How Does Mainstream Culture Threaten Digital Activism?
A Qualitative Study on the Online Lynching Experiences of Vegan Activists

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Abstract

Online lynching targets all kinds of online activities carried out by a user and their presence in digital networks. Publicly-published posts or such different contents as leaked private messages - even an offline action - can be used as an excuse to start online lynching. Activists are one of the groups that are considered the victims of online lynching while interactively using SNWs to inform others, to provide them with skills on social issues, or to reveal their skills. Online lynchers are directly concerned with the activists themselves rather than the advocacy contents of the activists. The purpose of this research is to discuss the lynching experiences of activists on social media. Moreover, to reveal the underlying causes of lynching and its consequences from the perspective of the activists. In this context, a semi-structured interview was conducted with some vegan activists producing content on social media accounts that represents an individual or a group in Turkey. The activists for the interviews were reached by using the snowball sampling method. The research is outstanding in terms of making sense of the online manifestation of lynching, an offline concept, in the framework of activism. This paper

will present that online lynching also has a role in the offline lives of the victims and the concept of online lynching is frequently associated with the concepts of power/potency/masculinity. Moreover, significant differences have been revealed between cyberbullying and online lynching in terms of repetition, anonymity and power imbalance.

Keywords: Online Lynching, Social Media, Veganism, Cyberbullying, Digital Activism

Anaakım Kültür Dijital Aktivizmi Nasıl Tehdit Ediyor?
Vegan Aktivistlerin Çevrim içi Linç Deneyimleri Üzerine Nitel Bir Çalışma

Özet

Çevrim içi linç, bir kullanıcının gerçekleştirdiği her türlü çevrim içi faaliyeti ve dijital ağlardaki varlığını hedeflemektedir. Herkese açık gönderiler veya sızdırılmış özel mesajlar gibi farklı içerikler - hatta çevrim dışı bir eylem – çevrim içi linç başlatmak için bir bahane olarak kullanılabilir. Aktivistler, sosyal medyayı başkalarını bilgilendirmek, onlara toplumsal konulara ilişkin beceri kazandırmak veya becerilerini ortaya çıkarmak için sosyal medyayı etkileşimli kullanırken çevrim içi linç kurbanı olan gruplardan biridir. Çevrim içi linçte bulunanlar, aktivistlerin aktivzm içeriklerinden çok, doğrudan aktivistlerin kendileriyle ilgilenmektedir.

Bu araştırmanın amacı, aktivistlerin sosyal medyadaki linç deneyimlerini tartışmaktır. Ayrıca linç olaylarının altında yatan sebep ve sonuçlarını aktivistlerin bakış açısıyla ortaya koymak istenmektedir. Bu kapsamda sosyal medya hesaplarında Türkiye'de bir kişiyi veya grubu temsil eden içerikler üreten bazı vegan aktivistlerle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yapılmıştır. Görüşme yapılacak aktivistlere kartopu örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak ulaşılmıştır. Araştırma, çevrim dışı bir kavram olan linç etmenin çevrim içi tezahürünü aktivizm çerçevesinde anlamlandırması açısından önem kazanmaktadır.

Görüşmelerin sonuçlarına göre, çevrim içi linçin, mağdurların çevrim dışı yaşamlarında da bir rolü olduğu ve çevrim içi linç kavramının sıklıkla güç/güç/erkeklik kavramlarıyla ilişkilendirildiği anlaşılmaktadır. Ayrıca siber zorbalıkla çevrim içi linç arasında tekrarlama, anonimlik ve güç dengesizliği açısından önemli farklılıklar görülmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Çevrim içi Linç, Sosyal Medya, Veganlık, Siber Zorbalık, Digital Aktivizm

Introduction

Advocacy in social media, which gained momentum upon the discussions in the blogosphere two decades ago, has, over time, generated a wide place for itself in activism. While the competition among the global brands in information and communication technologies has accelerated the development of these technologies, the decrease in the cost of mobile devices and Internet access has played a decisive role in the increase in the number of users, and therefore, meeting the demand of the users and providing them with innovations have become a must for all the actors in the market. Competition has also

increased for social media tools, and one of the most important ways to stand out in this competition has been to diversify the interaction facilities.

