

## The Paradox of Digital Activism in the Age of the Environmental Crisis: The Case of X (Twitter) Through the Lens of Slacktivism<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The impact of digital platforms on social movements and awareness is increasing significantly. While the act of expressing approval of the content shared on social media platforms through actions such as "liking" and "sharing" can create a sense of participation in users, it also raises the question of how these online interactions translate into concrete results in the physical world. In this context, the concept of slacktivism in particular reveals that users are content with online participation and avoid physical contribution. This study uses a qualitative research approach to understand the effects of digital activism on environmental awareness. Environment-themed digital campaigns on the X (Twitter) platform are subjected to systematic content analysis. The

study compares the level of visibility and social impact of global campaigns conducted through specific hashtags. The findings show that digital discourses, despite mass support, remain limited when not backed by concrete actions. Examining environmentally-oriented global campaigns through specific hashtags reveals that the impact of environmental discourses disseminated through digital channels is limited when they are not accompanied by concrete, real-world actions.

**Keywords:** Hashtag, Digital Activism, Environmental Movements, Social Media, Slacktivism

**JEL Codes:** Q01, Q51, Q54, Q56, D83

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## 1. Introduction

Activism is when people react to the social problems they face and come together to bring about some kind of transformation. Digital activism, which people choose as a way to provide peace of mind with the power to spread the problems of the globalized world to everyone thanks to technological progress, provides the next stage, opening up to a wide area in social movements. However, this opening has had a positive effect for some and a negative effect for others. As a matter of fact, efforts to bring solutions to problems by engaging in social movements that contribute to the conscientious relief of human beings have also opened the door to passive actions. Akpınar (2023) expressed digital activism with the following words: *“digital activism should also be evaluated within the scope of raising awareness and being a voice in society. Inasmuch as activism is basically a common stance against a social event, it should be evaluated within the scope of action”*. This situation, which includes a passive structure due to the nature of slacktivism, a sub-type of digital activism, creates a temporary effect with misleading success rates instead of concrete data. This continues to be an obstacle to finding a permanent solution to problems. In an issue as relevant as environmental problems today, the coming together of people and their consistency in offering solutions should go further than a slactivist effort. These so-called lazy efforts also reduce the visibility and impact of actions. However, it is important to note that globalization and the transformation of the world into a global village, as McLuhan argued (1962), has accelerated with the possibilities of the internet. With social media, passive individuals now have the opportunity to reach the whole world at the same time without the need for traditional media to make their voices heard (Karagöz, 2013). The capacity of everyone to access all information instantly has affected the emergence of a different perception in taking action on the one hand and the speed of social transformation on the other. Thus, people's approach to problems and action plans have changed, and although the opportunity to hear about problems has increased, the opportunity to find solutions has often decreased. The digital age we live in has significantly transformed the form and nature of social movements. Traditional square protests have been replaced by awareness campaigns, calls for signatures and social media hashtags conducted through digital platforms. With this transformation, it has become increasingly common for individuals to show their reactions to social problems digitally. However, these visible forms of participation have also raised questions about the actual impact of the action. The concept of “Slacktivism ” comes into play at this point, opening up the real-world impact

of the symbolic reactions that users show with low effort in the digital environment. This concept, which has become one of the most important issues of our time, has become even more popular with climate change and environmental crises.

Environmental activism is becoming increasingly important on social media, where the consequences of climate change are becoming increasingly evident. Platforms such as X (Twitter) have the power to organize users by enabling the publication of posts on a global scale thanks to its immediacy feature. In the world and in Türkiye, important hashtags on climate issues are used to raise awareness.

This study investigates the participation-action paradox in environmental activism on X (Twitter). The aim of the study is to reveal activism mobilization in the context of environmental crisis from the perspective of slacktivism. For this purpose, tweets containing the hashtags #climatechange and #iklimkrizi are analyzed, focusing on both global and Türkiye-specific hashtag campaigns. Systematic qualitative content analysis is used to examine the use of visuals, referral content, type of activism, type of tweet, and level of interaction.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. From Traditional Activism to Digital Activism

Activism is the activity of individuals or groups formed by coming together on similar themes to change an order they do not approve of or to realize certain goals by putting social and individual profit on the agenda. While there is conflict when individuals or groups do not have the same idea, uniting with those who have the same idea has given rise to the word activist. While activists serve the common good, they also fight against opposing views. In the process of struggle, which develops in the form of persuasion, discussion and pressure, people with united ideas gathered around a common consciousness (Köygülü, 2019). Activism is the conduct of activities developed for political and social endeavors through social communication networks, which was introduced in the 1970s. Activism refers to the process of pressure that activists exert on various interest groups to change the facts, conditions and policies that activists see as problems in society. In short, it is a struggle for change and transformation (Tuna & Türkölmez, 2023). Activism can also be defined as the expression of thoughts and ideas through demonstration. Although the concept includes protest, it should be examined in a wider range. Letters, telephone campaigns, petitions, signature campaigns, demonstrations and rallies represent the traditional side of activism (Ürkmez, 2020).

The internet, which has been dominating social life since the 1990s, has changed the course of social movements. The level of visibility of social problems and people's sensitivity towards these problems have increased. With the increase in participation and polyphony, people started to take part in solving more problems (Gürel & Nazlı, 2019). With globalization, the world has become a global village, which, as McLuhan said, is to live in a narrow space where tribal drums echo (1962), has accelerated even more with the possibilities of the internet. With social media, passive masses now have the opportunity to reach the whole world at the same time without the need for traditional media to make their voices heard (Karagöz, 2013). With the development of technology, the impact of the Internet has increased and changes have emerged in the form of social movements. New media, where communication is fast and practical, cost-effective and abstracted from time and space constraints, has emerged. As a tool of the new media, social media has been accepted as a medium of new social movements. People have utilized communication networks such as Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Facebook to make their voices heard on issues they are uncomfortable with (Tuna&Türkölmez, 2023). The virtual world is not only a source of entertainment, news and information, but also has the power to rally the masses around a common consciousness. Individuals of all ages have become active in social activism (Kırık et al., 2021).

