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THE LABOUR MOVEMENT'S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND PERSPECTIVE ON DIGITAL LABOUR AND AUDIENCE COMMODITY: THE CASE OF TRADE UNIONISTS IN TURKEY**

Abstract. *The study examines the extent to which individuals actively involved in trade unions[1] in Turkey, and holding various positions within these structures, are familiar with the concept of digital labour. Also explored is whether such individuals perceive their online activities, particularly on Twitter, as unpaid labour. For this purpose, the snowball sampling method was employed in the research, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 participants, namely professional unionists and union workers who create content on Twitter. The study revealed that the participants overlooked immaterial labour while assessing the concept of labour and were unfamiliar with digital labour. It is shown that while they are knowledgeable about various aspects of the labour movement, greater awareness regarding the prevalence of unpaid labour via social media is required. The presented research contributes to the literature by offering the perspective of trade unionists with respect to digital labour.*
Keywords: *labour movement, political economy, digital labour, Turkey, social media, labour union.*

INTRODUCTION

Social media users can directly become a member of the most visited social networks around the world without paying a fee. When these tools are used effectively, social media companies generate income through three basic models: ad-sponsored, subscription-based, or hybrid (Li et al. 2020). The functioning of these models is evident on some of the best-known social media platforms such as YouTube, LinkedIn, X, Flickr, and Vimeo.

The growth rate of Twitter[2] (X), a social network with the highest number of users worldwide, has well exceeded predictions due to its close relationship with providing a rapid news flow after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Briggs 2020). As of the end of 2020, Twitter was earning a significant portion (approximately 86%) of its revenues from advertising. In contrast, in 2015 it launched the Amplify Publisher Programme that allows users to earn income from the content they produce if they meet a series of conditions (Regan 2015).

Twitter's features, such as hashtags, trending topics, and following topics, are used by traditional politicians, journalists, activists, and other users for political news and everyday discussions. Various social and political events, including the Arab Spring protests in 2010, the beginning of the US presidential elections in 2012, the Hong Kong protests in 2014, and the US presidential elections in 2016, added to Twitter's recognition as a news source through user-generated content (Murty 2018, 99–100).

While, as stated by Fuchs, Twitter and similar social platforms survive commercially through user-generated content, there has been a revival of interest in the studies by Dallas Smythe, especially the questions of whether commercial social media users are workers and whether they are exploited (Fuchs 2015, 143).

This study explores trade unionists' use of social media in terms of their activities and content production on Twitter within the framework of Fuchs' digital labour concept and the concept of audience commodity. The framework is presented as an essential topic of discussion and an attempt is made to understand whether trade unionists perceive their online activities as a production process. Twitter was chosen as the preferred platform for this study because it has been a leading social media platform for social movements and political content over the past decade, especially in areas like women's rights, animal rights, and the labour movement. The participants actively use Twitter to support and strengthen the labour movement. The study's theoretical framework consists of Christian Fuchs' studies on digital labour exploitation and Dallas Smythe's concept of audience commodity, which he was primarily inspired by, and his approach that points to the effectiveness of communication in the capitalist economy. In the research phase of the study, efforts were made to ascertain whether

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[2] The company formerly known as Twitter changed its name to X in July 2023. However, it will be referred to by its former and more widely recognised name, Twitter, in this study.

users consider content generation and time spent on social media as exploitation and if they regard their online activities as a form of production.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONCEPT OF DIGITAL LABOUR

In the period from the second half of the 1970s until today, developments in communication and information technologies have led to significant transformations in all social processes. Since the crisis of the Fordist accumulation regime, capitalism has been undergoing structural changes that have transformed the accumulation of capital, modes of production, and organisation of labour, with the growing role of information lying at the centre of this change (Lebert and Vercellone 2016, 17). In the multifaceted restructuring carried out in response to the crisis, information technologies and their effects that enable globalisation have played a crucial role (Akçoroğlu 2009, 531). Different concepts, such as digital capitalism, information capitalism, cognitive capitalism, and big data capitalism, are used to explain the ways capitalism has transformed since 1970. All of these concepts indicate that digitalisation is the main factor in today's capitalism. Digital labour, which may be described as a new form of labour, has seen different evaluations of it in the academic literature. However, it has essentially emerged during the period when the transformation of capitalism mentioned above has been taking place. As production and circulation processes have become digital, labour has also evolved towards this form, increasingly working in information processing, storage, and transmission processes. The term digital labour is also used to define this type of labour (Kiyan 2015, 42).

