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THE POLITICS OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS:
SOUR DICTIONARY, ACTIVIST SUBJECTIVITIES,
AND
CONTEMPORARY CULTURES OF RESISTANCE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Politics of Digital Platforms: Sour Dictionary, Activist Subjectivities, and

Contemporary Cultures of Resistance

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I study the affective mechanisms of how information is turned into action or inaction within a participatory culture facilitated by social media platforms. I analyze Sour Dictionary (SD), a popular humor-based forum-like digital platform in Turkey. SD is not an official dictionary; it is a satire-based platform where users post definitions and re-definitions about daily events and socio-political issues to challenge each other's perception of their common sense judgments. I argue that SD facilitates interactions as a place of *unlearning*, where people detach themselves from the disciplinary apparatuses and authoritarian practices in Turkey through the help of everyday conversations and discussions about taboo topics on race, gender and sexuality, for example. However, I also show the limits of the unlearning movement through presenting the socio-technical changes in SD since 1999 in relation to design, moderation, Turkish law and politics. In order to address the tensions between unlearning and the crises of unlearning, I trace empowering and debilitating practices at the intersection of the development of SD as a major social media platform and socio-political developments in Turkey. I conducted two

digital ethnographies: the first was between September 2013 and January 2014 and the second was between January 2017 and January 2018. I also conducted 47 in-depth interviews with administrators, moderators, influencers, lawyers, coders, and key users of the platform. I show that the early-years geek culture within SD cultivated empowering practices through playful contributions, especially by building a culture of resistance against rote practices in Turkey in terms of race, gender, and social class. However, this geek culture also had its own tensions, as participants were mostly upper-middle class, educated, tech-deterministic, and reproduced masculine discourses by creating their own norms. By tracing the ambivalence around the empowering/debilitating potentials of the SD geek culture practices, I show how the culture of resistance presents itself within different milieus. First, it showed its peak potentials during the Gezi Protests in Turkey in 2013 in its the production of activist subjectivity. Second, I also argue that the post-Gezi political climate in Turkey, the tensions within the logic of culture of resistance, and platform developments on SD (design, governance, content moderation, format changes) created problematic information practices (misinformation, disinformation, trolling, insults). I show that the empowering potentials of SD were neutralized by the contradictory flow of affects that rendered the platform both alternative and mainstream at the same time. It was perceived as alternative because of the feeling of connectedness, sensibilities of critiquing, and ethos of opposition formed around challenging normalized practices; mainstream because of the interplay between its ad-based revenue streams and platforming developments.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Construction of Playful Participatory Culture, Platform Politics, and

Sour Dictionary

Sour Dictionary contributed to the expansion of my mind...as getting richer...it took me from point A and brought me to point B...Sour Dictionary was unique for me...it opened new horizons in my mind... I hold on to Sour Dictionary...

In the above excerpt from an interview, @teacher, a user of the Sour Dictionary social media platform in Turkey, talks about how it transformed him. He states that Sour Dictionary changed him to be a better, intellectual, open-minded person, to a state of mind that he thought would not have been possible if it were not for Sour Dictionary. How can a dictionary, typically thought of as a reference work for official meanings, be a communication tool? How can such a dictionary, now as a social media platform, transform a person? What are the ways that people interact on this social media platform and for what reasons?

In this dissertation, I investigate how information turns into action or inaction within a participatory culture, focusing on the most popular social platform in Turkey, Sour Dictionary (SD).¹ I show the construction of a culture of resistance around a geek culture at the intersection of socio-political developments in Turkey and the changes in the platform in terms of design, moderation, and internal policies. I trace the tensions around this geek culture in order to analyze empowering and debilitating practices that limits the potentials of the culture of resistance. To define “geek culture”, I expand on Dunbar-Hester’s (2014) explanation of geek activities as practices established around a particular technology.

¹ Please see Appendix I for a screenshot of Sour Dictionary.

SD plays an essential role in Turkish online culture for *susers* (slang derived from *sozluk*, or dictionary, plus “user”). It was founded in 1999 in Turkey. SD immediately turned into a place where people engaged in *geeking* together on technology, coding, games, movies, music, and politics. Since 1999, the platform’s users have exploited the minimally designed website to confront unquestioned rote practices in Turkish society. It provides a framework to study the emergent political climate in Turkey, which limits the production of critical information via internet bans on topics concerning racism and sexuality (such as the 2007 YouTube ban, 2008 SD ban, and 2014 Twitter ban).

It is important to ask: How did the *susers* subvert a static entry-posting system into an event-generator mechanism? Who are the *susers* posting entries on SD? Why are they doing it and why are they doing it on SD? Following an analysis of the regulatory apparatuses of the SD as a digital platform in the internet infrastructure, as well as the counter-cultural echoes experienced and produced in SD, in this dissertation I explore how people access information within a digital platform and how the architecture of that platform affords interaction among users. I also investigate how participatory cultures on digital platforms can be understood through notions of play. How was a particular kind of activist subjectivity made available within SD as a counter-culture as well as by the internal mechanisms of SD as a platform? On the other hand, I challenge the empowering potentials of participatory culture, tracing what happens when the process of play is used against the underlying logic of participation in a digital platform. For example, I ask: What would participatory culture mean in an environment of misinformation/disinformation practices and continuous information flux?

Despite its name, SD is not an official dictionary; it is a gathering place where people post their ways of seeing things, indexed by the titles. It is characterized by humorous interventions of users to any ongoing issues about public and private lives. The “Sour” part of the name comes from the founder’s (@ssg) earlier experiences on humor websites. Sour Times, a website that @ssg created before Sour Dictionary as a site to post humorous content, was named after the Portishead song “Sour Times.”² It also has the connotations of being “*inappropriate or indecent*”³ in Turkish. It can also be interpreted as being satirical in SD’s own way in Turkish slang that will be explained in the following chapters. Although the process was not called as such, users were posting about the ways they define things and created conversations that have never efficiently occurred in Turkish socio-political culture. If you were about to watch a movie and learn whether it was worth your time or not, SD was your immediate answer. This also applies to posts about everyday life, such as where to eat and shop. As I was a user since 2002, I counted on the way that these people commented more than I would rely on a random review on the Internet. This is because I knew their interests, argumentations, strengths, weaknesses, tastes and everything else that you could understand by reading people's thoughts online. At the time of this writing, there are millions of entries and an average of thirty-five million unique visitors per day.⁴

The practice of defining things was also valid for political discussions. People aimed to relay their argumentations based on their positions in society as if it is a casual

² <http://www.portishead.co.uk/home/>.

³ My translation from the official Turkish dictionary:
http://www.tdk.gov.tr/index.php?option=com_gts&arama=gts&guid=TDK.GTS.5cb1e992515ea7.87346241.

⁴ <https://eksisozluk.com/2016-yilinda-eksi-sozlukte-olan-biten--5264352?p=1>.

review of a meal. In addition to review-like posts, there were also posts that discuss culture and politics. In terms of the style, they had to be the same: 1) *a definition-format*, 2) *a summary or an example*. Gradually, people also introduced their opinions about political developments in their posts. In addition, you had a chance to come across a musician who could explain to you how to work on your guitar skills because you posted on the same title on something about music and engaged in a meaningful discussion. If you were about to buy a laptop, you could just search on SD and read about what other people posted (defined) about it. It was a combination of all the possible forums that you could ever need, connected under one roof with an important distinction: you needed to post a definition. But it was just a stylistic rule that users playfully subverted to relay their opinions – which made it different from the other review and forum websites on the Internet.

I view SD as a digital platform that facilitates interactions as a place of *unlearning* where people de-subjectivize themselves from disciplinary apparatuses. I show how a feeling of connectedness, sensibilities on critiquing, and an ethos of opposition builds a culture of resistance that affords users to become different people by posting definitions about the hegemonic codes and common-sense acceptances in Turkey. When they are posting an entry under a high-school history book, they challenge its nationalist historicizing by bringing academic articles and historians into the discussion. When they are posting about a TV commercial, they interrogate it with the critical lenses to point out the gender stereotypes. When they are posting under a title about the Kurdish community, they bring personal histories, the events that were never told, to the discussion. When others are discussing these topics, they do not merely “like” or “share” or “retweet.” If

they have any personal opinions, they read and come back with rebuttals, always in a definition format, to redefine the frame. Susers work collectively on removing all the frames from the banal politics of daily lives. Even when they can't remove it, they point out that there *is* a frame.

The affordances of the platform and the culture of resistance provided an arena that was immune to misinformation as susers were doing their best to explain *behind-the-scenes* mechanisms of everything. Let's say that you want to buy a new guitar. Instead of a Yelp-like review, in which you would need to get familiar with the reviewers who are best for to-the-point-reviews about the guitars, you go through various entries about a specific guitar in SD. Some entries will point you to the advantages of that particular guitar brand, and others will discuss the disadvantages of that particular brand. As you read, you will also see that some other entries further provide details about the specifics of those advantages and disadvantages to a point that even problematizes this kind of duality, and further bring another perspective, *a feeling*, that you wouldn't find in actual specifications of the product. You will follow that *feeling* as you share this space of existence with other users, you've met some of them before through "offline" meetings, you've trusted some of them before, and you know that they post *authentic definitions*, as you are also connected with them with similar sensibilities about *things*. The way that they are telling about *their truth* is familiar to you, you feel close as you are them, and they are you. You explain some other thing or an issue on some other title, and your enunciation of the truth is similar to theirs.

Let's say that an entry was posted on Kurdish or Armenian ethnical conflicts; you would see that a person was telling the truth because you were sharing a mutual presence

on SD that was making the received racist perceptions moot. A few hundred people, on an internet community, bonded with similar sensibilities trying to make sense of their world, feeling free from the rules of the real world, and feeling free as this is their first time to be uncensored within the traditional and top-down media channel context of the late 1990s in Turkey. It is this trust in the community of users that defined the early SD. All of those interactions were monitored by voluntary moderation until 2012, and the website was functioning due to significant sacrifices of the founder @ssg, his close coder and other friends who were the sources of (and laborers for) maintenance on the platform. One user I interviewed told me that during the early times, he was the only person providing service to the SD server, as the founder had to move to the US temporarily. One time, on a cold winter night, that user had to travel to the building where the server was in order to fix a problem. He was then named as the *warrior*, a nickname add-on label that he only has in the SD.

This logic of trust was almost the same during Gezi Protest in 2013. The mainstream media channels were not broadcasting the events in the Gezi Park, but users were posting entries about it. It is correct that Twitter and Facebook operated to connect people immediately, but how could you trust someone you did not know on Twitter? What if they were telling you to run to one street where you would be trapped and detained? But this did not apply to Sour Dictionary. You could log in to SD and see what was going on: live-posting, announcing, representing events as they happen. Yes, there were various views on what was going on, such as differences on perceptions of tactics, government policies, and politics in general, but you *felt* that it was accurate information—even if you didn't agree with some of it. In the early SD, users patiently

explained to each other the context of their posts, which enabled fruitful discussion. In their posts, users aggressively rejected arguments without references and context; they were challenging the existing cultural codes in Turkey and re-defining the socio-political arena in a way they thought was the best—and SD was providing the platform for them to accomplish it.

I also analyze the limits of unlearning by investigating how potentials within the process of unlearning can also facilitate a crisis of unlearning. To highlight the importance of this point, in this dissertation, I use Foucault's (2005, 2011, 2012) notion of parrhesia, to state that unlearning is a journey with unspecified risks for its outcome. Expanding on Foucault's notion, unlearning differs from critical thinking, which assumes and desires total transformation of subjects on the evaluation of intersecting philosophical, political, and cultural paradigms. With critical thinking, we might expect a democratizing momentum. In the process of unlearning, de-subjectivation is not a guarantee of critical reflection; it is a particular way of taking care of oneself that requires the practice of truth, a unique enunciation with a joyful mastery of cultural codes, and an affective embodiment of the socio-cultural arena that is a source of raced and gendered feedback loops. Every piece of critical thinking can also be identified as processes of unlearning, but every unlearning process is not critical thinking. I look especially at this in the arena of fake news, misinformation, and trolling through the research of Marwick & Lewis (2017) and Whitney Phillips (2017), which I will elaborate further on in the theoretical section of this chapter. Thus, this dissertation asks: What happens when right-wing activism finds a way to repurpose the unlearning process for its benefit? Does activist subjectivity also bring inaction?

Following the above discussion, in this dissertation, I trace the construction of the *culture of resistance* on Sour Dictionary and its practices as a force of opposition on *whatever*. I argue that the formation of a culture of resistance prefigured an activist subjectivity during the Gezi Protest through affective telepresence. The activist subjectivity has its roots in the formation of SD as a major social media platform in Turkey that spoke to specific socio-historical developments in the Turkish media. The feeling of mobility during the Gezi Protest and the emergent sensibilities against perceived injustice are forms of activist subjectivity that suggest a resonance with the affective bonds that are modulated by SD as a digital platform. I also investigate how the users idealize the feeling of connectedness in early geek culture. I show how they were connected during the Gezi Protests but not as much as they stated, and were not organized enough to further proceed with sustainable collective actions with policy-changing goals.

In the following chapters, I also show how the culture of resistance also lost its interrogative aspect because of its own tensions (creating emergent geek norms, masculinity, technologically determinism, and idealism) coupled with the platforming practices that gradually turned SD into a major commercial social media platform in Turkey. I will argue that the amateur spirit in the foundation of SD rendered the platform as if it were an alternative media (non-profit, collaborative platform), which created an ambivalence with respect to the continuous top-down technical and policy changes that sustained SD as a commercial social media platform. I investigate how the geek culture created a feeling of connectedness through perceived accurateness of the entries (felt-to-be-true) and how that feeling gradually went away because of the platforming

developments on SD coupled with the socio-political climate in Turkey, especially in post-2016 failed coup era.

I focus on the institutions, forms, content, uses, and users of such digital platforms by situating SD into the emergent media industry in Turkey in the post-1980 era. Furthermore, I unpack this juxtaposition to understand the relationship between digital platforms, affective politics and counter-cultural tendencies of finding truth within the abundance of true discourses. I also ask: what are the forces that manage the culture of resistance? I argue that, unlike other contexts where government action is the primary factor, in the SD case, the key facilitators of action/inaction are the changes in the platform, the culture of the users, and the moderators, especially in relation to the techno-social developments on SD and the socio-political developments in Turkey in post-2016 failed-coup era.

This dissertation situates SD within scholarly discussions on the relationship between technology and society. Some argue for the emancipatory possibilities enabled by the social networks (Rheingold, 2007; Shirky, 2008) while others posit that governments appropriate already existing structures of social media to enhance virtual policing strategies (Morozov, 2011). Moving beyond the duality of optimism and pessimism behind the “new” technologies of action, some investigate the construction of collective action through technologically enabled affective circulation (Bratich, 2015; Terranova, 2007). In this dissertation, I study, via the example of SD, the affective mechanism of how information is turned into action or inaction within a mediated environment that increases or diminishes capacities to act, and how a culture of resistance is constituted in at the intersection of platforms and socio-political developments. I also

trace empowering and debilitating practices, as guided by platform politics and socio-political developments in Turkey.

The term platform is at the center of this research (Gillespie, 2017; Helmond, 2015; Kelkar, 2008; Plantin, Lagoze, Edwards, & Sandvig, 2018). I demonstrate how SD infrastructure is an assemblage of people (engineers, moderators, owner(s), users, etc.), software, and institutions (advertisers and the Turkish government). I also investigate how content developers making business models align with the leading platforms (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Nieborg & Poell (2018) argue that platformization is a multi-sided market whereby we need to address infrastructure, governance (content moderation), distribution, and advertising. Platformization addresses how cultural production is governed and how it is moderated by the infrastructure. Regarding SD, I show that there is continuous reinvention to monetize content (through additional parallel platforms such as Sour Things or advertisements as part of Netflix campaigns, etc.). I also explain how the practice of governing with Terms of Service (which is explained by the discussion of user agreement in Chapter 2) continuously globalizes US cultural standards.

In this dissertation, I situate SD's development as a platform within the framework of how "social network sites transform themselves into social media platforms" (Helmond, 2015, p. 1). Following Helmond's (2015) discussion of platformization, which emphasizes how platforms dominate the internet through their infrastructure and economics, I study SD in a historical context to address such a transformation to a platform and what this entails in terms of uses, users, content, business model, and institutions (government and companies such as advertisers).

Nieborg & Poell (2018) define platformization as “the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystem, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries” (p. 4276). As platforms intervene (Gillespie, 2017) in socio-economic, socio-technical, and cultural practices (through social norms), they are not neutral (Gillespie, 2017; Helmond, 2015; Suzor, 2019). Platforms represent themselves as neutral to avoid any perceptions about their responsibility. With platformization, cultural commodities are open to revision and recirculation through data practices. “Network effects allow platform holders to set pricing structures where one side of the market, the ‘money side’, covers the costs of the other side, the ‘subsidy side’...As it is up to the platforms to design and alter pricing structures, platform holders can favor one side of the market over the others” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4278). This dissertation investigates a case study of how Social Network Sites (Boyd, 2012) transform into platforms (Gillespie, 2017; Helmond, 2015) by taking non-Western socio-political and technical issues into account (Flew, Martin & Suzor, 2019; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Tufekci, 2017).

In this dissertation, I also focus on SD interactions, as they are important for understanding sociotechnical arrangements (Gal, 2019). I specifically focus on “ironic humor” (Gal, 2019, p. 731) and how it empowers one group and marginalizes others. Ironic humor builds and navigates socio-cultural knowledge as users participate in discussions through irony. It began as geeks, nerds, and hackers facilitating their own interactions around such humor, and as platformization occurred on SD, emergent user groups also mimicked such humor for political gains, especially as various forms of trolling (as is explained in Chapters 3 and 5).

Nieborg & Poell (2018) call for international (non-Western) research to articulate the tensions within platformization at the intersection of market forces, governance, and infrastructures. They argue that “platformization...marks the organization of cultural production and circulation, rendering cultural commodities contingent” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4289). Platforms create “scalable, re-configurable, multi-sided information and communication markets” (Flew, Martin, & Suzor, 2019, p. 36). Flew, Martin & Suzor (2019) discuss how platforms regulate through terms of service, content guidelines, and moderation policies. The challenge of moderation is the scale, but community guidelines help to a certain extent. However, terms of service are for platforms, not for users: “In procedural terms, they generally struggle to provide the clarity that is required to guide behavior, they provide no protection from unilateral changes in rules, do nothing to ensure that decisions are made according to the rules, and present no meaningful avenues for appeal” (Suzor, 2018, p. 8). As platformization has occurred, social media companies have stopped mediating and begun to regulate. Flew, Martin & Suzor (2019) argue that national differences on content moderation must be addressed to understand platform governance. I ask how the story and history behind SD’s transformation from an online community to social media site and to a platform can help us to understand the tensions across users, designers, institutions, and content. When SD began to gradually turn into a platform, it allowed non-experts in. I trace how its unique forms of expression, within a humorous definition format, afforded emergent socio-technical arrangements.

In the following paragraphs, I first introduce SD as a platform and how people used to interact on SD, to trace the formation of the unlearning process in its early years to explicate the practices of the geek culture of the time. Second, I situate the research

questions of this dissertation within the dialogues of optimistic and pessimistic views on the consequences of technological development on communication. Third, I introduce platform studies in relation to discussion of technology and society. Fourth, I introduce a historical discussion on the development of media and internet policies in Turkey to point out the structural forces (political and cultural) at play during the formation of SD as a social media platform. Fifth, I introduce the three-layer theoretical framework of this dissertation, by discussing: 1) participatory culture (Delwiche & Henderson, 2013; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013; Jenkins, Ito, & boyd, 2016); 2) play (Caillois, 1958; Cohen, 2012; Huizinga, 1949; Rodriguez, 2006; Massarani, 2015; Salen 2014); and 3) production of subjectivity (Foucault, 2003; Guattari, 1995) in relation with affect studies (Blackman, 2012; Brennan, 2004; Papacharissi, 2014; Grusin, 2012; Thrift 2008,) that inform how the process of unlearning functions within digital platforms and how to address the crises of unlearning.

A. Sour Dictionary

SD is currently one of the most popular social media platforms in Turkey in addition to Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. It began in February 1999 as a coder-tinkering project in which the founder of the website, Sedat Kapanoglu, coded the algorithm so that they could have fun amongst friends. In one of his entries on the Sour Dictionary, Sedat Kapanoglu (posting under the nickname *ssg*) states that it was the book *The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams that was on his mind when he was coding the platform. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is also the name of the guide in the book. Douglas Adams created a science-fiction humor novel in which he talks about the Guide as being an ultimate survival kit for travelers across the universe.