Social media tools, which have a high level of interaction, ease of use without professional skills, and are free of charge, are actively used by approximately 3.8 billion people worldwide. In other words, while this rate corresponds to 49% of the total human population in the world, the users spend an average of 2 hours and 24 minutes a day on social media (Hootsuite & We are social, 2020). These data indicate that such factors as the loss of the distinction between producer and consumer of the information, the speed of the distribution of information, etc. bring about many possibilities which were not available in any social movement and activism in the past.

The networking capabilities of social media have an important role to play in the the distribution of information in activism. Tools that give different meanings to the information and gain a social, cultural or economic value, are more common on social media. Social media activism can be discussed at the final point where external activism (carried out through tools other than those provided by social media) or internal activism (conducted through the social media tools themselves) come together.

One of the main reasons why social media activism has a similar level of importance in different countries is the opportunity to form international public opinion. In the trend, which Gerbaudo (2017) calls cyber-populism, activism activities are brought to the agenda by the activists using tools offered by such monopolist companies as Facebook and Twitter. For instance, countries such as China, Egypt, and Iran, where freedom of expression is inhibited, block the access to social media sites as a way of restraining opposition.

When it comes to social movements, the disappearance of the agenda difference of both street and social media and the "hybridization" of these movements (Castells, 2015; McCaughey, 2014) go beyond evaluating the content in social media as just a digital technology-mediated object or message. In fact, at this point, the network structure of digital technologies comes to the fore again. The intensive and rapid dispersion of content about a social movement on digital networks also enables the diffusion of opposing thoughts. Hyper-textuality can be used to present contradiction, turning discussion into an "online lynching" so as to gender underestimation, neglect, and even to eradicate the opposing thought.

This study will discuss what kinds of actions caused vegan activists in Turkey to be exposed to online lynching on Twitter, in which ways they were lynched, the consequences of that lynching in terms of activism, and the lynching experiences of the activists in general.

Social Media Activism

It can be said that metavoicing, one of the digital activism actions in SNWs, plays an important role. People interested in an issue that is relevant to them can continue their online conversations through metavoicing, which is defined as "participating in an ongoing online information chat by reacting to the presence, profiles, content and effectiveness of others on an online setting" (Majchrzak et al., 2013, p. 41). Resharing content is a move that allows content to be transferred quickly within the network. This seems to be preferred over liking or commenting on content, based on algorithms. Such "micro-actions" as liking/rating/voting a content, commenting on content, etc. are all gathered under the concept of metavoicing.

SNWs has come a long way in the live broadcast stream after Twitter bought the Periscope application in 2015 and started broadcasting. In addition to this, when the story format, which was first introduced to the users by Snapchat, was adopted by Instagram in 2016, it turned into an important tool for daily updates. Live broadcast and the story format may be used as an interaction tool in activism and carry more than still or moving visuals to SNWs. Synchronous and asynchronous interaction are intertwined by offering such options as sending notifications to others when the live broadcast begins, storing the video as a post, and storing it for a certain time as a story

Online Lynched Activists On Social Media

The prominent function of SNWs is that it allows their users to interact with other users and to produce and share digital content (Lindmark, 2009). This interaction and sharing process has negative as well as many positive aspects, such as the rapid distribution of information and asynchronous communication. Some studies indicate that types of violent behaviour such as bullying, hate speech, discrimination, marginalization, harassment, disclosure, and targeting are increasingly observed in SNWs (Ali et al., 2011; Lyndon, Rocke & Cratty, 2011; Fogel & Nehmad, 2009 Peterson & Densley, 2017; Recuero, 2015). Even though the concept of online lynching is one of these types of violence, it is a term that is not frequently encountered in the literature. A historical

understanding of lynching follows in order to create a context for online lynch in the literature.

Although the word "lynch" literally refers to punishing through mob law (Skeat, 1980: 306), a very clear approach to the emergence of the word is not presented. A general view can be mentioned that the term lynch appeared in the USA. Historically it appears to refer to blacks being targeted by whites over a number of decades. (Preifer, 2011; Berg, 2011; Wood, 2009; Buckser, 1992). Whether or not the punishment actions of the crowds are death-oriented during this period is controversial. Berg (2011) states that until the mid-19th century lynching included such actions as public humiliation, whipping, and pouring tar and feathering. The tendency to do this in public spheres intimidated others and naturally narrowed the areas where they could survive.