Studies on digital labour generally provide the basis for research on digital capitalism and the labour process within this capitalism through the works of Lazzarato, Hardt and Negri. The concept has been used by the autonomist Marxist tradition to explain the mentioned position of labour in the face of the digitalisation of capitalism, which is considered immaterial labour. According to them, in the new phase of capitalism, unlike industrial capitalism, work transcends the boundaries of the traditional workplace and is becoming socialised (Sevgi 2021, 22). According to Lazzarato, immaterial labour is a type of labour that produces cultural and symbolic goods and has a vital role in contemporary capitalism (Lazzarato 1996, 133). Lazzarato states that the concept of immaterial labour refers to two aspects of labour. On one hand, it relates to workers' labour in sectors that increasingly require cybernetic and computer-aware skills, such as service production, audiovisual production, advertising, and digital media. In the context of the activity that produces the cultural content of the commodity, immaterial labour refers to activities generally not considered to be work, such as cultural and artistic standards, fashion, tastes, consumer norms and, more strategically, activities aimed at shaping public opinion (Lazzarato 2005, 227–28). Hardt and Negri developed Lazzarato's concept of immaterial labour and emphasised its central importance for the functioning of contemporary capitalism. The authors define the process as a transition from industrial dominance

to the dominance of services and information and the "informatisation" of the economy. At the heart of this informatisation process lies the immaterial labour process. Hardt and Negri explain that because service production does not lead to a physical or lasting product, the labour involved is called immaterial labour, meaning that it produces intangible goods like services, cultural products, information, or communication (Hardt and Negri 2008, 305–11).

Marx mentions that what determines the characteristic of labour is the way it relates to capital and defines only labour that produces capital as productive labour. Unproductive labour is often perceived as labour that does not provide material output. Yet, Marx states that the labour process will be evaluated as productive or unproductive according to whether this process creates surplus value for the capitalist. The material characteristics of labour and product are meaningless in terms of the separation of productive and unproductive labour (Marx 1998, 147).

Social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram also hold a significant place in discussions on digital labour. In the context of the immaterial labour they entail, these platforms are evaluated as social factories that produce digital labour. Produced in post-Fordist conditions, this labour transforms social media users into potential customers on one hand and producers (prosumers)[3] on the other (Özmakas 2015, 17).

Digital labour theory is rooted in Marxist ideology, and a fundamental framework of the theory is the question of whether the time spent by social media users on such platforms can be considered to be productive labour. Christian Fuchs offers a Marxist-based critical perspective on the nature of work in the digital age and suggests using the concept of digital labour instead of immaterial labour. Fuchs states that social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter offer free communication tools to users while commodifying their users' data for profit (Fuchs 2015, 136).

Fuchs defines digital labour as a term which denotes the unpaid labour performed by social media users. Nevertheless, Fuchs adds that user production on social media is only one form of digital labour and that the term includes all forms of labour – paid and unpaid – needed for the existence, production, dissemination, and use of digital media (Fuchs 2015, 422–23).

Fuchs and Sevignani explain users' online behaviour on social platforms using the concept of play labour (playbour), combining play and labour. As a result of playbour, advertisers can offer targeted advertising based on user interests and online behaviours which emerge voluntarily (Fuchs and Sevignani 2013, 237). Fuchs regards users on social media platforms who are unpaid for their labour as unpaid workers (Fuchs 2015, 368–69).

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[3] Alvin Toffler's concept of the "prosumer" combines producer and consumer, referring to people who both produce and consume goods and services (Toffler 2018: 335).

There are also criticisms of Fuchs' conceptualisation of digital labour. Kangal argues that Fuchs treats media users' information as the raw material of labour produced in the media economy. For him, in Marxist theory value is created not by the natural resources (raw material) themselves but by the human labour that intervenes and processes the natural resources. In the media industry, productive labour involves the creation of the software, hardware and cyberspace in use today. Rather than just focusing on the activities of users, it is necessary to consider where this labour originates (Kangal 2018, 164–66).

Arvidsson and Colleoni believe that value creation on social media platforms is loosely related to the amount of productive time. In this sense, it is impossible to apply the Marxist labour theory of value to this process (Arvidsson and Colleoni 2012, 136–37).

Huws also critiques the idea that digital labour generates surplus value in social media. The author states that advertisers, and therefore the producers of the commodities sold in the market, pay social media or search engine companies in return for the opportunity to advertise to users. The value obtained by social networks and search engines is derived from the surplus value produced by labour. Still, this value is not produced by social media users but by the labour of the workers who make the advertised commodities. The issue in question is therefore a profit relationship (Huws 2018, 182–83).

