

An Ethnographical Approach: Female Blogosphere In Turkey

Türkiye'deki Kadın Blog Dünyasına Etnografik Bir Bakış

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Abstract: This paper is about the preliminary ethnographic fieldwork of a work-in progress conducted on the female blogging practices and the female blogosphere in Turkey, focusing specifically on how blogging reshapes women's cultural and social environment. The study attempts to understand the role of blogging as a medium in women's self-formation processes and explore how female bloggers construct their identities via online media representations and negotiate disclosure, fame and labor in an age of extreme self-display. Based on an anthropological approach, the study explores the spaces within which women seek "self-realization", "publicity" and "employment opportunities" in the digital world, particularly, through the practice of blogging. Taking female blogosphere as a field, the study examines how blog production is manifested in Turkey, through the female bloggers' struggle for hope. Preliminary research demonstrates that blogging acts as a medium of hope for many female bloggers. Given the heterogeneous nature of female blogosphere, experiencing this hope shows differences. At times, upper mobility opportunities are expected, but sometimes hope is realized to provide feelings like happiness, appreciation, self-realization and usefulness. Networking and socialization opportunities are also other motivations of bloggers. The aim of the study is to see how these women use blogging as a media practice to explain themselves in social media platforms. Thus, through the framework of hope (Hage 2004), relatability (Kanai 2019), fame and visibility notions, material formation of identities in this process, the nature of labor production in blogs as well as the construction of female subjectivities within celebrity culture will also be discussed.

Keywords: Blogging, Ethnography, Women Bloggers, Hope Labor, Self-Realization, Fame

Özet: Bu makale; Türkiye'deki blog dünyasına, blog yazmanın kadınların kültürel ve sosyal çevrelerini yeniden şekillendirme biçimlerine odaklanarak, toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifinden incelemekte olan bir çalışmanın başlangıç aşamasındaki etnografik alan araştırmasını konu edinmektedir. Makale, blog yazmanın kadınların kendini gerçekleştirme süreçlerindeki aracı konumunu anlamayı ve kadın blog yazarlarının sanal dünyadaki medya temsillerini nasıl inşa ettiklerini; kendilerini ifşa etme, şöhret ve emek konusunu nasıl müzakere ettiklerini araştırmayı hedefler. Antropolojik yaklaşıma dayanan bu çalışma, blog yazma pratiği doğrultusunda kadınların dijital dünyadaki "kendini gerçekleştirme", "kendini bulma" ve

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“kamusallık” arayışlarına ışık tutmaya çalışmaktadır. Kadın blog dünyasını bir alan olarak ele alıp kadın blog yazarlarının umut arayışları üzerinden Türkiye’deki blog üretimine bakan bu çalışmanın amacı, kadınların kendilerini sosyal medya platformlarında açıklamak için blogları nasıl bir medya pratiği olarak kullandıklarını göstermektir. Çalışmada; umut (Hage, 2004) çerçevesi altında, ilişkilendirme (reliability) (Kanai, 2019), şöhret ve görünürlük nosyonları; kimlik oluşumu, emek ve aynı zamanda şöhret kültüründeki kadın özneliği konuları tartışılacaktır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Blog Yazma, Umut Emeği, Kendini Gerçekleştirme, Şöhret

Introduction

Last two decades witnessed a tremendous growth in the number of blogs published worldwide making them a significant feature of online culture. Bloggers play an important role in marketing and global advertising industry and blogging gives one more opportunities for self-explanation with its story-telling format. Reshaping the borders of the public sphere, blogs are important features of media making and prosumer culture and serve as a platform where “self” is made and remade. Turkish blogosphere is a very dynamic and competitive field where women take active roles and have complicated experiences between exploitation and pleasure. It is important to see how female bloggers reflect on, represent, construct or reproduce their identities as individuals, content creators, and members of an online community. Thus, this research will examine how female bloggers differ from each other in terms of their motivations for writing, labor they produce, self-branding styles, and also their search for *hope* while playing this game in the field of blogosphere.

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach combining the literature on digital labor with feminist theory, to understand the factors that shape Turkish female blogger practices and the material formation of identities in this process. The main research questions that undergird this project are: “What kind of opportunities does blogosphere provide for women and how do they use them?”, and “How does *hope* function and prevail on the actions of female bloggers in Turkey?”

These research questions will favor an interdisciplinary practice by presenting how these women, while constructing their identities as bloggers, incorporate to the neoliberal restructuring of Turkey. They will also contribute to evaluate and define women users’ needs and experiences in digital media platforms.

Women Blog: Socialization, Empowerment, Publicity and Hope in Digital Field

Based on TUIK's (Turkish Statistics Foundation) (2016) household labor force survey, the percentage of employees who are above 15 years of age is 46,3. While 28% of this number is female labor force, 65% of it remains as male labor force. Given the patriarchal nature of the country, insufficient female education, lack of social security and income gap between men and women, female labor force participation has been a problem. As feminist scholars indicate, patriarchy is embedded in the laws, state institutions and social norms of Turkey, affecting women's self-formation in private, socio-economic and political life (Kandiyoti 1991, Kogacioglu 2004). Many factors determine women's economic empowerment including the welfare state policies in Turkey, family-oriented care regime-based on the patriarchal male breadwinner model (Ilkcaracan 2012, Kılıç 2008) and the confinement of women to traditional gender roles (Dedeoğlu 2012).