According to Pfeifer (2011, p. 4), lynching may have been a cultural response to anxiety over legal uncertainties. According to the data shared by NAACP (2016), whereas 72.2% of the lynches registered in the USA between the years 1882 and 1968 targeted blacks, many of the lynched whites were exposed to lynching because they helped black people and showed anti-lynching attitudes. The term lynching, which changed semantically over time, was clearly defined by anti-lynch organizations in 1940. The new definition insisted on there being legal evidence that a person had been killed, there had to be an illegal death, a group had to have participated in the killing, and the excuse of the group for action had to be to serve justice, race, or tradition (Waldrep, 2000, p. 98). In fact, as Pfeifer stated, lynching changed from non-lethal to lethal collective violence. Thurston (2011) pointed out that it was unimportant whether the ending of life was slow or fast and that every lynching was ruthless.

Digital networks have as large a presence in the lives of people as offline networks do. The birth of the online lynching concept has been inevitable. The concept of online lynching can be defined in digital networks as that of a group or person wishing to punish another group or person without the premise of judgment. Like other types of violence, the phenomenon of online lynching is a set of linear actions between individuals in two different positions, such as the perpetrator and the sufferer or the bully and the victim. Aranha (2014) was one of the first researchers who wrote about the concept of online lynching and defined this concept as "the emergence of group bias among people in the discussion by guessing according to the instantly-known situation throughout the discussions in online environments and humiliating and discriminating a rival person or

group by neglecting the opponent ideas" (Neto & Barbosa, 2019). According to Navarria (2019), online lynching is a form of massive violence that turns the lives of individuals into hell. Like all other types of the political public sphere that Arendt (2013) suggests, SNW digital tools allow interaction among people who are similar to or completely different from each other. This situation may cause the individuals to see themselves as representative of 'truth' and to categorize others as the opposite. According to social identity theory by Turner (1991), the individuals who make social classifications tend to perceive other people not as individuals, but as members of a group (e.g. Jewish, gay, vegan). These classifications provide a basis for the formation of stereotypes and marginalization. At the same time, this situation makes individuals feel that they belong to one group and in the process acquire a social identity, and devaluate the other group. As stated by Aranha (2014, p. 125), many humiliating posts or messages irrelevant to the subject matter being discussed are sent to those who are seen as competitors. For example, non-vegans can create a class for themselves by categorizing vegans as an opposing group and consider themselves more knowledgeable about healthy eating, public health, and animal rights, and they may think that all members of their group are better than those in the other group in terms of these issues.

The difference between the concepts of cyberbullying and online lynching may blur at times. As a matter of fact, it is possible to discuss online lynching in the context of research related to cyberbullying. Nevertheless, the need to distinguish between these two concepts stems from the need to create individual spaces for discussion in terms of literature and social practices. Defining cyberbullying through research is an important resource for evaluating cyberbullying risks and the measures to be taken to prevent cyberbullying. Different definitions can be seen for cyberbullying in the literature. Espelage et al. (2018, p. 65) includes "flaming, harassment, stalking, impersonation, outing, trickery/phishing, as well as exclusion". In the study conducted with adolescents aged 11-17 in 6 countries in Europe by Menesini et al (2012), anonymity and private versus public contexts are also proposed as cyberbullying criteria in addition to intentionality, repetition, and imbalance of power. In this research, it was revealed that imbalance of power, intentionality and anonymity are prominent criteria to define cyberbullying. In a meta-analysis of another comprehensive study, Kowalski et al. (2014, p. 1109) define cyberbullying as follows: "The definition contains four components: (a) intentional aggressive behavior that (b) is carried out repeatedly, (c) occurs between a

perpetrator and victim who are unequal in power, and (d) occurs through electronic technologies."

Admittedly, these studies focus more on adolescents and children, and there is also a lack of research on cyberbullying among adults (Lam et al., 2019; Jenaro et al., 2018; Shadmanfaat et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019). The indications are that the focus of online lynching research is not on children and young victims. Online lynching is carried out by mobs, unlike cyberbullying, because of the very nature of lynching. At the beginning of the online lynching incident, mobs are involved in the matter between the accused and the accuser as jury and executioner (Arjun&Rai, 2018). Opinions, appearances or actions that do not conform to social norms, in general, can constitute a target for online lynching (Nwaiwu, 2017). Although the person who is exposed to online lynching facing the intense data and message flow of mobs has the opportunity to get away from the physical environment, the damage an online user may suffer depends on the emotional and mental strength of that person (Arjun & Rai, 2018).