In their study on the future of digital work as accelerated by digitalisation, Kanjuo-Mrčela (2022) discusses various actors, including platforms and users. Kanjuo-Mrčela also refers to Srnicek's critique of Fuchs' perspective on the time users spend on social media platforms as free labour. Srnicek challenges Fuchs' view, claiming that platforms do not derive value directly from users' labour but instead obtain data, which is raw material, acquired via legal and technical mechanisms (Robinson, 2017).

Fuchs, in comparison, explains social media and material/immaterial digital labour processes by starting with the basic concepts of Marxism. By so doing, he establishes a historical relationship with Marxism's concept of abstract labour and the immaterial labour/free labour concepts of Autonomist Marxists. As a result, the criticisms of Fuchs' studies constitute the main arguments for an essential discussion about the political economy of social media. Understanding the approaches taken by individuals in the labour movement to the issue of digital labour, as discussed on social media, is also critical for this discussion.

AUDIENCE COMMODITY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Political economy examines the production and exchange of the instruments required for people to sustain their material existence (Yaylagül 2006, 123) and arose in the 19th century as an approach relied on by classical economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo to explain the capitalist social order and analyse social production relations (Adaklı 2006, 22). Building on this foundation, the political economy of the media deals with the production and distribution

processes of media messages within capitalist production relations. Media messages are primarily commodities that can be bought and sold within capitalist production relations; still, unlike other commodities, they also have ideological functions that reproduce the dominant social structure and power relations. The political economy of the media is based on the premise that the media is powerful enough to influence public opinion and shape public discourse. It includes social analysis as well as the analysis of media and communication (Wittel 2019, 392–400). The critical political economy of communication sees media content as a cultural commodity of capitalism.

Christian Fuchs adapted the critical political economy of communication approach established by Dallas Smythe to digital media and applied Smythe's audience commodity thesis to social media platforms. Smythe begins his article by asserting that "…Western Marxist analyses have neglected the economic and political significance of mass communications systems…" (Smythe 1977, 1). Even this statement may be viewed as a precursor to a provocative audience commodity analysis as described by Yaylagül (2018, 67), and the mentioned article initiated a debate that would continue for many years. Smythe states that the monopoly capitalist stage is characterised by advertising-based communication tools that transform the audience into a commodity (Kiyan 2015, 233).

While advertising meets the needs of corporate capitalism, it has become a must in oligopolistic markets (McChesney 2006, 173–75). Smythe is a key figure in the economy politics of communication who significantly influenced North American research in the field (Mosco 2009, 6–7). The audience commodity of Smythe is an answer to the question: "What is the commodity form of mass-produced, advertiser-supported communications under monopoly capitalism?". Smythe mentioned that researchers who respond to this question with a superficial view such as information, images, meaning and entertainment are not really interested in the commodity value of mass communication and are idealists. The audience's commodification is the sale of the audience by the mass media to advertisers during non-work time shaped by monopoly capitalism (Smythe 1977, 2–5).

However, in social media, which over time has come under the surveillance and control of states and companies, the concept of audience commodity has again become important. Smythe is interested in creating surplus value in the media rather than its ideological effects (Fuchs 2015, 118) and treats the media as a component of the capital accumulation chain (Fisher 2019, 122). According to Smythe, the political economy of communication should focus on commodity analysis (Yaylagül 2018, 67).

Fuchs points out that Smythe's concept of audience commodity can illustrate how commercial platforms on the Internet exploit user activity. Fuchs also explains that user-generated online content is utilised for profit-seeking purposes, similar to shows and programmes in traditional mass media. Considering Marx's analysis of capitalism, the concept of audience commodity can be applied

to examine digital labour in social media (Fuchs 2015, 143–52). Fuchs' theorisation also extends the critical political economy of communication to social media and incorporates a critical political economy approach to new media or digital media.

One argument against commercial social media companies exploiting prosumers is that the latter receive service access in exchange for their work. Access to the service can nonetheless not be considered to be a salary since users cannot use it to purchase things like food (Fuchs 2015, 155–56). Capital accumulation in social media companies relies on the commodification of prosumers, the unpaid labour of Internet users, targeted advertising, and economic surveillance (Fuchs 2020, 487). Social media companies enable capital accumulation by way of targeted advertising tailored to individual user data and behaviour (Fuchs 2015, 149–51).