From this point of view, along with the opportunities web 2.0 brings, blogs appear as a reflexive medium for women to interact and communicate with each other, and also provide the digital spaces through which they reflect on their status in the society (Zareie 2013). The blogosphere offers women a wide range of possibilities to discuss social norms and hierarchies, and at times challenge authorities in their countries. As is well known, social media played a significant role in the Arab Spring in Middle East in late 2010, enabling uprisings to have an autonomous communicative capacity away from power structures (Castells 2012). Thus, thanks to social media's affordances regarding leadership and empowerment (Radsch and Khamis 2013), Arab women redefined their activism, empowerment and resistance through social media and the Western world was introduced to "a new image of women in the Middle East: women who are courageous, independent, and technologically savvy" (Eltantawy 2013: 765). Similarly, despite death threats, female bloggers in Afghanistan resisted patriarchal attitudes by posting about prostitution, poverty and their causes. Whereas, digital media let the transformation of social space for women in Egypt since they use blogs as nodes where spaces of home, work and political interest are integrated (Pahwa 2014). Sarah Jurkewicz (2018) examines the blogging in Beirut and concludes that the publics are not as static 'spheres' that actors merely enter, but as produced and constituted by social practices. Besides the socialization, empowerment, publicity and attention it brings, the blogosphere may also provide job/career opportunities, serving as a new battle-field for women where they struggle for "hope".

To achieve these ends, female bloggers develop their web-based application usage skills, SEO (Search Engine Optimization) techniques, language-learning and writing skills attending to

workshops, blog writing events and researching. These activities require a certain time and effort and correspond to Hage's "social hope" - hope for life - concept demonstrating the ways how they self-invest enhancing their own skills compared to their former self-status and proceed towards their targets. In the neoliberal restructuring of the country, many women in Turkish blogosphere take initiatives and come out as successful trendsetters, influencers, content creators or businesswomen while some others still struggle for certain ends in the field of blogosphere where rival market rules apply. According to Hage (2004), to construct a meaningful future for ourselves, we need hope and society since such futures are only possible within society that is the distributor of social opportunities for self-realization.

This partly coincides with Bourdieu's *illusio* concept- the belief that the "game" we collectively agree to play is worth playing- as he also argues people are not passive recipients of *being*; they need to struggle for the accumulation of it (Bourdieu 1998). Bourdieu uses this concept in his field theory to explain that people play the game in the field expecting some outcomes-that he calls *illusio(n)*- in return. These outcomes motivate people for playing the game. So people need to invest themselves to make a prosperous life and to achieve a dignified future. Despite the fact that blogger women compete as individual entrepreneurs in this field, being part of a blogger community also provides different possibilities and new forms of hoping ways to these women. People need to benefit from the opportunities they are given or they create plentiful circumstances that occur frequently themselves in a given situation or society, either as individuals or as part of a larger community. Thus, blogging appears not only as an individualistic practice, but also as an aspiration of a collective identity ideal. This reminds us the social stratification theory of Bourdieu since there are bloggers whose hopes are fulfilled and those whose not, but still aspire to be part of the community to experience a sense of belonging and an upward social mobility.

As Hage (2004) asserts, when the unequal distribution of hope in the capitalist society reaches extreme levels, some groups are not able to benefit from it. Given the state's inability to distribute hope equally and ethically under the neoliberal restructuring of Turkey and global capitalism, women appear as one of the least privileged groups in Turkey in terms of labor force participation, distribution of symbolic capital and participation to public life. Blogosphere appears as a new horizon distant from traditional ties; a platform that offers new possibilities for women who are in search for meaning-making opportunities for a distinguished future. Feeding from the neoliberal and capitalist powers of various sectors, the blogosphere serves as a medium that creates hope for new embodiments for women who can make claims about their future in terms of publicity, recognition, employment opportunities, sense of belonging, self-realization etc. Female bloggers freely choose to be whoever or however they want on the blogs by self-investing, taking

initiatives or risks as autonomous subjects. Neoliberalism is seen as a key driving force in the promotion of feminine subjectivities by some feminist media scholars and media promulgate affective attachments to the entrepreneurial subjectivities showing them the activities they do are freely chosen and doable as neoliberalism demanded (Kanai 2019). Currently, we talk about a “neoliberal governmentality for young middle class aspirational women-governmentality structured through futurity based on smart and careful self-investments in the present for an enhanced return in the future” (Rottenberg 2018: 15). Whereas, while neoliberalism creates its own autonomous, self-inventing hoping subjects in post-Fordist era, social reproduction crisis which our lives and the labor-force are reproduced confronts us (Carlin & Federici 2014). In Carlin’s interview, Silvia Federici asserts that “capitalism continuously creates underclasses that performs these activities without any remuneration and under conditions that make their exploitation invisible and naturalized” (Carlin & Federici 2014: 2) and this dual character of reproductive work-reproduction of the individual and the reproduction of labor-power, creates the site of a conflict that needs to be recognized by women. Then, it becomes necessary to consider digital labor debate from a gendered perspective to investigate whether these women are subjugated to a form of exploitation and alienation or not. If there is an exploitation and if they are aware of this process, in contemporary era where public/private and work/leisure distinctions are blurred, why do they continue blogging? What does blogging as a medium give them and what do they want?

At this point, it also becomes necessary to go beyond “exploitation vs. participation” discussions and investigate “relatability” as an affective relation “produced through labor that reflects a desirable notion of common experience to an unknown audience” (Kanai 2019: 4). When a blogger shares a personal experience of her own, then it becomes consumable by the others. Whole act of sharing transforms the individual act into a commonality, a relatable femininity to the audience, creating a proximity between the blogger and the follower. Blogger appears as a representative of the follower while “attaining relatability requires the conversion of general experience into an individual asset for the self as brand” (Kanai 2019: 125). Thus, blogger needs to carefully balance the generality and individuality for a fruitful relation of relatability and to establish a meaningful self-branding. Despite the exploited nature of the work done in blogs, many female bloggers seek for a relatable content production in rival market conditions. So, relatability is important as a concept to have a better understanding of the blogger’s sense of belonging arisen from the representation of the feelings of an unknown audience who also relates to the blogger by this way. Besides gaining economic profits or employment opportunities, many other dynamics

affect the motivations of the bloggers such as being members of a “blogger” community, creating shared spaces and hoping to be understood.