A decade ago, Harkin (2010) reported that Richard Dawkins was lynched online, in the process exposed to many aggressive and humiliating messages in his forum. Despite the anonymization of online lynchers in online news or academic studies, there is actually an effort to understand who or what institutions (political parties, ideological groups or a person, etc.) promote online lynching. In this respect, trolls are considered the best answer to this quest, both in terms of their brutal content creation capacity and their anonymity. In this respect, trolls are considered the best answer to this quest in terms of both their ruthless content creation capacity and their anonymity. While trolls seem to be the main perpetrators mentioned in reply to the question as to who instigates online lynchings, it also raises the question of who the trolls are. The most common definition of trolling is through provocation. A troll can disrupt an interaction process, cause fruitless discussions (Coles&West, 2016), engage online simply because they find it amusing, provoke an argument, or harass one or all of the parties. Therefore there can actually be some grouping for trolls, such as pertaining to humorous, pro-social or malicious trolling (Ortiz, 2020).

Arjun and Rai (2018, p. 36) use the concepts of trolling and online lynching almost interchangeably, and they explain the online form of real mob lynching: "Trolling by the virtual society in social media platform has its root grounded in the same mindset." In Ataman and Çoban's (2019) study entitled "Turkey: How to deal with threats to

journalism?", one of the most important threats to press freedom in Turkey is the trolls. Ataman and Çoban emphasize that the effects of online lynching that started after troll attacks were reversed when the attackers were exposed. Ataman and Çoban mention the concept of state-sponsored trolls in this study. Likewise, Karataş and Saka (2017) assert that online lynching is carried out by different groups of ruling-party-sponsored trolls in order to "discourage and silence the opposing voices". Thus, the effort of online lynching studies to recognise/know and understand the perpetrator(s) rather than the victims stands out.

Research Methodology

In this study, semi-structured online interviews were carried out with 11 vegan activists so as to comprehend how the online lynching experiences of the activists occurred and how these experiences shaped their digital actions. The activists for the interviews were selected by using the snowball sampling method. The activist, who was first interviewed, has been actively involved on social media activism and street activism in the past year, highlighting his real identity instead of anonymity. The snowball sampling was started with this activist by considering his role in a determined and ongoing series of collective actions that will attract public attention, and interview request was sent to him through an online message.

The data were collected through WhatsApp, Telegram and an online interview form. The interviews were conducted between February and April 2020 by two researchers so as to garner different perspectives. The answers of the interviewees were transferred to Google Sheets, thus enabling multiple users to study the same file simultaneously.

The first data table obtained from the interviews was then converted into a separate summary data table without changing the contexts or meanings. After that, a new table was generated by categorizing common words (such as 'power', 'violence', and 'intolerance') and common expressions (such as 'lynch culture', 'defence mechanism', and 'guilt') in the answers by the interviewees to each question. Thus, while the table with common expressions revealed the general framework, the summary table prevented subjective views and expressions from being overlooked. In data analysis, both tables were used to reveal different and similar answers.

The reason why the research was carried out within the ambit of vegan activists is primarily that veganism visibility has increased in Turkey in recent years. According to the research by the Ceuta Group on consumer interest, the interest in veganism in Turkey increased by 352% between 2014 and 2019 years (Vegconomist, 2019). On the other hand, vegan activists are marginalized as extremists. Different groups react to their activism in Turkey, where religious, cultural, and social codes have become established in commodifying non-human animals. In this context, it can be stated that the risk of online lynching increases for vegan activists.

Twitter is widely used by activists because anonymised accounts can be created. Twitter also creates an important area in setting agendas with the use of hashtags (Erben, 2019). Therefore, the research is limited to the Twitter experiences of vegan activists.