On the other hand, these companies offer paid subscriptions as an alternative for users who do not wish to be exposed to ads. In their study on online video platforms, Li et al. (2024) state that the paid subscription method which offers ad-free content is a remarkable strategy used in the promotion and growth stages of the platforms. Initially, the content is provided free of charge, which aims to boost the number of platform users and attract potential advertisers. However, when the number of subscribers reaches saturation, a paid subscription offer is introduced to users based on the provision of ad-free content. This model is utilised by many social media platforms, and not only based on being served with ad-free content but also provides access to the platform's premium services other users cannot access. For example, Twitter has stated that users who do not want a paid subscription can only perform read-only actions such as reading messages, watching videos and following accounts (Ozan and Altan 2024).

SOCIAL MEDIA: A CHALLENGE FOR UNIONS

Trade unions aim to protect and develop workers' economic and social rights and interests. Unions depend on social media to raise awareness, provide educational content, set the agenda, and pressure decision-makers. Like other social movements that conflict with capital and the dominant ideology, the demands of trade unions and the labour movement rarely find a place in the mass media.

On the other hand, unions can increase collective participation on social media platforms and build representation on social media to strengthen the labour movement. A study conducted in Australia revealed that some unionists avoided using the union's social media accounts for reasons like indifference and job concerns. Still, it is noteworthy that other participants' sense of belonging to the union increased through social media and increased interest in the union's offline activities (Barnes et al. 2019, 108).

Social media enables unions to communicate horizontally. In this respect, social media facilitates access to unionists, supporters and other social segments with organisational potential. Despite this potential, comparative analysis of the

Facebook pages of six trade union confederations in Brazil, Canada, Portugal and the United Kingdom shows that unions mostly use social media for one-way communication (Carneiro and Costa 2020, 43–45). It is in any case worth stressing that the Internet can provide a more interactive, transparent and intensive free communication environment that will reverse the traditional communication and information flow (Zivkovic and Hogan 2005, 174).

Although unions use social media to invite more workers to join the union, the unionisation rate of young workers is much lower than that of older workers. Unions must therefore use social media and digital technologies to reach, support and organise young workers, especially in countries with high youth unemployment rates (Andre 2023). In contrast, Hodder and Houghton (2020, 55) note that many young people lack knowledge and interest in unions and argue that those who follow union accounts on social media are already unionists.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed many shared difficult experiences for unions and unionists globally, with Ford and Sinpeng suggesting that unionists became aware of digital engagement during the difficulties the labour movement faced in the COVID-19 period. At the time of the pandemic, unions that were successful in digital participation had a digital communication strategy and the right communication staff (2022, 56–57). While the communication channels used by unions are shifting toward a more digital landscape, they can still produce content in the traditional style (Hodder and Houghton, 2015, 185). Given the historical reliance on conventional and vertical communication processes within unions, developing horizontal communication skills and a digital language is becoming crucial, notably for effective social media use. Further, adapting to this relatively new hybrid labour movement is essential for mobilising online supporters offline.

The use of social media has generally provided an alternative communication channel for social movements, making them more visible. It has also led to changes in the communication, organisation, and action styles of activists in social movements. As Emond-Sioufi (2018, 66) briefly states, social media has undoubtedly become one of the vital elements of the public sphere. These are platforms manipulated by algorithms that benefit special interests.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to assess the understanding and awareness about digital labour held by people involved in trade unions, specifically their experiences with using Twitter.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:
- Why and how frequently do union members use Twitter?
- How do union members connect their online activities with advertisements on Twitter?
- What do the audience commodity and digital labour concepts hold for these individuals?

In the data collection phase of the research, semi-structured interviews were conducted between February 2021 and October 2022 with 11 people involved in trade union activities. The difficulty experienced during the data collection was that some participants postponed the interviews due to having both union activities in the field and reservations about being able to remain anonymous in the research.

All interviewees were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity, and this information was communicated to them before each interview to ensure they felt secure and were open with the researchers. The first interviewee was an active Twitter user who frequently shares posts related to the union's fieldwork and activities in which he is an organisational expert. He is well acquainted with the issues mining workers face and has gained considerable recognition as a critic of the current labour conditions in Turkey. He maintains a strong presence in mainstream news and programmes focused on the labour movement, and is very engaged on Twitter. While the other interviewees were reached via snowball sampling, the interviewees were asked to suggest a new participant living in a different region/city or affiliated with a different union to ensure data diversity.