Taking blogosphere as a field of cultural production where women take various kinds of roles, I assert that blogger women try to broaden their public spaces searching for hope in the framework of state’s incapacity to distribute hope in an equal manner. For a better understanding of the nature of the struggle of female bloggers in the field, it is necessary to consider their blogging practices along with the “habitus” and “symbolic capital” they have from a gendered perspective. As the ways bloggers dress, make-up or the events they choose to attend vary, their ways of establishing networks or friendships also show differences. These choices are not by coincidence but come from a pile of experiences influenced by their economic, cultural and social capitals as well as their habitus. Based on their blogging activities, once they are successful and reach to a celebrity status, they may have an upward social mobility and their existing habitus and symbolic capital may change which will also affect their behaviors in and outside the field. Thus, these Bourdieuan concepts will be relevant in focusing daily lives of the bloggers as they are closely related to the ways they behave and the issues they blog about.

Thus, the first goal of this comprehensive analysis is to answer what blogging offers to women understanding the impacts of blogging practices on women’s empowerment and identity formation and vice versa. The study will provide a better understanding of the cultural and social meanings of that media practice, including the motivations behind female blogging, the opportunities they gain through the blogosphere and how it improves women’s lives in terms of adjusting to the social structure. Following the lines of Couldry, who offers a new paradigm for media research that “sees media not as text or production economy, but first and foremost as practice” (2004: 115), blogging is regarded as a media practice since blogs are entities not only consumed by the reader but also blog-writing itself is an important practice worth to be explored. Adopting a practice perspective, the study aims to focus on routine activities of female bloggers shedding light into their media production processes to prove the media effects through these subjects.

Second goal of the study is to situate and contextualize Turkish female blogging practices in digital labor and feminist media studies. The study will contribute to the growing literature about the representation of women online while adding to research on representation of self and self-branding techniques in cyberspace (Marwick 2013, Eltantawy 2013, Banet-Weiser 2011) as well as digital media and communication studies. Specifically, the study will add a whole new way of looking to the study of blogging practices of women through a combination of notions including

hope, fame and labor, demonstrating how digital media, namely blogging, offers new ways of representing the self.

Blogging Trends in Turkey

Studies about blogging in Turkey generally evolves around thematic blogging, focusing on specific fields. Atikkan and Tunç (2011) explores news blogs as a new form of communication medium, Bayraktutan-Sütçü (2010) focuses on academic blogs critically examining the relation between intellectuals and media, whereas Cantek (2011) analyzes food blogs which provided many possibilities to women like improvement of their skills of using information technologies, and help their socialization and self-representation processes. Yelsalı-Parmaksız (2012)' study on "mommy blogs" investigates the representation of motherhood in Turkey. Some studies analyze blogging as a medium. Saka (2008) considers blogging as a research tool for ethnographic fieldwork, whereas Bakla and Arıkan (2011) explore language learning through blogging. Depeli's (2015) research differentiates as it chooses the blogs based on their female authors, not their themes.

Although much has been written about blogging from a variety of perspectives, little attention has been given to the blogging as a media practice which serves as a playground for women who struggle for hope negotiating disclosure, fame and labor in their online self-presentation. Moreover, adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the study will discuss transformation processes of bloggers from offline to online personas in reference to time and effort they spend, social and economic mobility they experience and the kind of labor they produce.

Not considering only a specific genre but adopting a wider perspective, including bloggers from various kinds of blogs and backgrounds, this research focuses on women as producers and consumers, as content-creators and influencers, as writers and readers, in sum as main users of blogs and the main players of blogosphere. Taking blogging as a medium for transformation of feminine subjectivities, the study concentrates on randomly chosen female bloggers from popular ones to amateur souls. It will show how blog writing practice and the labor they produce differ depending on certain dynamics such as class, habitus, capital they have and fame they have reached.

Evaluating Turkish blogosphere from a gendered perspective, the study attempts to examine the advantages and disadvantages of blog writing through digital labor debate. I agree with Duffy's (2018) statement about creative industry studies need a feminist critique, so in line with Duffy, this study will point out the gendered side of creative labor produced in blogs letting creative industry studies communicate with feminist theory. From this point of view, the study will add to the digital labor scholarship which is mainly Western and has a male voice. Additionally,

in terms of celebrity studies, this research will shed light into bloggers as celebrities in a non-Western context, which will also provide us an understanding of the differences and similarities between them on a regional base. Being in a liminal space, Turkish female blogosphere also differs from its Middle Eastern counterparts like Egypt (Pahwa 2014) or Lebanon (Jurkiewicz 2018) where female bloggers historically affected from the interplay between digital media and activism.

Adopting an anthropological approach, this research benefits from both an ethnographic fieldwork (since 2015) and a discourse analysis (since 2007) which has started from the researcher's entering into the blogosphere. Interview data is gathered through semi-structured interviews, life-story interviews and conversational chit-chats. The study will gain its authenticity from the insider's view as the researcher has also several blogs and she was an active blogger between the years 2010 and 2015. In many ways, this study extends the conversation about labor and the digital economy by situating the activities of the female bloggers as undertaking new forms of media industry work. Thus, the study attempts to go beyond the dichotomies of public vs. private and participation vs. exploitation and add new perspectives to study social media activities and self-presentation techniques of women in cyberspace.