Whenever in the galaxy hitchhikers come across an issue, all they have to do is to check the guide (a well-written hyperlinked dictionary) to find out how they can survive. It includes all the encyclopedic knowledge that is required to understand the lives of other non-human living beings as well as dictionary-style entries to help familiarize hitchhikers with the daily events of the planets or spaceships they visit.

SD is an online forum-dictionary that has a specific posting policy: a dictionary-logic in which you have to post your entries under a particular title in a definition format, which is supposed to explain what that title is about.⁵ SD has two frames: there are titles (topics) on the left, and there are entries for the titles, in which you click on the right.⁶ The first five titles (also entries) were: *pena*, *amiga*, *sour times*, *cocoa puffs* and *sprite*. The entries under these titles are simple and fun short definitions of what those things mean to the users who posted about them. According to the platform's official statistics, these are some selective hit titles in 2016: *survivor*, *game of thrones*, *pokemon go*, *14 march 2016 istanbul traffic*, *28 july 2016 atatürk airport explosion*, *details about life that makes you smile*, *working life*, *the condition when men reduce the volume of car radio when they think they are lost on the road*.⁷

⁵ It should be noted that SD is the first and most popular dictionary-like forum in Turkey (yet it should also be noted that it is not a forum). In later years, there were some clone-dictionaries (as identified in the SD jargon) such as Itusozluk, Uludagsozluk, and Incisozluk. As of 2016, the second most popular dictionary-forum was Uludagsozluk, yet it cannot offer the interactive capacity of SD. Itusozluk is no longer as popular, and Incisozluk operates more like a trolling forum that does not have an internal format or policies. These are the reasons why this research studies Sour Dictionary as a pioneer dictionary-like forum and as the most famous social media platform in Turkey.

⁶ Please see the Image 1, Appendix I for the previous interface and please see the Image 2, Appendix I for the upgraded interface in 2014.

⁷ Because of the many changes that have been occurring on SD that will be discussed in the following chapters, 2016 was chosen as the year to portray an overall view on the topics. Choosing a few years before or later might produce a different understanding of the way discussions are shaped.

Susers in SD post their entries in a definition format as if they are contributing to a collective official dictionary.⁸ However, the entries posted on the platform may consist of opinions, satire, anecdotes, confessions, and jokes as an open archive of knowledge (Furman, 2014). Also, each entry should be posted without referring to any previous entries; the next entry should be original as well as feel separate from the previous ones. All entries are written in lowercase, and in fact, the website automatically cancels letters written otherwise and converts the writing to lowercase. It should be noted that the site only allows specific forms of interactions yet managed to become the most popular social media platform in Turkey after Facebook and Twitter. The minimalist design that only allows lowercase, the interface with its two frames (titles on the left and entries on the right) makes it work smoothly. Until 2015, if anybody wanted to be a *suser*, they needed to post at least ten entries on SD. Those entries used to be evaluated by the moderators. During the evaluation period, those users were called rookies. If the moderators thought the entries followed the definition-format and its internal policies (which will be further discussed in Chapter 2), they would approve the rookies as *susers*. Gradually since 2015, professionalized moderation and an algorithm have been used to approve rookies as *susers*.⁹ Moreover, the *susers* use a nickname that provides limited anonymity. There is also no *suser* profiles, but only some summaries about the *susers*' entries in lieu of a profile, which will be further explained in Chapter 2.

At the time of this writing, when you log in to SD, you see two main frames.¹⁰ On the left side, there are titles, and on the right side, there are entries about the title that you

⁸ *Susers* use nicknames instead of their real names.

⁹ I will further discuss the ramifications of leaving the *suser* approvals to an algorithm in Chapter 5.

¹⁰ Please see Appendix I for the old and new design of SD.

click on. The titles are currently filtered titles, as the website went through a major renovation in early 2014 in which the filter *agenda* (popular) is set as the default. This means that you only see the popular titles of the day on the left—the ones in which susers have posted the most entries. As susers can't directly answer any previous posts, they have to come up with an authentic and original way to put their opinions out there. This restrictive sense of posting turns into a game of telling-the-truth, as susers subvert the format to reflect what they think about the ongoing socio-political issues in Turkey. This rule-subverting substantially differentiates it from many other communities formed online, especially from Wikipedia, Reddit, and UrbanDictionary.

SD has a unique position in terms of freedom of speech in Turkey. Especially after the 1980 coup, media consolidation, nationalistic and conservative reflexes prevented people from openly discussing essential topics such as Kurdish issues, topics on Armenian Genocide, gender issues, and LGBTQ issues. There was no venue that people could find out what was going on in the other parts of Turkey due to the tabloidization and sensationalizing of news. When SD first entered the arena, it did not aim to focus on freedom of speech and empowering people on “taboo” topics. It started as an ordinary dictionary which unofficially required people to fill out their way of knowing things about anything.

A suser logs in and creates a title and then posts an entry that explains that title with a funny twist.¹¹ That fun twist gradually turned into a satiric engagement especially with cultural and political issues, as susers discovered that this unofficial dictionary

¹¹ Posting definitions worked as a camouflage to protect the SD from any issues with the law in its early years. It also worked as a gateway to be accepted by the early geek culture on SD. The first stance will be explored in Chapter 2, especially with the user-agreement example. The second stance will be explored in Chapter 3, by explaining the formation of culture of resistance.

allows any title you want to talk about. Titles on SD are produced in the sense of Wikipedia-entries, which can vary from defining simple everyday objects such as “door” to defining a socio-political issue such as “Turkish–Kurdish relations.” The idea is that a suser comes up with a title that is anticipated to get entries about something that should matter to those people within SD and those people who read the SD. The next entries under that title should not refer to each other (no forum-like talking is allowed), and no entry should follow a question-and-answer logic.

All the relevant topics and entries are hyperlinked together with the usage of *see: x* cross-reference generator, which helps susers to connect conversations to each other. Every entry under a title needs to be unique—and satiric if possible. The logic of satire increased the reputation of the website as a “fun place to be in,” which gathers users online to post on everyday issues such as crowded buses, boring jobs, dysfunctional labor laws, local elections, and foreign affairs. This continued resurfacing of otherwise lost discussions creates trending topics of the day, which turns into popular agendas across susers. Considering the period in which SD gained higher visibility (the early 2000s), it provided a platform for people to see that some taboo topics (such as nationalism, women’s roles, and LGBTQ issues) can be easily discussed on such a site, subverting the internal static entry-posting system. It was also important to have a digital platform as an escape from the mainstream media, which was consolidated within a military-state-corporation logic after the 1980 coup in Turkey.

In Sour Dictionary, enunciation is important, as it creates ruptures with the dominant narratives. When a suser is posting an entry under a title, she/he asserts a version of reality into other susers' versions of reality. Users create new webs of information

hyperlinked with the possible ways of extending that knowledge, which links their posts to somewhere else on SD. Sour Dictionary is one of the first digital platforms that actively fought against the dissemination of misinformation through the cultural logic of opposition and practice of truth.

The claim was that there was no single authority of knowledge on SD, everyone could argue with evidence that would stimulate the discussion in a way to open up further discussions on issues that were used to be deemed as off-limits, such as ethnic and gender issues. At face value, it is easy to conclude that Sour Dictionary provided empowerment for people by affording them a unique space where they are not pressured by the cultural codes. However, before making such a big leap, we should investigate the potentials that the mechanisms within SD create with its rules, moderation, design and usage norms.

This critical reading builds a framework to analyze the relationship between representation, legitimization, and amplification of codes (cultural and computational) at the intersection of user, administration, and government practices. This study thus intervenes in the broader discussions of technology and society summarized by Rheingold (2008) and Morozov (2011a). The relationship between digital platforms and users' online and offline interactions require nuanced understandings which will be further discussed in the theoretical discussion section.

In the following paragraphs, this study will introduce the political developments and media relations in Turkey to situate the development of the internet and digital platforms within a historical discussion that investigates how a platform such as SD was welcomed across geek cultures as a place to discuss Turkish everyday relations.

B. History of the Media and Internet Policies in Turkey

The following is an overview of the development of media and internet policies in Turkish media beginning from the period after the 1980 coup. Turkey's political and media systems should be put into the context of the post-1980 coup era and the neo-liberalization of the market after the 1980s (Yesil, 2016, p. 43). This section introduces emergent media conglomerations and the way that they were affected by the accelerated embrace of neoliberalism. The post-1980 coup era refers to the repressive media practices between 1980 and 1994. It is immediately followed by the neoliberal market practices started in early 1990s, accelerated by the introduction of multi-channel structure in Turkish media.

This discussion is important because Sour Dictionary was founded in an era of a need for an arena to engage in freedom of speech. In the mid-1990s, the common-sense political discourse was nationalistic and ethnic minorities (mostly Kurdish and Armenian) were facing practices of othering. To explain the immediate success of SD as a platform, I aim to present connections between the media conglomerates and State and military apparatuses. Next, this section provides an overview of internet regulation in Turkey. This next part will be crucial to address that States are also users of the Internet and they also learn how to manage the emerging online communications along the way. A critical aspect of Turkish Internet is that the infrastructure is mostly owned by the State, and privatization is directly monitored by the government, which limits the ability to tinker with the technology without government support. This section highlights the crucial junctions in media and internet regulation and addresses the events that happen around the same time that influenced decision makers such as the government, media

conglomerates, social media companies, and internet users (including platform moderation).

The 1980 coup accelerated the shutdown of left-wing newspapers, jailed journalists, diminished criticism of the media by limiting freedom of speech (which was labeled a security threat), as well as banning print-languages such as Kurdish (Yesil, 2016).¹² In the post-coup 1980s, discussions of politics were discouraged, encouraging interest in football and religion as a way to silence leftist opposition (Christensen, 2007, p. 181). Democratic instability produced the conditions for depoliticization, contrary to opposite trends in many countries (Bek, 2004; Christensen, 2007; Sparks, 1988).

In the early 1990s, after the coup and installation of a military-based government, non-media entrepreneurs bought newspapers, which resulted in an increase in media conglomeration and shifted the attention of journalism from street-level issues to tabloidization (sensationalist news, political scandals, and celebrity gossip) and stock-market corporate-related topics (Yesil, 2016). Christensen (2007) states that the early 1990s saw a neoliberal revolution with commercialization and privatization, an era of anti-politics in which politics was reduced to trivial matters to dramatize the private sphere with morning reality shows and evening sensationalist news. He further states that this process parallels to what happened in Greece and in Latin American countries in terms of tabloidization and politicization of public broadcasting.

In the mid-1990s, the post-coup military logic of restricted news-making enabled opinion-based and sensational reporting through a corporate logic led by Dogan and

¹² Pro-Kurdish expression was criminalized after 1982 Constitution, as it was considered a security threat (Yesil, 2016).

Sabah capital groups in Turkey (Yesil, 2016).¹³ Development and investment in information infrastructure started during the Ozal government in the early 1990s by opening the market to foreign investment that opened up the multi-channel TV era in Turkey. Until 1991, there was only state-run TRT, until the introduction of the private network Star TV.¹⁴ These developments, under the previous post-coup logic and the emerging neoliberal logic, facilitated a convergence of State and private interests which then limited the outlets for alternative voices, such as the Kurdish and Armenian minorities. Also, during the same time, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTUK) was established for making moral checks and balances of the content and also for licensing purposes (Yesil, 2016). The following six governments and five prime ministers after Ozal were not able to address the diverse interests in Turkey (Kaya & Cakmur, 2010). Between 1991 and 2002 there were coalition governments with increased nepotism and a variety of corruption scandals.¹⁵

In 2002, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) period began.¹⁶ Media ownership patterns started to shift towards more government-friendly owners. Four issues affected the way media systems functioned at that moment: toning down of coverage due to conglomerate pressure, judicial suspensions against journalists, blocking

¹³ Post-1980 logic reformed the comparatively pluralistic understandings of 1960s political life in Turkey. It refers to the 1990s, and it gradually merged with neoliberal understandings that started with the introduction of multi-channel Turkish TV. The post-coup period cleared the way for private investment, especially with the Ozal government.

¹⁴ Star TV signals had to be technically altered in order to let the network broadcast from Europe, as Turkish laws during the time were designed to protect the development of TRT. Please see Yesil, B (2016) for further information.

¹⁵ The 1997 post-modern coup (without physical military action) was against the rise in Islamic Political Movements that undermines secular republic foundations. This also shows that there is military intervention on press and broadcasting (Akser & Baybars-Hawk, 2012,).

¹⁶ Until 2002, there were only coalition governments with multiple political parties involved in the decision-making processes.

online discontent, and internet surveillance (Akser & Baybars-Hawk, 2012, p. 316).

Elected in 2002, the JDP cultivated Eastern/Western duality in Turkey to propagate a new conceptualization of Islam by claiming modernity and associating the negative connotations of Islam with Arabic versions (Sanli, 2013, p. 909). The relationship with the EU was turned into a dual mechanism to support neoliberalism which would bring change yet still contribute to the traditional "Turkish" values with persistent nationalism (Kaymas, 2011, p. 65).

In addition to the racial tensions that were caused by nationalist discourses, Cosar & Yegenoglu (2011) argue that the JDP style neoliberal-conservative patriarchy demanded that women fit into a type of womanhood as housewives yet asked them to join the free market. This helped JDP to be seen as supporting women's movements by helping them to join the workforce in the economy, yet still showing hostility towards feminist identities. With JDP's second election victory (2007), they accelerated the regulation of laws such as Article 301, which made it possible for the ruling party to control media content (Kaymas, 2011).¹⁷

After the 1982 coup and throughout the 1990s, family ownership of the media transformed into corporate holding companies. In 2007, President Erdogan boycotted the Dogan media group (Hurriyet and Milliyet newspapers), who were critical towards the government agenda and published news on money embezzling that year. The Dogan group received a \$500 million tax fine in February 2009 which was increased to \$2.5 billion later. Dogan group sold the newspapers Milliyet and Vatan to pro-government

¹⁷ In addition to the above brief discussion, it should be noted that Article 301 in the Penal Code of Turkey bans insults on Turkishness (Kantrowitz, 2013), which is vaguely defined and as such helps to limit expression on political issues mainly related to ethnicity.

groups to settle the tax bill (Freedom House, 2014). The Savings Deposit and Insurance Fund, which is a fund of the Prime Minister's office to recover debts owed to banks, was used as a political tool to gain control of the troubled companies such as Sabah newspaper and ATV channel (Tunc, 2015).

In 2011, the Sabah newspaper and ATV channel were sold to Celik Holding which is run by President Erdogan's son-in-law. Also, the editorial line in the newspaper was changed from center-left political opponents to pro-government (Freedom House, 2014, p. 5). In June 2006, over 600 people were charged and detained for alleged membership in an armed terrorist group and incitement of people to an armed rebellion against the government (Tunc, 2015). These *Ergenekon* (Sledgehammer) trials lingered into 2013, in which the police arrested generals, journalists, professors and army officers for alleged conspiracy against the government (Freedom House, 2014). This is a period of extreme polarization due to the judicial process, pre-trial detention, contradictions and misinformation that was portrayed as the “cleaning period” by pro-government media channels. These developments helped the JDP to break down military tutelage. Without any threats from the army, the JDP turned into the dominant force.¹⁸

Another significant moment in the development of media systems is when Turkey connected to the Internet infrastructure in 1993 (Tonta, 1997, p. 221). In 1994, the internet infrastructure belonged to the state-owned Telecom, and it was partly privatized

¹⁸ Concerning privatization processes, the Prime Minister has the final say in Privatization High Council, which is why media conglomerates avoid conflicts (Tunc, 2015, p. 208). This is another reason why pro-government groups such as Dogus holding (NTV, StarTV), who won a \$702 million bid to operate Galataport, Ihlas holding, who won \$1.86 billion deal to redevelop Gaziosmanpasa neighborhood, and the Demiroren group, who bought Milliyet and Vatan newspapers (Freedom House, 2014; Tunc, 2015), enjoyed benefits.

(30%) in 2005 (Akser & Baybars-Hawk, 2012).¹⁹ Between 1993 and 2007, there was no legal policy framework to govern the Internet. “Regulation” was only case-by-case; for instance, most forum shutdowns were done because of alleged criticism against state and police (Yesil, Sozeri & Khazraee, 2017). Yesil (2016) states that the intensifying state power in Turkey at the time utilized a blend of the penal code, anti-terrorism, intellectual property policies and Internet-specific legislation (p. 36). Until the implementation of 2007 Internet Law (Law # 5651, Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Suppression of Crimes Committed by means of such Publication), the government exercised penal codes to regulate the Internet. This law was mostly implemented because of moral concerns about child porn, gambling, drugs, violence, obscenity and slandering Atatürk.

After their second and third election victories (2007 & 2011), the JDP began to aggressively utilize the BTK (Information Technologies and Communication Authority) and TIB (Telecommunication Association Presidency) to control and manage online information (Akser & Baybars-Hawks, 2012; Tunc, 2013).²⁰ Established in 2007, TIB can order access blocks based on sufficient suspicion, even if a complaint is filed by an

¹⁹ The National Academic Web and Information Center (ULAKBİM) was established in 1996 and formed to connect the cities of Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir and 38 universities (Tonta, 1997). Access to the Internet in Turkey was made commercially available with the TURNET infrastructural project in 1996 (Furman, 2014). In 1999, TURNET was replaced by TTNET (Turkish Telecom), which is mostly regulated by the State.

²⁰ TIB was founded in 2006 to authorize court orders for blocking websites. The YouTube ban in 2007 and SD ban in 2008 show how Law 5651 in Turkey is used to regulate freedom of speech online (Akser & Baybars, 2012). It forbids insults against the founder of Turkey, Atatürk, child pornography, vulgarity, gambling and obscenity and allows the banning of websites by vague derivative definitions of those items (Kose & Ozen, 2010; Tunc, 2013). Law 5651 also regulates internet broadcasting and applies to “fighting internet crimes,” which enables the TIB president to remove/ban content immediately (after providing 24 hours for access providers to remove the content themselves) (Zeldin, 2014).

individual (Yesil, 2016). Access providers needed to have an activity certificate to obey TIB filters.

The economic and political restraints imposed on the media gradually became visible with the YouTube ban in 2007, and the Sour Dictionary ban in 2008, because of the users' criticisms of the government following its use of moral codes to filter the content of the Internet (Akser & Baybars, 2012). The legal code has some ambiguities and openness to biased interpretations. Article 285 & Article 288 emphasize the *confidentiality* of investigations and possible *influence* on ongoing trials and restrictions of the news about it (Tunc, 2013). Following the circulation of the insult video about Atatürk (founder of the Republic of Turkey) on YouTube (March, 2007), TIB executed Law 5651 (in May, 2007) and Article 300 of the Turkish Criminal Code.²¹ Although content providers are not responsible for third-party links, *presentation* of the content may be interpreted as a deliberate act that might give them responsibility. *Hosting provider liabilities* enforced a requirement of removal of content after TIB notified them to do so. Access and internet service providers are also required to have an *activity certificate* that regulates the *allowed* published content. So, how are these regulations are going to be executed?

Akdeniz (2008) points out that Article 8 of Law 5651 says “access to websites are subject to blocking if there is sufficient suspicion that certain crimes are being

²¹ Founded in 2006, TIB was given authority to execute court orders or administrative blocking orders. After the enactment of Law 5651 in March 2007, which includes amendments referenced through Law 5816 forbidding insulting the founder of Turkey, Atatürk, as well as child pornography, vulgarity, gambling and obscenity, and allowing the government to ban websites on the basis of its vague definitions about those categories (Kose & Ozen, 2010; Tunc, 2013, Yalkin, 2013). SourDictionary and YouTube bans in 2007 and 2008 are among the ones which were talked about intensely. According to Akdeniz's (2008) report, websites of gay communities, online discussion forums about south-eastern issues (Kurdish–Turkish relations) were among the common blocked websites.

committed” (p. 8) without defining what *sufficient suspicion* might be. Article 9 allows individuals to claim their rights for *personal infringement* in courts, although they cannot ask for content removal unless the courts decide to do so. If so, content providers have to reply in 48 hours, or they have to obey the takedown order (Akdeniz, 2008, p. 9).

Akdeniz (2008) argues that dissemination of terrorist propaganda, denigration of Turkishness or hate crimes are not included in Law 5651 Article 8. Because of Article 8(2), content providers might not be aware that there is a blocking order as they are not always notified. Akdeniz (2008) points out that, although TIB provides the article numbers of the laws for blocking the websites, they fail to give future guidance on what to be done and what is *problematic* that limits freedom of speech.²² In addition to the Internet Law, anti-terror law was utilized on online content about Kurdish/ethnic conflicts, and the Penal Code was mostly used on issues about the Turkish nation and army. With the Internet filtering system introduced by BTK, banned-words were included such as gay, naked, confession, high school student, bastard, teen, and hot, which enabled TIB to ban domain names which contained those words. Yesil (2016) argues that blacklist and block strategies work because Turk Telecom (partly state-owned) dominates the ISP market and all internet traffic passes through its infrastructure.²³

Between 2013 and 2016, the government utilized legislation, bans, content removal, surveillance, and throttling to control the internet (Yesil, Sozeri & Khazraee, 2017, p. 6). Law Number 5651 was updated on February 19, 2014, which regulates

²² Because of the international treaties binding Turkey, the ECHR (European Convention of Human Rights) Article 10 should protect freedom of speech in Turkey. As Akdeniz (2008) discusses, Law 5651 contradicts this: “the use of blocking orders to silence speech amounts to censorship and a violation of Article 10 of ECHR” (Akdeniz, 2008, p. 30).

