silencing critical voices on social media and in the streets, the potential to build an organized social movement to curtail these violent crimes is minimal.

Keywords: gender, femicide, social media use, women's rights, Turkey, connective action, affective publics

The women of Turkey have been fighting a difficult battle against a patriarchal and authoritarian government and its conservative cultural agenda to win back what they feel is being taken away from them. The decline of those rights has resulted in a dramatic rise in violence against women. The Kadın Cinayetleri (Femicide) website breaks down the number of homicides by province across Turkey and lists the names and ages of every woman murdered (by its count). The reported number of women killed, mostly by a spouse or partner, has risen from 66 in 2002 to 474 in 2019 (Çetin, 2015; Kadın Cinayetleri Durduracağız, 2019).

Social media users, concerned about these developments, have used specific hashtags to share information, opinions, and feelings about the acts of violence against women in Turkey and advance the struggle for safety and gender equality. Studying the uses of social media related to social and political issues in an authoritarian country such as Turkey makes an important contribution to the understanding of the effects of political pressure on any kind of social dissidence, including online activism.

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To assess the use of social media from the perspective of connective action against the gender-based injustices in Turkish society, a content analysis of tweets with relevant hashtags was conducted. We analyzed the shared tweets about six different acts of violence against women in Turkey that occurred between 2015 and 2019. The qualitative content analysis was conducted to investigate (a) whether the user-generated content on Twitter served as a form of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) and (b) whether it can be regarded as representing affective publics, in the soft structures of feeling, expression, and connection in the tweets related to the women who were the victims of violent acts (Papacharissi, 2015).

Social Media Activism

Most mainstream media in Turkey are aligned with and under the control of the AKP government ("Political Affiliations," 2020). Charging journalists with a range of crimes for writing about topics unfavorable to the president is one way this control is maintained. For three years, Turkey has held the dubious honor of jailing more journalists than any other country—68 in 2018 (including the most female journalists—14), all of whom were charged with crimes against the state (Beiser, 2019; Bulut, 2019). Therefore, women have not viewed the press as a legitimate outlet for airing their grievances or for reporting on incidences of violence perpetrated on them (Mat, 2018).

The use of social media for expressing opinion has provided a better option, though not completely safe, because of government surveillance, criminal investigations, and prosecutions and convictions regarding the critical content of such posts (Human Rights Watch, 2020). For example, by the end of March 2020, some 410 people had been arrested for "provocative" posts on social media about the coronavirus ("Turkey Rounds Up," 2020). Several times the government has blocked access to social media for political reasons, including a recent three-year ban of Wikipedia. Freedom House has ranked Turkey in the "not free" category for Internet freedom, mentioning "numerous people who were investigated or detained for online activities" ("Freedom on the Net 2019," 2019, para. 5).

In the years since the rise of online social networks, activists have adopted these tools to gain widespread support and build social movements to combat injustices on local, national and international levels. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) refer to such use of social networks as following the logic of connective action, in contrast to the logic of collective action "associated with high levels of organizational resources and the formation of collective identities" (p. 739). One of the organizational patterns for connective action the authors identify can be applied to the hashtag campaigns directed toward attacks on Turkish women. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) describe this pattern as "characterized by networks of issue advocacy organizations that engage the public using interactive digital media and easy-to-personalize action themes, often deploying batteries of social technologies to help citizens spread the word over their personal networks" (p. 742).

Connective action relies on "loose organizational linkages, technology deployments and personal action frames" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 757) and not on organizationally brokered networks where communication is based on collective action frames more characteristic of a time when digitally networked action was not possible. The authors do not claim that connective action has replaced collective action, where people, often connected through an organizational structure, work together for some kind of common

goal. Instead, social media, such as Twitter, provide additional dimensions to protest movements (Segerberg & Bennett, 2011).

While collective identity constitutes an important focus of social movements and is often discussed in relation to collective action (Aourgh & Alexander, 2011; Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015; Ogan & Varol, 2017; Papaioannou & Olivos, 2013), activism that is constructed online through connective action, such as the protests to combat violence against women, may take a much longer time to achieve a shared identity. Personal networks do not stand in opposition to building collective identity, but are instead complementary to it (Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015). In our study, the issue is multidimensional, covering a range of violent acts, from domestic violence to attacks on strangers in the streets, that have taken place over a long period. Some of the cases of violence rise to the level of public scrutiny and become a focus for social media posters, whereas others fade, becoming mere statistics in the rising toll of victims. We believe that it will require a magnitude of violent acts that constitute a critical mass to mobilize individuals to form a collective identity taking collective action. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) detect a boundary zone where the personalized connections that are forged in social media give way to collective action in a defined social movement. This research examines protest against violence targeted at women, at a stage where connective action is predominant.