Findings

Activism experiences of participants

The participants were asked how long they have been in activism and what kind of action they had taken. The duration of online or offline actions related to vegan activism is between 1 and 10 years, and the average is 3.5 years. Some of the participants (2 people) do not fully accept the actions or protests they participate in, especially with non-vegans, as vegan activism. For instance, #5 stated that they have been involved in signature actions, protests, financial support actions, and campaigns for more than ten years but have not participated in any activism action with non-vegans for 1.5 years. In addition, #9 regularly (almost daily) shared stories through Instagram on behalf of online activism. #9 performs such actions for offline activism as reality cube, vigil (going and witnessing the places where animal exploitation takes place), and disruption (acting in places where animal exploitation takes place and stopping the operation), and at the same time, they show their open reaction in daily life by not sitting at the tables where non-vegan products are consumed. The participants mostly share content about activism on Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.

Online content generation processes and contents of participants

The content production processes of the interviewed activists have purposes such as informing about animal rights, informing about activities, spreading scientific research, and translating foreign content. Among the participants who produce content for information purposes, #2 generally tries to inform people about the things they do not

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know by reacting to wrong information about animals on Twitter and Instagram. Whereas #4 states that they both inform and produce persuasive content about veganism as a result of their anger and sense of justice, #5 tries to spread the contents of universities, official institutions, or independent institutions regarding rights violations, campaigns, and the vegan process.

Some of the participants (2 people) refrain from sharing content that shows violence against non-human animals. For example, #9 expresses that they do not include violent images, but they try to use hard and striking language against animal exploitation. Similarly, participant #10 mentions that they try to make people face exploitation instead of sharing violent images and to persuade them to become vegan.

Perspectives of the participants about online lynching

Responses to "What does the online lynching mean to you?" were examined in the context of emotions about lynching exposure, and the lynchers' emotional motivation. Nearly half of the interviewees (5 people) states that the online lynching experience caused feelings with regard to hate, bullying, anger, fear, psychological violence, and vegan phobia. #4 defines online lynching as hatred and intolerance and emphasizes that individuals actually need to talk about veganism, but they resort to this method because they cannot confront animal rights. #6 says that online lynching is also a crime, and they define it as the delusions of a particular social group directed at vegan activists. Participant #9 states that online lynching was carried out for intimidation and targeting, which may result in disturbing, humiliating, and discrediting situations. Participant #11 indicates that online lynching is a form of virtual bullying and that it is a virtual depiction of the desire to beat and lynch someone in the street. Whereas participant #12 states that the online lynching action is not actually about the lynched person but more about the people who lynch. Participant #13 emphasizes that the attempts to lynch are caused by the fact that non-vegans see their own inconsistency in issues such as equality and justice as a threat to their comfort zone and adds that: "Of course, there are thousands of different reasons for this. They do not have moral impulses. Their ethical understanding is only for people. They do not know what discrimination and speciesism are. They have the priority to solve human problems, and they see people as superior. Besides, it is difficult for them to do research and read. They also consider what they taste to be more valuable than the life of an animal…"

Online lynching experience of participants

The interviewed activists were asked to convey their experiences or observations about online lynching. The vast majority of the interviewees (9 people) stated that they had online lynching experiences in different ways, and two people expressed that they had not encountered such a situation.

More than half (6 people) of the interviewed vegan activists have been sworn at or insulted. #4 draws attention to the intensity of insults against vegan activists by claiming "Insult was commonplace." On the other hand, some of the interviewees (3 people) state that they were exposed to online lynching by other vegans in some situations or actions where there were disputes. In these responses, it is emphasized that slander is combined with lynching. Participant #10 mentions that they had a spiritual breakdown after being exposed to online lynching by the followers of a vegan activist with whom they had a disagreement, and adds that "It was a horrible experience, and you feel as if you are physically abused. I did not eat anything for a few weeks." #11 reports that they thought this question was asked to understand the lynching actions by vegans by non-vegans, but that their own online lynching experiences were perpetrated by other vegans.

Three interviewed activists were exposed to visual or textual disturbing content through private messages or mentions on social media. This content includes images or videos of dead animals, stories of killing an animal and/or turning it into food, or threats to harm another creature.

The interviewed three activists state that they also witnessed threats and were targeted. #8 underlines that online lynching for vegan activists may occur in different countries. In addition, #8 emphasizes that the social media account of their friend, a vegan activist, was disclosed by farmers after the "Meat the Victims" action that took place in the Netherlands for the first time in 2019. After this disclosure, their friend was threatened with rape, death, and family harm.