²³ YouTube was inaccessible between 2008 and 2010 over a case about insult on Atatürk in a video, and the content was removed in 2010 by a German-based company's copyright claim.

broadcasting on the Internet and *fighting against crimes committed through the Internet*. It enables the TIB president to decide on the removal of the offending content, allowing TIB to get any information from access providers and makes access providers reply in 24 hours for any violation of personal rights. Further, TIB was authorized to issue blocks without a court order, ISPs were ordered to record user data up to two years, and the MIT (National Intelligence Organization) is allowed to get all user information (Yesil, Sozeri & Khazraee, 2017).

Social media bans in the early 2000s were about alleged disruptions to national unity, family and moral values; after 2014 it was used to curb scandals, security crises and the Kurdish issue (Yesil, Sozeri & Khazraee, 2017). Especially in the post-2016-failed-coup era, Facebook, Google, and Twitter were on board with censorship with Facebook closing down topics on Kurdish conflicts, Twitter issuing a new policy of Country Withheld Content. After the 2016 coup attempt, Decree Law 670, 671 and 680 consequently allows collection of private data, allows BTK to overtake communications, allows the Department of Cybercrimes to collect personal information.

After the coup attempt, TIB was closed, and the government began to control ISPs directly by decree laws with content removals and coordinated online presences of pro-government users, also with trolling.²⁴ For surveillance and data localization, there was an addendum to Decree Law 678: ‘to incentivize the establishment of local data centers, the government will provide favorable terms in regard to land use, corporate taxes and electricity costs... the government plans to encourage Google, YouTube,

²⁴ Trolling as a right-wing practice gradually began to be visible in 2013 after the Gezi Protests and following alleged corruption scandals and was seen in the post-2016 failed-coup era again. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Facebook, and Twitter to establish data centers in Turkey and consequently make them subject to local laws” (Yesil, Sozeri & Khazraee, 2017, p. 15). Yesil, Sozeri & Khazraee (2017) argue that government transformed its practices of internet regulation from direct control (technical and legal) to indirect control (throttling, trolling, snitching) that shows the emergence of decentralized censorship. For example, a sub-genre of trolling called *ak-trolls* (paid social media agents of the government) is a version of proactive censorship.²⁵ With deception and manipulation online, the government practices proactive cooptation as states learn to use the internet as well.

Currently, most of the media platforms are owned by the entities openly supporting the JDP government (Tunc, 2013, p. 159). This is why social media is becoming more important in Turkey (Tunc, 2013, p. 160). The emergence of the online platform SD (and the following spin-offs of SD such as UludagSozluk) should be contextualized within the political climate of Turkey, merging the post-coup 1980 militarized era with the rapid neo-liberalization of the market that put a limitation on free speech, which triggered and still sustains the motivation of the design and functioning of the SD as a digital platform.

As there was no legal policy framework for the Internet in the late 1990s, SD was able to benefit from the perceived freedom (or lack of such a discussion for online communication in the Turkish law). However, as the platform became more popular, some celebrities used available Turkish law to have criticism against them removed (such as Ece Erken, a pop-culture celebrity and a host of a reality show at the time, who had SD

²⁵ Here is an explanation of the name *ak-troll*: Justice of Development Party in Turkish is *Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*. The abbreviation is AKP or AK Party. The party name Ak (which is also another word for white in Turkish) is added as a prefix to define pro-government propaganda as *aktrolling*.

remove all the criticism against her in 2004). With the popularization of Facebook and Twitter in the mid to late 2000s, government agencies eventually paid attention to online communication. The rules designed to govern those platforms were applicable to SD as well (such as Article 301). However, unlike Facebook and Twitter's direct contact and agreements with the government, SD administration followed precautions against possible censorship with the introduction of digital tools and updating their format and policies, which will be discussed in Chapter 2 in detail. At this point, it is important to point out that the SD administration was able to channel interactivity to a place where they could control any possible issues and prevent the platform from getting banned. This positionality further blurred the distinctions between play, visibility, empowerment, activism, and inaction.

C. Theoretical Framework

To analyze SD as a digital platform and situate it within the policies on the Internet within the political climate of Turkey, I discuss theories on the play, participatory culture, and subjectivity in relation to affective politics. This theoretical inquiry builds an underlying mechanism to understanding how the process of *unlearning* functions. This research argues that techno-fundamentalism is embedded in SD's design and algorithm; it is biased towards particular content and encourages re-solidification of popular content through its ranking system, especially after the major redesign of its interface in 2014. I will argue that, although it tries to regulate content with the human intervention of moderators, the platform itself acts as a mediator, as if it is a channel of guidance to a truth people seek.

I trace how the technologically determinist ideals of the administration techno-fundamentalism coupled with the authoritarian socio-political climate in Turkey further facilitates practices of *problematic information* on SD. Following Marwick (2018), I define *problematic information* as all the practices of misinformation, disinformation, and trolling. In addition, I add speculations and hypothesis about State intrigue, deliberate antagonizing, political propaganda trolling, conversation-style entries, insults and name calling, and unpleasant jokes. I argue that they blur the process of unlearning and lead to *a crisis of unlearning*.

The notion of *ambivalence* is important to investigate practices that facilitate the tension between unlearning and crises of unlearning through tracing empowering/debilitating practices and perceptions of alternative/mainstream media presence of SD afforded by the platform in relation to socio-political developments in Turkey. Phillips & Milner (2018) utilize the concept of ambivalence to complicate the binaries of then/now, online/offline, constitutive/destructive, and antagonistic/social. They argue that in order to track ambivalence, we need to investigate who is pushing against whom across political and ethical conversations.

Below, I situate the discussion on the relationship between technology and society within the literature to investigate SD as a socio-technical system by connecting it to how platform studies are understood. Then, I introduce the three-layer theoretical framework, by discussing play, participatory culture, and subjectivity. I use affect theory to connect the three-layered theoretical framework (play, participatory culture, subjectivity) with respect to the socio-political climate in Turkey. Through the affect literature presented

below, I argue that affect serves as a connection between the technical and the emotional to address the construction of subjectivities.

1. Technology and Society

Raymond Williams (1974) states that when we talk about technology, we don't know what we are talking about. Is it uses of technology, or is it about institutions, or about content or form? Rheingold (2008) discusses his expectations of the emancipatory features of the internet through cyber-security, digital literacy, and education on how to detect “crap,” disinformation on the Internet (Rheingold, 2012; Valenti, 2012).²⁶ Shirky (2010) asserts that an environmental view on social media that aims to develop a robust public sphere will help pro-democratic governments to emerge, so internet freedom should be viewed as an input for promoting the public sphere (p. 9).²⁷ On the other hand, Keen (2007) discusses amateurs' attempts to destroy the professional aesthetics of design and how they ruin the culture with cheap blogs and sloppy YouTube videos. He fears that amateurs will lead to many ideas being available, which will eventually mess up societies' truth systems.²⁸ Levine (2011) is also frustrated by developments on the Internet, as indicated by his focus on sites like YouTube as the middleman and online music distributor that is killing the industry.²⁹ In a parallel vein, Morozov (2011a) discusses how authoritarian governments keep updated with technology and continue their oppression through cyber-tactics. He states that protesters were identified in Tehran

²⁶ He further emphasizes the ability of information, attention, and filtering to digitally amplify the mental capacities of humans (Rheingold, 2012).

²⁷ Matei (2012) discusses how Shirky demonstrates ways in which spontaneous online action can empower communities to challenge repression and sustain emotional support.

²⁸ He asserts that “the monkeys take over. Say goodbye to today's experts and cultural gatekeepers—our reporters, news anchors, editors, music companies, and Hollywood movie studios” (Keen, 2007, p. 12).

²⁹ He also worries about the effects of emerging amateur population on creativity: “This isn't creative destruction, it's destruction of creativity” (p. 14).

with face-recognition technology, and adds that, with the future availability of audio-visual search (with projects such as the SAPIR search engine), governments will be able to use everyday internet sites such as YouTube to locate and identify protesters by matching voices in the protests to users' online sharing content (Morozov, 2011a).³⁰

To investigate the tensions surrounding optimistic and pessimistic perceptions of technology and what they mean in terms of addressing the politics of the platforms, this dissertation utilizes the concept of affordances. Gibson (1977) discusses how affordances allows users to experiment with the designs, while Norman (1988) employs the concept of affordances to emphasize the statements and counterstatements constituted through the socio-cultural life around the technological design. Hutchby (2001) argues that affordances frame the possibilities of what actors can do about specific objects, focusing on the relationality of power: neither attributing agency to the human nor to the technology. Meanwhile, Fisher (2004) contends that in addition to the built-in affordances of the objects, there are also affordances through interactions with the objects, while Rappert (2003) states that affordances of objects suggest but do not determine their uses. Finally, Pfaffenberger (1992) uses the concept of affordances to explain the political interpretations and reconfiguration of design by the people using it. Communication systems do not necessarily create new systems of society, and developments of technology do not stem from the need for that technology (Williams, 1974). Turner (2005) discusses how a newly emerged community around the 1960s saw

³⁰ He points out that encryption technologies are not good enough to protect privacy, since software such as Skype or e-mail services can be altered through various programs, such as Keylogger's transmitting keyboard strokes (Morozov, 2011a). He states that "the idea that internet favors the oppressed rather than the oppressor is marred by what I call cyber-utopianism: a naive belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside" (Morozov, 2011a, p. xiii).

technology as a way to create an alternative world, a new intimate social order without hierarchy and bureaucracy. The Whole Earth Catalog turned into something that facilitated connection with the people who felt close to countercultural leanings. The growth of SD shows parallels to the development of 1960s Whole Earth Catalog by Stewart Brand and in the 1970s, the Whole Earth 'Electronics Link (WELL) in terms of the production of counter-cultural ethos. Turner (2005) discusses “technologically mediated sociability” arguing that early computer networks turned into avenues for consciousness-changing places by the help of celebration of new technologies within the community (p. 489). Whole Earth Catalog introduced reviewing a product as well as introduced a new style of thinking (Turner, 2005).

According to Papacharissi (2014), the Internet pluralizes socio-cultural spaces but does not necessarily democratize those spaces. The affective intensity of digitally enabled connection helps networked publics to create “electronic elsewhere” or “third places” (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 24) which are discursively established—so not necessarily the place they want to be but where they are. Those hybrid places blend dualisms of commercial/alternative, public/private and work/leisure, individual/collective. The intensity of these hybrid venues promotes connective action, which is claimed affectively through liking-sharing-uploading-tweeting (Papacharissi, 2014). Bratich (2013) and Terranova (2007) discuss “noopolitics,” as a kind of governmentality in which digital platforms come with constructed algorithms that can work as systems of control imposed on the subjects. Action at a distance engages the public through tele-technologies which trigger them to further mobilize in their territorialized (and then de-territorialized) relationship between the individual and the collective (Terranova, 2007). "The public is

constituted through its presence in time, not in space” (Lazzarato, as cited in Terranova, 2007, p. 139), which means that the public's way of doing things is used actively to let them live, rather than preventing them from doing something.³¹ Terranova (2007) argues that cultural hegemony is assembled by the intermingling of statements, images, passions and the corporeality of the body in which that assemblage crystallizes a future-event, a secondary result of embodied associations (p. 134). This is a collective individuation of the public by affective facts. She states that the population is optimized through the government of sexuality and racism, a bio-racism (Terranova, 2007).

Platforms have their embedded relations of affects (Elmer & Langlois, 2013). They enable “affective participation” (Elmer & Langlois, 2013, p. 3) among users through implicit and explicit interactions. Studying platforms contributes to the research on social media and activism as platforms afford communication (Gillespie, 2010, 2014; Hands, 2013). Clark & Marchi (2017) argue that affect allows people to feel connected enough to others to take the risk of sharing political views through “artifacts of engagement” (p. 133) and eventually engage in connective and collective action both online and offline. Vaidhyanathan (2011) states that how the information flows are much more important than what flows. In addition, research on affect enables studying relations and affordances online (Parikka, 2013) as it helps to unpack the hybridization that is formed between the online and offline presence of bodies. Protocols stitch the technicality of networks to the political. The patterns facilitated by protocols in the networks (sharing, chatting, linking) modulate social-political forces (but does not

³¹ This stance will be further explored in Chapter 5 where I investigate the inertia created within the continuous information flux on SD and what users do about it. When there is too much information to read (referring to the post-2016 era), there is no need for any direct action to silence any opposition, as the criticisms are mostly clouded in the abundance of information shared on SD.

determine them) (Galloway & Thacker, 2007).³² Hyper-linked information materializes control through the design of the interfaces.

Elmer & Langlois (2013) argue that we should focus on articulations between technological, cultural, economic and social logics as they shape each other and simultaneously create new relations within the platforms. According to them, the interconnected design of three digital objects can make new forms of activism possible (Langlois & Elmer, 2013). They discuss 1) digital objects within platforms and in contact with each other as objects of discourse which creates semantics, 2) network objects are the interfaces which connects info-networks such as the Like button on Facebook (also in SD, which will be discussed in Chapter 2), and 3) phatic objects which produce and sustain presence among users such as liking a political topic on Facebook (or posting entries on politics or Gezi Protests on SD, which will be discussed in Chapter 3 & 4). They argue that the digital objects amplify or diminish the presence of users and their actions with each other, which repurpose ways of being and acting together (Langlois & Elmer, 2013, p. 14).

Thomas (2013) discusses digital platforms as spaces of reconfiguration of life in which the desire to remember is commodified. According to him, presence is preserved by the lived experience embedded in the networked societies. He discusses the experience of what happens next through reactivation of information as specific knowledge within networked societies. Interface enables the networked society to immediately blend with the historical, which reduces events to affective participation (of the masses).

³² The links between SD entries through titles and 'see: example' connectors record the acts of communication in addition to the discourses made available.

Caplan (2013) discusses online agents' channeling of construction of selves (such as through Facebook liking, sharing, etc.) by the management of "conduct of conduct" (p. 2). SD and its changing interfaces show a similar pattern, which motivates users to curate their own online selves by cultivating daily agendas. Caplan (2013) focuses on the productive capacities of struggles to argue for a push (rather than resistance). In a parallel vein, Jordan (2013) discusses information as politics and how political change occurs through facilitation of information online. He discusses politics of information within recursion, devices and networks. He argues that each recursion produces new possibilities of action rather than starting from the beginning. However, this differentiation within each recursion is also limited to the affordances of the platform (the web environment—which limits it to the control of the administrators and the internet governance. According to Jordan (2013) recursion, devices and protocols facilitate information as political antagonism. In Bucher's (2012) analysis, technicity is defined as productive construction of a milieu with users and their engagement with the technical aspects of the platforms (p. 4).

Following the above discussion, I will trace how SD embodies a mentality as a platform while simultaneously being perceived as an alternative media through a relationship between the subjects and the objects. The discussion outlined above is important to explain the notions that are developed around the technology by addressing the socio-political changes. From the point of the administrators, digital tools are introduced to improve the flow on the platform's interface, to address a tension with the users, and to address tensions with the laws which will be further explored in Chapter 2. From the point of the users, the introduction of digital tools has the potential to govern

interactions on the social media platforms as they build certain perimeters about what can be done on the platform, especially in relation to socio-political developments. The introduction of digital tools needs to be evaluated by also addressing socio-political developments and the specific culture that uses the digital tools. The above debate provides us with the necessary perspective to investigate Sour Dictionary as a socio-technical mechanism in which a specific arrangement of digital tools, within a certain socio-political climate (culture, laws, politics, and economics) would further empower or disempower people. It also allows us to study the repercussions of such ambiguity of the empowerment/disempowerment duality.

Following the above discussion, this dissertation investigates how subjectivities are produced and networked leading to the construction of culture of resistance. The culture of resistance (discussed in Chapter 3) is a sensibility that was formed in the early years of SD, peaked during the Gezi Protests in 2013 through production of activist subjectivity (Chapter 4), and still shows its potential at the time of the writing of this dissertation. Problematic information practices (discussed in Chapter 5), although most visible during the post-2016 period, have their roots to the inherent playfulness of the early years of geek culture. The dissertation addresses the simultaneous existence of two opposite practices (and what does it mean to be so) while addressing the ways in which those practices are more visible in one period compared to the other. Tracing the formation of culture of resistance will guide the research to address the ambivalence around SD on its perceived alternative media status by the users and its commercial social media platform status by its administrators.

The tensions between unlearning and the crises of unlearning address the production of activist subjectivity which will be discussed in Chapter 4. I will follow Jeffrey Juris (2008), Paolo Gerbaudo (2012), and Todd Wolfson (2014) in order to investigate the activism in Gezi with respect to SD, in relation to media technologies. Juris (2008) broadens the notion of spaces of flow and posits that, with the use of alternative and tactical media—culture jamming, Indymedia, electronic civil disobedience—protestors produced new cultural grammars to change political visions. He unpacks anti-corporate globalization movements through analyzing horizontal, decentralized communication and coordination, circulation of information, and self-directed networking. His points highlight existing associations on networks, which are built upon horizontal ties (Juris, 2012, p. 266). Gerbaudo (2012) discusses social media as “choreography of assembly” (p. 48) in which ongoing identity building and emotional facilitation occur. Social media helped in facilitating the “emotional choreography”, but “reappropriation of public sphere” sustained a long-term mobilization (assemblies, sit-ins, etc.) (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 84).

Wolfson (2014) argues that the complex logic of the Indymedia movement that began in Seattle in 1999 is informative in understanding current social movement media. The pre-figurative politics of the cultural logic of resistance of Cyberleft informed through the Indymedia movements emphasize decentralized structures, which immediately removes hierarchies. Cyberleft shows participatory involvement, which renders all contributors and activists as leaders of the movement. Its strategical positioning does not reduce diverse movements under the umbrella of one banner but explicates multiple fronts of struggle both locally and globally. However, he argues that

Cyberleft (as mostly discontented people) tended to see technology as the motivator of the movements, which fell short for long-term sustainability, as it is a tech-deterministic vision. The discussion on activism in relation to media technologies is important to address whether users facilitated a sensibility calling for ethical actions or chasing broad, abstract goals (bringing democracy, ending capitalism), which does not turn into concrete policies on social change. The Sour Dictionary case study situates this tension within the Turkish online sphere to investigate the prefiguration of activist sensibilities in Turkey, the neoliberal-conservative forces they claim they are fighting, and how it presents itself through the developments of SD as a platform in relation with the socio-political climate in Turkey.

2. Platform Studies

Platform studies emphasizes the power companies have through the “platform” metaphor to claim neutrality in important policy issues (Bucher, 2012; Hands, 2013; Helmond, 2015; Gillespie, 2010, 2017; Kelkar, 2018; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Plantin et al., 2018; Plantin & Punathambaker, 2018; Van Dijck, 2013). Digital media scholars also highlight the role of the software in relation to the production of various discourses and participation across social media applications (Bucher, 2012; Hands, 2013; Van Dijck, 2013), the production of knowledge through affordances of the interface (Stanfill, 2015; Weltevrede & Borra, 2016), content moderation, practices, norms (Flew et al., 2019; Gal, 2019; Kaun & Stierstedt, 2014; Massanari, 2017; Squirrell, 2019), governance (Kelkar, 2018; Suzor, 2018), and resistances in relation to algorithms (Ilten, 2015; Magalhaes, 2018; Milan, 2015).

Platform studies is interested in studying how the new media enable and constrain communication; “how expression, communication, and knowledge are constrained within profit-driven corporate ecosystems” (Plantin et al., 2018, p. 295). It examines “how platforms’ affordances simultaneously allow and constrain expression, as well as how technical, social, and economics concerns determine platforms’ structure, function, and use” (Plantin et al., 2018, p. 298). Platforms power-over (biopolitics) on practices stem from their efforts in categorizing and ranking (such as subject hashtags on SD and the agenda button for trending topics, as I show in the following chapters) (Kelkar, 2018). According to Kelkar (2008), the platform metaphor addresses four intersecting features: division of labor, programmability, innovation, and social media. Division of labor is sustained through interface and organizational roles. Platform studies investigates “how platforms preconfigure specific practices through designed features and functions” (Weltevrede & Borra, 2016, p. 1). Following these points, I demonstrate how SD turned itself into platform through visionary rhetoric moderated by humor and counter-cultural ethos, technical machinery (digital interfaces), and social relations (including organizational roles that are technical and discursive work). I further demonstrate how platform capitalism subsumes users’ cultural production through its centralized and commercialized control system.