Research on Social Media Activism in Turkey and Elsewhere

The protests around violence against women in Turkey have followed a pattern identified by Johri, Karbasian, Malik, Handa, and Purohit (2018), who analyzed a campaign promoting gender diversity in engineering. In their Twitter analysis of the protests, the authors found that several triggers prompted surges in online activity for the campaign. Those were based on specific offline events, news coverage by the media, industry-driven Web campaigns, and entry to the protests by celebrities. The researchers' findings supported the logic of connective action where the activists make use of "large scale fluid social networks" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 748). In their research, news coverage of the protests served as triggers to social media campaigns. Similarly, Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia (2014) created a four-stage model of political movements based on social media. The model identified trigger events that were then covered by the media, leading to viral organization and an eventual physical response. We combine the theory of connective action with the concept of affective publics, a theory developed by Papacharissi (2015, 2016). Based on Raymond Williams' (1961/2001) concept of the "structures of feeling," Papacharissi (2015) states that "it is through understanding the soft structures of feeling, expression, and connection" (p. 5) that she analyzes the impact of social media and, in particular, Twitter. These soft structures emerge through storytelling in the tweets, despite the 140-character limit Twitter placed on messages at the time. She adopts this approach for understanding online civic engagement because it goes beyond an analysis of structured opinion in the social medium, and that to be "accurately understood, the discourses produced via Twitter must be interpreted as soft structures of feeling" (p. 116). In her later work, Papacharissi (2016) lays out four characteristics of affective publics that guide our own analysis. "Affective publics materialize uniquely and leave distinct digital footprints" (p. 312); they "support connective yet not necessarily collective action" (p. 314); they "are powered by affective statements of opinion, fact or a blend of both" (p. 316); and they "typically produce disruptions/interruptions of dominant political narratives by presencing underrepresented viewpoints" (p. 318). It is also important to specify that affect is not the same thing as emotion; rather, it is the "intensity with which we experience emotion" (p. 316).

When sharing content about social protest, users of social media commonly post images and videos with relevant hashtags. Including visual elements in posts is an important way to express emotion in social media. A content analysis by Kharroub and Bas (2016), for instance, was conducted on Twitter images shared during the 2011 Egyptian revolution. They identified the prevalence of images with the potential to provoke emotion (anger) and increase their efficacy levels. Therefore, analyzing emotional images in the context of protest posts shared on social media is necessary.

The subject of our focus is inherently emotional, because whenever violent acts are committed, consumers of the stories of the recipients of those acts frequently experience an emotional response. In our analysis, we categorized the tweeted emotional expressions as anger, sadness, hatred or outrage, fear, or no emotion. We also distinguished the emotional response from expressed opinion, and we coded for images and videos included in the tweet. In this way, we could examine the affective publics in the several cases of women who were the recipients of the violent acts.

Therefore, we were interested in examining the extent to which shared messages, in both text and visual form on Twitter, related to violence against women in Turkey, included references to emotions through connective action. Our research question is posed:

RQ1:   *What evidence exists that posters of messages on Twitter about the violent acts against women are engaging in a form of connective action through their personal action frames and are following the theory of affective publics in the storytelling through the tweeted text and images shared about the women who were the recipients?*

Historical and Contemporary Context for Studying Violence Against Women

Women in Turkey have long struggled against a patriarchal society, and the current situation is born out of the nearly century-long history of the republic itself. When the government was established in 1923, lawmakers held the power to write the future of the country's institutions and the roles women would play in that process. In the early years, women in Turkey improved their Ottoman-era status through the Civil Code of 1926, which granted them equal property rights, ended the practice of polygamy, and allowed women the right to civil marriage and divorce.

However, it wasn't until 2001 that the government amended the civil code to include a change in the marrying age for girls from 15 to 18 years, the removal of the head-of-household requirement, and the adoption of a shared property right for married couples (Arat, 2016).

The Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has held power since 2002, had tried to block the amendment, claiming that the proposed definition of a family was at odds with its concept of Turkish culture. Once in charge, however, AKP sought full membership in the European Union, which required significant advancements in legal rights expansion for women (Güneş-Ayata & Doğangün, 2017).