Methodology

In the light of above-mentioned literature and theoretical framework, an ethnographical approach is adopted for the study. Semi-structured/structured interviews and conversational chit-chats are conducted with 50 bloggers. 15 of them can be regarded as “celebrities.”

Deploying ethnography as the main method, the study casts light on the blogging practices of women in Turkey to understand their main motivations for blogging, how it is connected with their social class, cultural background, and their self-actualization in cultural, economic and social realms. Blogger events and workshops are fruitful sites for conducting participant observation and face-to-face interviews and to gain a close familiarity with the bloggers and their cultural and social environment. As a researcher and a blogger, I have observed and engaged with many bloggers who serve a wide range of subject areas, including make-up, fashion, do it yourself, sewing, literature, poetry, spiritual experience and food culture. Having 5 different blogs in different subjects have let me get to know so many bloggers from 2007 onwards. I have the access from first hand to these blogger communities and participate in blogger events. Acting also as an “advisor angel (*tavsiye meleği*)” who is generally chosen from a blogger to experiment new products of different companies and give advices to people especially using social media tools, gives me a good opportunity in terms of accession to many informal gatherings and areas during my research.

In this framework, following section explains the planned methodological phases and what I have done so far.

Choosing Ethnographic Sites

As a preliminary ethnographic fieldwork, two sites are chosen for participant observation. First one is *Tavsiye Evi* which is a public relations and media agency company that has close ties with certain brands like Profilo, Procter&Gamble, Bosch, Unilever, and so on. It acts as a vehicle between these brands and bloggers. *Tavsiye Evi* relies on word of mouth in viral campaigns and invites bloggers to the house and unites them with its clients who also decorate parts of the house as sponsors. *Tavsiye Evi* names its members as *Tavsiye Melekleri* (advisor angels) and expects from them to write about the events they organize or the gifts they give to bloggers for certain purposes. Being located in Bagdat Street, a fancy and popular street of Istanbul, *Tavsiye Evi* has visitors both weekdays and weekends, mostly in daytime. Banks, offices and several kinds of fancy shops surround its neighborhood, so it is very likely for people to come there after their lunch breaks to drink coffee or just to say hi. Renan, the owner of the house says; “*Tavsiye Evi is just like a real home, where you can chat and have coffee with your friends, it is that comfortable and our angels feel themselves at home.*” The space distribution in *Tavsiye Evi* is organized as a family home. As soon as you enter from the flat door, you face the open kitchen and the dining table at the very center of the big saloon around which the events are organized. So, the atmosphere is intimate and all the blogger events take place here are very friendly. Women come here bringing homemade cakes and cookies with a sense of belonging. *Tavsiye Evi* generally targets housewives so that they can join the events in weekdays as well and spend much more time on distributing the events’ details on their blogs.

The second site my participant observations took place is Macro Atelier, which is part of Macrocenter-a supermarket targets the elite consumers- at Kanyon, a famous shopping center of Istanbul located in a very busy business center. Macro Atelier lets people come together for cooking workshops accompanied by a professional chef. The number of people does not exceed eight. Usually these people are chosen from bloggers so that Macrocenter can also promote its own products- they give freely to each person for cooking purposes- and circulate its own brand in social media. The space distribution in Macro Atelier is important since it is designed as a big kitchen counter where eight people can fit working in pairs and see each other while cooking so that they can also socialize. Thus, for Macro Atelier, the aim is to give pleasure while advertising. The target blogger community of Macro Atelier is more working or student bloggers since they organize all the workshops after 6pm in weekdays.

These two sites are distinct from each other so they will give the opportunity to compare bloggers in different settings. *Tavsiye Evi* appears as a family-like, a sincere atmosphere where women meet each other on a regularly basis. What is striking is the reproduction of gendered relationships in this setting, where women attend to the meetings bringing snacks they cooked at home; like home-made cookies and cakes and men deal with technical stuff like photo-shootings and filming. They organize theme-based events including knitting, cooking, sewing together. So, this site reproduces the traditionally inherited gender roles. Macro Atalier, on the contrary, presents a more “business-like” atmosphere, where people meet for the first time (every time new people are invited) and male and female bloggers cook together not only with bloggers but also with other people from various occupations.

Entering into Field: How I Entered the Field and My Fieldwork Identity

In my participant observation methods, I was closer to participant since I had the opportunity to attend to blogger events and take invitations due to my blogger career. Even if I do not post to my blogs very often, my previous experiences as a blogger gave me the chance to be a real participant. *Tavsiye Evi*'s owner Renan knows me very well since I am an advisor angel of her company. I had attended many of the blogger events she organized before so I asked her to invite me any upcoming blogger event so that I can meet new bloggers. After revealing my researcher identity and sharing the intention of my work, Renan felt enthusiastic about the research to be conducted and agreed to cooperate.

For Macro workshops my connection was Duygu, who is also my main informant. Duygu is a friend of my sister from university and she works as a product and sales specialist in Macrocenter, a job she took with the help of her blog. Thus, listening to Duygu's story was important and I had a life story interview with her to understand the role her blog played in her career path.