Motivation source of online lynchers

The interviewed vegan activists were asked about the motivation source of online lynchers. Through this question, it was tried to more deeply understand how the interviewed people make sense of online lynching. Accordingly, the desire to feel strong, the threat perception towards the interests, the feeling of guilt or the defence desire as a result of this are among the prominent answers by the participants.

An important part of the interviewees (6 people) thinks that the desire to feel strong is an important source of motivation. #12 states that othering was also involved in addition to this desire and they emphasize the role of the numerical multitude in the motivation of lynchers through the following explanations. "The basic motivations of a community with the same opinion, are to exaggerate their interpretation with the power they get from being outnumbered, to be on fire, to say with heart, and not be afraid to be judged while doing so. There are dozens of people who think like him or her, and even if there is someone who says they did wrong, they know the power of the community behind him or her."

According to four of the interviewed activists, the lynchers perceive the vegan activism content as a threat since they gain some interest by using animals. According to #5, as a result of this situation, online lynching is carried out with anger that purposes to destroy the different one. Five of the interviewed vegan activists state that not questioning the general view of animal rights has an important place in the online lynch. According to #3, online lynchers do not live daily life with ethical values, and therefore they do not hesitate while lynching someone because they do not tend to be criticized by such authorities as a father, state, teacher, and a boss they are afraid of. Similarly, #8 also draws attention to the criticism and questioning of authority:

> *"...the reason is the masculine, hierarchical, and capitalist mentality. When you suggest to people that change is impossible and position them hierarchically, this encourages individuals to attack, especially on the people demanding change, without thinking on their own behalf, and especially when this change will eliminate the benefits gained through the hierarchy."*

Social media use after the online lynching

The participants were asked what kind of changes have emerged in the social media use of those exposed to online lynching. Two quite different answers were given to this question. The first of these is an increase in the number of content produced by those exposed to online lynching, and the other is to hesitate to produce less content or to close/freeze the account after the online lynching.

Four of the interviewed activists mention that the number of content has increased, and one participant says that there has been no change. Seven interviewed activists point out that online lynching reduces content production. #11 states that the online lynched user is unable to share anything and experience shyness. Based on their own experience,

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#12 also states that they were unable to share for a long time because they were afraid to re-encounter disturbing comments under the image of a lamb they shared before. #6 draws attention to the reservations of vegan activists, who have been lynched online, about social media presence such as suspending, hiding, or closing social media accounts for a while, and changing profile photos.

Based on their own experience, #4 mentions the opposite process: "The attitude of the doctors after the question of TUS made me worried about all the doctors and treatments I will go to. (…) I started to investigate what I can do against these people (finding a vegan doctor, etc.). I started to write more generally and more clearly in online communications."

According to #3, activists who have been lynched have an increase in their anxiety levels first, and this causes hesitation in content production for a while. Starting from their own experience, #3 had the desire to produce more content after being exposed to online lynching. On the other hand, they also state that vegans without political affiliation or reference are sensitive, emotional, shy, and fragile people because they sometimes cannot predict how to deal with the pain they have witnessed. For this reason, some activists think that online lynching can have a dissuasive effect that contradicts their own experience. Moreover, since these vegans do not know their rights, protection mechanisms, and powers enough or prefer to stay away from violence, online lynching may be the reason for closing accounts.

Converting online lynching to favour vegan activism

The question related to how to turn online lynching into an advantage in terms of vegan activism was asked. This question is aimed to clarify whether there are such efforts as increasing the visibility of online lynching and increasing the interaction as a result of online lynching.

7 interviewed activists pointed out that more people can be reached by producing content to increase interaction. It is noteworthy that there are such approaches as attracting the attention of other vegans and bringing the movement to the agenda by deliberately aggressive responses to the online lynchers, as #10 and #11 conveyed, based on the experiences of others, and expressing veganism through such hashtags as "steak" and "cheese", by risking online lynching exposure as stated by #8. On the other hand, #5 states that a vegan activist who is exposed to online lynching can act like a victim even

though they are not a victim, and can transfer information about veganism to people with a lack of knowledge about it.