But over time, and with the prospects of joining the European Union dimming, the Erdoğan government began to treat women as just another group in society that needed protection, much like

orphans. Erdoğan even stated in a 2010 conference of women's organizations that he didn't believe in equality for women and that their destiny was "divinely foreordained." Women were asked to give birth to at least three children, fulfilling their role "first and foremost as mothers"; in addition, the government condemned abortion as a form of genocide, according to Deniz Kandiyoti, in an interview with the BBC ("Is Life Getting Worse," 2015).

At its roots, however, AKP's policies regarding women were in conflict with the laws it passed to protect them (Cavdar & Yasar, 2019)—for example, the Law to Protect Family and Prevent Violence Against Women of 2012 (Ailenin Korunmasına ve Kadına Karşı Şiddetin Önlenmesine Dair Kanun, 2012). "Because the AKP does not fulfill its duty to prevent gender-based injustices and adopt an egalitarian discourse and policies, the implementation of these laws has been limited and violence against women has skyrocketed" (Çavdar & Yaşar, 2019, p. 88).

In March 2012, Turkey was the first country to sign and ratify the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention to prevent and combat the problem of violence against women, including domestic violence. Later ratified by 33 other European countries, it was the "first international instrument to set legally binding standards to prevent gender-based violence" ("Istanbul convention," 2019, para. 6). Since that time, however, Turkey has failed to enforce the provisions of the convention or the 2012 law, with Islamists arguing that both "threaten the family" (Lapeska, 2020).

The party's guiding ideology—that women's roles in society are as wives and mothers in the sacred family—was taken from Islamic history, the hadith, and the sunnah (the Prophet Mohammed's sayings and deeds; Çavdar & Yaşar, 2019). Therefore, the authors argue, the party has failed to protect women outside of those roles in three ways: (1) in the other areas of women's lives, such as political participation, violence, sexual harassment, equal pay with men, and workplace bullying; (2) in the idealization of the family in which the wife/mother sacrifices her needs to those of the rest of the family; and (3) in the transformation of the AKP "sacred family" concept to the detriment of women (Çavdar & Yaşar, 2019).

Today, there are many signs that women experience challenges to their physical safety and health, psychological well-being, and opportunities for gaining equality with men. The failure to obtain equal status with men in Turkey is reflected in the 2018 Global Gender Gap Report, in which Turkey's rank in gender parity stands at 130 of 149 countries studied (World Economic Forum, 2019).

The aforementioned 2012 law instituting harsher punishments for such crimes widened the scope of protection from married women to all women and was supported by both Islamist and secular women. However, women who report domestic violence need first to prove to the police that such acts actually occurred and that they were the recipients of the violence (Çavdar & Yaşar, 2019). The law has not served as a deterrent, with incidents of femicide rising year-on-year, leading to the establishment of Kadın Cinayetleri Durduracağız (We Will Stop Femicide). The organization hosts a website and social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter with tens of thousands of followers.

Kadın Cinayetleri Durduracağız (We Will Stop Femicide) provides legal assistance and joins court cases through its lawyers to assist women who are in danger. "However, courts often give reduced sentences

to men found guilty of committing violence against women, citing good behavior during the trial or 'provocation' by women as an extenuating circumstance of the crime" (OECD Development Center, 2019). According to Kavas, a representative of the platform, "They (the perpetrators) look into Turkish penal codes and decide how to kill. They say, 'If I kill you, I will get only 10 years' sentence and I will be free—so what?'" (Asquith, 2015).

Though the legal framework for supporting the rights of women may be solid, legal exceptions are easy to locate. In 2015, İzmir Bar Association central executive board member and women's rights advocate Nuriye Kadan stated that one third of marriages (or 181,036) in the country involve child brides ("Child Marriages," 2015). Those marriages occur because the girl's parents file a request for an exception to the legal minimum age of 18.

On International Women's Day in 2018, President Tayyip Erdoğan said that violence against women and children is a "crime against humanity" and the environment encouraging such savage acts must be eliminated. He added that discrimination against women was contrary to Turkish culture ("Gender Discrimination," 2018), despite the contrary evidence from the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2019).