In the blogger meetings I attended in *Tavsiye Evi*, I revealed my blogger and researcher identity from the beginning for ethical purposes. Given my previous blogger career, retrospectively, I had already observations and determinations so I went to the field with some presuppositions. Since I was one of them and I had an easy access to their networks, I thought I could conduct interviews easily and we could understand each other. However, as Johnson indicates a liminal period between arrival and admission to the field (in Robben 2007), my researcher & blogger identity in the field posed a controversy among the participants. While some participants found use of blogger identity for research insincere and distance themselves, others welcomed me and wanted to help voluntarily. Celebrity bloggers were generally among those who had hesitations to

reveal themselves to me for research purposes. On the contrary, amateur bloggers- beginners who are not famous and struggle to stay in the blogging community- were more open and willing to share anything with me including writing tips, gossips, events, sponsorships and so on.

The participants are aware that they are being watched constantly, they are aware of the gaze upon them which means their presence and their blogger identities are underlined and accepted. Gaze is twofold! While I watch them, they watch me too. Ethnographer needs to fully devote herself/himself for full accession to membership in the community she/he researches obeying all the rules of the community (Robben 2007). At times, the identity I trusted most was an obstacle for a full devotion and I had a dilemma about favoring my blogger identity and wanted to keep it behind.

One incident shows how my dual identity created a conflict for me. I was invited personally to an event in a hotel and it was confirmed days before. When the day came, I cancelled my other meetings and arrived at the hotel on time and I realized I was the only one there. When I called the organizer, she said to me: *“Oh, I am terribly sorry I totally forgot you since you are not a blogger, a researcher, I did not put you in our blogger invitation list”*. The event was cancelled but the organization company did not call me because I was not a blogger. I was forgotten.

When you tell the bloggers that you are a researcher, then your researcher identity becomes the prominent one and they don't see your blog as a serious one and you are not a blogger for them anymore. Despite the difficulties created by this duality of my identity presentation in the field, it still has many advantages. Given the exchange of blog links and names within the blogger community and to keep a track of each other, it was easy to follow our blogs in social media. Being a blogger was useful for establishing connections and growth of network, and entering into the field. By actively being present in these sites, I had the opportunity to talk to women face-to-face and interviews are conducted either at these sites or promises are taken to conduct later.

Virtual Ethnography

As a model that based on interaction and face-to-face interviews and living subjects, as well as lived experiences, ethnographic method is chosen with its interpretivist approach as the main method of the study. Given the subjects of this study are bloggers and even they attend to certain blogger events, their blogging activities mainly take place in virtual world. Besides the physical sites -Tavsiye Evi and Macro Atelier- chosen for participant observation, or any other physical field I randomly attend an event, a virtual ethnography is also conducted to fully understand the relationship between online and offline worlds. Online activities in some settings might also create offline mobilization as bloggers make invitations from/take invitations at their blogs.

In the blogosphere, the connections and acquaintances incur via exchange of messages and they sometimes find their embodiment in the form of blogger events. In return, these events quickly go viral across social media with hashtags which allow bloggers to file their comments about the brand, event and other bloggers. Hashtags are markers through which users develop a specific conversation thread – mostly used in Twitter or Instagram. Users generally self-categorize their own tweets or Instagram feeds by using these markers, however hashtags also create a corporate social responsibility. Hashtag ethnography (Bonilla 2015) is a useful tool for my research since bloggers usually use hashtags in their social network sites, especially when they attend to a blogger event. The cause, the sponsor or the venue of the event are always represented by hashtags which are continuously mentioned by the bloggers to keep the conversation alive during the meeting, while creating a sense of unity, commonality among each other. The meanings assigned to them and the cultural connections that link them together make hashtags an important part of the digital activity. Bloggers spend most of their leisure time on their blogs or social media accounts to be able to reach a broader audience and gain publicity. This publicity comes from virtual world and reflects on the physical world of the blogger. One way to examine this is to follow female bloggers as much as I can and determine what they hashtag about and how. In addition to physical ethnography, following the use of hashtags will also help to interpret the digital data. I became members of their blogs, google+ pages, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter accounts. To fully experience the blogger experience, I read their posts and write feedbacks to them, I joined their gift lotteries online, I took part in a “*mim*” and even organized lotteries in my blogs which constitute my online engagement in the process. I fully immersed in the virtual filed.

I want to share an example how I understand the time and effort bloggers put for finding a sponsorship for organizing a lottery. I decided to organize a lottery in my blog and I wanted to find a sponsor for it. I was told to be aggressive and I tried my best and found one newly established jewelry company for my wedding organization blog, *Oh My God I am Marrying*. We made a deal for making 300 people members of this company’s Facebook and Google+ pages in exchange of 2 diamond necklaces, one will be given in the lottery and the other will be given to me. The result was my overload work for reaching the target day and night, bugging people to become the company’s member, which they are not that much interested in. In return, the diamond necklace was a silver necklace with a very small diamond that one can barely see and the winner was not happy at all. In exchange of the time and energy I put forward, I gained 100 followers more. The aim of this activity was not winning a small diamond necklace but to gain followers which is the main objective of all bloggers organizing lotteries.

Fieldwork Conflicts and Dangers

I had attended many blogger events previously. This time it was different since my mission was observing the event as a researcher. I had the feeling that I need to observe every move the bloggers make.

The dangers in my community arose from the practices of celebrity culture the bloggers found themselves in. A certain fame and attention attached to these female bloggers along with the expectations from them in terms of brand making strategies. All participants are self-confident, open-minded intellectuals, keeping up with the latest technology and news.

An obstacle faced in finding informants was about the celebrity bloggers' attitude when I tried to make interviews with them. They turned their blogs into reputable websites with their own domain names and became very popular brands. Although previously known as bloggers, some of them explained to me that they cannot answer my questions since they are not bloggers. Instead, their current self-identifications vary from designers to journalists, social media specialists to businesswomen. This identification is not only for avoiding the interviews, but is a definition of self with an occupation which they find more valid. Some of them see being a blogger as a job, while some see it as a tool to reach certain career goals.