Activism, which means taking action to enable social change, can take place in social, political, economic or environmental fields. One of the most common types of activism is digital activism (Chibita, 2016). As in most areas of life, digitalization has greatly affected the nature of activist practices. Activists have thus moved away from traditional stereotypes and, through the possibilities provided by digital technologies, they have been able to move the processes they apply throughout public spaces online, breaking free from the limitations of space and creating virtual public spaces. These spaces have given social movements a wide sphere of influence (Şivgin, 2020). Today, people can use social media sites to become members of political and social groups and express their opinions on social and political issues. Therefore, social media has the power to inform, mobilize and unite people around a common consciousness. The fact that social media puts users at the center of social movements creates an alternative public sphere for new social events. Thus, it should be said that the activities of new social movements have spread to the digital side and the concept of "digital activism" has emerged as a new type of activism (Uzunoğlu, 2022).

The anti-globalization movements that influenced the world in the 2000s, together with the first international and then national forums, shared some stra-

tegies with new social movements. In these years, public opinion was formed by utilizing the internet, with discourses and actions that were counter-arguments of the mainstream media. This power of the internet paved the way for social media and became an intermediary for people to share their discourses as they wished (Öke, 2018).

With the entry of the activism movement into the digital environment, new media users have begun to be called digital activists. People have become digital activists for reasons such as reducing the burden of conscience by not remaining silent in the face of social problems and taking advantage of the opportunities to adapt to the community. However, since this mobilization involves a passive structure, it is also criticized (Ürkmez, 2020). The most important point of these criticisms is the idea that it does not go beyond being a clicking activity that allows participants to experience only catharsis at the desk and gives the impression of being able to do something about the problems (Scholz, 2010).

Social networks allow people to express themselves and social issues in the public sphere. With the developing technology, information about the truth can be disseminated without recognizing geographical boundaries. Digital activism is when individuals or organizations take action digitally to bring about desired social change. These activities, which are effective on social platforms for the betterment of the environment in which we live, allow us to present social problems and solutions to them. The communication within the community creates a meaningful collective experience (Öztunç, 2023). Successful activist campaigns have often depended on a group of people to influence the choices of decision-makers in the direction the public wants. In all activism movements, the measure of success should be strategic rather than tactical (Karpf, 2010). According to Mary Joyce, who studies digital activism, the concept is based on technological infrastructure, social and political factors, and economic factors. Technological infrastructure is the first step of digital activism. It is only possible for the whole world to speak a single language through the internet and the power of the digital code. Economic and social factors determine the way people use technological infrastructure. This is because the economic power of activists affects the purchasing status of products, the type of hardware and its functionality. In addition, many factors such as the social group, age and gender determine expectations and the direction of digital activism. Regarding the influence of politics, digital activists in democratic and semi-democratic societies can have a say in the actions of the government, while digital activists are restricted in societies with repressive governments (2010). Digital activism is generally non-violent, albeit collective in nature with opposing discourses. Although there are concepts

such as cybercrimes and attacks used in the media, technological and physical violence is rarely encountered (Öke, 2018).

It would be wrong to look at digital activism from a traditional perspective. Because social actions based on traditional communication are like a spider. When the organizational structure with the center ends, so does the movement. Digital activist movements with new communication possibilities, on the other hand, can live without a clear organizational structure like a starfish. There are three perspectives on digital activism. The first one is optimistic and thinks that the traditional system will minimize inequalities in the distribution of power. Therefore, according to optimistic thinking, authoritarian rule becomes more difficult to occur. The second is pessimistic, suspecting that technology will be open to malicious use. The third, with a consistent approach, considers the possibility of message dissemination and online organization (Svitanides 2011, as cited in Turhan, 2016). It is possible to categorize digital activism into types depending on the goals of activists and the methods they apply. The types that emerge on the basis that new additions will be made based on technological developments are as follows: Taking sides, Slacktivism, Hacktivism, Citizen Journalism (Turhan, 2017).

## 2.2. A Type of Digital Activism: Slacktivism

A combination of the words "slacker" and "activism", "slacktivism" is used to refer to the disjuncture between awareness and action through social media. In other words, it is a break from traditional activism. Slacktivism, which minimizes effort by making likes to feel good about oneself and has no clear indication of solving problems, has been excluded by some due to its passive nature. However, despite all its negative connotations, it is viewed positively by some in the sense that people can unite even from far distances and rely on a collective cause (Glenn, 2015). Özkula (2021) came to the following conclusion in his study: (1) a lot of activism activity that includes digitalised activity today is integrated/enmeshed/ hybrid, (2) digitality as the distinguishing factor for current activism is fairly non-descript as it merely suggests the use of some tools as part of a range of activities that are not further defined, and (3) digital activism is a very broad concept as it is based on the use of a very broad set of technologies. Thus, it was argued that digital activism as a concept is both obscure and problematic for its operationalisation. Through a discussion of derogatory views of digitally enabled activism (the clicktivist example) and universalist views of the "digital", it was further argued that the "digital" label is attached to a range of processes of social construction. It was therefore suggested that digital activism as a label is dysfunctional to how contemporary activism is theorised.