On other occasions, Erdoğan has spoken out against equality of the sexes, labeling women who choose careers over motherhood as "deficient" or "half women" (Bruton, 2016) and decrying the practices of birth control and even cesarean births. He has urged families to have at least three children to sustain the nation's population size, expressing concern that the fertility rate in the country had fallen to a level under the replacement rate (Shaheen & Saracoglu, 2017). His government has offered extra maternity leave from work and financial incentives for who women birth additional children ("Turkish Gov't Unveils," 2015). He also supported a 2017 law allowing muftis (religious civil servants) to perform marriages in an effort to register more marriages in the country. Because religious leaders have promoted underage marriages, secularists believe the law will lead to increased numbers of child marriages (Uras, 2017).

A most severe attack on women came in his 2014 speech in Istanbul: "You cannot put women and men on an equal footing. It is against their delicate nature," he said. He added that in the workplace, a man and a pregnant woman cannot be treated the same and that feminists don't understand that Islam regards motherhood highly ("Turkey President Erdogan," 2014).

Other public statements criticizing women's legal rights have come from several AKP officials, and a statement from the National Directorate of Religious Affairs cited Islamic law in supporting the marriage of 9-year-old girls (Butcher, 2018). In 2018, the head of the Social Fabric Foundation remarked that "women should be grateful to God, because God allowed men to beat women and be relaxed." In 2014, then Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç said in regard to his view of the declining moral standards in society, "A man should be moral but women should be moral as well; they should know what is decent and what is not decent. She should not laugh loudly in front of all the world and should preserve her decency at all times" ("Turkish Deputy Prime Minister," 2014, para. 3). Public comments from government officials like these contribute to the climate for increased violence against women. Cindoglu and Unal (2017) argue that the

ruling party's "hegemonic gender politics" have been aimed at the "pervasive control over women's bodies and sexuality" (p. 39).

In the face of policies that stripped away hard-won gains over the years, women believed they "would lose control over both their bodies and their future under AKP rule" (Yörük, 2014, p. 422). Seeing those rights decline, Yörük claims, women became the "pioneers of the Gezi uprising" (p. 421). Though the 2013 protests over Gezi Park in the heart of Istanbul were ostensibly focused on protecting dwindling green space in the city, the movement that spread around the country became a rallying cry for a range of human rights, especially those related to women and minorities.

Since the first feminist night march in 2003, just months after AKP came to power, women's groups representing all political parties in Turkey have been particularly vocal during the annual International Women's Day demonstrations. In most years, thousands of women's rights protesters have marched in the streets, recently focused on the increased violence perpetrated by men. In 2019, the demonstrations highlighted the case of Şule Çet, who fell to her death after allegedly being pushed by her boss and another man out a 20-story window (Jones, 2019).

Women's marches have not been partisan in their composition, Tremblay (2019) reports, including various religious and secular groups. One participant in the 2019 march is quoted as saying, "We're not immune from patriarchy because of our piety" (Tremblay, 2019, para 12).

On the day of the 2019 demonstration in Istanbul, Erdoğan abruptly canceled it. Women defied the edict, gathering in the streets in large numbers. Afterward, the women were chastised by the president in the press for not being quiet during the call to prayer from the mosques around the city, to which the women responded that the noise in the streets prevented them from hearing the *ezan* at all (Tremblay, 2019).

As Papacharissi (2015) points out, collective action requires coordination, consensus building, and leadership. The annual women's marches do support a degree of collective action, but are largely viewed as singular events that fall on the date celebrating global rights for women, not as a sustained movement.

The cases we examine represent different types and degrees of violence occurring in different parts of the country at different times with different motivations, and they even make use of different hashtags carrying the names of the individual women. They are all examples of the violence-against-women theme, but at this time, we do not find evidence of collective action.

In the years under AKP rule, street protests, including the 2019 women's march, have been banned during times of resistance to controversial decisions/actions taken by the government, so it is not likely that the tweets related to violent acts against women would include calls to collective action in public spaces. However, we decided to code for any such postings if they were detected.

From the results of cited studies and theoretical work on online protest activity, it is no surprise that the cases of femicide and other physical attacks on women prompted people to express their feelings on Twitter and other social media and to use the social networks as a connective action. To our knowledge,

existing research has not focused on the content shared on social media concerning femicides and violence against women, hence the need for a content analysis of the social media postings. We therefore analyze posts on Twitter calling for justice for six of the Turkish women victims, basing our work on descriptive measures of the types and substance of postings in six prominent cases.