As (Robben&Sluka 2007:8) states, *"All this attention may be flattering, but it may breed suspicion, hostility, and jealousy. In a less isolated and more sophisticated community, "being studied" may smack of condescension and may offend pride, not arouse it."* While there is a direct correlation between bloggers' fame and their unreachability, it is also directly related to the idea of being studied. Avoiding the blogger identity is an excuse especially used by celebrity bloggers. Other excuses vary like, *"I am in hospital, I cannot answer any questions"*, *"I have no time since I am a very busy businesswoman"*, *"My computer has a problem and I wait for my son to fix it"...*etc.

I came across with an excuse in an interview, where virtual world and physical world dilemma showed itself. I wanted to conduct an interview with a famous cooking blogger. She refused to make a face-to-face interview because she has no time and told me she could answer my questions online. After I sent her my questions she told that her Word programme's license is over so she could not manage to answer them in anyway, promising to reply me when her son is back from his journey. This reminded me what Briggs (2007) argued about interactive modalities that *"they provide "users" with a feeling of agency—the sense that they can shape the flow of information and engage with a computerized interlocutor"*. It was hard to believe she could not manage to fix this small problem as a very famous blogger who uses Internet technologies anytime.

Thinking that she could shape the flow of information online, she was paralyzed from it and even I started to think it as an excuse, she sent me her answers after her son came back as a Word format.

Immersing in the Field

In relation to the above-mentioned framework, my status in the blogger events vary depending on the context of the meeting, whether it is a cooking, mothering, fashion or make up event. For instance, when I went to a diaper company's event about promoting a new diaper, I came across with many mommy bloggers. Some of the mommy bloggers are very famous and two of them made annual agreements with the company, taking 40,000 TL annually just to participate these events and share their experiences in their blogs, of course recommending the brand to other mothers. In these kinds of gatherings, it is hard to immerse in the field since first of all I am not a mother, I do not write about child caring, they don't know my blog, and my research does not interest them so basically I am ignored. Therefore, sometimes I cannot fully immerse but sit in the corner taking notes. However, when various kinds of bloggers meet for a certain cause, or the community consists of less famous bloggers, it is more likely to have a fruitful conversation.

Emerson's (1995) statement about the necessity of immersing one's self in the ethnographic research to see how people respond to certain cases and the circumstances that give rise to their behaviors as well as the ethnographer's own experiences, prevented me to surrender my emotions if I am rejected or rebuffed. As an ethnographer, I seek a deep immersion into the blogger world to understand what motivates female bloggers to write about these companies, what kind of expectations they have and what they experience as bloggers.

Then, as Pollner and Emerson (in Emerson, 1995:3) argue, "*No field researcher can be completely neutral, detached observer, outside and independent of the observed phenomena*" and this is why my study in the field kept feeding from my retrospective perspective containing my prior experiences as a blogger and my close interactions with my other blogger friends. Despite his stress on immersion in ethnographic study, Emerson (1995)'s claim about the ethnographer's transience is puzzling.

... [e]ven with intensive resocialization, the ethnographer never becomes a member in the same sense that those 'naturally' in the setting are members. The fieldworker plans on leaving the setting after a relatively brief stay, and his experience of local life is colored by this transience. ... In these ways, research and writing commitments qualify ethnographic immersion, making the fieldworker at least something of an outsider and, at an extreme, a cultural alien. (Emerson et al., 1995: 4).

This transience can still be managed by the ethnographer. The insider position I have achieved is paramount for understanding the sample in question. The bloggers whom I had conversations are chosen by me from those who see me as a part of the community; I selected what to observe and write about so mediating effects of the ethnographer cannot be underestimated (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995).

Interviewing and Encounters

This study benefits from both unstructured and semi-structured interviews. As Bernard (2011) states, in unstructured interviews based on a clear plan, the ethnographer keeps the idea of interviewing in mind. That was exactly what I did in the blogger events I participated. After letting people know me, I sat down with some of the bloggers and talked about various topics varying from their blogs to the research I conduct. Since “*The idea is to get people to open up and let them express themselves in their own terms, and their own pace*” (Bernard 2011: 157), I had no control on their responses. After establishing the connections, we agreed upon a date to meet up for in-depth interviews. That is how I knew Birgül, a very famous 56 year-old cooking blogger from Istanbul and Berrak, a 28 year-old lifestyle blogger from İzmir.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with three respondents, Duygu, Birgül and Berrak. My main informant Duygu is 30 years old and writes her blog *Pamuktan Bulut* for 3 years. The interview took place at Macrocenter Kanyon where she works, so that she would not be separated from her work for a long time. Being at her own domain also eased the process for her; she did not feel alienated but comfortable. Having our coffees we chit-chatted at first and then moved to the semi-structured questions.

Duygu's case is important for explaining the future employment opportunities the blogs can provide because she was discovered by her blog for her current position in the company. This case stands as a preeminent example of hope for life; a hope comes with blogging to relate to the future career. She had applied for a job interview but she was not hired for that position. The human resources coordinator liked her blog so much and she consulted with her manager to hire Duygu creating a new job definition for her. Under the title of Product&Sales Development Specialist, she has taken a position specifically related to what she is doing in her blog which focuses on authentic cooking photography. *Figure 1* shows time sequencing of specific events and turning points in Duygu's life.