The online interviews conducted via WhatsApp, Skype, and Google Meet averaged out at 35 minutes. Each session was audio-recorded. The collected data were transferred to Google Sheets for online collaboration. The presented research specifically focuses on Twitter, renowned for its online agenda-setting and rapid news flow features, and is limited to trade unionists who utilise the platform.

FINDINGS[4]

Demographics of the Interviewees

In this study, semi-structured online interviews were conducted with 11 unionists actively participating in the labour movement in Turkey. The interviewees ranged in age from 36 to 50 years. Only one participant was female, which is notable given the rate of unionised women in Turkey.[5]

While one interviewee identified themself as a worker, five individuals primarily described themselves as workers despite holding representative or managerial roles within the union. In addition, one person identified themself as a business owner, another as a technician, and one as a union official.

The majority of those interviewed (nine people) stated they were currently employed, while two mentioned they had been fired due to being a member of a union. Seven participants who were representatives or managers in a union described their income situation as above the average income level of the

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[4] Access to the research data available at: https://osf.io/u9nzg.
[5] Taşkın and Çakın's (2022, 281) 2020 study revealed that the average female union membership rate in Turkey's top three unions is just 18%.

working class, considering the overall situation. One of the three participants who indicated their low-income status emphasised that he relied on family support to make ends meet.

Social Media Use of the Interviewees

Nine interviewed individuals mentioned they had been using social media for over 10 years, starting with Facebook. In contrast, one participant noted that social media had only been part of their life in the last few years. Participants used a variety of platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Telegram.

Reasons for Twitter Use

The trade unionists interviewed use Twitter to follow the news and agenda, shape public opinion, express solidarity, make announcements, and support activities through hashtags.

All interviewees use Twitter for political purposes, unlike Facebook and Instagram, especially to follow political figures and agendas and to announce or support union activities. G2 mentioned that he uses Twitter to shape public opinion and generate different ideas. He stressed that workers do not use Twitter often. According to G2, union members do not use Twitter to make their voices heard by workers, but instead to connect with other individuals who can demonstrate solidarity with workers.

One of the key findings is that even though Facebook is used widely within the working class, the interviewees especially log into Twitter to shape public opinion. It is here that the aim of strengthening the labour movement together with users who are not in the working class comes to the fore. Expressing the purpose of logging into Twitter as creating public opinion and exploring diverse ideas, I2 underscored the low representation of workers on the platform. I2 clarified that they use Twitter not simply to amplify their voice among workers but to connect with individuals who can express solidarity with the labour cause. Similarly, I3 stated that they log into Twitter to reach various communities and individuals, including non-governmental organisations, political party members, and trade union groups, for solidarity. In addition, they viewed Twitter's ability to re-post content and reach more people as a plus. On the other hand, three interviewees regarded Twitter as a free and more comfortable environment where they can express themselves.

Twitter Agenda and Offline Agenda

Six interviewees perceive a similarity between the agendas of the online and offline environments, while four individuals believe that such a similarity exists only occasionally. I2 expressed, "Social media is more of a fantasy world, and it is a reality on the street". They highlighted that people on the street do not have much to do with social media and that there is no relationship between the

agenda on Twitter and the agenda on the street. G1, an organisational expert, explained that different socio-economic conditions should be taken into account regarding the similarity of agendas as follows:

> *Twitter is more about the discussions of the cultural middle classes and the liberal world. There is a certain angle between it (Twitter's agenda) and reality. When you follow Twitter, it seems like a political party will get 10% or 20% of the votes, but there is no such reality on the ground. On the street, it is possible to see through which relationship networks, coalitions and correlations political parties can gain votes.*

From a different perspective, G7 believes that the agenda on the street and the agenda on Twitter have been similar since the COVID-19 pandemic given the considerable role of people working from home. On the other hand, G8 explains that from time to time there is a similar agenda both online and offline and that those who are afraid to express themselves on the street express themselves freely on Twitter.

Opinions on Advertising for Union Activities and the Labour Movement

Participants were asked for their opinions on targeted advertising for trade union activities and labour movements to gain deeper understanding of their views on targeted advertising. All interviewees had noticed that they had viewed ads related to topics they had previously searched on search engines or social media accounts. After G7 had noted that the ads took up space, he expressed his discomfort with the ad content as follows: "It's like someone is following us".