In addition, #3 indicates that it is important to try legal remedies and create news value: "(…) it would be a serious advantage to try legal remedies. This would be a good tool not to take revenge on the perpetrator, but to demolish the perception that vegans are people who turn the other cheek each time they are slapped. While they are doing this action by taking some accepted ideas, that is, the power behind them, it will be a deterrent for them to see another power (law) against them. Secondly, the use of law by vegans as a mechanism will also be newsworthy for reasons fed by popular culture."

Whereas #4 says that not taking online lynching seriously and making fun of the online lyncher is a positive step, only #7 of all the participants state that it is difficult to turn online lynching into an advantage because it is really difficult to make people understand the facts that are shown on social media.

Preventing online lynching

The question "How is it possible to prevent online lynching?" was asked. One-third of the participants (4 people) state that it is difficult or impossible to prevent online lynching. #8 emphasizes that the victim is not a human being and that other species are being fought for the struggle for freedom, and they explain that it is not possible to prevent online lynching through these explanations: "As with all other freedom struggles, I think there will be a lynching as long as there are individuals who do not want to lose their privilege, profit from it, are believed and worshipped in the hierarchy."

4 of the interviewees state that it is possible to prevent online lynching by law. #6 explains comprehensively that online lynching can be prevented by giving more importance to love, respect, tolerance, morality and human relations in education, by making efforts to remove the prejudice against veganism in society, by having the vegan option on the menus of restaurants and cafes, by making the necessary legal arrangements, and by including online lynching under the category of hate crimes. #3 points out that the lynching was also carried out by the opposition and that the termination of online lynching was directly related to the power and values of the social opposition. They foresee that the law may be the strongest deterrent here, but in the short term, it is not possible. On the other hand, at this point, #9 also deems it necessary for social media companies to put enforcements in place, as well as having legal regulations.

In addition to this, the phenomenon of education and non-violence also have an important place in the answers. 4 of the interviewees emphasize the necessity of education and state that nonviolence against all kinds of discrimination can prevent lynching.

Discussion

In academic studies, the concept of online lynching is generally examined within the context of such terms as cyberbullying. However, daily practices provide a sign that this concept should be studied more. In everyday life, any user can easily encounter online lynching because the content they produce is not liked by a group. Dirağ (2019) categorizes the users on social media as alpha, beta, and omega. According to Dirağ, although omegas have a high sense of belonging to a group, they are the ones that benefit the least from the interests of that group. Thus, the omega group, with few interests, can easily be radicalized as the group with the least to lose. In this context, it can be thought that the online lynchers are mostly omegas, which is in agreement with the statements made by the interviewed vegan activists. What online lynchers do is enormously marginalize those who are different from them, and interact with them in a way that will radically end the online presence of a lynched person. However, it cannot be said that online lynching is performed only by anonymous users and "omegas". Even though being anonymous on social media offers significant opportunities to users in terms of freedom of expression and government surveillance anxiety, reservations about getting involved in online lynching may also decrease significantly for those who remain anonymous. On the other hand, the results obtained from the findings indicate that targeting another user by a large number of followers with a prominent attitude towards social issues and interaction rate may also lead to online lynching.

Activists need to master scientific and legal information that supports their views while producing content with a demand for social transformation. While how vegan activists share information and news about animal rights differ (for example, some share torture or blood images), the online lynchings they encounter are the same. Online lynchers affect the life of the lynched person not only online, but also offline and this study confirms the research by Navarria about the online lynching methods of Internet vigilantes in China: "Internet vigilantes turn people's networked lives into an exploitable weakness, to thwart and do harm." (Navarria, 2019, p. 247). While highlighting the transformation in the moral use of the Internet, in which there is a condemnation of

postings in which animals are killed or tortured, Navarria exemplified the exemplary nationalists.

What happens here is an attempt to destroy the existence of the one whose thought is different. Such concepts as power, authority, and masculinity are frequently questioned by activists, and the inequality of a hierarchical order is evident in discrimination against animals. Online lynching, to which vegan activists are exposed, also comes mostly from non-vegans. However, another remarkable result is that vegans also expose other vegans to online lynching. Therefore, the validity of the expression "not thinking like him or herself" remains in the same social movement. At this point, the tendency of individuals to perceive themselves as members of a group that is part of the social identity theory by Turner (1991) has fewer classifications when it comes to the vegan movement. A larger group of people forming the vegan movement clearly include the confrontational interactions of narrower groups, though this should not be seen as specific to the vegan movement. For example, another study about digital ecology activism shows that SNWs are associated with the culture of lynching, that people with similar thinking create their own online neighbourhoods, and that those in these neighbourhoods also experience some conflicts within themselves (Erben, 2019, p. 153).