Methodology

Description of the Six Cases

To answer our research question, we examined several recent hashtag campaigns revolving around cases of femicide and physical violence against women in Turkey, described next. These Twitter campaigns have brought women's rights issues to the forefront, including the six cases we describe here (e.g., #sendeanlat, #SuleCetIcinAdalet, and #AyşegülTerzininSesiOlalim).

The first of these emerged as a result of the rape and brutal murder of Özgecan Aslan, a 20-year-old woman who was riding home in a minibus in Mersin on February 15, 2015. The bus driver was the perpetrator, but his father and a friend came to help dispose of her body, first burning it and then throwing it into a river. Following media reports of the crime, individuals expressed outrage on Twitter. On the day of her death, a law professor tweeted her encouragement to others to report experiences of incidents that occurred because of their gender, using the hashtag #sendeanlat (tell your story too). Kandiyoti (2016) cites this case as one in which "the existence of a vocal women's movement and of civil society organizations that monitor rights (including those of sexual minorities) and gender-based violence" (p. 110) illustrates that organized resistance can sometimes turn into civic protest.

In the week following Aslan's death, nearly 640,000 comments were tweeted or retweeted, according to a study of the themes of the tweets posted as #sendeanlat (Ikizer, Ramirez-Esparza, & Boyd, 2019). The authors identified five key themes, focusing on the assault experience, alongside reactions to victim blaming and to whether women should be held responsible for assaults, honor culture, and so on. Many women suggested tactics to prevent such attacks, like wearing a wedding ring or getting off the bus before one's stop to avoid being the last passenger (Davidson, 2015). The hashtag drew the most postings in the first few days, but by the end of the week, unable to sustain focus, the number had dropped off significantly. In addition to the social media campaign, people in major Turkish cities engaged in mass protests, wearing black to signify their protest and mourning for Özgecan.

Other social-media-supported protests against women's violence involved an attack on Melisa Sağlam, a young nurse who was wearing shorts on a bus in Istanbul in September 2016; the incident sparked a Twitter storm. Ayşegül Terzi reported that a man verbally abused her, saying, "Those who wear shorts must die." Then he kicked her in the face because she ignored his request for her to "sit appropriately." In his trial, Abdullah Çakıroğlu's final statement before being sentenced to three years in prison was:

> I was not going to say this, since it is disgraceful, but her [Terzi's] underwear could be
> seen while she was sitting down. I would like to know where our state draws the line. This
> is Turkey and it is an Islamic country . . . I have been provoked. ("Man Sentenced," 2017)

Members of the public were angered that Çakıroğlu was initially released by a prosecutor who said the attack did not warrant arrest. The dismissal of the case by the court prompted street protests and a social media campaign using the hashtag #AyşegülTerzininSesiOlalım (Let's be the Voice for Ayşegül Terzi). In Yanarocak's (2016) view of the effectiveness of social media protests for women's rights, Terzi's case

> highlights the role of SNS as the "new watchdog of democracy," and the power they give
> the public for launching significant public campaigns. Despite the power SNS place in the
> hands of the public, their global reach contravenes the desire of some people to conceal
> social problems and resolve them only within the "walls" of the country, for fear of harming
> its image—even though such leaks are inevitable in this day and age. (para. 8)

A third recent example of a death of a young woman resulted in a call for justice on social media. Şule Çet, a university student who had worked part time for two businessmen in Ankara, was invited by Çağatay Aksu and Berk Akand for dinner followed by drinks in a high-rise office building in the city. Later in the evening Çet fell or was pushed from the window to her death on the first-floor terrace of the building. Initially the prosecutor ruled the death a suicide based on the two men's statements. Following their release, new evidence eventually led to charges of rape and murder (Mortimer, 2019). Many female protestors stood in front of the Palace of Justice, where the trial was taking place, with pictures of Çet on posters and the caption, "We will not remain silent—Women Organizations" (Mortimer, 2019). Twitter posts carried the hashtag #SuleCetIcinAdalet (Justice for Şule Çet). Women on the site called for exposing the lies after describing the circumstances under which Çet died.

The wearing of shorts on a bus during Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting and prayer, was considered a violation of *namus* (the moral rules of society) by the man who called out Melisa Sağlam for her clothing. He said that he was provoked into attacking her by the way she was dressed, after asking her if she was not ashamed to dress like that during the holy month ("Istanbul Man," 2018).