A key moment of platformization is programmability (Helmond, 2015) which can include reprogramming the interface or applications by other service providers to be embedded in the platforms. Programmability can include how the platform allows for personalization – such as SD’s pre-2011 popular function that enables users to create their own themes for the interface, which is discussed in the following chapters. Although

these user-generated themes refer to a comparatively early era for SD, I argue that platformization accelerated when SD began to function as a big data center, which supports the idea regarding how “platforms enact their programmability to decentralize data production and recentralize data collection” (Gerlitz & Helmond, as cited in Helmond, 2015, p. 5). I argue that this data collection is made through algorithms that manage and market the content, especially after the 2015 CEO change on SD.

Affordance of the platforms enables creativity but also channels the participation (data production) for platform profit. There is a double-movement when it comes to relations of power within the platform: users create discourses and perform their actions to meet their goals about expressions (humor, politics, etc.), and platforms aim to use that performativity for profit (for example, through ads). As Plantin et al. (2018, p. 297) note, “Corporations’ goal of gathering users’ personal data determines the technical properties of platforms, which in turn shapes how they organize communication among users” through buttons such as like, dislike, fav (on SD). Platform architects produce users by giving them limited control and freedom on the interface (which is regulated by the interface). This “socio-technical-discursive work” (Kelkar, 2018, p. 2631) facilitates participation and resistance (to the platform control) which is simultaneously reworked for marketability by the platform architects by remaining somewhat open to negotiation with the users.

Whereas focusing on platform politics provides us with an understanding of users, clients, advertisers, and policy makers, the emphasis on architectures helps us to understand data, uses, and features (Weltevrede & Borra, 2016). Weltevrede & Borra (2016) study the production of knowledge and controversies through analyzing the

platform affordances of Wikipedia. They argue that to understand the knowledge production, we need to address negotiations (between users and platform architecture), interactions (across users, admins, and institutions), and affordances of the design. They take Wikipedia as a case study and propose that a consensus is needed for Wikipedia controversies so that an entry is submitted and approved (Wetevrede & Borra, 2016). However, as I demonstrate, such consensus is neither necessary nor sought on SD. I further demonstrate how SD knowledge production is rendered through its policies and guidelines, and users' continuous negotiation for speech rights with the admins (as in Wikipedia). I explain how social arrangement and cultural practices are mediated with the interface within this platform.

In addition, production of knowledge is exploited through users' content creation and performativity. The algorithm facilitates narrative possibilities. Kaun & Stiernstedt (2014) discuss how the infrastructure of immediacy is experienced by users and negotiated through archive, flow, and narrative aspects of social media time with the help of the technical and institutional affordances. They argue that "platforms foster exchange but not understanding and engagement with actual content" (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2014, p. 1164). Flow governs how assembled information works. I illustrate how early-SD search mechanisms and culture facilitated an environment for remembering through archive, and how the contemporary platformization led to "rapid change and forgetfulness" (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2014, p. 1161), as the platform affordances "annihilates narrative forms" (p. 1162). I also show a double movement between how early SD-practices sustained a continuity across various knowledge production and how contemporary platformization promotes a "stream logic" (p. 1162).

Following Kaun & Stiernstedt (2014), I also demonstrate how SD orders and indexes titles (through features such as trending titles, etc.). The original structure of the SD allowed users to benefit from it as if it was an archive. However, I explain how the algorithmic ordering and indexing that came with the platformization of SD turned SD into a forum (similar to Reddit) rather than an archive of knowledge (or archive of user experiences). Archiving depends on what the platform promotes, such as promoting new uploads or searches. To investigate the role of this kind of promotion, I investigate how the previous emphasis on “believing in searching” (through the work-like-a-dog-to-find-it interface that is explained in Chapter 2) was transformed into contemporary features such as the trending function.

The platformization facilitates interactivity through measurable and manageable actions. In a parallel vein, Stanfill (2015) studies “how interface reflect common sense and produce norms” (p. 1071). Interface “makes a normative claim” (Stanfill, 2015, p. 1061). Norms are produced through least resistant paths. This production is not about the designer’s intent but rather concerned with the structures within the interface and how people (users) respond to such structures: it is about “what is available to want or choose from” (Stanfill, 2015, p. 1062). Stanfill argues that technologies are products of social context and analyzes how social norms are built in the functionalities, menu options, and page layouts simultaneously to produce new norms and constrain interaction. The affordances of the platform facilitate productive constraints. For example, Stanfill (2015) discusses how below-the-fold sections in newspapers are easily overlooked (similar to the parts you cannot see without scrolling on websites). Following this logic, I also address similar design choices (such as the “...” button that is added on long SD entries and how

it hides most of the parts of the longer entries, as is explained in Chapter 2 and the following chapters).

Squirrell (2019) discusses practices and norms on platforms, specifically addressing how moderators on Reddit actively create norms through discussions. In the following chapters, I demonstrate that what Squirrell (2019) highlights regarding Reddit also applies for SD, and why a study about SD is necessary to address its “hybrid role as both social media and message board and the unique combination of those affordances results in complex and rich social interactions” (Squirrell, 2019, p. 15). Reddit, and in a parallel vein SD, “combines the affordances of social media (shareability, networked groups, algorithmic newsfeeds), and early Internet message boards and Usenet groups (anonymity, volunteer moderation, and subject specificity)” (Squirrell, 2019, p. 2). As a message board (Squirrell, 2019, Massanari, 2017) and as a platform (Gillespie), I also note how SD influences visibility with karma points and algorithms. I specifically show how karma makes users post compatible entries with the common sensibilities (Squirrell, 2019).

Magalhaes (2018) argues that when people are aware of how algorithms work, those codes cannot truly govern their behaviors as they resist those data practices. He further discusses how people reflect on algorithms and transform themselves as a reaction and in resistance to those algorithms. As I demonstrate in this dissertation, the way algorithms work on SD is that they determine which title and topic will be visible to get more exposure and comments, which leads to “networked gatekeeping” (Myers-West, 2017, p. 29). I show how content moderation influences information flows with the help of the community guidelines that allow users to monitor themselves. Although algorithms

(the *like* button and *agenda* button, as explained in the following chapters) have generative power, they also facilitate the illusion of platform neutrality (Milan, 2015). Milan (2015) argues that media technologies can enable and constrain social action, but the collective dimension is key to understanding dissent and online activism in relation to platform affordances (Ilten, 2015). Milan (2015) further discusses the notion of the “politics of visibility” and “could protesting” (Milan, 2015) and how they are important, as they aim to combine connective action (Bennet & Segerberg, 2012) – which assumes natural connectivity – and the politics of the platforms (Gillespie, 2017), which helps with the understanding of the complex dynamics of politics, economics, and technicality within and around social media platforms.

Participation and governance (in terms of the discursive work) are two important keywords for understanding how platforms function (Kelkar, 2018). As far as SD is concerned, participation is about content, and governance is about the division of labor for the organizational roles, as I illustrate with the example of how volunteered moderation is transformed to professionalized governing. Governance is concerned with socio-technical-discursive work as much as it is about the legal arrangements and policies (Kelkar, 2008). Platforms govern and they are governed (Gorwa, 2019). Content moderation, algorithms, interfaces and socio-technical arrangements are central pillars of internet governance (Gillespie, 2017; Helmond, 2015; Plantin et al., 2018). Platforms govern through algorithms, content moderation, community guidelines, interfaces, data and cultural practices; and they are governed by local and global policy and political mechanisms. I explain how social media establish their own rationality through platformization.

3. The Process of Unlearning

Theorization of unlearning requires three steps: it is playful, participatory, it involves the production of subjectivity, and it occurs due to continuously constructed affective parameters in which the *dispositifs* function. To unpack the unlearning process, I discuss what these three steps contribute in the following sections. The process of unlearning, in addition to its crises within the problematic information practices, intervenes in the above discussions between optimistic and pessimistic views on the relations between technology and society. Participation can be fruitful in creating a democratic space for political discussion and artful political voices, yet the problematic information practices hijack the playfulness of participation and debilitate productive compositions.

3.a. Playful and Participatory Culture

In this section, I introduce how the notions of play and participatory culture are important to address geek practices and trolling. According to Jenkins (2006), participatory culture is a community of practice. In this practice, the community contributes and develops content. It is specific engagement practice within the parameters of the context in which the community lives. There is an informal mentorship, low barrier of entry, support for sharing in which participants are acknowledged and encouraged for their creations, and binding internal social connections (Jenkins, Ito & boyd, 2016). Participation differs from interaction; participant experiences of participants is directly affected by the decisions they make. The idea of resistance embedded in participatory culture comes from the tension between fascination and frustration (Jenkins, Ito & boyd, 2016). You need to be drawn to something, but you want it to be removed from

institutionalized power as a response (Jenkins, Ito & boyd, 2016, p. 17). Participation is resistance when it is a response to that limiting power. In a participatory culture, people create “new kinds of boundaries and status hierarchies” (Jenkins, Ito & boyd, 2016, p. 19). Learning is the most important productive outcome of such participation; it does not usually begin for the sake of learning, but the regulated system of information sharing facilitates a form of learning that unpacks relations of power among peers and possibilities of democratic action however it is defined by participants. We should ask “under what conditions people began to think themselves as political agents” (Jenkins, Ito & boyd, 2016, p. 152). The way network publics operate helps us see an acting participatory culture with their persistence, spreadability, and searchability (Jenkins, Ito & boyd, 2016, p. 184).

According to Delwiche & Henderson (2013), participatory culture is made up of contribution, collaboration, and collective knowledge: “Participatory culture simultaneously empowers people and puts up new barriers to community membership” (p. 257). Participatory culture is not necessarily empowering, as it is shaped by the design, place, time and particular people interacted with. As participatory culture requires a kind of belongingness (such as knowing the lingo of a specific community or having a registered user name on a social media platform), it is suggested that it is prone to reproduce dominant norms in the society, as they are not free to participate but compelled to participate. This compulsion does not stem from a psychological drive or an imposed force; it is about the fascination or the frustration of the users. It involves the feeling of need to explain a topic further as they feel like they are the experts, and sometimes to question the duality of being an expert/amateur. Participatory culture can evolve to

participatory politics in which the cultural structures in participation can also be used in politics and education as more “serious” venues (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013).³³

For that improvement to function, users undergo a transformation to recreate the boundaries set by the rules within digital platforms. For example, in Sour Dictionary, users play with the definition format to relay their arguments on “serious” topics. Adrienne Massarani (2015) states that “design choices enable and constrain the kind of play that occurs” (p. 1). Play re-inscribes hegemonic tendencies in terms of how the play is shaped (its content and its players) through the design of the platform. Massarani (2015) argues that, following Gershan Logman on jokes, they “... illuminate the cultural system (and systems of power) out of which the jokes emerge” (p. 38). Addressing how play functions is important to understand the ways users engage with each other in subverting the internal policy constraints of the platform and using humor to bring perspectives about the socio-political context.

According to Katie Salen (2004), play is an iterative process as players act upon their actions; they are reciprocally active, thus “play implies interactivity” (p. 208). According to her, a play is about pretending, joking and deliberate fooling for fun and being playful is being in the spirit of play and performing a play in a clever way. She argues that it is the rigid structures that help play to exist as opposition and a free movement. Being playful is “making use of existing structures to invent new forms of expression” (Salen, 2004, p. 1078). This is a transformative play in which playful

³³ Jenkins & Carpentier (2013) argue for critical participation that brings into Paulo Freire's emphasis on interrogating the oppressed way of living to produce improved social conditions.

innovation with the rigid structures produces unpredictable results. Then, we should ask how does this transformative play functions in participatory culture.

Huizinga (1949) discusses play as a voluntary activity that helps actors to go outside of their ordinary and serious “real” life and create a communal, ordered territory. There is an embedded tension and uncertainty in play and “a striving to decide the issue and so end it” (Huizinga, 1949, p. 53). There is secrecy that implies the game is for those players only, not for the others who don't belong in that circle. Caillois (1958) states that play has a component of subversion of rules and it is an engagement with the here and now. Hector Rodriguez (2006) argues that encounter with otherness is essential in a game, a kind of a to-and-fro quality. This pattern of movement facilitates the socio-temporal framework that caters to the learning process within the game (Rodriguez, 2006). This helps players to organize and experiment on their experience and sustains “tentative approximation to regions of life that resist exact categorization” (Rodriguez, 2006, p. 17).

Julie Cohen (2012) argues that play helps us to locate the construction of morality and intellectual development as it mediates a transformative process that locates individuals within the culture and the narrative as well as the objects. She argues that with playful encounters, you can challenge the established boundaries. In the to-and-fro play of circumstance, there is always a disruption of the process of explanation. She states that play is “in-between reproduction and resistance and in between predictability and contingency” (Cohen, 2012, p. 56). People claim membership within a social network with the help of play. Theorizing subjectivity through play is helpful, as it helps us to remove prediction from the equation. Thus, according to Cohen (2012), it is not the

element of prediction that shapes possibilities within social networks; it is experimentation.

This above discussion is to say that playfulness caters to users, so that they can continuously experiment with arguments and the socio-political contexts that those arguments flourish. It addresses how experimentation with socio-political topics functions as a bond-making mechanism across user groups through the to-and-fro quality of the play. The discussion that follows will help to unpack how users playfully create new ways of existence online, despite the boundaries of platform architecture or rules of engagement. The argument on fascination vs. frustration is important to identify when users disrupt each other's argumentation because of their fascination with a topic, and when they disrupt an argument because of their frustration of a particular articulation. It helps to clarify how and why they need each other to play the *game of truth* and how it enables them to influence each other's argumentation. In terms of SD interactions, the discussion on play will be helpful to unpack whether playful participation create places of collective agreement or a space of existence where they build argumentative structures. Understanding play will show how users teach, learn, unlearn, and create new possibilities of connection.

In order to address geek practices in connection with playful participant, I follow Christina Dunbar-Hester's (2014) research on the "politics of technological engagement" (p. 25). She studies how geeks are organized around a technology and constitute set of practices around that technology, in her case, building community radio. She argues that although geeks demystify technology for political consciousness, there is a tension between activist selves and technical/geek selves, because the former performs

egalitarian values but the latter wants to control technicality because of lack of trust to the newcomers. She also argues that both men and young women geeks/tech experts use this masculine formation of gender around technology to exclude the non-experts. In a parallel vein, Kelty (2008) studies free software to trace the experimentation on this form of creating codes and discussing geek relations, which constitutes a cultural practice and space of modification, reorienting power and knowledge. According to him, “recursive public” refers to a public that maintains its own terms of existence through legal, technological, and practical means by creating alternatives to existing forms of power (Kelty, 2008, p. 3). He studies being a geek as a practice and argues that it is not that the practice of recursive publics was once ideas; rather, they emerge along the way. This concept helps to understand the overcoming of the ideal/material practice dichotomy. The idea of geek as a practice and as a community (as in Dunbar-Hester, 2014) shows the associations between geeks and between cultural practices as they connect and redistribute people. Chapter 3 will highlight the tensions within the SD geek culture around claiming expertise, imposing masculine culture, and geek culture’s own set of norms. I will investigate the assumptions of the geek culture on the way that they built intimacies and trust online and offline. I will also discuss how the feeling of connectedness stems from the intimacy and proximity of users, especially in the pre-2011 era where they 1) already knew each other 2) met in meet-ups frequently 3) could use a person they already know as a reference for a user who posts an entry.

In addition to empowering potentials that are suggested by the above-mentioned play and participatory culture, I also explore whether there are any limits to such playful participatory practices. In order to address this tension, I investigate how trolling can be

addressed through tracing empowering and debilitating potentials of play. I follow the understandings of Whitney Phillip (2017) and Marwick & Lewis (2017) on trolling to address such tensions within play. Whitney Phillips defines trolling as disrupting and upsetting as many people as possible; Marwick & Lewis define internet trolls through offensive speech, their emotional impacts on the users and ambiguity in their production of online content. There is a certain element of play frame that trolls embody in order to generate constitutive content that reconfigures the meanings of following content (Phillips, 2017). In addition, Phillips (2017) argues that, affordances of digital platforms such as Facebook enables the construction of strong affinity networks which produce user enmeshment that helps “trolling became a fundamentally social activity” (p. 77). She studies what troll behaviors reveal, which I will further explore in Chapter 3.

Phillips (2017) argues that “...trolls and trolling behaviors replicate and are animated by a number of pervasive cultural logics” (p. 123). This can be a version of andocentrism, masculinity, assertiveness, nationalism and exploiting cooperation. She argues that trolls avoid truths and aim to cultivate anger in their opponents by pushing the limits of the arguments by manipulating the terminology (such as calling abortion as baby killing). She also argues that there is a certain level of disassociative humor and exploiting established connectedness online within trolling culture (Phillips, 2017, p. 118). This is also in line with media influencers who cultivate power to amplify messages mimicking the participatory culture processes that I further explain in Chapter 5. This process of trolling engenders a content remix: an individualized filter bubble shaped by personal choices online (Phillips, 2017). Following the above discussion, Chapter 3 will also address trolling as deception with a social purpose, as part of the geek culture of the

early-years SD empowering practices. Chapter 5 will focus on how the playfulness of early-years geek culture (and the way that trolling used to work) is imitated over time (with respect to platform and socio-political changes) to disrupt empowering potentials with trolling as pro-government propaganda and antagonism.

Next, I discuss how playful participation plays a role in construction of activist subjectivity, which is a component of culture of resistance that I will discuss in Chapter 3.

3.b. Theories of Subject

The next step of theorizing the process of unlearning is to analyze the “production of subjectivity” (Deleuze, 1978; Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; Guattari, 1995; Foucault, 2003, 2011, 2012; Hardt, 1995; Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2005, 2009). This discussion also explains why an approach through digital platforms and protocols is needed to articulate the construction of subjectivity around the development of Sour Dictionary. This dissertation discusses how a certain production of subjectivity through geek practices (with respect to socio-political developments and the SD platform’s affordances) cultivates a culture of resistance (Chapter 3), activist subjectivity (Chapter 4), and problematic information practices such as disinformation, misinformation, trolling (Chapter 5) with respect to different milieus. I argue that the early-years logic of the culture of resistance produced activist subjectivity during the Gezi Protests in Turkey in 2013. However, transformation of SD from a perceived alternative media status to a major social media platform coupled with the post-2016 failed-coup political climate in Turkey and changing demographics on SD produces parallel problematic information practices. These practices coexist with and are fed from the tensions in culture of

resistance and activist subjectivity.³⁴ I will also argue that the amateur spirit that used to run SD almost until 2004 strongly glued the SD-specific cultural rhetoric into users' everyday interactions on SD. Those early values have led to contemporary controversies, which I will examine in Chapter 2 and throughout the dissertation.

At the core of culture of resistance, there is an experience of the need to change the things as they have been. It is about other people as well as it is about oneself. The methods of Foucault (2011) insist on a passage from historicizing the contents of knowledge to analyzing focal points of experience: forms of knowledge, normative frameworks of behavior and mode of existence. For example, in order to apply this methodological framework to the formation of activist subjectivities that will be explored in Chapter 4, activism needs to be analyzed as an experience in our culture. This analysis can be done through the methodological intervention advocated by Foucault (2011): synthesizing forms of veridiction, set of norms and constitution of the subjects' mode of being. Foucault's methodological intervention unpacks the forms in which “the individual is let to constitute herself or himself” (Foucault, 2011, p. 5). In order to understand the way subjects influence each other in the space of encounter, we need to look at how they take care of themselves within the parameters of that space and what that space does to them with or without their awareness. This can be an architecture of a building that shapes the way we walk and think when we are inside it because of its design, or this can be how a digital platform is coded so that the users can move on that platform via predetermined paths.

³⁴ This is to say that tensions within the logic of culture of resistance has two different peak moments with respect to different milieus: as activist subjectivity during Gezi Protests, and as problematic information practices in the post-2016 failed-coup political climate.

A subject relays codes (Foucault, 2003). The construction of subjects and *dispositifs* work in tandem with each other. In addition, the conduct of the people should be analyzed as opposed to how counter-conduct forms. According to Foucault (2005), the truth is not “uncovered” by a subject, the practice of self (in this dissertation's case, with the digital tools such as links, entries, like button) transfigures the subjectivity with new truths through care of the self. Care of the self is curative, and it is transforming by doing, a way of living. Foucault (2005) discusses the care of the self as a project of “unlearning” (p. 95), carefully equipping oneself by engaging others.