While G8 held a similar opinion, they also emphasised that the technology's gains and negative aspects must be evaluated carefully: "Are we its masters or its slaves? I look at it from the worker's perspective. No one is talking during the tea break today; everyone is on the phone", G8 pointed out that time being spent this way reduces interaction in the physical environment.

There were significant differences of opinion among the interviewees concerning political and advertising content for the labour movement. Here, it is clear that, alongside positive and negative opinions about advertising, the perspective of affiliated unions on the advertising content is also important. While eight interviewees were positive about the advertising on social media, three participants stated that their unions had a negative approach. All those who found it positive to share paid advertising content on behalf of the labour movement agreed that the movement's visibility will grow and more people will be aware of what is happening.

G10's statement was remarkable for its ideological opposition to advertising on Twitter. G10 stated that the trade union with which they are affiliated opposes capitalism, asserting that paying for advertising content implies establishing a

partnership with capitalism. G4 was similarly clear, "No advertising. I am not selling a commodity. I am living a real life".

Taking a different approach, G6 stated that the labour movement is more accurate in the field and that informative advertisements, especially regarding workers' rights, will contribute to the labour movement.

Thoughts on Paid Subscriptions

All of the interviewees held a perspective opposed to being a paid subscriber for a social media channel. For instance, G9 mentioned having deleted the YouTube application from their phone following increased advertising density in YouTube content. On the contrary, G4 believed that viewing advertising content in the content stream on their social networks has become necessary since they would otherwise be unable to use that platform. They explained, "As income levels decrease, these advertisements are not considered a burden. You have to bear them".

Commodity Value of the Content

Almost all (10) of the participants associated the commodity value related to social media use with the potential for user-generated content to generate income. They also assessed these contents in terms of commercial opportunities such as finding sponsors for social media accounts or advertising products. These interviewees ignored that their content would have a commodity value for social media companies. Still, they mentioned feeling uncomfortable with the idea of personally making a profit from the content they had produced to strengthen the labour movement.

G1, in comparison, stated that those who follow the content he produces encounter a series of advertisements linked to the content: "Advertisements cause something to happen on their (followers') consumption preferences. It takes hold in your consciousness".

Opinions on the Returns to Time Spent on Twitter

Nine of the eleven participants claimed that advertising displays on social media have increased, and companies have thus made greater profits. While G3 and G4 suggest that spending time on social media may positively affect the labour movement, they did not describe what kind of return this would mean for social media companies.

G8 stated that someone makes a considerable profit because users do not have financial expectations about gaining in social media, adding, "Advertising is a reality. As the time we spend increases, advertising increases, and the money earned by companies increases". G10 described how they unfortunately become partners in the success that social media companies aim for by purchasing products they see being advertised. G2, on the other hand, noted that social media companies cannot survive if users do not spend time or produce content.

What Digital Labour Means for the Interviewees

All interviewees encountered the concept of digital labour for the first time through this question. Almost all of them expressed a desire to explain digital labour based on the perspectives of the labour movement. Only G9 hesitated and conveyed their inability to offer an explanation or prediction. The remaining interviewees underscored the labour of individuals engaged directly in technology development, production, and software stages in their assessments of digital labour. No interviewee directly associated themselves with the digital labour concept in terms of content production or time spent on social media.

According to G2, labour is already produced by the worker, and those who engage as workers in various stages of digital technologies are associated with digital labour. Similarly, G11 directly associates digital labour with productivity, but unlike the other interviewees also accounts for those who produce the content. Thus, G11 was the sole interviewee to indirectly point out the content production process. G5 held a different perspective. As noted by G5, digital labour not only includes the productive process but also the time spent by people preparing for production.

G10 stated that many employees are involved because no one person can operate all processes for a given digital platform and that the boss pays for the time spent by those employees. Using software developers as an example, G10 declared, "This part of labour always turns into something different. It tires your mind and your eyes". By saying this, they stressed that labour is not only spent on material production. Moreover, they associated digital labour with inequality, "The boss always wins".

G1 evaluated the digital labour concept, which they associate with "… the increase in the rate of circulation of capital, the role of computerisation, transportation technology, and the articulation of labour on an international level", from a broader perspective of those working in different fields and stages of digital technologies.

What Audience Commodity Means to the Interviewees

In this study, the concept of audience commodity, a key concept alongside the concept of digital labour, was not clear and understandable for the interviewees. Throughout the interviews, the question was therefore rephrased and asked in different ways – such as selling the user to advertisers and converting a user into a commodity – to make it more understandable. During the interviews, seven interviewees expressed their opinions on the concept of audience commodity. It is noted that significant differences exist between the initial views on audience commodity, as presented in the first question, and the answers provided to the explained question. This distinction was carefully elucidated while assuring that the participants were not manipulated.