A similar concept to Slacktivism is Clicktivism. The word "click", which means clicking in English, gains importance here. Although this concept is also based on people experiencing catharsis by raising their voices on issues they are uncomfortable with (Gürel & Nazlı, 2019), it differs from slactivism with a slight difference. Liking a post, sharing an article, photo or video, re-sharing someone else's message, changing the profile photo can be examples of slactivism. Clicktivism, on the other hand, is like making contact with the real world. Clicktivism depends on the integrity of internet and street struggles and contributes to participatory democracy (Karagöz, 2024). Clicktivists can initiate petitions, protest campaigns, open action-specific websites, and their leaders are more prominent (Karataş, 2023). In other words, Clicktivism is a deepened form of meaningful participation of light online actions (Zohouri et al. 2020). The word "slacker", which means lazy in English, and the word "click", which means clicking, express the expansion of slactivism more clearly. Because it defines the state of people taking passive actions to reach the conscientious relief of being able to do something on digital platforms. The black ribbon used on profiles after an act of terrorism, opening hashtags and writing messages are the most common examples of slactivism. It is thought that the fact that people take such simple and passive actions blunts their desire for social change (Turhan, 2016). Apart from these criticisms, slactivism is a low-cost and low-risk activity that raises awareness, generates change, or provides satisfaction to people who engage in certain activities. So it can be said that the environment where slactivism takes place is the home (Uzunoğlu, 2022). Criticisms of slactivism have developed in two directions. On the one hand, while it is thought that reacting to social problems online creates awareness, on the other hand, there have been thoughts that conclude that reacting by clicking relieves people's conscience and dulls the feeling of taking physical action. On the other hand, in the context of positive criticism, the idea that these small messages increase the permanence to support social mobility continues. Because the fact that passively supporting a movement at the desk does not constitute an obstacle to physical action is also considered (Karataş, 2023).

Critics of slacktivism argue that instead of a tangible change in posting or hashtag use, a misleading sense of achievement emerges. This, in turn, has a negative impact on real grassroots activism and increases complacency. However, slacktivism can also be positive in that it encourages concrete activism (Zohouri et al., 2020). According to the study, which aims to present a counterargument against derogatory criticism of slacktivism, the term slacktivism was adopted in an attempt to denigrate everyday digital political and civic participation. Those who wished to argue the pointlessness of such activity used

it as a pejorative moniker. The term designates those conducting digital political and civic acts as slacker activists even though they themselves may not be calling themselves activists. As the digital world was unable to instantly and decisively resolve issues in the physical world, the efforts of digital activism were immediately seen as having no real effect by its critics. The critics continued by calling out the participants as lazy, technocentric, narcissists who were either delusional about the ability of technology to support change, or whose real interest in digital activism was self-promotion. This criticism, however, seems to intentionally ignore the reality of the interconnectedness of online and offline environments. Digital participation is here to stay, it is an inevitable part of social movements, activism, and protest. Moreover, the technology brings with it a range of benefits for the organization and dissemination of activism in addition to innovative forms of protest. It is therefore harmful to dismiss this technologically mediated reality and it is vital to consider its strengths and weaknesses for any given movement (Madison & Klang, 2020).

Likes, comments or posts that are seen as participation in slactivism include the element of intention. Although clicking on a like button or re-tweeting a hashtag may be seen as effortless in isolation from traditional actions, for theorists such as Lalonde and Wright, collective action is often fueled not only by the active aspect of taking action but also by the intention-oriented aspect that will contribute to the group. Some scholars argue that the impact of social media lacks permanence and therefore weak bonds are common among people. Because, according to them, individuals in traditional activism are real people and have more credibility (Yiğit & Karayılan, 2023).

Increasingly, people and organizations are using information communication technologies for various forms of activism, such as fundraising, community building, lobbying and organizing. However, despite its potential to reach people and raise awareness at large scales, critics continue to question the efficacy of this low-cost, low risk form of activism. Critics argue that slactivism may hurt real activism-people may feel satisfied through their slactivism and this type of low-cost civic participation decreases other subsequent activities that could make a difference. If critics are correct, then we must re-consider the use of slactivism (Lee & Hsieh, 2013).

### 2.3. Environmental Movement through Social Media

In recent years, social media has become a critical tool for organizing social movements and reaching large masses. The development of computer technology and the shrinking of computer technology

down to the size of a pocket and the accessibility of the internet from anywhere via wireless connection have paved the way for the rapid spread of social media platforms and a significant increase in the number of users. Christian Fuchs (2020), while defining social media, emphasizes concepts such as collective participation, communication processes, community formation, networking, collaboration, creative forms of user-generated content production, entertainment and sharing. In today's social media platforms, which constitute an important interaction and awareness network, especially environmental movements have become more visible using digital platforms and have achieved solidarity on a global scale (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). However, debates continue on the effectiveness of activism on social media and its reflection on real life. In this context, the concept of slactivism is used to describe superficial or symbolic acts of support in the digital environment (Morozov, 2009). As a form of movement limited to symbolic support (Christensen, 2011), slactivism can play an important role in raising awareness. One of the important problems brought about by globalization is ecological problems. In this world, environmental problems need to be addressed at a global level. The subjects of environmental actions are activists and governments. In this context, governments have started to take international climate agreements and projects into consideration. Nature, which has been destroyed by human hands, has lost its balance and the effects of this have begun to manifest themselves in the form of global warming. This deterioration in natural systems is revealed as a warning by nature with the increasing number of natural disasters around the world. Therefore, more effective steps must be taken urgently at the individual and societal level to protect the environmental balance and slow down climate change. In this process, the actions carried out by climate activists should be monitored and the content of these movements should be carefully evaluated (Özkan & Aydemir, 2025).

Digital activism is a powerful tool for increasing the visibility of environmental movements. However, taking into account the criticisms of slactivism, it is critical for environmental change that the movements start on social media turn into physical actions. Digital activism plays an active role in global environmental agendas such as anti-fossil fuel campaigns and reducing plastic use (Kavada, 2015). However, the limits of slactivism in the context of environmental movements should also be considered. If digital support does not translate into field actions, it can limit the power of the movement (Morozov, 2009). Platforms such as Twitter and Instagram have been important channels used by young people and civil society organizations to raise environmental awareness (Korkmaz & Genç, 2021). Environmental

movements organized through social media in Türkiye can yield more effective results if digital and field activism are carried out in a balanced manner.