Parrhesia, as a form of care of the self, constitutes an important aspect of the process of unlearning. Parrhesia is about demonstrating the truth, not convincing the other of a particular content (Foucault, 2011). The action of parrhesia itself transforms the mode of being of the subject in the time of enunciation. It is a movement. Parrhesiastic enunciation creates affinities that constitute the foundation of the process of unlearning among users. Affinity-based relationships produce mobility among subjects as they practice parrhesia. According to Foucault (2005), this movement of the subject is detachment from bad assemblages. The process of unlearning is not about paying attention and protecting yourself; it is a technique of carefully fashioned behaving (Foucault, 2005).

According to Foucault (2005), care of the self does not fit into a morality framework; it justifies conduct within one's subjectivity. Parrhesia, on the other hand, is particular care of the self, an action of telling the truth, with courage for freedom. Care of the self is a constitutive action; it awakens the capacities; it is mastery and joy in oneself (Foucault, 2005). Care of the self necessitates the other for the practice of unlearning

(Foucault, 2005). Care of the self does not prescribe possible actions.³⁵ In parrhesiastic enunciation, form matters more than the content. Parrhesia is showing what you feel, not speaking about it. The care of the self is about the restlessness, movement, and continuous action. It is a transformation through a form of movement. The practice of truth equips the subject for him to constitute himself. One could argue that text (discourse of entries on SD) is not only about meaning; it is equipping yourself with “true” propositions. Parrhesia does not unveil structures; it shows the present in which the subject fails to experience (Foucault, 2012).

In a performative event, the following effects of the enunciation are known, but in parrhesia, there is an open situation; the effects are unknown, and there is an unspecified risk. A parrhesiastic act is a truth-telling which creates risk; it involves courage, so there is no need for status (not like citizenship); it is free (Foucault, 2011). Transformation of the mode of being matters more than the prescription of what to do (Foucault, 2011). Parrhesia qualifies the other human (or non-human entity) as a constitutive element of the truth-telling subjectivity. As there is an unspecified risk, this is also why a parrhesiastic action is also possible to facilitate crises of unlearning if hijacked by problematic information practices. This last stance will be further exemplified in Chapter 5. I will argue that left-wing and right-wing practices can both embody parrhesia when the mechanisms that cultivate *truth* are in question.

The process of unlearning can be seen as “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (Foucault, 2003, p. 4). By “subjugated knowledges”, Foucault (2003) refers to historical

³⁵ Foucault (2005) discusses that the discourses (logoi) of materiality constitute the equipment that the subject acts on for transformation. The discourse turns into an ethical action of the subject by the aid of paraskue. The practice of truth (askesis) makes paraskue (equipment), and discourses are turned into ethical actions as the subject constitutes himself.

forces that are disqualified or masked by formal systematizations (p. 7).³⁶ In the case of this dissertation, subjugated knowledges are knowledges that are disqualified by the Turkish military-state, which gained its power over information channels especially after the 1980 post-coup developments, as previously discussed. The top-down control of information channels nullifies local knowledges and memories to assemble a structure of the hierarchy, the patriarchy of neoconservative culture formation that relies on Turkish nationalism and neoliberalism (deregulation of the market and privatization that further leaves control to fewer entities, strengthening levels of top-down governing). By insurrection of subjugated knowledges, Foucault (2003) points to “historical knowledge of struggle” and “an insurrection against the controlling power-effect” (p. 9).³⁷ This discussion on de-subjugation is connected to the process of unlearning that Foucault (2005, 2011) discusses.³⁸ Foucault (2005) uses the notion of unlearning as a process to achieve taking care of the self. I define unlearning as a de-subjugation from imposed military-state knowledge on how to live a racial and gendered life in Turkey.

Subjectivity is an assemblage of conditions for an individual or collective to emerge in relation to a difference that is confining or constitutive and is also subjective

³⁶ In a parallel vein, Hardt & Negri (2009) discuss a political project of constituting an art of self-rule within the multitude (becoming-other). According to them, interaction, care, and cohabitation will reproduce the common which will be constituted through the multitude's productivity and creativity. The multitude is not an identity; it's a process, a becoming. Bratich (2008) points out the tension between “official knowledges” and subjugated knowledges (that are deemed as naïve and disqualified) as the former sets the players in a “regime of truth.” Foucault states that “Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.” (Foucault as quoted in Bratich, 2008, p. 4).

³⁷ Foucault (2003) states that insurrection is the “reappearance of what people know at a local level of these disqualified knowledges, which made the critique possible” (p. 9).

³⁸ Foucault's (2005) attempt by emphasizing unlearning as he investigates care of the self is to contrast it with the idea of knowing the self to get access to the truth. He discusses unlearning as “...stripping away previous education, established habits, and the environment” (Foucault, 2005, p. 95).

(Guattari, 1995). The rupture of the space-time continuum within the production of subjectivity create *haecceities* which produce entities within the exact moment during that very rupture. Foucault (2003) argues that the objective is to search for the extremities of power, to its capillary modalities and investigate how the subjects are constituted. Counter-conduct is a web of resistance to a process of conducting people by redistributing the relations of forces within the conduct, nullifying, reversing or partially discrediting the regulatory processes. Counter-conduct constitutes a new modality for a struggle.³⁹ The notion of counter-conduct is an important component of culture of resistance that will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Power (in action) works as a hinge that facilitates the transformation from speculation to practice (Hardt, 1995). The practice is about “how we can come to produce active affections... how can we come to experience a maximum of joyful passions” (Spinoza as quoted in Hardt, 1995, p. 95). This explains how affect turns into action enveloping the cause. Hardt & Negri (2009) argue that *dispositifs* facilitate a political terrain of action for production of subjectivity which is also a process of becoming-other. At the time of enunciation, digital objects on SD within the socio-political climate in Turkey arrange a specific kind of critical break. These are moments of questioning the assumptions of the others, whether it is the arguments of the users or arguments of governmentality of the State. At those very moments, there is an emergent subjectivity

³⁹ Foucault talks about five forms of counter-conduct against pastoral conduct which apply to struggles found in other regulatory mechanisms. The first form of counter-conduct is an exercise of self on self, aiming to govern oneself. The second one refers to the formation of communities to struggle against hierarchy. The third emphasizes the significance of an experience, the virtuality of action embedded in the soul. The fourth posits the circumvention of dominant texts (and laws) using those laws against the institutionalized aspects of law-making. The fifth one refers to a Spirit which nullifies the shepherd. Thus, counter-conducts are becomings-other than the available category. The struggle does not take place in exteriority of conduct; it takes place within that field by using tactical elements (p. 215). Counter-conduct replaces the rules of obedience with the requirements of “civic” body (p. 356).

that is ready for new compositions—such as empowering the community on a nationalistic history formation or calling out the sexist discourses or comments that are coming from privileged class dispositions.

As I will show in Chapter 2, SD posts need to resemble an embodiment of a definition-format, an encyclopedia style that allows multiple ways of articulation. This helps susers to orient the form of entries to make theirs look parallel to a general outline of the definition format. This practice is apprenticeship of argumentation, and when it is applied to topics of social change, such as ethnic conflict, it helps to transform the speculations into action, a kind of awareness that is distilled from the capillary forms of power that aim to govern.

Following the above discussion, this dissertation connects the content of truth-making discourses (situating SD content-production in Turkey's socio-political context) as well as analyzes the form of transforming the orientation of susers toward each other, the government, and outsiders through parrhesia (as it is a movement). This transformation means that tracing the construction of subjectivity builds a bridge on understanding affective compositions of self.⁴⁰ Speaking of truth transforms user-experience to a suser subjectivity. The specific protocols within platforms (in this dissertation's case, SD) orient a modality of struggle within everyday discourses that facilitates counter-conduct that helps to form a practice of life through content production to turn affects into actions. The specific socio-economic climate produces a kind of affectivity. Susers are faced with actions of stereotyping, framing, political scandals and

⁴⁰ Through unmasking the neoliberal media control, parrhesiastic action mobilizes the process of producing alter-movements. According to Hardt & Negri (2009), the alter-movement process has to be situated within the “investigation of the capacities people already exercise in their daily lives and specifically in the process of biopolitical production” (p. 364).

turn those topics into analyzable stories through their own expertise, education, experience, and situatedness within the society. I will examine in Chapter 3 how the early-years of SD provided a space of escape from state-controlled media to produce raw truths to people who seek for them. In addition, I will explore how the digital arrangement and the format-policy orientations helped people to form a resistance to unquestioned practices to create ways of empowerment. I will argue that these practice of apprenticeship helps to remove bonds from bad assemblages rather than producing counter-hegemonic resistances that necessitate a platform supported by the institutions of the State. I will also examine whether there are any limitations to these practices.

3.c. Affective Embodiment

This subsection adds to the theorizing the process of unlearning, especially in understanding of how the technical and the emotional are embodied and woven together on a digital platform. Affect is important, as it bridges not-yet events in time (Papacharissi, 2014). Papacharissi's (2014) discussion of affect shows us that it is an articulation of intensity, immediacy, and emergence. How do users see other people as resources? What does it mean in terms of escaping domination? In this dissertation, applying affect to trace the tensions of unlearning/crises of unlearning and empowerment/debilitating practices will help to unpack the emergent collaborations behind entry-posting practices to address the changeability in terms of reactions to the platform changes, socio-political changes, and cultural changes. Through Chapters 3–5, I explore how users aim to redefine politics with respect their embodiment of the platform extended to a form of preconscious, a movement, a transformation.

Two streams of affect research are used to sketch out the mechanism of affect. The first is the idea of affect-as-flow as discussed by Teresa Brennan (2004), Richard Grusin (2012), and Nigel Thrift (2008). This idea explains the flux of bodies discovering their capacities for action (especially after their hybridization with media technologies such as tweeting, live-streaming, or posting on SD). The second is extension by Lisa Blackman (2012) of the concept of flow by emphasizing that affect is not merely a flow but requires a subject. Thrift (2008) argues that design interacts with the affective practices (which are embodied) to produce politics via the formation of new collectives.⁴¹ Addressing affect in relation to the process of unlearning will be helpful to unpack SD as an experiment that opens up more room for an invention to create instant communities in which affective technologies are embodied in people's actions. In the following chapters, I will explore how the design activates some possibilities such as attachments and movements and inhibits others.

Chapter 4 picks up the construction of culture of resistance (that will be elaborated in Chapter 3) and investigates how it helps to produce activist subjectivity during the Gezi Protests in Turkey. At this point, Papacharissi's (2014) concept of "affective publics" is important, as affect is at the intersection of care of the self, virtuality, and hope. She states that affective publics are "networked digitally but connected discursively" (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 54).⁴² Marginal boundary spaces are

⁴¹ He follows Tarde's notion of the 'social' as associations and posits that his focus on innovations can be merged with the affective understandings of performance to explain the "biopolitics of imitation" (Thrift, 2008, p. 253).

⁴² Affective publics is derived from the concept of network publics, the term of Mizuko Ito (2008) to emphasize networked media, is used to refer to the restructuring publics at the "intersection of people, technology, practice" (Boyd, 2010, p. 1) who are configuring and are configured by the environment via affordances of technologies. Bits (digitalization) facilitate change in people's everyday life as the codes reconfigure the structure of the networked publics (Boyd, 2010, p. 4). Profiles, friend lists (as intended

where political power of affect become available but not necessarily articulated yet, where “affective power is pre-actualized, networked and of a liquid nature” (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 19).⁴³ In Chapter 4, I will explore how the “feeling of being counted” (Coleman as cited in Papacharissi, 2014, p. 25) renders online spaces venues for civic engagement.⁴⁴ Following Papacharissi (2014), I will also investigate how affective infrastructure sustained through emerging news values helped events to turn into stories.

Affect turns into action: the speculation becomes practice through relations of power. When affect envelops its cause, it turns into action, a practice. Affects are open; they escape confinement (Thrift, 2008). Feedback loops among technology (the media) and humans show that affect translates (intentions to actions) and transforms as it transmits itself (Grusin, 2010). The next section ties the three steps (play, participatory culture, and production of subjectivity) together with respect to how these concepts will be helpful to unpack tensions on SD. It provides guidance for the rest of the research on theorizing the tensions between the process of unlearning/crises of unlearning.

4. The Process of Unlearning and Crises of Unlearning on Digital Platforms

I argue throughout this dissertation that SD produces a momentum as a platform through a relationship between the subjects and the objects. The interface enables the networked society to immediately blend with the historical, which also reduces the posted entries on titles to affective participation (of the masses).

publics), and commentaries help the users to configure their connectedness as networked publics (Boyd, 2010, p. 6).⁴²

⁴³ Boyd (2010) argues that networked publics are immediately aligned by affective power as they are technologically networked and socially imagined in their interactions and practice.

⁴⁴ The networked publics that are assembled on social media structure the forming, interaction, and dissolution of publics (Gillespie, 2014).

The emphasis on playful participatory culture, subjectivity, and affect in connection with the previous discussion on technology and society provides us with the tools to address the intertwined relations between the social media platform as a web of codes and digital tools, the users who post on the platform, the immediate publics who follow the platform, the government in which the social media platform functions, the owners of the platform, the global Internet governance policies that allows certain communication channels, and the culture, politics, and economics of the society that the social media platform develops. The theoretical framework points us to address social media platforms such as SD as a sociotechnical system.

During the process of unlearning, you don't necessarily persuade others: in fact, as in parrhesia, you speak within the being of the one you are speaking to (Foucault, 2011). This practice of care of the self, I will argue, was facilitated through the internal format in connection with the specific political climate in Turkey.⁴⁵ This dissertation calls it unlearning when subjects constitute themselves as spectacles rendering socio-political contradictions visible.⁴⁶ Subjects multiply available information and interrupt dominant narratives as will be shown in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. You can quit SD (a trend that will be discussed further in Chapter 2), but it is not easy to quit its cultural unlearning logic. Specific conditions such as politics, race, and economics make *SD culture* present

⁴⁵ Although it was a dominant form of entry-posting logic, there were also people who did not follow the format, practice trolling, initiate political propaganda, and hate speech. These practices will be further discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to the culture of resistance, and in Chapter 5 in relation to problematic information practices.

⁴⁶ Care of the self facilitates the subject to constitute themselves as spectacles, which renders the contradictions with the world and with the others visible (Foucault, 2012). The frequency and significance of the practice of care of the self on SD, in relation with unlearning will be further explained in connection with the construction of the culture of resistance in Chapter 3.

in everyday life. Chapter 3 will further elaborate this last point by bringing perspectives from the interview participants. I will also show how SD is molded into a terrain of conflict in which people engage with differences.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrate how the process unlearning functions by tracing the formation of a collaborative living archive on SD. I discuss how SD's internal posting policies were turned into a playful participation with the help of geek-culture sharing practices. I analyze how humor functions as an important element of playful participation (i.e., functions as parrhesia) as a form of building bonds between the users. The concept of parrhesia will be helpful to unpack how the users' demonstration of truth also matters in addition to what they are sharing on SD. However, I will also show how geek culture produces its own norms which creates tensions on the construction of culture of resistance.

Chapter 4 will explore how the culture of resistance shows its peak potentials during the Gezi Protests in Turkey. The theoretical discussions on playful participation, subjectivity, and affect will be helpful to unpack how the platform activity (in relation with the socio-political developments in Turkey) distributes people rather than only being an enabler of discourses. In Chapter 5, the three-step theoretical explanation of the process of unlearning/crises of unlearning will be helpful to address the tensions in the post-2016 failed-coup political climate with respect the developments in SD. I will argue that the playful participation practices can be exploited by user groups (especially trolls) to disrupt empowering potentials or to produce right-wing propaganda.

I argue that through unlearning, the process of participatory culture that organizes and produces valuable content on SD turns the practice into participatory politics, which

creates at least two operations within the same reality. The first operation occurs in an arena where productive critical participation is possible in which the users with their definitions decompose the actions, events, and possibilities by juxtaposing them to the contexts in which they are produced (such as Kurdish–Turkish relations, gender inequality, and the conditions of Gezi Protests in Turkey). The alternative operation occurs in which trolling hijacks the process of government of self and others through creative and playful facilitation of misinformation, deliberate antagonizing, insults, and hate speech. SD-trolling (which is further discussed in Chapter 3) conceals in the disguise of revealing, by posting too many entries or entries that might generate bifurcated ambiguous knowledge about a government agenda.

In the following chapters, I explore how the digital objects and the networked sensibilities on SD facilitate a momentum that made it possible for a construction of culture of resistance, and activist subjectivity. However, as the process of unlearning involves unspecified risks, I also investigate whether this subjectivity is necessarily equipped with historical contingencies and political nuances that can make a concrete difference on perceived injustices. I will argue that this construction of activist subjectivity shows that mobile (in-flow) subjects are created through a joyful experiment with such a dictionary concept that unlearns to act, yet may not always build a momentum to challenge hegemony. Chapter 5 will specifically argue that the mobility, flow, and tensions within a culture of resistance can make it (and activist subjectivity) vulnerable to problematic information practices that fuel the momentum of its debilitating hybridity.

Behind the face-value of empowering actions, here are three different disempowering potentials I will discuss. First is the production of discourses about rights against the State via reactions to daily political news, scandals, announcements. Second is the SD administration's repurposing the momentum of SD participation into profits by channeling the spirit of actions to increase production of “neutral content” that is beyond governmental visibility. The third is the production of a continuous information flux, which makes it harder to follow the pace of the entries. I will argue that the nexus of these three disempowering potentials blurs the meaningful conversations on SD. With this dissertation, I propose tracing the formation of a culture of resistance that is facilitated through the Sour Dictionary digital platform, and I also aim to trace whether this culture of resistance has an incapacitating form of action that is shadowed by its productive momentum.

D. Method

For my dissertation, I conducted ethnography as a participant observer on the SD platform. I conducted the ethnography in two different time periods. The first was between September 2013 and January 2014 and the second between January 2017 and January 2018.

Digital ethnography is an articulation of the notion of “being there” for online environments. The study of Boelstorff (2008) on Second Life is an illustration of digital ethnography: “how participant observation works to discover culture through non-elicited, everyday interaction” (p. 72). Boellstorff (2008) argues that the virtual is also real and uses *actual* to denote that virtual anthropologies are also researching the actual. He argues that a virtual world is also a culture where ethnographic fieldwork can take

place. According to him, virtual anthropology should be evaluated in the space of an interaction in which it takes place; in this study, it is the SD digital platform. Hine (2000) suggests that online space is not detached from “real life,” and ethnographers should pursue a sustained and intensive presence and engagement within an online field by concentrating the flow and connectivity in the field (p. 66). Preece & Maloney-Krichmar (2005) discuss digital ethnography as a study of “what people do in online spaces, how they express themselves, what motivates them, how they govern themselves, what attracts people to participate” (para 6).

Furthermore, Jemielniak (2014) studied Wikipedia through a digital ethnography, and he posits that researchers need to conduct extensive fieldwork and additional methods (such as scheduling interviews) to reflect on how “natives” think (p. 193). To be a native in the studied community, an ethnographer needs to be accepted through his/her prolonged presence and participation (Jemielniak, 2014, p. 193).⁴⁷ According to his experience studying Wikipedia and Wikipedians, “being a fully active Wikipedian was quite likely the only way to gain trust and friendship of other Wikipedians” (Jemielniak, 2014, p. 194). According to him, a researcher who is transformed to a native status can address the tensions of posting on Wikipedia (or discussing certain topics within Wikipedia) as there is a steep learning curve of how things have to be done within the platform. That is why, in his research, he conducts participant observation, open-ended

⁴⁷ According to Van Maanen (2011), the interpretive experience is important to explain the sayings and doings of the natives within the researched community to understand the culture's presence, social relations, and problems. Van Maanen (2011) argues that ethnography can be supported by finding key informants and conducting additional participant observation in the field to increase the validity of the research. Participant observation and conducting interviews helps to collect fieldwork notes. In participant observation, ethnographers simply live and spend time participating within the field for at least six months to learn the patterns in the culture and how people behave (Fetterman, 2010): “thick description and verbatim quotations are the most identifiable features of ethnographic field notes, reports, articles and books” (p. 125).

interviews and case studies to overcome the possible challenges. Those challenges might be the ability of users to self-construct their identities, as it is an online platform, relying only on text for communication, access to the site and going native within the platform. It is important to make a brief remark on how Sour Dictionary resembles and differs from Wikipedia logic. Reagle (2011) discusses Wikipedia by referring to it as an argument engine through connecting it to earlier reference works such as the 17th century Encyclopedie or Brittanica. He posits that the idea behind preparing the first French dictionary or such encyclopedias aimed at fixing the language or to serve the tension between conservative and progressive interests on classed and gendered lives in the society. He argues that “we should understand the debate about reference works to be as revealing about the society as the work itself” (Reagle, 2011, p.16). He continues, stating “It's not hard to see Wikipedia as a ‘reordered book’ of reconstituted knowledge” (Reagle, 2011, p. 19).