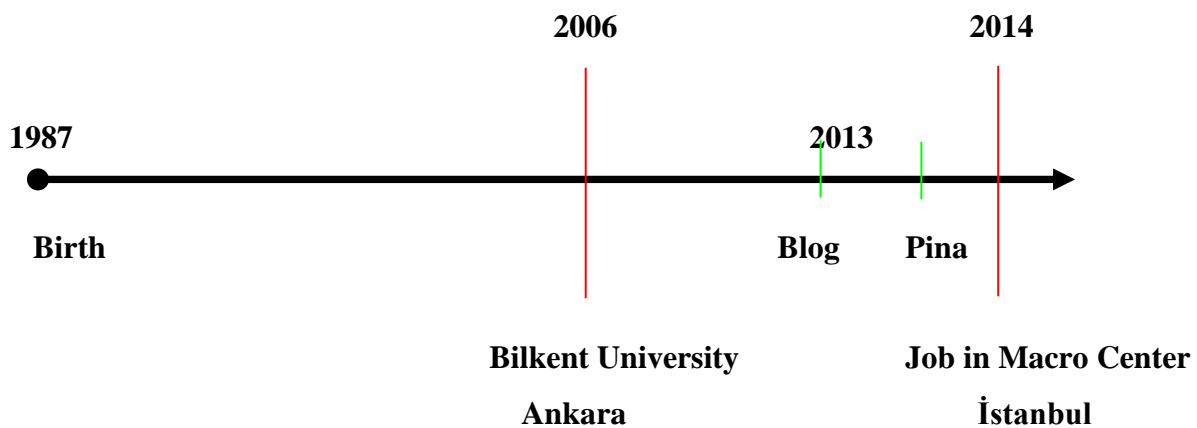


Figure 1. Time sequencing of specific events and turning points

In *Figure 2*, we see how the intervening variables are connected to each other and how the causality between them brought Duygu to her contemporary situation.

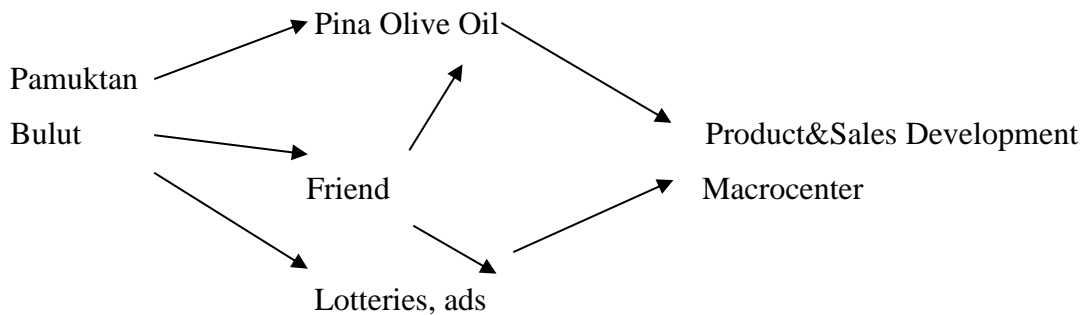


Figure 2. Intervening variables and causality

The interview was a life story interview and questions varied from her education, working life to how she ended up in her current career. Her life events have been motivated by adequate causality since she stresses the causality of her choices of each profession and the continuity between her choices to make a coherent narrative (Linde 1993). Given her blog’s determining role in her career development, life story interview was suitable for Duygu to learn all the elements- including blogging - influencing her life.

Current views in anthropology give importance to the construction of the narrative than its coherence as Angrosino (2002) points out and Duygu constructs her narrative upon her blog. She says, “*I had my job directly because of my blog*” and “*I would love to continue my career on my blog, I wish I could do it as a job and earn money from it*”. Thus, life story is not only stories, explanations but also relations between them (Linde 1993). Despite Duygu’s blog has less followers or she is not famous, her blog paved the way for her current working life, so life story interview was an effective way to make her open up. I used open-ended questions for gaining descriptive data with a chatty tone, giving examples from my own blog experiences as well.

Conclusion

This study conducts an ethnographic analysis of blogging practices in Turkey from a gendered and digital labor perspective, focusing on how female bloggers locate and represent themselves in the blogosphere. Through the participant observation, I established close connections with many female bloggers and a great variety of networking possibilities which will let me opportunities for future ethnography. On the background of the social and cultural dynamics of the blogger gatherings in the two sites chosen, female bloggers' aspirations, expectations and motivations are analyzed. Blogger talking to blogger, women talking to women, I had the opportunity to use my blogger identity as well as my own gendered identity in this preliminary fieldwork research. Women dissolved easily when they found a counterpart, who is a female blogger as Briggs (2007: 554) claims "women interviewing women became an important focus of feminist social science research because these interactions seemed to unlock suppressed self-expression, create more open, egalitarian, and honest exchanges, include women in public discourse, and open up female counterparts." However, there are still limitations of this claim in this research as much famous is the blogger as much unreachable she is.

Although this article is limited to methodological overview of an ongoing research, we can come up with certain conclusions in the light of the research conducted so far. Based on the data collected, the blogosphere appears as a new playground for women, creative work done in blogs comes out as a subjective and independent entrepreneurship based on hope labor which also brings new job titles or belongings. Female bloggers realize hope in different ways depending on variables like class, education, occupation, *habitus* they have and fame they gained. The ways these women's blogger identities differ demonstrate us the labor they produce, the statuses and the mobility they gain in the society along with the nature of their struggle in the blogosphere.

Thus, celebrity bloggers have already achieved a certain status in the society showing an upward mobility while aspiring bloggers' struggle continues. Besides this dichotomy, some women achieved successful careers through their blogging activities. Thus, blogging may appear as a medium for social/economic mobility, but also create unpleasant circumstances for exploitation/alienation of those women who are in search of emancipation, self-realization or at times job opportunities.