Social media environments constitute an important virtual medium for environmental activism. On these channels, users can share through activism-oriented pages and groups (Yaşa, 2022). With these shares, the level of communication increases as individuals and societies come together. Therefore, compared to traditional environments, social media environments have made it easier for individuals and groups to be heard and have expanded the possibility of organizing. Today, individuals can interact with and participate in various social and political groups through social media platforms. They also find the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings about social and political issues on these platforms. In this respect, social media functions as an effective tool used to gain supporters, inform, mobilize and organize these supporters (Gürbüz & Aydın, 2020).

Morozov (2008), in his study titled "Activism and New Media", discussed how activists benefit from new media opportunities under various headings. These include access to accurate and accessible information, drawing public attention to a particular issue, facilitating access by analyzing data on voters, establishing direct communication with politicians and voters, reaching new audiences, organizing actions and providing logistical support, developing creative collective action methods, and disseminating information sharing between civil society organizations and activists. Although Morozov's points directly explain the reasons why activists use new media, these motivations are not limited to activism, but also apply to many other fields such as journalism, marketing, political communication and public relations. Today, many institutions, brands and non-governmental organizations try to establish a presence on social media platforms with such motives. Media platforms both use and produce ideological elements (Ulaş, 2025). These platforms play an important role both in terms of sustainability and visibility for these structures and in terms of users' access to these structures and making their voices heard.

Social media is a platform for awareness campaigns and event announcements. The world's leading non-governmental organizations (such as TEMA, Greenpeace Turkey, Fridays for Future Turkey) strive to raise awareness through social media. Especially on certain days and dates (such as March 21, World Forestry Day, June 5, World Environment Day), campaigns are frequently observed. Hashtag campaigns (#climacrisis, #globalwarming, #iclimacil, #climadaleti, etc.) are also part of this process. Users support these contents by sharing them. However, most of the time, the posts are limited to the reaction shown here. For example, during forest fires, a large-sca-

le digital campaign was launched with the hashtag #HelpTurkey, but it was also subject to criticism. In times of environmental disasters, social media channels are also used extensively. Citizens share videos and photos, sometimes criticizing the inadequacy of the state or local governments. Elements such as disaster content, calls for help and interviews with local people attract a lot of attention during these periods. Consulting expert opinions and sharing informative content form part of this process. In general, it is students and young people who participate in these activism actions. Students' own experiences, climate concerns and demands are explained through videos and stories to support activism. Environmental activism in Türkiye has also gained a new dimension with the increasing use of social media. According to the findings of Özkan's (2019) study, especially issues such as the flooding of Hasankeyf and anti-mining protests in Kazdağları have found wide resonance on social media.

Hashtag activism, one of the most well-known forms of digital activism, mostly focuses on the technological role of hashtags in directing social movements and the effects or ineffectiveness of these movements on real life (Dobrin, 2020). This method, which is used to gain public support through social media, to publicize a struggle, or for individuals to reach a wider audience in the digital environment, has become one of the prominent forms of digital activism in recent years. The use of hashtags, which was proposed by Chris Messina in 2007 to help Twitter users find content with similar interests more easily, has been widely adopted, especially with the Arab Spring demonstrations in 2011, and has started to be used effectively for various social purposes such as raising awareness, organizing protests, running campaigns or providing support (İli & Büyükbaykal, 2023). While the hashtag represents a social issue, social networks allow users to politically frame the context by using the relevant protest hashtag (Theochari & Van Deth, 2018). Hashtags play an important role in engaging and mobilizing large audiences. However, a hashtag becomes noticeable only when it is shared by a large number of users. This intensive use allows the hashtag to be effective on a national or global scale. Social media platforms, especially Twitter, use various analytics systems to track how widely these hashtags are used. With these systems, users can easily view the most popular hashtags in their region or around the world. The "trends" section on Twitter's homepage, which is accessible to users, is a prominent example in this regard (Khan-Ibarra, 2014).

The climate crisis hashtag discussed in this study is one of the most pressing global problems that require urgent solutions. In particular, the hashtag #iklimkrizi is frequently used in digital media to draw attention to environmental injustices, raise public

awareness and mobilize decision-makers. Through this hashtag, individuals can make their environmental problems visible, and activists can reach large audiences with their campaigns and calls to action. Likewise, while on the one hand this hashtag unites individuals from different geographies around the same problem and creates collective awareness, on the other hand, given the risks of the social media environment such as anonymity and polarization, accepting every call made using this hashtag without questioning it may lead to other problems. For this reason, it is of great importance for users to be conscious of the content disseminated under the hashtag, to pay attention to information verification processes and to stay away from provocative discourse. The #iklimkrizi hashtag is an important digital tool for raising environmental awareness on social media. However, for this power to be used positively, both individuals and communities need to act consciously, inquisitively and responsibly. Advances in technology have also changed the form and structure of social movements. Today, individuals can come together and make their voices heard on social, environmental and social issues not only locally but also on a global scale through social media. These developments have paved the way for the formation of groups that are not dependent on a centralized structure, can organize quickly and disband just as quickly. However, social media is not only a platform for solidarity and organization; it can also become a space where opposing groups come into conflict. While the anonymity offered by platforms allows individuals to express their thoughts more freely, this can sometimes lead to polarizing consequences. In order to prevent such negativity, before participating in new social movements shaped through social media, it is important to obtain detailed information about the purpose, content and possible effects of the movement and to be careful against provocative actions. As Uzunoğlu (2022) states, social media has a great power of influence; the important thing is to be able to direct this power correctly and to react consciously against social injustices.

### 3. Method

The theoretical framework of the study is based on the concept of slactivism. Slactivism is an attitude popularized especially by Evgeny Morozov (Tüfekçi, 2017). It is defined as a form of action between low effort and the realization of conscientious responsibilities. In an era of deepening environmental crisis, the question of whether the increasing environmental awareness on online platforms has evolved into a real social transformation or merely symbolic slactivist practices has not been sufficiently examined in the academic literature. In this context, this study aims to fill an important gap in the field by exami-

ning the forms of digital representation of environmental activism.