O’Sullivan (2011) outlines the encyclopedic historical works to point out the visible and invisible links between them in terms of their design as well as the reason why they were built that affords the construction of online hyperlinked encyclopedias such as Wikipedia. He begins by examining Pliny, a Roman public official, and his work on ‘Natural History’ which was prepared by his own research based on tales, superstitions and not-yet-verified facts to challenge official scientific instruction in order to help everyday people. Then, he discusses Vincent de Beauvais and the way he thinks that dictionaries and encyclopedias should mirror the order in society as a reflection of God’s creation, emphasizing the Christian framings. Francis Bacon, on the other hand, thought that knowledge production is a dynamic process, and it should be reflected within

encyclopedias with trees of knowledge. According to O'Sullivan, it was Vannevar Bush and Ted Nelson who made it possible to remove the ordered dictionary and encyclopedia format and helped with the formation of navigation by links (with Bush's Memex and Nelsons hypertext notions) (O'Sullivan, 2011). Sour Dictionary embodies the concept of hyperlinked information within its design yet differs itself from an encyclopedic formation, as it also catalogs daily events by making susers' point of views more visible. Following the above discussion on how to conduct a digital ethnography, I supplemented the research with in-depth Skype interviews with key susers, as well as case studies. But, how does a researcher decide which case studies to investigate during an ethnography? My experiences during the first fieldwork on the platform suggested that *SD is a fluid platform* that is unique in the way the interaction and governance take place.⁴⁸ Susers post on the titles that they just created at the time when that fieldwork was conducted and post on the previous conversations. Their entry-posting practice is recursive in the sense that they refer to the practices and histories on SD when they are participating in the discussions. How do we study *the now*, when the field takes us back and forth in time? How should we study a terrain that is fluid? Even when I started my second fieldwork on January 1st, 2017, I found myself in many conversations, including the following: the initial years on SD, Turkish–Armenian relations through the murder of the Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, the 2011 IP address crisis on SD where more than a hundred susers were on trial (including the founder of the platform) because of alleged insults to Islam,

⁴⁸ This is not to claim that none of the other social platforms are static. Platforms are fluid as they continuously change in relation to design, market, user experiences, culture, and politics. It is to say that SD case provides an important example to show the visibility of this fluidity. Especially because it started as if it was an alternative media, then gradually transformed into a major social media platform, as I will further discuss in the following chapters.

and 2013 Gezi Protests to which users felt a certain kind of belongingness. Also, there were sharp changes in the platform's digital tools (the overall design as well as the addition of a like button, agenda button, and others that will be discussed in Chapter 2) as well as continuities that needed to be addressed (playful participation that Chapters 3–5 address with respect to different milieus). The conduct of ethnography suggests that we study *the now*, but how do we study “now” when user interactions online keep referring to their previous conversations?

In line with the above discussion on addressing the specific fluidity of SD, there are two important layers of the ethnographic method: 1) The participants referred to their earlier SD interactions when they were articulating their presence on SD. After the interview process was completed, their statements provided with important turning points as perceived by the participants to address the changes on SD. 2) Because of its design (platform affordances), my interactions on SD were not always related to the events that happened during the fieldwork. Users might post something that happened years ago for various reasons: to bring the discussion back, to connect the discussion to some other conversation, etc. My posting practices, interactions with the users, and hyperlinks on SD took the research back-and-forth between different time intervals. The fieldwork also verified the turning points that the interview participants mentioned as changes.⁴⁹

According to the above explanation, the (digital) ethnography of SD begins *now*. For this research, it started on January 1st, 2017, and it took the research back and forth between 1999 and the time when this dissertation is written. Using my own SD account, I logged in to SD every day, and I spent 3–5 hours a day online. The default user interface

⁴⁹ They did not specify certain time periods. They explained their interactions, and I analyze the similarities and changes in their interactions across the turning points suggested by the fieldwork.

was different in the second ethnography for the registered users (authors and readers) and for others. Before the change in the interface in 2014, the left frame only showed entries in reverse chronological order (titles with newest entries first). In the second period, non-registered users only see the *agenda* button where SD shows only popular titles on the left. Registered users had the option to choose one of the two settings. I switched between the two views daily to make it further possible to engage diverse titles. I posted entries on popular topics, and for some of them, I received messages (such as details about a phone operation system issue, references for books, requests for further information about some topics I followed such as technology news).

I also took fieldnotes about how susers make sense of each other's styles of arguments. Each day, I took field notes about daily observations and experiences about critical daily interactions. For example, to illustrate the entry-posting practices, I recorded the below entries in the order presented below in the first period. The below entries are from the *sociology* title where susers were defining what sociology is.

Entry 1: In other words, it is the engineering of society. But, people mostly do not appreciate it enough. This is the discipline which most of the intelligence guys and human resources people love.

Entry 2: It is a discipline which is absolutely not something like social engineering. It does not attempt to change people; it observes them.

Entry 3: This is one of the most exciting disciplines. It tries to understand what is going on in society by analyzing everyday lives. It is obviously not social engineering, but it is surely a terrain where those people take their data.

The first suser points out how s/he defines sociology through an engineering perspective.

The other two susers tries to talk with the first suser and attempt to negate what s/he is saying through their own definitions. The second one presents the argument from the side of observing, the other one from the side of understanding. So, what does this mean?

Before posting a new entry, another suser has to read those comments first. If I want to argue in line or in opposition to them, I should include what I want to say in a definition format, reading the initial entries. This is exactly what the second and the third suser did. The internal policies invite the next susers to discuss the earlier entries first which produces an environment of engagement with other people's thoughts. This practice ideally applies to every entry for every title. Next, susers are invited to come up with a different way to relay their arguments to continue the conversation, but at the same time contributing to a larger encyclopedia entry about what sociology is.

I also recorded the three most discussed titles with the entries each day to provide a sense of the discussion spectrum on SD in a Word document. On a given day, I posted entries on popular topics and wrote down how people tried to engage with me. For example, when people accused others of being trolls, I took notes about 1) the patterns of behaviors, 2) who initiated these kinds of discussions and to what end, 3) what those discussions made people talk about, and 4) administrating "problematic" content. For example, to understand trolling, I investigated susers' alleged trolling behaviors through their various posts, names, and other posts of the susers who liked those entries. These connections suggest a trend on their conversation topics toward government propaganda work that is considered as trolling within SD. Each week, I summarized the week's events and interactions as a memo on a Word document.

To support the fieldwork, I conducted in-depth interviews. I arranged one-hour Skype meetings with susers. I recorded the interviews following the relevant IRB protocols. Although I was able to meet with about 100 people on SD virtually, only 47 of them officially participated. Those who did not want to be on the record cited the 2016

post-coup political environment in Turkey. They told me that they were afraid of what can be misunderstood in that climate. Some of my interviewees wanted me to pause the recording during the interview process to further provide information about a specific tension on a topic they found too sensitive to be recorded. A total of 29 of the official interviewees came from the earlier generations on SD who also witnessed the emergent practices between 1999 and 2004. A total of 16 of these were mostly active between 2006 and 2018. Two of the interviewees were new susers who joined the SD in 2017. Among those interviewed, there were online influencers who are very popular on SD, coders who also worked for SD, moderators who helped the administration, trolls (who claim to empower by assuming an identity and posting through it which might be otherwise silenced), and published authors.

In-depth interviews provided additional perspectives to unpack thick descriptions of this online platform. For example, one could see a rise of a group of susers who populated the post-2016 failed-coup climate of right-wing-propaganda in a playful way. There are accounts that follow the geek culture practices created in the early years of SD and imitate their posting logics to disturb conversations as I will further elaborate in Chapter 5. Interviewees provided perspectives on how earlier groupings on SD, especially after the 2013 Gezi Protest, prefigured the way in which trolling turned into problematic information practices.

To analyze my fieldwork notes, and in-depth interviews, I used Atlas.ti software. This software does not compute automatic analysis; it helps to organize the provided qualitative data. Atlas.ti software helps to categorize the fieldwork with relevant codes and helps to record important quotations for each code. I transcribed 47 interviews and

uploaded them to this software. Then, I added all my fieldwork notes to the software, such as Word and pdf documents. Word documents were my daily fieldnotes and memos; pdf documents were recordings of the titles such as the Gezi title that is analyzed in Chapter 4. After proceeding with the Atlas.ti coding schema, I coded 1701 categories and recorded 4006 quotations. Atlas.ti provides a basic analysis that further helps users to explore the relations of the codes with each other. For example, when I coded *activist subjectivity*, it told me how many times I also coded *affect*. This further helped to reduce categories to a manageable size by producing new combined coding categories. For example, the theme *feeling of connectedness* is associated with posting subjective experiences, norms, discussion manners, protocols, and common sensibilities. I came up with these categories as I coded, and Atlas.ti provided me with a networking option telling that these categories are associated with each other. Then, I combined the categories to reflect them together in relation to the literature review of the dissertation.⁵⁰

I should also emphasize that my own involvement in SD provided me with some advantages and challenges. On the one side, I was able to reach to key susers, SD influencers, and the founder @ssg. And, as I already knew how to navigate myself around SD, I was able to start taking fieldnotes on several aspects of SD immediately. Also, my acceptance into some new circles was comparatively easier. On the other hand, as I have been a suser since 2002, I had my own personal views about SD at the beginning of the project, which later turned into analytical investigations. My first ethnography provided me with perspectives and sign-posts about what to trace. It also

⁵⁰ The coding through Atlas.ti is further explained in Chapters 3–5 as I operationalize the notions used in the dissertation in the chapters unpacking the case studies.

made me aware of my own situatedness on SD. That is why I was able to effectively conduct my second ethnography more as a researcher rather than a suser.⁵¹

E. Outline of the Chapters

Chapter 2, “On Understanding How SD Functions: Key Digital Tools, Policies, and Practices,” analyzes in detail the techno-cultural components of SD as well as ownership, and platform governance. This chapter traces the tensions between the susers and administrators through investigating the affordances of SD by analyzing how its design arranges a particular mode of participation. Hyperlinks within SD as well as messages, filters, and internal protocols repurpose SD as a body to act in accordance by transforming by doing, unlearning with the other through care of the self. This chapter also addresses the gradual changes in digital tools and platform governance on SD.

Chapter 3, “The Construction of the Culture of Resistance, Affective Publics and Playful Affinities” introduces the notion of the *culture of resistance* that has been formed on SD through its affordances in relation to socio-political developments in Turkey. Its focus starts with the early years of SD (especially 1999-2004) to trace the formation of the culture of resistance, and how it presents itself during the time when the fieldwork was conducted in 2017. SD has a reputation of resisting *whatever*. This chapter traces the development of cultural norms within SD by also analyzing in-depth interviews with susers. The key components of the logic of culture of resistance are: *the feeling of connectedness, the sensibilities on critiquing, the ethos of opposition, construction of knowledge-power; geek culture; and playful engagement with the definition format*. I argue that susers empower themselves through the logic of culture of resistance.

⁵¹ Conducting two ethnographies also helped to address the technical changes in the platform as I will further elaborate in Chapter 2.

However, the analysis also shows that the culture of resistance has a tech-deterministic, masculine, heteronormative, and discriminatory language. Thus, the chapter also addresses this tension between empowering and debilitating practices through the production of the culture of resistance.

Chapter 4, “The Culture of Resistance and the Gezi Protest: Affective Telepresence and Construction of Activist Subjectivity,” argues that the unlearning momentum created within SD was turned into a form of activism that prefigured the way people react to and define Gezi Events in 2013. Analyzing Gezi Events in relation to SD is important, to point out the peak potentials of the culture of resistance and how to address the tensions between empowering and debilitating practices around people's interactions on the social media platforms. This chapter builds on the previous chapter's discussion on the culture of resistance and further investigates the mechanism that cultivated the reactions towards Gezi Events. I argue that although users were able to unpack the discourses about Gezi with their entries, the activist subjectivity was not able to build ethical actions to move beyond producing mere reactions to the government.

Chapter 5, “Crises of Unlearning: Information Flux and the Construction of Toxic Techno-cultures,” emphasizes the reasons and the ramifications of the platforming developments within SD, such as the introduction of a formal user agreement (2010), switching to paid moderation (2012), removal of the definition-format (~2015), and flexibility in user approval mechanisms (as well as assigning algorithms to proceed with the user approvals in 2016). I argue that the embodiment of playfulness, coupled with platforming developments and post-2016 coup-attempt political climate in Turkey facilitated a continuous information flux on SD. This abundance of information, in

addition to the formation of problematic information practices, lack of clear content moderation, vague governance, and hate speech policies create ambivalence and further blur the truth-seeking possibilities on SD.

Chapter 6, “Concluding Remarks: Construction of Culture of Resistance, and Platform Politics,” discusses what it means to harness the momentum of empowering and/or debilitating inauthenticity for digital platforms. Playful encounters make digital platforms hospitable to form participatory cultures that also make it exploitable by speculation, antagonizing, political propaganda and *trolling* (as perceived by the users). In addition, inherent playfulness in a place of millions of users, political instability, the introduction of digital tools to steer information flow, and lack of ethical content moderation policies contribute to user *inaction*. During such transformations, social media companies position themselves in the middle as platforms, which helps them to convert such information flow traffic into lucrative sources or ad-revenue through questionable data collection practices. Thus, the platforms reproduce hegemonic relations of power through a participatory culture that is continuously redefined by ongoing political and playful affect.

Chapter 2

Understanding How SD Functions: Key Digital Tools, Policies, and Practices

In this chapter, I trace the dynamics between susers and administration by analyzing how digital tools, internal policies, and practices on Sour Dictionary function and render it a platform.⁵² Gillespie (2018) defines platforms as “online sites and services that a) host, organize, and circulate users’ shared content or social interactions for them b) without having produced or commissioned (the bulk of that content) c) built an infrastructure, beneath that circulation of information, for processing data for customer service, advertising and profit ... d) platforms do, and must, moderate the content and activity of users using some logistics of detection” (p. 18-19). I argue that the way digital tools are set in addition to the internal policies of the SD-style posting facilitates a unique form of interaction that is specific to SD. SD creates its own culture and design that set it apart from other mainstream social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

In the following sections, I present the main features of the playful participatory interactions on SD with respect to the actors and the tools. I also present the possible terrains of actions and stakes informed by the affordances of the platform (through its design), socio-political developments, and content moderation. The techno-cultural components that I discuss are: the interface, trending and today buttons, *see: x* hyperlinks, internal messaging, cross-platform integration (with Facebook and Twitter), entries, user agreement, sub-etha (alternative portals within SD), titles, susers, registered readers, *zirve* (or *summitz*: meet-ups), content-moderation, *Sour Things* (a 2016 addition of SD’s own BuzzFeed/Mashable-like platform), and trolling (as a playful techno-cultural component).

⁵² Please see Appendix II for SD Timeline.

Understanding these techno-cultural components helps to provide a perspective on the ongoing battle between susers and admins regarding what SD is. Is it an amateur website on which everybody can post whatever they want? Is it a professional social media platform that competes with Twitter and Facebook? Is it a social network in which susers can build relationships with each other? What does it mean for SD to function in Turkey? What does its function in Turkey mean for its susers? I argue that a specific kind of suser-network is constituted through affective bonds with each other (and each other's experiences) that is facilitated by the format, policies, and the digital and cultural tools of the platform.

The dominant amateur spirit during the very early-years (1999-2002) further facilitated SD-specific cultural rhetoric into suser's everyday interactions on SD. Later in this chapter and throughout the dissertation, I also address how those early values led to contemporary tensions between the susers and the administration. These controversies concerned monetization, professionalization, and top-down administrative decision making processes that altered the way susers interacted on SD (especially coupled with the Turkish socio-political climate on issues of freedom of speech and the authoritarian government structure). Some suser groups cannot appreciate and feel connected to the money-making mechanisms within SD. Thus, they cannot currently (fieldwork period) accept that it is a money-making social media platform. On the other hand, the professionalization of SD as a digital platform was backed up by transformations dictated from above by the owners of the website that ignored the existence of their content producers.⁵³

⁵³ Gillespie (2018) argues that it would be a fantasy for a platform to be completely open, and that fantasy is usually fed with utopian understandings of community and democracy. He argues that, for various

My in-depth interviews and participation on SD throughout my fieldwork suggests that susers expect that the platform administrators should protect them from any governmental action. On the other hand, administrators seem to introduce new digital tools (such as Sour Things) which challenge the momentum of opposition stemming from posting on issues otherwise unquestioned in Turkish culture in early years within the SD. This chapter investigates the main actants that played roles in attaching various meanings to SD within itself.

A. Design and Interface

Sour Dictionary had a famous and unchanged interface from 1999 until 2014. It then went through a major redesign which caused some susers to delete all of their entries in protest and quit SD. In 2013, the SD administration gradually introduced Sour-beta (upgraded design), and susers were able to use the previous interface as an option. In 2014, SD completely switched to the new design. In 2016, the design changed again in a similar top-down fashion. The second design change maintained the difference in the flow of the interface (as I explain below) that was introduced in the first one. Additionally, the most important aspect of the second design change was the introduction of new navigation buttons that arranged emergent practices, such as the (...) button. The new interface in the 2016 design shows only a few sentences of every entry, then reading the rest was made to be optional by clicking (...) button. I address the differences in the design in terms of the interface below. I also investigate how this design change

reasons, platforms need to moderate, so as to attract more people, maintain a balance between opposing groups, and maintain legality. The platforms' argument on neutrality based on their stated position as "merely hosting the content" help them to mask their specific moderation policies, application of algorithms, and promoting the advertised or popular content (Gillespie, 2018, p. 6).

facilitated the interactions on SD, and what we can learn from the conversations around the design changes.

Image 1 in Appendix III shows what an SD reader saw on a random day before the 2014 design change. The Left frame lists all the recent titles that susers post the entries. When you click on one of the titles on the left, you can read the entries inside it on the right frame. On the left frame, there is a vertical button called “hayvan ara” (i.e., work-like-a-dog-to-find-it application). If you are a suser, before posting an entry about something, you have to do a search using this button. If you find a similar title to the one you wanted to create, then you should add your entry into that title. On its default mode, the frame on the left lists the recent titles on top. This design used to help susers catch-up with the most-recent content on SD. This design also allowed users to create their interface themes which they used to personalize the way they used SD and shared it with others.

There are 12 navigation buttons on the top, and there is one vertical navigation button on the left frame. On the top, these are *random*, *someday*, *asl*, *statistics*, *log in*, *new*, *contact*; on the second row there are *today*, *yesterday*, *mix-it-up*, *marvelous*, *bring*, *search* buttons. My fieldwork suggests that, in the previous design, after a suser logged in, they interacted with mostly the *today* button, which brought the latest titles first on the left frame. Although users could choose to see the left frame with the *yesterday* button for yesterday's title or the *marvelous* button for mostly liked titles and entries, the dominant usage was the default mode, involving clicking *today* and interacting with the most recent titles or creating new titles continuously on the left frame.

SD transformed the way it looked in 2014 and subsequently in 2016.⁵⁴ In the 2016 design, susers mostly have similar buttons to the original design as well as new buttons with added algorithmic values. For example, from the left, there is *today*, *top* (agenda), *today in history*, *buddy*⁵⁵ (follow), *latest*, *draft*, *rookies* buttons and some channels with hashtags: *sports*, *relationship*, *politics*, *travel*, *automotive*, *TV*, *survey*, *science*, *literature*, *education*, *sour dictionary*, *news*, *aviation*, *magazine*, *fashion*, *motorcycle*, *music*. The platform now offers users more ways to engage with the website and engage with others. The algorithm categorizes the titles on the left with the hashtags mentioned above, so susers do not post under categories; their posts are categorized after they post their entries. Susers do not follow SD titles by only using the today button as they used to do with the previous design. Susers mostly use *agenda* or their specified filtered-channels to personalize the way that they follow SD. The new design also enables susers to block people that they don't want to engage. The introduction of filters and algorithmic-topic-indexing enabled users to escape from the information overload. It also suggests that the admins are confirming that it is harder to find information on SD, with its millions of entries. SD also began to approve susers with an automated process that determines appropriate entries and approves susers in bulk. Although they were very proud to announce such an automated system, the introduction of this screening process shows

⁵⁴ Please see Image 2 in Appendix III for 2014 design change and Image 3 for 2016 design change. I obtained the screenshot of the 2014 design from one of the users who posted under the relevant title on SD: Sour Dictionary Beta (in Turkish original: eski sozluk beta). Here, I mainly focus on the differences between the original design and the 2016 design, as the 2016 design informs the suser interactions during the fieldwork period. Throughout the dissertation, I include aspects of the 2014 design if it is relevant to the discussion. The main difference between the 2014 and 2016 design is the placement of the "agenda" button and making it the default way of navigating SD with the 2016 design. In addition, SD replaced its logo with the 2016 design change in line with the professionalization efforts of the administration.