Fatma Şengül was shot and killed by a male colleague in front of her house on March 30, 2019. The murderer had planned this act; he waited for Şengül to leave the house and brutally killed her. The social backlash against this femicide was taken to Twitter, with the popular hashtag #FatmaŞengülİçinAdalet. Şengül's children gathered support to bring their mother justice through the use of social media.

Most recently, on August 18, 2019, Emine Bulut was stabbed and killed by her husband in front of her daughter. The recording of the last minutes of Emine Bulut's life, in which she cries, "I don't want to die!" and her daughter responding, "Mom, please don't die!" led to outrage across large segments of society in Turkey. Social media have become a major outlet for people to voice their anger and seek for justice for Emine Bulut.

Because these hashtag movements have attracted citizens' attention, and commentaries point to the role of SNS in empowering women's resistance against violence in Turkey, a close analysis of the Twitter

content is necessary. To our knowledge, no studies have examined social media postings related to the physical and verbal violence against women. A systematic examination of the content of Twitter postings should reveal the nature and breadth of the connective action and whether affective publics are evident in these campaigns. All six campaigns were reported in the news media, some over an extended period, including coverage of the court cases. Our qualitative content analysis maps out the common themes and ways in which Twitter users have employed social media as tools of resistance and means of struggle against violence.

Data Collection

The database consisted of 91,101 tweets extracted from all tweets that used hashtags for one of the six women under study. The Twitter "garden hose" was used to obtain 10% of all tweets that included the selected hashtags (Clayton et al., 2016). Following the coding of the 100 most tweeted/retweeted posts for the six women's cases described earlier—Emine Bulut (2019), stabbed/murdered by her husband; Şule Çet (2018), thrown from a balcony to her death by her employers; Özgecan Aslan (2015), murdered while resisting rape; Ayşegül Terzi (2016), kicked for wearing shorts on a bus; Melisa Sağlam (2017), attacked for wearing shorts on a bus during Ramazan; and Fatma Şengül (2019), shot and killed by a work colleague—we analyzed the tweet content and information about the posters to answer our research question.

The unit of analysis was a single tweet. We selected the 100 most retweeted posts of each of the campaigns, from the time of the attack through six months after, and coded them according to categories defined.

Coding Instrument

Tweet popularity. The number of times each tweet was retweeted was coded as an indicator of tweet popularity and indication of connective action.

Number of followers. The number of followers that each poster of the tweet selected was recorded, also a measure of connective action.

Tweet content. All tweets were coded as to whether they contained: (a) an opinion, (b) factual detail, (c) emotional content (sadness, anger, outrage, fear, or no emotion), and (d) media (images, video). All content variables were measured to determine whether affective publics were established surrounding the violent incidents.

Findings

Before addressing our research question, we provide an overall description of the content and the commonalities in the tweets through a close examination of the posts. We found overwhelming support for these women (72%) and the cause of justice for prosecuting the men who attacked and killed them—from calling for justice in the hashtag to describing what justice might look like in the court case against the perpetrator. (See Table 1 for the summary statistics.)

There was little criticism of public officials (4.8%) for lack of action in these or other cases. We also found limited efforts to organize protests or initiate other activity (only 18.4% of the tweets suggested any specific action), indicating a lack of collective action. We know that protests took place from the news reports of the demonstrations outside courthouses and in the streets, but we speculate that the information about the activity circulated in more closed spaces (such as texting on cell phones or direct messaging in other social media). We believe that posters might have been fearful of repercussions by government officials for public statements to organize such events, given the authorities' use of tear gas, water cannons, and wide-scale arrests during the 2013 Gezi Park protests and more recent arrests for social media criticism of government action/inaction related to the Syrian invasion and the coronavirus crisis. In a study of social and system trust in the use of social media during the Gezi uprising, Haciyakupoglu and Zhang (2015) found that participants in the protests were concerned about trusting social media information sources; compared with Twitter, they had greater trust in WhatsApp and Facebook, where conversations are more private. System trust was also important at the format level for the information, such that written information was trusted less than videos.

Table 1. Descriptive Summary Statistics of the Six Hashtag Campaigns Analyzed.

Categories	Yes (%)	No (%)
Tweet content		
Multiple hashtags	11.6	88.4
Includes media	29.2	54.5
Includes support	72.0	28.0
Includes opinion	61.3	38.6
Includes emotion	40.8	59.2
Includes call to action	18.4	81.6
Questioning authorities	4.8	95.2

These incidents of violence against women might be thought of as individual incidents rather than societal issues. However, we have documented that the social context has been created by officials, and the lack of enforcement of laws, or loopholes in the laws themselves, exists at a systemic rather than an individual level.