With the rise of new media surpassing traditional media, the research techniques used in communication studies have also undergone significant changes (Acar, 2024). In order to evaluate digital environmental activism in the context of slactivism theory, the study analyzes the content of tweets shared on the social media platform X (Twitter) with the hashtags #climatechange globally and #iklimkrizi in Türkiye. Qualitative content analysis is used in the study. The study is also supported by methods such as frequency distribution, category-based classification and discourse analysis.

#### 3.1. Data Collection Phase

The research data was collected on X (Twitter) using Python programming language between June 15 and July 15, 2025. A total of 504 tweets were sampled for both hashtags, and these tweets were categorized in terms of image, orientation, content type, level of engagement and form of activism. Hashtag cloud, word cloud and word frequency tables were also analyzed. The selection of the data set was based on publicly available posts to the extent allowed by X (Twitter), posts at the center of the hashtags, and tweets with criteria that have environmental context in their content.

#### 3.2. Data Analysis Process

The tweets obtained from the hashtags #climatechange (n=254) and #iklimkrizi (n=250) were coded in five main categories:

1. Image Usage: Whether the tweet contains an image or not,
2. Referral Content: With/without referral content, news site, event announcement and petition,
3. Type of Activism: Slacktivism /Participatory Activism
4. Tweet Type: Emotional Support only, informational, humorous, call to action
5. Engagement Level: Low, medium, high (based on number of likes, retweets, comments)

Data for both labels were classified separately and a comparative analysis was made in the results section. The frequency calculation of the data in the tables was made with the SPSS 25.0 program and category-based interpretive analysis was taken as basis.

The coding process was conducted manually by the researcher based on a category-based interpretive framework. Although inter-coder reliability was not calculated, the analysis was carried out through iterative coding and cross-checking of categories to ensure internal consistency.

### 3.3.Results and Interpretation

#### 3.3.1. Findings of the #climatechange tag in terms of slactivism

Table 1. Analysis of the #Climatechange Tag

| Category                | Lower Value       | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>Image Usage</b>      | No                | 171           | 67,3%          |
|                         | There is          | 83            | 32,7%          |
| <b>Referral Content</b> | No                | 161           | 63,4%          |
|                         | News Website      | 85            | 33,5%          |
|                         | Event             | 7             | 2,8%           |
|                         | Announcement      |               |                |
|                         | Signature         | 1             | 0,4%           |
|                         | Campaign          |               |                |
|                         |                   |               |                |
| <b>Type of Activism</b> | Slacktivism       | 246           | 96,9%          |
|                         | Participatory     | 8             | 3,1%           |
|                         | Activism          |               |                |
| <b>Tweet Type</b>       | Emotional Support | 138           | 54,3%          |
|                         | Only              |               |                |
|                         | Information       | 100           | 39,4%          |
|                         | Call to Action    | 8             | 3,1%           |
|                         | Humorous          | 8             | 3,1%           |
|                         | Approach          |               |                |
| <b>Engagement Level</b> | Low               | 119           | 46,9%          |
|                         | Middle            | 89            | 35,0%          |
|                         | High              | 46            | 18,1%          |
| <b>Label</b>            | English           | 254           | 100,0%         |

**Image Usage:** When the rates of visual usage related to the #climatechange hashtag in the last one month data obtained from X (Twitter) are analyzed, it is found that the majority of posts (67.3%) do not use visuals. Only 32.7% of the tweets used visuals,

and it is noteworthy that the visuals used were generally informative. In all of the tweets with humorous approaches, humorous approaches are used about state officials against the environmental crisis by using visuals.

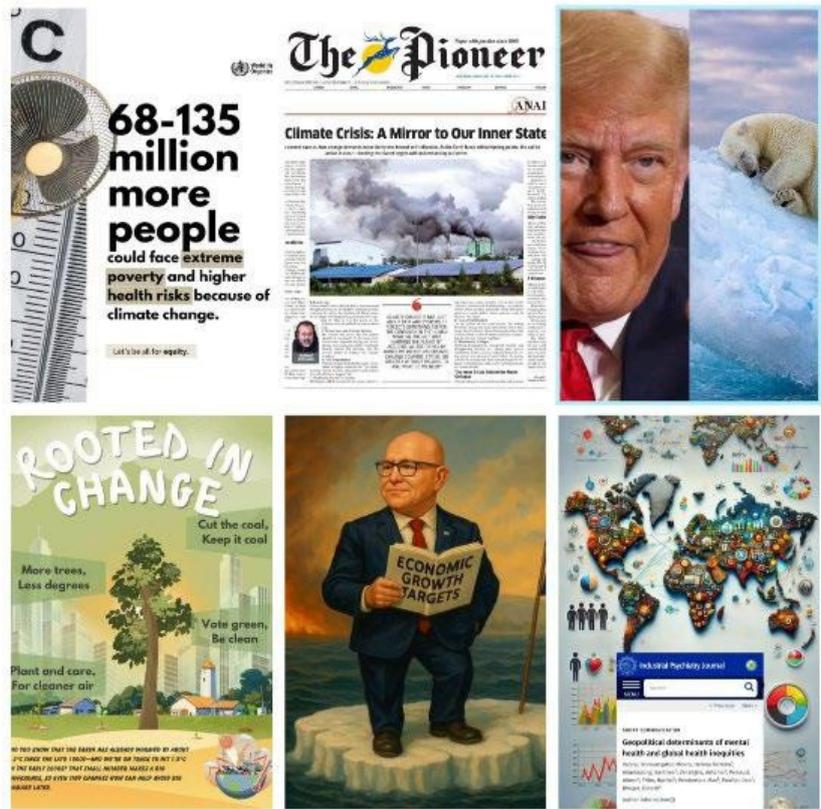


Figure 1. Examples of Images Related to #Climatechange from X (Twitter)

When the tweets with a low rate of visual use are analyzed, it is seen that the type of tweet generally consists of tweets containing emotional support.