Only G6 among the 11 interviewees had a positive approach to audience commodity, mentioning that "The content you produce will have a long-term value. I can say that it will serve the public and justice".

G5 was critical of social media despite its intense use. It is generally believed that track users in all kinds of ways through users' smartphones and social media activities. Although he individually aims to reach more people with his social media content, he considers social media as a space that makes people spend more money and introduces them to artificial needs. He stated that the processing of user data and the sale of users as a commodity to advertisers entails the voluntary slavery of the user.

G1 and G8 discussed the audience commodity concept within the framework of transforming the user into a consumer by displaying advertisements. G1 noted that social media offers capital many opportunities such as information/data, defining the market, shaping perceptions, product design, production and planning, while the audience commodity also contributes to this with its shares. G8 similarly stated that social media offers various opportunities to deliver and purchase a product to more users. G8 expressed self-criticism here, adding that he too could not remain indifferent to the advertisements of e-commerce companies and had ordered products from them.

G11 first responded to the question by saying that he uses social media as a tool in a controlled manner. When reframing the issue to sell users to advertisers, he added: "We position them as commodities". After this remarkable shift in his opinion, he wanted to justify his use of social media with the mass media ignoring the labour movement.

Similarly to G11, when the question was posed in a different form, G10 also mentioned a different purpose for social media use: "Since we can't get anything from the (mainstream) media, we can obtain more accurate information from social media and distribute it". According to G10, when a tool is invented it is up to the user to use that tool for good or bad. In this context, G10 cited the advocacy of women's rights as an example of a positive use.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In 2003, the total number of unionised workers in Turkey amounted to 58% of the registered workforce, yet by 2023 the figure had dropped to 15%. In other words, 85% of workers in Turkey are not in a union (TC Ministry of Labour and Social Security 2024). Only relatively recently has digital labour become a topic of discussion in academic circles. However, there is currently no framework for including the perspectives of union members in Turkey in the concept of digital labour. The participants of this study, which sought to evaluate the perspective of union members in Turkey on digital labour and the audience commodity, were 11 individuals from left-leaning trade unions. All of the interviewees use social media for their personal needs, union activities and goals.

The research results show that unionists are unfamiliar with the concept of digital labour in the context discussed by Fuchs, and consider the concept as a form of labour engaged in by employees in computer-mediated work processes. Although Fuchs also considers computer-mediated work processes to fall within the scope of digital labour, it is clearly evident that the interviewees do not share the understanding of digital labour conceptualised by Fuchs, especially with regard to the exploitation of social media users via their unpaid labour. However, the union interviewees were very familiar with traditional labour theory and labour movement approaches.

Although most interviewees were aware of targeted advertising, they did not evaluate this process in terms of audience commodity. Participants associate social media platforms' monitoring, recording and use of users' Internet activities and data with advertising display, control and surveillance. Yet, the interviewees do not think that social media content and the time spent on social media have a commodity value. Gindin et al. (2021, 8) indicate that the behavioural approach considers the datafication–society relationship in the context of changing people's behaviour with respect to the data's ability to cause people to react. The participants were aware that social media companies use the data they collect from them to guide and trigger their purchasing behaviour. Yet, notwithstanding this awareness of targeted advertising, which has an important place in digital labour discussions, the participants avoid defining their actions in social media as value-creating labour or themselves as workers exploited by social media companies.

As mentioned in the introduction to the study, the discourse on digital labour is mostly framed within the context of the theory of immaterial labour. Nonetheless, the interviewees do not characterise their behaviour on social media as immaterial labour. They perceive labour as the creating of something in a factory, with social media activity not being regarded as such.

Another noteworthy finding of the study is that Facebook is used as an extension of face-to-face relationships and is considered to be an apolitical platform. Content related to the labour movement or politics is predominantly shared on Twitter. Twitter stands out as a platform on which strikes and actions are announced, and social support is sought to foster solidarity with segments of society that are not direct subjects of the labour movement, particularly intellectuals and artists. The study also reveals that the primary interlocutors of the labour movement, namely workers, spend more time on Facebook than on Twitter. This indicates that workers utilise Twitter as a platform for more political discourse linked to the labour movement while sharing more personal, day-to-day contents on Facebook.