⁵⁵ The *buddy* (add to friends) button turned into the *follow* button on February 9, 2018.

that they are more interested in numbers than the material being discussed. The new design, in addition to the launch of *Sour Things*, helped them to market SD aggressively. When users show their discontent about SD administrative decision-making processes, their argument is based on how admins are dictating a specific use for the users. The major design changes in 2014 and 2016 are important examples of how SD introduced changes to the users. For example, in 2014, they introduced the new design and let users know that they could continue to use the old design with a *go back to antique* button. After the grace period, SD admins removed this button. However, they also did not announce that there would be a grace period. According to my conversations with former SD coders, it was a necessary change for three reasons: 1) The way the code was built in the first place could not sustain the population of users and the number of entries on SD, as it was based on a tree-like coding system with long codes. When there are too many trees in the code to call, it takes time; 2) They implicitly felt forced to change the code in Google. In the Google Search rankings, SD was gradually shown in the latter pages. This is a practice Google imposes on old websites as it necessitates too much power to retrieve and index the coding schema. Google punishes it if the website is too slow to load/index. 3) The old look was not good for the advertisers. Their social media agency also did not like the *go-back-to-antique* button.

SD needed to be compatible with Google, Facebook, and Twitter, as it uses them to further infiltrate social networks to make itself more visible. On interoperability, Google Search began punishing SD by pushing its page rank down because of its eclectic coding system. A former coder who worked on SD explained this situation. As Google is a search engine, it continuously indexes web pages so that it knows where to find a

correspondence for keywords. SD used to have too many links to be indexed, as it has many different titles. Google Search algorithms require web pages to load fast so that Google works best, and it penalizes the slow ones. After observing that the old design was being penalized by Google, @ssg directed the coder theme to work on a solution to make the infrastructure compatible with Google algorithms. The situation regarding interoperability suggest that SD admins gradually worked on the platform, so it *feels* like one of the major social media platforms.

B. Titles, Entries, and Susers

People can only post on SD if they are susers. As of 2005, registered users can have all the SD privileges (messaging, liking, disliking, attending meet-ups, etc.) except posting. As SD aimed to increase its user size and popularity, this feature brought a layer of easy monitoring to how many people are actively following SD. Registered user function is also a gateway activity by allowing users to spend time on SD without posting. The next step is to enter ten entries, which are reviewed by moderators/administrators, and you are accepted as long as you follow the format/policies.

When you are about to post an entry, you should ensure that it is a definition or it provides an example of the definition previously posted. For example, under the title *dominos*, there is an entry which complains about the way the company works. A suser was frustrated by the delivery which took more than 40 minutes even though he lived only half a mile from the pizza store. He tried to resolve it with the manager, but they couldn't come to a solution. In his entry, he relays his dissatisfaction and criticizes the delivery person and the local branch manager. Another suser read the entry and

strategized a way to criticize the previous suser's point of view by posting: "A pizza place in which the customers of it are beginning to be boring because of the complaints about 30-mins rule (see: running after small benefits⁵⁶)". Therefore, in the latter entry, the suser completely disagrees with the attitude of the previous entry, then criticizes his/her behavior, within the rules of the platform. Furthermore, it is a definition, it does not refer to the previous entries (the entry itself means something, without any links to another entry) and it is not a forum-like discussion (where you post a direct response). The following entry is also in a similar vein: "a pizza place where some fat-ass people order for the sake of growing their asses a little more and then complain about the delivery guys who are insufficiently paid." Although the topic is a pizza company, reading these three entries provides us with ways to engage with the realities of low-paid jobs and how fast-food chains work.

There have never been personalized user-profiles on SD. At the time of writing, when you click on a suser's name, you see the number of entries they posted, the last time they posted, and their karma. You also see a random entry among the ones they posted and their entries from newest to latest. Image 4 in Appendix III shows an example of how a suser's logs can be seen by all susers. This is a screenshot of the @ssg info page (Sedat Kapanaoglu), the founder of the platform. As shown at the top, his karma is currently 537, which is calculated by the likes and dislikes his entries received. According to his karma point, he is assigned an automated karma status that is given as humor. His karma

⁵⁶ This is another feature on SD that is discussed further in the following sections. The initial rule was that if the entry you are posting necessitates a link to another entry or a title, susers are invited to link their entry with that title or entry via a *see: x* format. This feature was later repurposed and started to be used as an amplification of the point in the entry, as we can see from the Dominos example.

status is “mulayim ama sempatik” which translates as “non-violent but still charming.”⁵⁷ He is also one of the susers who has additional tags such as *azimli* (ambitious – for those who posted an extraordinary number of entries) and *tasnifci* (classifier – for those who classified titles/entries heavily as a moderator). Real names of some susers are known, and @ssg is one of them. For those susers (and for those who requested) your Tweet-feed can also be seen on your "profile." On the top right, there are suser's entries that have been chosen to be displayed on SD's parallel platform *Eksi Seyler (Sour Things)*, which is explained in the next sub-section.

In addition to the logs, there are also titles which are susers' names. For example, when you type *ssg* on Sour Dictionary, you see it as a regular title, and you also see the entries under that title that are written for that suser. Under the *ssg* title, there are 1300 written entries that "define" what *ssg* is. They are comments of the susers about *ssg* and who he is. Interview participants reported that checking a suser's nickname titles and ensuring that a popular suser posted something good in there is another way to authenticate their status on SD. According to them, this is a creative way of identifying trolling and mostly unwelcomed trolling behaviors. However, one could argue that this also increases the segregation and distrust of others if your network is not familiar with them. You might not be a troll on SD, but you might be labeled as one, especially if you weren't able to figure out the posting mechanisms. The point on trust and labelling as a troll is further explained in Chapter 5.

⁵⁷ Although *mulayim* translates as non-violent, it is culturally used as a kind of insult for those who do not speak for themselves and accept the outcomes. According to one suser, *Friends* character *Ross Geller* might be a good example to define what *mulayim ama sempatik* means. It is also an expression that is also hard to pinpoint in Turkish.

There also used to be suser *generations* (displayed in the susers' info screens, as explained above) which were discontinued in 2012. Those susers who registered as the first susers in 1999 are called *first-generation susers*. The first three (and, for some susers, the first four) generations are the framework-generations that set the stage for what SD is as I will further elaborate within the geek culture practices in Chapter 3.⁵⁸ When fourth-generation susers arrived in 2002, they were mostly criticized for not understanding the SD culture very well. However, the significantly harsh criticisms began after the fourth generation susers and still occur for the newest generation after each suser-approval process on SD. SD admins dropped categorizing susers with their generations after the fourteenth generation in 2012 (there was therefore almost a new generation every year). Although the labels were removed, my interview participants' conversations suggest that they continued to practice labeling newcomers. The continuation of this practice shows that susers feel they are more "native" than the others who have just arrived, and nostalgic of the days without the constant moderation and corporatization of SD.

To address the generation conflicts on SD, I should address the dynamics within the first generation susers. They were people within the inner circle of @ssg and his close friends. These people were mostly coders, designers, and engineers. They had the means to access the Internet in the early 1990s. The core group was even active online through BBS networks (Bulletin Board Systems) even before the introduction of the Internet in Turkey. @ssg used to belong to the popular HitNet BBS in Turkey and copied some styles of interaction from there. They used to post mostly about solutions to technology

⁵⁸ I am also a fourth-generation suser, and I have been active on SD since 2002.

problems, but there was also room for amusement when they posted their announcements as if they lived in ancient times or as if they were religious leaders. As that generation was already part of a network of geeks, the foundation of SD is based on those geek culture adventures. Knowing and sharing *stuff* was an essential aspect of that culture, which carried to the SD environment. They used to pour their knowledge of their specialties of geekiness onto SD: techy susers started to post about coding and software, sci-fi users started to post about comics and movies, literature users started to post about books, philosophy users started to post about Greek philosophers, etc. It eventually turned into a perspective-taking game where geeks from different backgrounds were introduced into other geeky worlds where they felt free to discuss their opinions. The shareability of experiences and seemingly non-judgmental culture prompted other new susers to share their expertise on SD. This created a momentum that allowed people to talk about everything as if they were officially making a collective analysis of an issue. This is not to say that everyone on SD was talking about one fixed issue at a certain time, but rather to say that the way that thoughts were indexed by titles provided everyone with enough space to engage in the ongoing dialogues guided by the digital tools. New generations on SD aimed to copy that momentum of geekiness and carry it further. Every suser I interviewed has unique expertise on one issue that separates them from the others *except the new users*, especially after the 2014 design change. Their belonging to SD stems from the myth of engagement that was once available on SD.

Titles are SD's way of naming topics for discussion. As SD is based on a dictionary-like format, each title was originally something definable. When susers want to edit their original post, they have a practice of adding the word "edit" on their posts as

a courtesy to let people know that they edited, and they state reasons for the edit. This practice suggests that the user did not change his mind but edited a portion of the entry under the *supervision* of other users.

Image 5 in Appendix III shows one of the most liked entries in 2015. The title is an observation about life in general: "per kg hazelnut is more expensive than per kg of mercedes." The entry calculates and compares the two:

"a fact I just realized. The msrp of a Mercedes 180 is 84800 Turkish Liras, and it weighs 1370kg. So, per kg is $84300/1370 = 61.89$ Turkish Liras.
Per kg of hazelnut is = 70 TL.
You really wonder sometimes"

Apart from the absurdity of this apparent comparison, one of the unexplained parts of this entry is that it uses former Turkish President Abdullah Gul's catchphrase "You really wonder sometimes"—a phrase he used when he wanted a neutral statement about certain issues. It also points out the significant rise in hazelnut prices, which is taken up by most of the users in the following entries. Some users even took the hazelnut producers' own point of view by stating that nobody is doing anything about the price gauging. This entry also points out the problematic layers of taxation on imported cars, which has seen car prices tripled in Turkey.

During the time when this dissertation was written, titles and entries gradually became politically loaded, in terms of political party propaganda, at the expense of ordinary musings, observations, and humor. This dissertation uses the notion of *politicized* (politically loaded) to describe how people included their affinities to political parties in their posts, and how it produced further segregation across SD. This is different to how SD culture (especially between 1999-2012) politicized any issue to question the way it is culturally constructed (in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, nationalism). The

former refers to party politics, and the second refers to a form of empowerment through contextualization (almost in parallel with cultural studies; the understanding of everything is political). I elaborate on this change further in Chapter 5, but I provide a brief example below.

In the example shown in Image 6 in Appendix III, the title is "right of education in Kurdish." Briefly, the first entry in the title shown in the screenshot image suggests that there is a part of the language reform that allows Kurdish as a language in the Turkish education system. Even though the suser supports the Kurdish point of view, she/he adds a note: "I am not a PKK supporter," suggesting that she/he is defending the language rights but not the terrorist status of PKK in Turkey. The next entry is just one sentence, stating nothing about the point but rather providing a link to a slang proverb, which translates as "we f..ked all the birds but the white stork" suggesting that it is absurd to talk about peace as if we succeeded in anything else in any category. The 216 favs (favorites) this received also suggests the racist inclination of the recent reading patterns of the susers. The third entry is an entry that briefly suggests there is no such thing, by posting "not a right. Are you going to legitimize a group's language that has only brought trouble to this country?" The relaxation of the definition-format and the later relaxation of rigorous content-moderation on SD, along with the new aggressive marketing discourse of the platform, shows that they are interested in "clicks" rather than a meaningful conversation. This latter stance is further explored in Chapter 5.

C. Trending

SD wants its susers to follow the platform by making the agenda button default, which filters and shows trending titles first. When people log in as susers, they have two

default options to navigate through daily titles. On the top-left side of the website, these two options are the *today* button and the *agenda (top hits)* button. Every title on the left shows the number of entries that are posted on that day. When people click on the agenda button, they see titles that have the most entries that day, shown by the number of entries next to the titles. The agenda button filters the titles by the number of entries and by the time it is posted. Between 2012 -2017, there was also a *debe* button, which is short for *dunun en begenilen entryleri* (i.e., yesterday's most liked entries) which was introduced in March 2012 and removed on January 2017. *debe* was extremely popular, and some susers stated that they followed SD through that button. However, it enabled a meme culture that only inserted empty *see: x* buttons under the titles with word-plays to make it to the debe list. This practice diminished the originality and quality of the earlier entries on the titles.

Image 7 in Appendix III shows how the agenda button filters daily titles. Mostly posted titles are marked with the number of entries, such as 321 entries and 203 entries for Image 7. Newly emerging popular entries are also there with their entry numbers, such as 31 and 22. The title with the 321 entries is "disrespect to the teacher at the tech high school." The conversation refers to the news of how students mocked their teacher by disrupting his class in multiple ways and recorded it at a high school. This trending title surfaced on February 10th, 2018, and it was still shown as trending at the time this image was taken (February 12, 2018). On the other hand, a new trending title is also shown here that surfaced on the next day (February 11th), which is "February 11 Soccer Game between Medipol Basaksehir and Fenerbahce (116)."

There are two points to emphasize regarding how this trending filter works: 1) In a platform that has many titles and users, this function helps users to navigate through what is considered as popular at the point when they log in to the website; and 2) This filtering facilitates more superficial dialogues between users, as many of them began to post emotional opinions after a certain number of entries. This latter point is further evaluated in Chapter 5 on the intersection of changes on SD and the socio-political climate in Turkey. I also argue that this latter practice rather facilitates affective engagement, in which users share only short reactions (sometimes with insults) on the issue discussed. In Chapter 5, I also discuss how most of the interview participants noted that, at the time of the fieldwork, they do not read everything that is posted on SD, in contrast to their previous practice. Reading all the entries in a title used to be considered important before preparing your post. However, it is now considered impractical to do, considering the growing number of entries under vague governance policies on SD at the time of writing. As is further explored in Chapter 5, this situation creates a rupture that alienates long-time SD users from using SD, opening up more space for newcomers to hijack the culture of resistance that is constituted within the SD.

D. The *see: x* button

The *see: x* button (in Turkish: *bkz*) feature is one of the earliest features of the SD. It follows an online-encyclopedia logic that helps users hyperlink contents so that readers can learn more about any related issues about the topic that the entry discusses. Image 8 in Appendix III shows an example from the *coca cola* title as one of the main ways it is used:

"A drink which I feel like I have to drink every day even though I know it is something like acidic, blackish and even cooled and watered-down molasses; especially a drink of adorability in its glass form. (bkz: lipton ice tea lemon)"

The suser here wants users to know that he/she is providing examples with this *see: x* button. This is the most important tool on SD that links entries in titles to other entries in other titles. As providing a *see: x* link is highly popular on SD, this tool enables susers to create sites of hyperlinks. In the interviews, susers pointed out that they used to log in to SD and get lost in the information-hyperlinks by clicking on the *see: x* buttons. When susers do that, they go to another title and read more entries there. They also click on another *see: x* on another entry, and read more entries on that title there.

Gradually, over time on SD, especially after the new design change, new susers created another usage for the *see: x*. They turned some phrases into mottos and added them as *see: x* when reacting to a title. One of the best examples is (*bkz: okumadim kardes durumumuz yoktu*) which means (*see: I couldn't attend school, we were poor*) but actually means "you've posted extraordinarily long, and I am not going to read it." This is a word-play on some Turkish words and common sense phrases. This phrase is usually used when a drop-out or a person with no means for official education defend themselves by positioning their social status against others.⁵⁹ This specific *see: x* is used whenever the previous entry is very long, and is mostly found to be irrelevant to the title at hand, as a humorous readjustment of the conversation in order to render it something else.

Other popular selected similar usage of *see: x* is as follows: (*bkz: tabi lan manyak misin?*) (*see: sure, are you silly c'mon?*); (*bkz: eyyorlamam bu kadar*)(*see: mic drop*). The latter

⁵⁹ "Attending a school" is "reading" in Turkish language and "being poor" is presented as if it is something to be ashamed of and cannot be enunciated as such in public. You would instead say "durumumuz" which translates as "our situation" but reads as "financial means" in which the former attributes the problems to the context rather than personality.

is actually used when a suser used the original entry to teach a lesson about that topic to the original author of the entry; and (*bkz: salak yemin ederim gerizekali bu cocuk ya*) (*see: idiot I swear this kid is retarded*). This *see: x* is a popular phrase from a viral video in 2010. It started on YouTube and was picked up by the susers as a *see: x* style meme. In the video, a working-class teenager aims to take a video of himself just posing, and his mother can't understand what is going on and curses immediately (susers are using this phrase as a textual meme to render what's been posted before as unnecessary).

The various emergent usages of this button show that even if a particular format and use is enforced, susers create new ways to include it in the SD vernacular. Susers also use *see: x* as a proxy to circumvent the writing policies to relay an instantaneous viewpoint. This usage shows that even though there are no images on SD, susers were able to create "memes" whereby they had already pictured the image in their minds by sharing the repurposed *see: x* hyperlinks.

E. User Agreement

Until October 10, 2010, there was a general regulation/disclaimer as a user agreement on SD. It was at the bottom of the website, and it used to say:

Nothing written on this website is correct. It might be legally problematic if you try to be a suser under 18 years old (what the hell are you doing here if you are younger, drop the internet and go out, travel and have someone travel with you). By posting here, susers are assumed to transfer copyrights to Michael Jackson. Those who copy, paste and send what's been written here without citation, to their friends with topics such as "fw: alternative Turkish astronaut and Houston dialogues! Veryyy funnyyy" are shabby, roundabout, hincal and uluc⁶⁰. Suser identities are protected except when needed by law. It is just maybe admins can browse them a little with some "important" reasons until they could eventually find out that suser is "unfortunately a man." If someone knocks on our door some

⁶⁰ Hincal Uluc is a Turkish journalist who is disliked by the SD population as he is considered to be a shallow person on SD. He has stated numerous times that he is disgusted by SD, and that people shouldn't have such right to replies.

day and asks "who are these susers," we can just say "just a sec, in the shower now!" and escape from the kitchen window.

Although there have been many legal issues, the above statement was the closest statement to a user agreement until 2010. It restates general outlines about how they cannot be held responsible for everybody's actions. It reminds the user of three important issues: copyright, citation, and legal concerns. This statement aims to short-cut the necessity of a longer user agreement by simply stating that "nothing written on this website is correct" which directly contradicts the SD motto "sacred source of knowledge" on its face value. However, "sacred source of knowledge" is also another ironic way for the admins to render the website a one-stop-shop for everything, using the language of religious discourse by inserting the word "sacred". The language is supposed to be funny – and for most of the susers, it was funny. It was written using the sense of humor that is generated on SD.⁶¹ However, this statement has been dropped and replaced by a very complicated, deliberately vague and longer user agreement, with legal terms that are unclear to the susers. Below is a section from the updated user agreement.⁶²

Sour Dictionary belongs to Sour Technology and Information Company (Eksi Teknoloji) and is a service provider for the content of the registered users. Following are the rules and other laws that are going to be applied when you are registered to the Sour Dictionary.

Your content must obey the law and the Sour Dictionary rules. As there is no moderation to detect content prior to their publication, you are responsible for what you create, please be sure to follow the law when you are posting. When your post is published, your legal responsibilities begin; even if your post is deleted by you or after a complaint, etc. you will still be responsible for it.

⁶¹ In Chapter 5, I elaborate how the early-years SD geek culture practices and humor are hijacked by the trolling accounts to disrupt empowering potentials.

⁶² <https://eksisozluk.com/eksi-sozluk-kullanici-sozlesmesi--2602660>. The above excerpt from the new user agreement is translated by myself. A formal translation might necessitate legal advice on the correspondence of law terms to American legal setting. This translation is presented only to support the differences in the use of language, and the introduction of formal discourses in the user agreement.

Your information could be shared with legal authorities when required by the law. According to the current bylaws, the registered user's IPs are recorded for 12-months. This user agreement can be changed without an announcement. We advise you to check the agreement text frequently as the publication of the updates will mean the changes are approved by the users.

Under any disagreement that may arise through relational aspects of this contract, Sour Dictionary records (e-mail, internet traffic information, logs, etc.) can be official evidence under the Turkish law, and you agree that this article of the contract can also be processed as a contract of evidence.

The new user agreement was introduced on October 10, 2010 and updated on January 26, 2016. It mentions legal terms, user responsibilities, content-removal terms, security disclaimer, privacy, and copyright. For example, there is a statement on copyright which states that although susers have the copyright of their content, SD has the right to copy, repurpose, and use the content for further publication purposes. Regarding content-moderation, it states that with or without consultation, an entry can be partially removed, or completely removed when it is found necessary, which might also result in the removal of a suser account. It also states that susers should be aware of the "Sour Dictionary rules", which is cited as "Sour Dictionary rules" within the rules itself that does not clarify the nature of the rules. By creating a deliberate vagueness through the new user agreement, admins exercise full control over user content.