**Referral Content:** Referral content is an important indicator of whether a social media post directs the user to external resources, calls to action or organized campaigns. Posts that do not contain calls to action constitute the majority of the sample (63.4%). This suggests that users express their environmental concerns primarily through sharing, but do not extend this expression with specific calls to action or guidance. This behavior can be seen as a typical example of slacktivism, which is characterized by showing support with minimal effort.

According to the data obtained, links to news websites ranked second with 33.5%. Although these social media posts do not explicitly call for immediate action, they fulfill the role of disseminating relevant information. However, this phenomenon can also be categorized as "knowledge-based slacktivism". Essentially, while drawing attention to environmental issues, users limit their participation to information sharing and refrain from engaging in physical or digital actions.

Tweets containing event announcements (2.8%) and petitions (0.4%) are extremely rare. This suggests that online environmental activism lacks a coherent and directive structure and instead proceeds in an individual and scattered manner, prioritizing impressions over engagement. These findings are in line with Morozov's (2011) concept of slacktivism,

or online well-being, Castells (2005) critique of dispersed activism in network society, and Bennett & Segerberg's (2013) theory of personalized collective action. The informational, ephemeral and often introverted nature of slactivist participation was also observed in this dataset, with a lack of referral content.

**Type of Activism:** The findings from this data confirm the assumption that slacktivism has become the dominant form of participation in environmental movements. The observation that 96.9% of tweets were identified as examples of activist behavior indicates the absence of participatory hashtag activism. Activists' social media contributions mainly consist of retweets, tagging, information sharing and emotional support only. In contrast, only 3.1% of tweets can be categorized as examples of participatory activism. These social media posts contain concrete actions such as offline event announcements and petitions.

Although the data does not refute the prevalence of online activism, it shows that such participation remains at a symbolic level. A significant portion of discourse on environmental issues on social media focuses on showing emotional support and managing perceptions of the government in general, rather than focusing on offline actions and petitions. Morozov (2011) defines such digital actions as slacktivism and emphasizes the necessity of sustainable activism. In this context, the data obtained reveals exactly the type of activism described by Morozov.



Climate, change, climatechange, people, planet, global, impact, action, government, world, no, will, today are among the frequently repeated words. The words planet, flood, weather, heatwave, drought, underwater, carbon, fossil, oil, emission, extreme weather, ecosystem point to different dimensions of the environmental crisis. Although words with strong time emphasis such as now, today, future point to participatory activism, it is determined that

they remain at the expression level according to the findings obtained in the data set. When compared to other datasets, the data in the word cloud in the Image reaffirms that the discourses on climate change in the digital space mostly remain at the level of emotional support and information. The findings show that it strengthens the phenomenon of slacktivism.

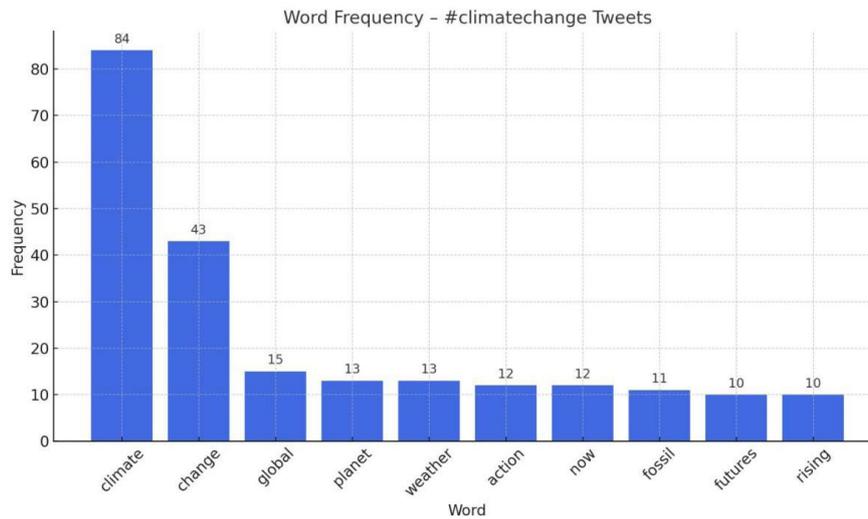


Figure 4. Word Frequency Related to the #Climatechange Tag

The fact that the words "climate" and "change" appear at the very beginning of the graph shows that the posts are directly centered around the climate change discourse. This shows that the hashtag #climatechange is used for awareness raising and attention-grabbing purposes. Words such as "global", "planet" and "futures" show that the environmental discourse is structured in a global and future generations oriented way rather than local. These words reflect the perception that environmental problems are a matter of common humanity and in this respect are intended to raise awareness. However, this awareness is not translated into action in most of

the content. Words such as "action", "now" and "rising" are expressions that emphasize the sense of urgency. Comparing the findings, although the expression "Action" (12 times) contains a call to action, the rate at which this call is transformed into interaction or organized participation is quite low. The emphasis on "Now" implies time pressure; however, at the content level, this call remains mostly at the slogan level. These terms indicate that climate change content on Twitter has a high level of emotion, alarm and call. However, these calls, like the other findings in the dataset, are not action-oriented but only expression-based.