On the other hand, vegan activists with online lynching experience have some tactics to turn this in favour of their advocacy. These tactics do not develop in the same way for every vegan activist. Much more devastating experiences, such as the sharing of real credentials and addresses of some activists as a threat by online lynchers, might even bring about avoiding the use of social media. As noted by Thurston (2011), brutal lynching is also carried out online. However, a clear relationship was not established by the interviewees linking the trolls producing the brutal and aggressive content, the sponsored trolls (state or ruling party) mentioned by Ataman & Çoban (2019) and Karataş & Saka (2017) and the online lynchers. In previous studies on online lynching in Turkey, trolls and online lynchers were associated with each other. There is a dramatic increase in interest in the vegan movement in Turkey (Vegconomist, 2019) and the online visibility of vegans has increased. However, in this study, it has been revealed that vegan activists are not targeted by trolls as "opposing voices" desired to be silenced in the words of Karataş & Saka (2017).

In the findings of how vegan activists generated the content, participants were shown to produce impressive visuals, informative articles, and posters with striking words

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and sentences, rather than images, that directly show violence against animals. There are studies indicating that the Internet, especially media tools, is effective in spreading and legitimizing types of violence, such as bullying, suicide attempts, and self-harm (Daine et al., 2013). Therefore, instigating violence against animals through text instead of reproducing and inuring to violence through images, can be considered an effort to draw attention to the violence itself rather than the form it takes.

One of the purposes of this research is to determine why lynchers want to lynch activists and to define the source of motivation for the arguments they use while carrying out these actions. Replies to "what are the sources of the motivation of lynchers" indicated such concepts as the desire to feel strong, the perception of threat to interests, the feeling of guilt, or the desire to defend. Especially, power and domination are among the key concepts in the interaction of non-vegans with vegans through social media and their actions result in lynching. According to Bourdieu (1984), dominant groups (male gender, state power, non-vegans, heterosexuals) attempt to preserve and maintain their dominant positions through such symbolic violence as domination and power. In this respect, non-vegans try to impose their own dietary culture and their lifestyles for consuming animal products in general by establishing domination and power over vegan activists through social media. Also, one of the main motivations in this power relationship is that non-vegans try to maintain the dominant culture individually through this domination. The domination efforts of non-vegans also stem from their feeling that they belong to a majority group.

While anonymity in the use of social media helps to overcome social, cultural or legal barriers to freedom of expression, it can also turn into a tool that hinders freedom of expression and rights-based movements. As mentioned above, therefore online lynching can be seen as an attempt to terminate and destroy activist existence in social networks. The prominent repetition, the power imbalance between perpetrator-victim, or the anonymity in the conceptualization of cyberbullying, may not be observed in online lynching. According to this research, the differences between cyberbullying and online lynching can be explained through the online lynching experiences of vegan activists as follows:

- The absence of repetition in the common definition of cyberbullying in online lynching is more consistent in an attempt to end online presence. It is not possible to lynch an online asset that is destroyed in one go. This does not mean that the

threats to the offline activity or existence of an individual should be handled independently from online lynching. It is the end of an online presence that the online lynching content will target.

- The unequal power between perpetrator-victim in the common definition of cyberbullying is not a key indicator for an online lynch. There is not a single perpetrator in online lynching, and there is no clear analysis of a common power created by perpetrators.

- The online lynching experiences of vegan activists are not entirely based on anonymity. On the contrary, an online lynching initiated by a person whose identity is not hidden (deliberately or unintentionally) can be joined by other users of accounts with known identities.

Because this study is based only on the online lynching experiences of activists, such important findings as the motivational sources of online lynchers could not be examined in detail. A study that has as its participant's online lynchers would contribute greatly to the literature in understanding online lynching more comprehensively. Moreover, the studies to be conducted with different social movement groups would allow for a comparison of the findings.

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