Something else that posters had in common, despite the differences in the nature of the attacks and the victims themselves, was the tendency to post tweets without media accompaniment. Only 27.7% of the tweets contained an image or a video alongside the tweet. Many of the images were retweeted from another poster, thereby increasing the evidence of connective action. Retweeting of images or video is considered a part of the storytelling by posters shared through the retweets by followers and others.

The affective level of the post was not as high as expected. Though 63.6% of the posts contained no obvious expression of emotion, anger was directed at the perpetrator or society in 8.1% of the posts, while a higher level, 14.1%, was found for hatred/outrage. Sadness was shared in 12.5% of the posts. The

sadness and statements surrounding the remembrance of the victim or the unwillingness to ever forget them were key, particularly related to the four-year anniversary of the heinous murder of Özgecan Aslan.

In addition to the cases' common features, there were some specific posting characteristics. In the tweets for Çet, the focus was on convicting the two men who were initially and who claimed she had committed suicide. Posters never believed that the men were innocent, even before evidence supporting the charge of murder was revealed. Similarly, tweets for Terzi, almost all of which provided a running commentary on the trial itself by one or two individuals, included several that contested the defense's claim that the perpetrator was mentally ill.

Repetition was a feature of many of the tweets. For example, on the anniversary of Aslan's death, many posters included a quote from her mother about her wish that Özgecan had been killed by a bullet, rather than experiencing a longer, more torturous death—another sign of connective action. Identical photos of the victims were frequently repeated, or the exact wording of a sentiment, a call for justice, or message of support for the victims.

Finally, we examined the identification of the poster. Many used their own names, and we could see pictures of the posters when they identified themselves if the tweet was still available. Because many accounts had been suspended (possibly at the request of the government) or were no longer visible, we did not report numbers for the actual identity or gender of the account holders. However, the posters seemed to include almost as many men as women. Accuracy in gender coding was impossible because many individuals wrote multiple tweets about a specific case, and overcounting would have occurred. Additionally, many accounts could not be identified by gender.

Interestingly, none of the females who posted their own pictures wore headscarves, indicating that secular women were more public about their concern for the problem of violence against women. One self-identifying Muslim man cynically noted that Twitter campaigns only existed for secular women, whereas Muslim women were ignored. Some posters were celebrities—musicians, actors, or politicians—following on the research of Johri et al. (2018), which identified postings from celebrities as triggers for increased numbers of tweets. Celebrities in this study tended to have very large numbers of followers, inflating the mean number of followers. Notably, Meral Akşener, former vice speaker of the Turkish Parliament and leader of the Iyi (Good) Party in Turkey, posted a tweet with the hashtag #EmineBulut that included a video critical of the government for using women's bodies for political agendas. The post was retweeted 26,600 times. Alongside political figures, representatives for women's rights organizations and a labor union tended to have larger numbers of followers, but their posts didn't necessarily result in the largest number of retweets. Several of these people provided commentary on the trial of Abdullah Çakıroğlu, who was convicted of the attack on Ayşegül Terzi. Aylin Nazliyaka, a Parliamentarian representing the opposition Republican People's party, who had more than 400,000 followers, tweeted multiple times about the trial.

Our research question asked whether evidence of connective action and/or affective publics existed among the posters. At first glance, the use of multiple hashtags in the tweets might indicate an interest in linking the various cases of violent acts against women, thus building a foundation for collective action against all such violence. However, only 11.6% of the tweets included more than one hashtag. We view this

low percentage as an indicator that most posters dealt with each case as separate from the others rather than as part of a trend. Most posts used a hashtag that included a single victim's name.

We also coded the tweets for mention of proposed action surrounding the case—announcing demonstrations, attendance at trials or other court activity, or a public protest. In only 18.4% of the cases was any action mentioned, and the mentions were focused on specific women's cases, not in reference to a larger social movement on violence against women or even about a particular instance of collective action. We found no indication of collective identity, other than phrases referring to supporters through use of the word "we" in the tweet. Statements such as "we will never forget" were often made, but with no sense of who the referenced "we" represented. Some speculated that all women were in danger of violence, but the tweets were never more specific. Further, no focused collective action was ever proposed. We would conclude that though many individuals spoke up to express their concern, anger, or outrage about the increased frequency of violence against Turkish women, expressions of opinion did not rise to the level of collective action for social change; however, they were able to connect with many others through repostings that told and reacted to specific women's stories.