### 3.3.2 Findings of the hashtag #iklimkrizi in terms of slacktivism

Table 2. Analysis of the #iklimkrizi Tag

| Variable                | Category           | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>Image Usage</b>      | No                 | 170           | 68.0           |
|                         | Yes                | 80            | 32.0           |
| <b>Referral Content</b> | No                 | 157           | 62.8           |
|                         | News Website       | 82            | 32.8           |
|                         | Event Announcement | 8             | 3.2            |
|                         | Signature Campaign | 2             | 0.8            |
|                         | Call to Action     | 1             | 0.4            |

|                         |                        |     |       |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-----|-------|
| <b>Type of Activism</b> | Slacktivism            | 248 | 99.2  |
|                         | Participatory Activism | 2   | 0.8   |
| <b>Tweet Type</b>       | Emotional Support Only | 142 | 56.8  |
|                         | Informational          | 102 | 40.8  |
|                         | Humorous Approach      | 4   | 1.6   |
|                         | Call to Action         | 2   | 0.8   |
| <b>Engagement Level</b> | Low                    | 140 | 56.0  |
|                         | Medium                 | 68  | 27.2  |
|                         | High                   | 42  | 16.8  |
| <b>Label</b>            | Turkish                | 250 | 100.0 |

**Image Usage:** According to the use of visuals in Table 2, only 32% of tweets with the hashtag #iklimkrizi contain visual content. The vast majority (68%) contain only text. In social media platforms such as X (Twitter), where visual content is at the forefront, it is of great importance for the interaction rate to be high and for a tweet to be popular.

In the climate crisis hashtag, where visual content is used less, it is seen that only emotional support and information tweet types are predominant. The supporters of the unorganized hashtag carry out slacktivist actions. It is also found that tweets that do not interact do not take action.

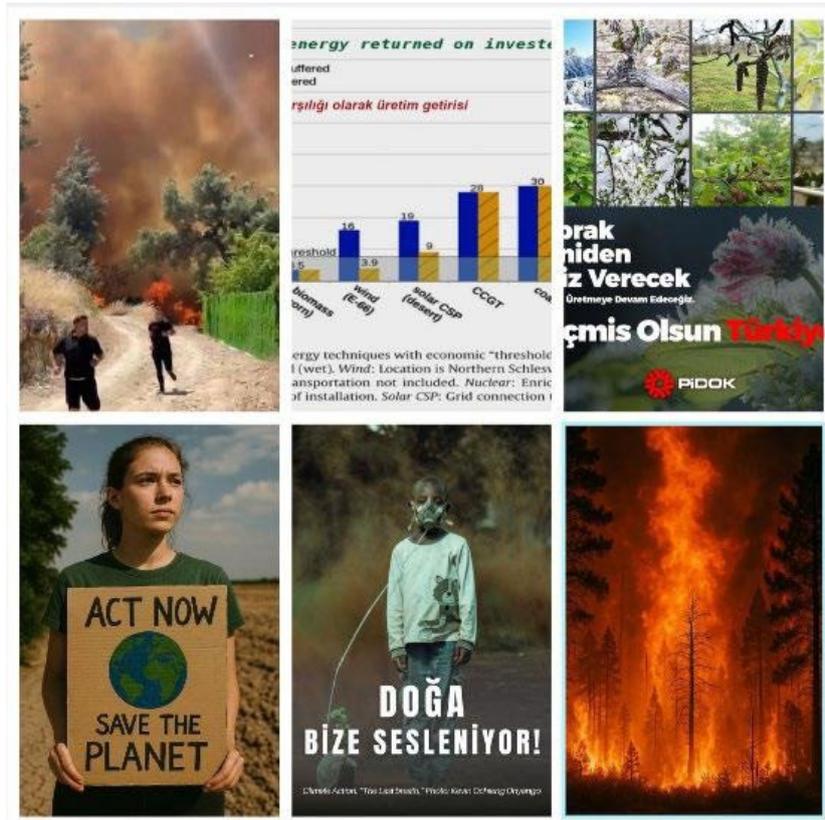


Figure 5. Examples of Visuals Related to #iklimkrizi from X (Twitter)

On June 25, 2025, when forest fires started in Türkiye, it is seen that the number of images related to the fires increased. The majority of these images were used only for emotional support and informational purposes. The content of the images consisted of images of burning forests and landscapes in flames. Since the action content and interaction levels in some images are low, they remain as a form of passive participation.

**Referral Content:** According to the findings, 62.8% of the tweets shared about #iklimkrizi do not contain any guidance content. In these tweets, there is only emotional expression, textual content for informational purposes, and no referral to another source. This directly reflects the low-effort symbolic form of participation, which is the main feature of slacktivism. 32.8% of the tweets were linked to a news website, which can be considered within the scope of infor-





Figure 7. Word Cloud Related to the Hashtag #iklimkrizi

In the word cloud in the image, contextual words are mostly used in tweets with the hashtag #iklimkrizi. When we look at the most prominent words, the words climate, a, crisis, world, no, exist, global, water, agriculture, critical, threat contain both threats and solutions to the climate crisis. Words such as climate law, law, tbmm, no to the law reveal that users want to keep the agenda alive by using not only environmental sensitivity but also political dis-

courses. This is one of the rare examples of participatory call traces.

According to the findings in the word cloud visual, it is revealed that discourses on climate crisis are concentrated on social media and these discourses consist of sharing emotions and calling for awareness. No matter how much discursive content there is, the lack of action reveals the dimension of slacktivism.

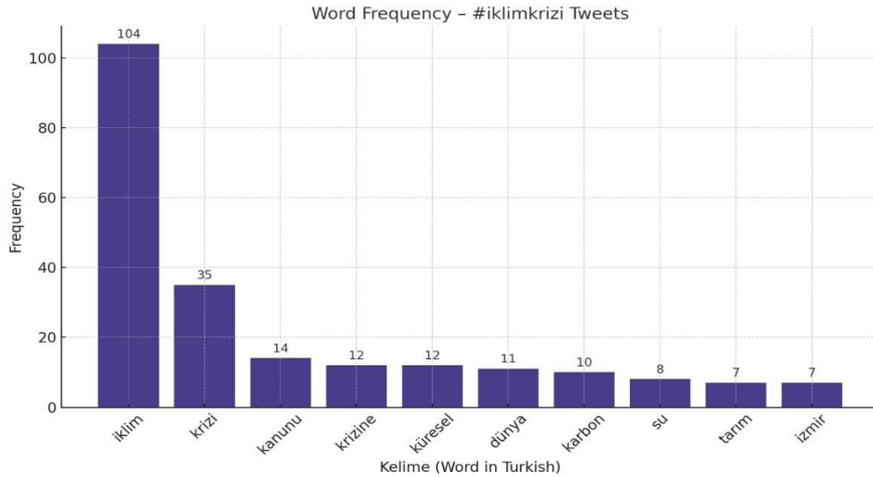


Figure 8. Frequency of Words Related to the Hashtag #iklimkrizi

The words in the graph are created by selecting meaningful words other than contextual words in the tweets shared about #iklimkrizi. The words climate (104) and crisis (35) reveal that climate crisis is included in environmental discourse. As with the words in the word cloud, the prominent words do not only include nature and sentimentality, but also political, legal and global interaction.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this study, which examines the impact of social media on environmental issues today, the framework of digital activism on the basis of both local and global labels was drawn. In the data obtained, it has been revealed that users generally produce limited