This study adds to the literature on representation of self and self-branding techniques in cyberspace (Marwick 2013, Banet-Weiser 2011). There is a mutual relationship between the female bloggers and advertising industry, where bloggers enjoy from the efforts they give voluntarily, in the hope that they can create their own brands or they can gain job opportunities in

the future. Thus, the labor practiced in these blogs can be regarded as “hope labor” (Kuehn and Corrigan 2013) which will be analyzed broadly in the upcoming phases of my research.

Geniřletilmiř Özet

Bu makale; kadın blog yazarlarının blog yazma pratiklerini ve Türkiye’deki kadın blog dünyasını ele alan, süregelen bir çalışmanın etnografik alan araştırmasını konu edinmektedir. Blog yazma pratiğini toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifinden incelemekte olan araştırma; bu pratiğin kadınların kültürel ve sosyal çevrelerini yeniden şekillendirme biçimlerine, bunu yaparken de nasıl bir “umut” mekanizması olarak ortaya çıktığına odaklanmaktadır. Çalışma; blog yazmanın kadınların kendini gerçekleştirme süreçlerindeki aracı konumunu anlamayı ve kadın blog yazarlarının sanal dünyadaki medya temsillerini nasıl inşa ettiklerini; kendilerini ifşa etme, şöhret ve emek konusunu nasıl müzakere ettiklerini arařtırmayı hedefler. Antropolojik yaklařıma dayanan araştırma, blog yazma pratiğı doğrultusunda kadınların dijital dünyadaki “kendini gerçekleştirme”, “kendini bulma” ve “kamusallık” arayışlarına ışık tutmakla birlikte, kadın blog dünyasını bir alan olarak ele alıp kadın blog yazarlarının umut arayışları üzerinden Türkiye’deki blog üretimine bakmaktadır. Ayrıca çalışma; umut (Hage 2004) çerçevesi altında, ilişkilendirme (relatability) (Kanai 2019); şöhret ve görünürlük nosyonları, kimlik oluşumu, emek ve aynı zamanda şöhret kültüründeki kadın öznelliğı konularını da tartışmaktadır.

Çalışmanın iki ana sorusu bulunmaktadır: “Blog dünyası kadınlara ne gibi imkânlar sunuyor ve kadınlar bu imkânları nasıl kullanıyorlar?” ve “Türkiye’deki kadın blog yazarlarının pratiklerinde “umut” kavramı nasıl bir fonksiyona sahip ve kavram, bu pratiklerin neresinde duruyor?” Bu zamana dek yapılan araştırma göstermektedir ki blog yazma pratiğı, çoğu kadın için umuda açılan bir araç/kapı? görevi görürken heterojen bir doğaya sahip olan kadın blog dünyasındaki umut deneyimleri de farklılıklar göstermektedir. Kimi zaman yukarı hareketlilik fırsatları yakalamak umut edilirken bazen de mutluluk, beğenilme, kendini bulma ve işe yararlık gibi duyguları elde etmek hedeflenmektedir. Network sağlama ve sosyalleşme fırsatları da blog yazarlarının diğeri motivasyonları olarak göze çarpmaktadır. Bulgulara göre kadınlar; blog yazarı kimliklerini kurarken aynı zamanda blog yazma sayesinde girdikleri global pazar sistemiyle, Türkiye’nin neoliberal yeniden şekillenmesine de entegre oluyorlar. Bloglar ekonomik kazanç ve iş imkânları sağlasa da kadınların blog yazmasının ardındaki ana motivasyon, kendini gerçekleştirme ve kendini tatmin etme dürtüsü olarak karşımıza çıkıyor. Sonuç olarak bu çalışmanın amacı, kadınların kendilerini sosyal medya platformlarında açıklamak için blogları nasıl bir medya pratiğı olarak kullandıklarını göstermektir.

Bu makale, yukarıda bahsedilen ve hâlâ sürmekte olan çalışmanın araştırma yöntemlerini tüm hatlarıyla detaylandırarak medya ve iletişim çalışmaları, toplumsal cinsiyet, antropoloji ve sosyoloji gibi alanlarda çalışma yapacak öğrenci ve akademisyenlere yol gösterici olmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu bağlamda; blog yazarlığı, blog yazma pratikleri ve motivasyonları ile ilgili dünyadaki ve Türkiye'deki literatür taraması paylaşılmaktadır. Hem fiziksel hem de sanal ortamdaki etnografi süreçleri, alan araştırmasının yapılacağı sahaların seçimi, araştırmacının her iki alana da dâhil olması, karşılaşılan çatışmalar ve kısıtlamalar, katılımcıların seçimi, yaşam öyküsü mülakatları gibi yöntemler; ilgili literatür dâhilinde tüm aşamalarıyla aktarılmaktadır. Etnografik alan çalışması için seçilen birbirinden farklı iki sahada kadın blog yazarlarının fiziki olarak bir araya gelmesi, paylaşım ve etkileşimlerde bulunması; katılımcı gözlem yöntemiyle hem araştırmacı hem de blog yazarı kimliği ile yakından gözlemlenmiş, tanışılan farklı öykülere ve motivasyonlara sahip blog yazarlarının blogları da tüm detaylarıyla sanal ortamda incelenmiştir. Bu çerçevede, araştırmacının izlenen yöntemlerle etnografik sürece tamamıyla entegre olması sağlanmış ve bu alanda yapılacak olan etnografi çalışmaları için de bir yol haritası çizilmiştir.

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