Social media serves as an alternative media for the labour movement. For instance, Bostanci's research (2019, 2093–094) demonstrates that women unionists chiefly track the agenda on social media, followed by online news sites and union websites. In the presented study, findings similar to Bostanci's conclusions

were obtained. The study demonstrates that social media platforms are not utilised for fundamental issues in the labour movement, such as organising new workers and popularising the idea of unions among the unorganised masses. Activism on Twitter is largely confined to hashtag activism. The labour movement has limited engagement with digital forms of action.

The described situation concerning Twitter applies not only to activists but also to unions on corporate level. In her doctoral study, Sevgi (2018) reached similar results regarding social media use in union activities in Germany, France, the Netherlands, Poland, and Turkey. Sevgi reveals that unions do not leverage digital opportunities sufficiently. Lee (2000, 71–72) stated nearly 25 years ago that most union leaders do not possess sufficient knowledge about the Internet. As stated by Lee, unions in Turkey have increased online campaigns, interactivity, and news dissemination. Despite their widespread use of the Internet, unionists in Turkey remain distant from networked global unions.

Hodder and Houghton (2020, 56) point to the difficulties unions face in moving beyond interaction with their existing activists and carrying out their online activities effectively. Yet, many social movements are turning to advertising on social media, focusing more on providing interaction rather than how to manage interaction. Even though some participants held a positive opinion about advertising on social media individually on behalf of the labour movement, it is understood that unions do not resort to this method when it comes to political processes on the institutional level. Examining digital campaigns by feminist communities in Australia, Gleeson (2016) concludes that activities performed by feminist campaigners, when evaluated and compensated as paid digital labour, could offer positive contributions beyond their daily/personal use of social media. Moreover, the study showed that feminist campaigners experienced burnout after a while due to not being paid.

It should be noted that, irrespective of holding a critical stance on advertising, some interviewees found political content in advertising worth considering. However, in Fuchs' conceptualisation, commercial social media is not discussed solely in terms of labour exploitation; it is positioned as a locus of power that calls for ideological resistance, while the establishment of alternatives is advocated. It can also be said that the people who engage in the labour movement do not view the Internet or social media as a direct space for union activities or the class struggle.

The general approach to social media in the labour movement is associated with the purpose for which users employ these tools. Social media is considered useful if users employ it consciously and with good intentions and at some point the money earned from it is viewed as the service provided by these tools. Fuchs, in comparison, defines the capitalist Internet as a class-structured Internet and states that a fair Internet one that is classless.

Individuals in the labour movement and union members are unfamiliar with the concept of digital labour concerning social media and the Internet. Here, the

Internet, which Fuchs defines as an important tool in the ideological struggle, is considered instrumental for the labour movement and its possible contributions to the struggle are evaluated in a limited way. It is necessary to diversify the forms of digital action as well as the discussions on user labour and to consider they ways the Internet's contribution to the social movement will affect it. Critical political economy studies on commodification and labour processes on widely used social platforms like Twitter will add to this process.

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UPORABA DRUŽBENIH OMREŽIJ MED PRIPADNIKI DELAVSKEGA GIBANJA TER NJIHOV POGLED NA DIGITALNO DELO IN OBČINSTVO KOT TRŽNO BLAGO: PRIMER SINDIKALNIH DELAVCEV V TURČIJI

Povzetek. *Poudarjajo, da so uporabniki družbenih medijev izkoriščani z neplačanim delom kot prosumerji. Ta študija preučuje seznanjenost posameznikov, ki so aktivno vključeni v delavske sindikate v Turčiji in zasedajo različne položaje v teh strukturah, s konceptom digitalnega dela. Raziskuje tudi, ali ti posamezniki dojemajo svoje spletne aktivnosti, zlasti na Twitterju, kot neplačano delo. V ta namen smo v raziskavi uporabili metodo snežne kepe in izvedli polstrukturirane intervjuje z enajstimi udeleženci, sestavljenimi iz poklicnih sindikalistov in sindikalistov, ki ustvarjajo vsebine na Twitterju. Študija je pokazala, da so udeleženci pri ocenjevanju koncepta dela spregledali nematerialno delo in niso bili seznanjeni z digitalnim delom. Študija kaže, da čeprav so dobro seznanjeni z različnimi vidiki delavskega gibanja, je potrebna večja ozaveščenost glede razširjenosti neplačanega dela prek družbenih medijev.*

Ključni pojmi: *delavsko gibanje, politična ekonomija, digitalno delo, Turčija, socialni mediji, sindikat delavcev.*