content for catharsis purposes, with a focus on visibility without any effort. On the contrary, it is seen that participatory and unifying actions remain at a low level. Although the impact of the digital world in bringing environmental problems to the agenda cannot be denied, there is a lack of sustainability in social transformation. As Tüfekci (2017) reminds, "networked protests can be powerful yet fragile, depending on how online engagement translates into offline action."

Considering previous studies on environmental activism, Tani & Taşkıran (2018) found that non-governmental organizations engaged in digital activism activities achieved more successful results in their campaigns in their study to determine the effects of digital activism activities in reaching the public and

state organs. Kocabay-Şener & Öymen (2023), who conducted a research on environmentalist phenomena, examined the posts of 8 accounts that produce content on Instagram and can be defined as "environmentalist phenomena" and examined in which category they post the most, the topics they draw attention to and the sectoral distribution of brand collaborations. In terms of environmental activism, Özel (2015) provides a theoretical perspective on the criticisms against public relations for greenwashing.

Today, when the boundary between environmental activism and slacktivism is blurred on social media platforms, the limited number of studies examining the interaction of these two concepts with social media data makes this research both timely and original. Slacktivism or clicktivism is a term for easy action that involves little effort or commitment (Tüfekçi, 2017). In order to analyze how environmental sensitivity is expressed on social media platforms and what kind of digital participation forms these expressions turn into, this study focuses on the hashtags #climatechange and #iklimkrizi shared on X (Twitter). The findings reveal that digital environmental discourses largely have a slacktivist structure. The preference for slacktivism-type participation indicates that digital activism can be an easily accessible but ineffective way of producing visibility. In both hashtag contexts, users expressed their environmental concerns mostly through emotional support and information, while posts calling for action were almost non-existent. This situation shows that if the production of environmental awareness is limited to digital media, it will not create a sustainable change. In this respect, in line with the data obtained, it is possible to state that digital participation remains at a symbolic level.

The use of visuals in both hashtags hovers around 30% and the vast majority consists of text-based posts. Therefore, the difference in visual usage between #climatechange and #iklimkrizi stands out. When it is revealed that tweets containing visuals receive low engagement, it is observed that the level of impact can be increased by popularizing visual-heavy posts in order to bring high engagement.

In both hashtags in the dataset, users prefer slacktivism as a type of activism. Posts on participatory activism are negligible. There are slight differences in the distribution of tweet types in the two hashtags, with a slightly higher proportion of tweets containing only emotional support in #climatecrisis tweets, while the rate of information is almost the same in #climatechange tweets. Humorous content and calls to action remained low for both hashtags. In this framework, analyzing the data set for both hashtags reveals that digital environmental activism is largely realized at the slacktivist level and is limited to emotional and textual expression.

Considering the findings of the study, although social media is successful in making individuals visible,

it is insufficient in directing them to long-term organized actions. While individuals become active in situations that do not require effort, they are passive in actions that require effort and cannot produce sustainable action. Although environmental activism gains visibility on social media in Türkiye, especially in the posts obtained during the period when forest fires are intense, it reveals that these users cannot go beyond fulfilling their conscientious responsibilities and generating political pressure. In the data obtained, the necessity of rethinking digital environmental discourses becomes clear.

The fact that the globally used #climatechange hashtag has lost its impact over time is also among the results of the study. Although youth-oriented global movements such as Fridays for Future had a great resonance in the 2019-2021 period, the impact of these movements has decreased in recent years. One of the main reasons for this is the desensitization of social media users to recurrent crises and the low interaction levels of tweets. In this sense, although global hashtags such as #climatechange provide apparent continuity, it is among the results of the study that they have become increasingly passive.

Social media activism against both local (forest fires in Türkiye) and global environmental crises is becoming increasingly slacktivist. In today's world of ever-increasing users and content, posts fade away without interaction. It is necessary to support the visibility of environmental crises not only on digital channels, but also in cooperation with local media, with calls for public action, in order to transform them into real activism that can be effective in the field. In this context, another important conclusion of the study is that for digital activism to be effective, online awareness practices should be supported by sustainable participation mechanisms and strategic field-based actions at the local level.

This study contributes to the existing literature on digital activism and slacktivism by providing a comparative, data-driven analysis of environmental activism on social media across both global and national contexts. By examining the hashtags #climatechange and #iklimkrizi on X (Twitter), the study moves beyond purely theoretical discussions of slacktivism and offers empirical evidence on how environmental awareness is predominantly expressed through low-effort, symbolic forms of participation. In this respect, the findings support and extend previous critiques of slacktivism by demonstrating that digital environmental activism largely remains at a symbolic level, with limited translation into participatory or action-oriented engagement. Furthermore, by focusing on the Türkiye context alongside global data, the study addresses a significant gap in the literature, where comparative analyses of environmental hashtag activism remain limited. The results underline the necessity of rethinking digital activism not

only as a tool for visibility, but also in terms of its capacity to foster sustainable, long-term social and environmental change.

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## The Paradox of Digital Activism in the Age of the Environmental Crisis: The Case of X (Twitter) Through the Lens of Slacktivism

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