Each case engendered a great deal of interest on Twitter among people from across the country—ordinary citizens of all ages, as well as individuals of prominence in politics and the arts, supporting Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) concept of connective action. It may be too soon for the online expressions of solidarity to hold the government accountable for not playing a greater role in curbing the violence, especially given the fear of detention or arrest by the government (only 4.8% of the tweets mentioned any questioning of the authorities). However, some tweets pointed to the inadequacy of the courts to deliver appropriate punishment to the perpetrators. Additionally, no indications of anyone playing a leadership role in moving toward collective action was found. Human rights and women's organizations and individual protestors must play that role. That will be hard to accomplish, given that the government blocks every effort toward any organized opposition.

The existence of affective publics in this study was affirmed through the stories told in the images (19.2%), videos (8.4%), and quotes that were tweeted and retweeted. Unfortunately, in 16.2% of the postings, the links to possible media were not available. Of the 40.9% of the posts that expressed emotion, 14% were sad, 1.2% were fearful, and 9.4% showed anger, while hatred for the perpetrator or even outrage was shown in 16%. The emotionality of the images and videos was coded. The emotional component of images and videos was coded alongside the textual content. Therefore, a holistic coding based on the tweets was conducted. An example of the emotionally charged videos was the short recording of Melisa Sağlam captured by a closed-circuit television camera while she was being attacked by a man in a minibus for wearing shorts. This video was retweeted multiple times with different comments by the posters. Another videotaped example displayed the emotional testimony of Melisa Sağlam, expressing her current anxieties following the incident when the perpetrator who attacked her in the minibus was released. The tweet, including the video, was coded for fear. Even though fewer than 20% of the tweets we coded included images and videos, the impact of those postings was seemingly much higher because of the added power of the emotionally charged visual content alongside the text in the tweets.

Overall, the mean number of retweeted posts was 1,377, and the mean number of followers of each poster was more than 200,000, thus spreading the impact of the emotions widely across Twitter users. We view this as support for Papacharissi's theory of affective publics (2015, 2016).

Conclusion: Social Media Fears

For this group of social media posters, all of whom have been prompted to defend the rights of women who were targets of violence, we know that social media are also sites where surveillance takes place, and punishment can easily follow in Turkey. Not only have a number of citizens been detained for social media posts (including more than 800 in a one-month period in 2018 for protest against Turkish military actions in Afrin, Syria), but the country also has the distinction of having made the most requests for removal of content/posts from Twitter between 2014 and mid-2017 (Human Rights Watch, 2018). In the two years following a coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016, during which the country lived under a state of emergency, Amnesty International (2018) reported that "a chilling climate of fear is sweeping across Turkish society as the Turkish government continues to use the state of emergency to shrink the space for dissenting or alternative views" (para.). The report noted that Article 7/2 of the anti-terrorism law has been used extensively to target people for their critical comments on social media (Amnesty International, 2018).

The fear of getting on the wrong side of the government may prevent these and other social media users from posting anything even minimally critical of its actions or policies, including those that affect women. That fear can also prevent the establishment of collective action. Still, as our results suggest, citizens have raised their voices, demanding justice for women who have been physically attacked, raped, and murdered; called for changes in the laws that protect women's reproductive rights and the right to their sexual identity; and supported protests for equality between men and women under the law in the workplace, in civil society, and in their homes. Justice and equality may not come soon for the women of Turkey, and violence may increase when people are sheltering in place during the coronavirus pandemic, but in spite of this fear and the limits of online activism, citizens have not been cowed in their efforts to restore and expand those democratic rights.

Future studies should explore the ways in which individual examples or cases of social injustice become connected over time to build toward social movements. In a country like Turkey, where the constant fear of reprisal for making public statements initiating action and calling for changes in public policy is widespread, social media campaigns may have only limited success. This study illustrates that the political environment for campaigns must be taken into account in future research when assessing the effectiveness of social media as a tool for social change. We have shown that the logic of connective action and the existence of affective publics help us understand the nature of social media's role, but we believe that the episodic nature of the violent acts against women in Turkey and the contradictory positions of the government regarding the role of women in society have prevented any sustained social movement to bring about permanent reduction in that violence.

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