Comparing these two user agreements shows the transformation of the SD governance within itself. The amateur spirit that makes fun of everything, even in the official user agreement, was turned into a professionalized environment that solidified the “platform” status of SD. It was able to rise above the content producers and declared itself a “neutral zone”, hiding behind the legal jargon that cannot be unpacked by the everyday suser. This shows the other aspect of what SD is, through the lenses of admins compared to the lenses of its susers. Recently, emerging SD policies have been making

long-timers leave, as further explained in the last section of this chapter. The exodus creates new spaces for the redistribution of power. In the emergent SD governance mechanisms, users have no control over their content.

F. Messaging

There is an internal messaging system on Sour Dictionary. The immediate two benefits of messaging are 1) to extend networking among the people you feel close to when reading their entries 2) to build dialogues in the background that do not conform with SD's internal posting-policies. When you message a user, the message button on your account is highlighted with a green color. In SD, messaging is called *greening*. When a user posts an entry and expects people to return to him as private messages, that user usually writes a phrase such as "if you really think you know more about this, please green me," as way of signalling the need for help.

There is also one more aspect that is not as novel as the messaging service intended to be. Gradually, over the years, the messaging service has been used to curse people. When a user reads an entry that she/he disagrees with, she/he sends a disrespectful message to let the owner of the entry know of his/her discontent. Interviewees reported that this harsh and mostly non-constructive criticism could be seen under some entries on SD. For example, a user posts a controversial entry on a title. Then, a couple of hours later, that user edits the entry (in which the editing date and time are visible to everyone) and she/he then points out the curse messages she/he received because of that entry.

G. Sub-etha

This is a hub of social networks under the SD platform. The application is named after a concept in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams. It is *sub-etha sens-o-matic*, and, according to the book, it allows hitchhiking between spaceships in space as it is a network of signals. Here are the current sub-networks which function on sub-etha: *soursummitz* (meet-up network), *eksi duyuru* (announcements network), *sour berry* (online radio), *eksi anket* (online surveys), *zekiz* (susers' photo collections), *eksi sozluk birinci pazar ligi* (sports platform), and *hangberry* (a multiplayer version of the game hangman). After the design change in 2015, the sub-etha button was moved to the bottom of the interface as a small button (which used to be at the top). My fieldwork suggests that it is not as popular as it used to be during the 1999-2008 period. My fieldwork suggests that susers mostly follow, at the time of writing, *sour summitz* and *sour berry*. Below, I briefly explain why they were important for the construction of early-years geek culture practices which I further elaborate on in Chapter 3.

Two important sites of interactions here were *sour summitz* and *sour berry*.⁶³ *Sour Summitz* is a portal where susers can organize meet-ups through various categories such as listening to a musician meet-up, binge-watching a movie-trilogy meet up, just hanging out meet-up, meeting with a celebrity meet-up, etc. According to the interviews, this process was different from meeting people online. When you met someone in a *summitz*, you know them by their nicknames. When you saw the nicknames, you recognized their

⁶³ The rest of the buttons are not omitted from the research. However, during my fieldwork or throughout the interview process, I did not observe any interactions that were directly related with the rest of the buttons here. From my own susership, I am mostly familiar with the announcements network, where people used to treat it as a forum to ask questions to each other (which was a practice that was frowned upon during the 1999-2012 period). However, as the post-2016 SD allows any kind of interactions and titles, the need for such sub-networks is gradually diminishing.

entries and the issues discussed on SD. It used to immediately build an intimacy, as if you already knew their personality. Summitz strengthened the way susers thought about each other and thought about SD at large. It connected them as well as distanced them from the world outside of the SD, creating micro-elite groups on the relevant topic of that specific summitz. As for Sour Berry, it is SD-specific online radio. DJs are the susers. Susers log-in to *sour berry* to follow their channels of likes and create an alternative online music scene where they share music as they want, without ads, specific programming, and top 40 formats.

These built-in hanging-out features enabled people to assign the legitimacy and authenticity of the owners of the entries. Participants stated that this was how they managed the growing content on SD, where they cannot be sure whether something is accurate or simply trolling. However, when you added that person you met in a meet-up to your buddy list on SD, it provided you with an additional filter. If you wanted, you could only follow your buddies on SD that you authenticated yourself. However, meet-ups also facilitated a specific kind of elitism as it brought similar people together and distanced people who did not know anyone. The participants were aware of how this could be seen as elitism, but they were okay with it. This last stance is further elaborated on in Chapter 3.

H. Professionalization of the Amateur Spirit

When SD was established on February 15, 1999, there was no revenue stream. Sedat Kapanoglu had to pay for the maintenance costs of the server himself out of pocket. The server was also a used and donated server from another suser's workplace. As SD grew, he wanted to turn this into an opportunity to earn money and dedicate himself full-

time to SD by introducing ads. He first tried Amazon ads in 2001, which were not able to generate enough money to keep SD as his only focus. With the help of a user-friend in 2003, the first advertisement was for Ford, which he began to apply as a business model: renting space on SD for advertising. His first business partner was also that same friend from 2003. In 2004, they added banner and SD-themes for advertising purposes. Creating themes for personalized SD-viewing was a game-changer. It also allowed users to create their own themes such as Coca-Cola, South Park, the Simpsons, etc. When you select the theme, it converts the website to the designed theme.

SD started to work with an advertising agency in 2005 and continued a marketing space for ads through that agency until 2010. In 2005, @ssg also met with Basak Purut, the current owner (at the time of writing) and previous partner of SD, while he was searching for a law advisor because of a possible lawsuit. Although it is hard to pinpoint the turning point to a more professionalized SD, it started more or less around 2004 and solidified when Purut established *Eksi Technology and Informatics Limited Corporation* (3/16/2004). According to public records, there are two branches: one has been in Istanbul since 2004, and one has been in Palo Alto, CA since 2013. There is no mention of the Palo Alto branch on public announcements and on SD titles/entries.⁶⁴

SD established their own agency in 2011 named Social IQ; and managed all ads and other promotions through this agency. This initiative is based on the idea that corporations can open accounts on SD with their names and promote their products as if

⁶⁴ The first time the Palo Alto office is officially mentioned was in January, 2019. SD introduced a new ask-me-anything format, and one of the guests was SD's former CEO and founder @ssg. In those conversations, he mentioned the Palo Alto office, and SD's parallel works in that office. @ssg told me during our interview that they have been working on research projects in Palo Alto since 2013. He added that they have been also working on creating a new social media platform which will target global audiences rather than specifically targeting Turkey.

they are susers. According to @ssg, these accounts cannot post regular entries, and they can only post to correct misinformation about their products and reply to customer issues. According to the public records, Basak Purut has been the CEO of the company since May 5, 2015. At the time of writing, Eksi Office has three departments: Eksi Technology, Law, and Administration (paid moderation). Especially with the new design change in 2015, they are pushing to generate more posts. This resulted in the removal of the definition format rule and the adding of the *fav* button in addition to the likes and dislikes buttons. With the removal of the existing posting rule, SD's suser practices dramatically changed, which alienated some key susers and their circles.⁶⁵ Introducing the *fav* button made "rookies" actions on SD more visible. When an entry is posted about an ongoing political issue, there might be five favs from susers and hundreds of favs from rookies that can make that title and entry more visible thanks to the agenda/popular button. Although fav was initially introduced to favorite an entry so that you could follow that topic later, it is now used as a popularity sign as if it is a *like* button. As an entry can be *faved* by waiting-to-be approved rookies, it also means that the SD agenda can be set by the people who are not officially approved to post entries.

I. Content Moderation

I trace content moderation both from the admin and susers' points of view, emphasizing the latter through discussing susers' "ongoing negotiation with the platform – sometimes a negotiation with the interface, sometimes a negotiation with the company itself, and sometimes a public reckoning about our shared values" (Gillespie, 2018, p. 142). Architectural regulations through codes, interface, moderation, and internal policies

⁶⁵ Chapter 5 provides detailed explanations on how the design changes along with the socio-political developments in Turkey altered the ways people interact on SD.

are hard to call into question as they are invisible to the users (Gillespie, 2018). SD's initial content moderation runs parallel to what Gillespie (2018) observes for early-moderation across social media platforms in general "fueled with naïve optimism, a pervasive faith in technology, and single-minded entrepreneurial zeal" (p. 40). Platforms connect people, host, and organize the content with their choices through content moderation which makes those choices the commodity as they help build the user base. When platforms start to introduce trending/popular categories, tags, profiles, doing anything other than listing comments in reverse chronological order, they constitute that content (Gillespie, 2018).

Following Gillespie (2018) on the importance of content moderation, in order to effectively address the way content moderation functions on SD, I first discuss how @ssg sees content moderation through my interview with him. I then outline the developments on content moderation using my fieldwork and participation. I show that the content moderation is managed mostly as a need-based system, where there are no prior decision-making processes and decisions are made when a "need" for intervention occurs.

According to my conversations with @ssg, there were a variety of intersecting developments that paved the way for him to build SD. A Bulletin Board System community in Turkey, HitNET, was governed through a humorous content moderation where they aimed to engage people across topics. On this BBS community, he used to post in an encyclopedia format by using humor as if that text was part of a larger encyclopedia. In our interview, he stated that he was thinking about *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams, creating "a knowledge base where everyone in the universe can edit the information." On SD, there was no username at first. A user was

posting curses about one of the other user's girlfriend, and @ssg introduced login credentials (username and password). Then, somebody else exploited the website by posting random entries. In order to prevent this from happening, @ssg introduced entry-deletion and kicking-out-susers features. In 2002, with a small volunteer moderator group, they introduced the signature definition-format. @ssg states that in 2002 they thought:

This site needs to be a knowledge-base, then the entries should inform us about something, and we need to find ways to measure it objectively, so, the entries should be definitions.

Around the same time, they introduced *snitching* so that experienced susers can "snitch" entries that do not comply with the format. Then, because of the lawsuits following criticism entries (especially with popular media celebrities), he realized that he needed lawyers. A group of volunteer lawyers on SD helped him. @ssg states that he already thought volunteer moderation was problematic as they did not report to anyone and there was no mechanism that penalized "bad moderation." @ssg argues that the ideal moderation would be a level where there is no need for moderation and everybody regulates themselves. @ssg states:

For example, social media partially help people fulfill this premise, you see the content that you want to see, and you don't see what you don't want to see. Twitter, for instance. You only see what you don't follow only if it is brought to your attention by the people you follow.

Although his points do not address the overall problematic information practices on platforms, he prefers to proceed with individualized solutions. In this regard, they introduced buddy list (friends or favorite susers) and banning a suser/title to help users choose the entries they want to follow. In addition, since 2015, they have been working on building an algorithm which functions through big data processes to analyze the

entries and use that information to approve/decline new susers. The algorithm processes contain a continuous analysis of content length, word frequency, words with negative connotations, and words that are used by people who were not previously approved. As of the time of writing, there is no volunteer moderation on SD. Moderation uses an account named *@eksi sozluk* and has been posting announcements and individualized moderation messages using this account since 2012. This is a major change from the previous practice. Before professionalization of the moderation, there were 12 volunteer moderators. Whenever there needed to be a change in the newly opened title or a problematic entry (that does not conform to the format or the policies of the SD platform), one of these 12 moderators (susers knew their nicknames, but not real identities) used to take down the content, rephrase the title or “kick-out” (i.e. *ucurmak*) or suspend the suser for not meeting the requirements. Although a similar practice continues on SD, since 2012, susers only see the *eksi sozluk* suser-administrator account (paid moderation, a group of people) making the changes and sending the messages about content-removal or warnings. One prior highly-ranked administrator explained in interview that this is how they managed to control discontent toward moderation and administration. When susers don’t know who takes down their content, they have no one to direct their complaints and anger to; the issue calms down on its own. This practice shows how adjusting small technological controls can enforce user practices.

@ssg was the first moderator, as the founder of the website, and his close friends helped him along the way. The first volunteer-moderator outside of his close friends was *armonipolisi* in 2004, a highly respected suser on SD. Individually assigned moderator-ship turned into a group-moderation with the 12 moderators until 2012. In that year a

significant event, known as the Webrazzi incident, led to a mass resignation. Webrazzi is a professionalized technology blog, and the current owner of the SD (Basak Burut) has shares in it. According to the susers, the Webrazzi incident is a recent addition to the ongoing issue of top-down control on SD. On August 8, 2012, a suser posted an entry that criticized the way Webrazzi works. The SD law team took down the entry with the following reason: "this post is taken down as it may jeopardize the company's commercial status." According to some susers, this was the application of a rumor that had been on SD's agenda for a very long time. All the moderators issued a joint statement on September 1, 2012 about their resignation following the mid-August *Webrazzi* incident on SD. In their joint statement, they stated:

SD is not a place that is worth our labor anymore for us 12 people who served/have been serving as moderators. The current dynamics within SD does not make us feel like moderating anymore. Current instantaneous flow on SD makes it more similar to Twitter/a random forum/wall posts on Facebook, and it is very far away from to be moderated by its current shape. Maybe this is what it is supposed to be, but it is not something that we want to be a part of as mods or admins.⁶⁶

One suser posted on SD on August 16, 2012, under the title "ticari itibari zedeleyici icerik" (i.e., content that jeopardizes commercial status) and shared a link of a screenshot of ssg's post of 2002 under the title "Microsoft ile ilgili kimi entrylerin silinmesi" (deletion of some entries about Microsoft). The Microsoft incident was the first episode to show how SD reacted to the outside commercialized world regarding the suser criticism. ssg was invited to a televised talk within Microsoft (he was an employee at the Seattle Microsoft Office back then), and they took down some entries criticizing Microsoft. The reason he gave in the now deleted screenshot entry was that SD was

⁶⁶ September 1st, 2012, <https://eksisozluk.com/entry/30029153>.

expanding and they had to decide to either shut down or ensure they fit in the outer world. A few of my interview participants remember this incident as a turning point (or the opening of their eyes for them) regarding the fact that SD is a business platform, not a non-profit maker-space to exercise freedom of speech. Along with the Microsoft incident, the Webrazzi incident solidified the practice of an additional rule: your entries can be taken down if you criticize the commercial activities of companies. This incident introduced another layer in the tension between the susers and the administrators, as criticizing companies had been a practice that was an important pillar for the construction of a culture of resistance (as further discussed in Chapter 3). However, administrator actions about the Webrazzi incident also suggest that SD might not always welcome every kind of criticism.

What was it like to moderate SD systematically before the Webrazzi incident? Between 1999-2007, people from the inner circle (closer to @ssg) and a couple of outsiders were monitoring the content. Until 2007, there were different susers who volunteered to help on moderation and legal issues. The 2007-2012 era was a comparatively more organized moderation era. Beginning around 2007, a protocol for moderating SD-content emerged with volunteer suser-labor. From the top rank to the minor positions, there were: *owners*, *praetors*, *12 moderators*, *hacivat/karagoz group*, and *gammaz staff* (i.e., snitching staff).

Initial content-moderation was based on a few introductory protocols. The first entry of each title should be a definition. The rest of the entries can be a definition or an example that further explains the definition. To illustrate the content moderation on the definition format, one of the popular participants, @bluepear, states that she forgot to

post one of the first entries in a definition format in 2008 and simply relayed her opinions with a phrase such as “a title that makes me think of...”. This usage was frowned upon on SD and was later entered into a category of banned expressions, as it was not defining the concept, but rather faking an attempt at it by bouncing off the subject that was the title itself. Furthermore, *@bluepear* states that her account was suspended for a couple of months. On the one hand, this sounds extreme to most of the participants and susers, but on the other hand, the method used to provide a framework to maintain the factual and accurate information flow. Another rule involved the policy “*gotumuze girebilir*” which is slang and translates almost as “*we can be screwed*.” The *we-can-be-screwed* policy was introduced in 2003 without any clear guidance on what constitutes a problematic entry. A former praetor and a then-voluntary-legal-advisor suser posted 17 examples in 2003 to clarify what constitutes as *we-can-be-screwed* entries. According to his post in 2003, they are:

- 1) Insult and cursing crimes
- 2) Insulting the personalities of the dead
- 3) Provoking public for hatred and hostility
- 4) Crimes against freedom of religion
- 5) Insulting the President
- 6) Insulting Foreign State Officials
- 7) Insulting Turkishness, Republic, and the State Institutions
- 8) Insulting Turkish Official Freedom March
- 9) Violating Communication Freedom
- 10) Slander and crime of making-up crimes

- 11) Encouraging drug usage
- 12) Promoting crimes and criminals
- 13) Propaganda against military
- 14) Copyright
- 15) Obscenity
- 16) Threat
- 17) Crimes against Atatürk

All of these items are entered into SD in *see: x* format and when you click on them, the first entry is a definition of them by the user in the volunteer-legal team. It defines the statement, cites the relevant law, and provides a possible example. However, all of these items are considered to be open to further interpretation by other lawyer users, and the first collective reaction was to render the *we-can-be-screwed* initiative as censorship. The exclusion of the user population from the decision-making processes led to users distancing themselves from their continuous SD presence. From the user point of view, they woke up to new rules that threatened their accustomed way of posting. On the other hand, from the admins' point of view, user content should not threaten their business platform.⁶⁷ According to my interviews with the users in previous admin positions, they can always find someone who wants to be a user on SD; it is understandable that some people will disagree with admin decisions and leave (and they

⁶⁷ According to my interview with @ssg, SD has always been a business platform. My argument is that the early-geek culture playful practices lured people onto the platform. This developing interest made the admins aware of the SD's potential as a business platform. However, the way that geek culture practices developed (as will be explained in Chapter 3) prevented the users from registering SD as a business platform.

do not really care). Although this value was not dominant in the 1999-2004 era, it was certainly dominant during the fieldwork period.

Towards 2007, the systematization of SD moderation mostly settled. Praetors were lawyers, and they were following suits against SD based on posted content. The name comes from Ancient Rome, where Praetors were judges and guardians of the emperor who solved conflicts among people. Although there have been a few minor cases where celebrities had SD remove negative content about them, the major case that called for the necessity of a legal team was the Ece Erken case in 2004. She was a pop-culture celebrity and a TV show host whom users did not like very much. She asked for the removal of the negative content about her and started a trial process with her lawyers. In one of the initial entries, *@kanzuk* (Basak Purut) explains the process and states that *@ssg* did not think she was worth fighting about content or content removal, and temporarily banned the access and creation of a title named "ece erken." They reopened the title a couple of years later as the SD-regulation on content removal was updated and moderated by the volunteer lawyer team, and new policies such as we-can-be-screwed came into being. Although the creation of a lawyer team suggests a move toward professionalization, policies such as we-can-be-screwed have always been open to the whims of an individual moderator or snitching staff.

Hacivat/Karagoz are the volunteer users who monitor grammar issues on SD, sometimes referred to as *grammar nazis*. The name comes from the traditional Ottoman theatrical characters of the shadow play *Hacivat and Karagoz*. Karagoz is illiterate in the play and uses a vulgar language, whereas Hacivat always aims to correct Karagoz's language and thought-processes, which always produces more contradictions through

comedy and satire. *Karagoz team* on SD used to work on correcting typos, wording, and merging relevant titles. *Hacivats* were users who decided how to translate some concepts in Turkish to comply with Turkish language usage. Three of my interviewees used to belong to the Hacivat/Karagoz team. One of the hacivats states that this was full-time work. He states that they had their own Google group to discuss how they should translate and correct some concepts on SD. He said that once they had to work in libraries for days to come up with an appropriate translation of an Ottoman word, so the translation did not dictate a certain stereotype. He states that this was a very prestigious process as there were academics in their Google groups, and users wanted to impress each other with their research on translations.

Snitching staff used to monitor everything summarized above, but they were only able to "snitch" the problems to higher levels of moderation. For example, if they thought that there might be a legal issue about an entry, they used to "snitch" it to a moderator and the moderator used to decide whether a praetor should investigate it further. Other than official issues, a snitching staff member could snitch an entry if it did not conform to a definition format, or if it had an empty *see: x* link usage (Until 2012, no one on SD could just post an empty *see: x* link. Every *see: x* link had to carry you to somewhere where some relevant part of the topic was discussed. Every information link had to carry another piece of information. Every hyperlink had to function appropriately; otherwise, it would be taken down as it was an empty *see: x* link. To be a member of a snitching staff, you needed to post at least a thousand entries.)

On SD, the continuous "review" process helps users to mimic each other's ways of articulating an argument, which is helpful for the process of unlearning in addition to

learning new information. The "spirit of building" (Turner, 2005, p. 510) enables people to share information without any expectations in return. WELL's governing was relaxed; users were allowed to ban each other yet continue to follow the other's conversations (Turner, 2005). The formation of SD shows that admins celebrated a counter-cultural ethos linking information, technology, and community together, and transformed that momentum into a platform. As occurred in WELL, there was an overlap of professional and personal interactions on SD. On the other hand, although SD had a rigorous and highly functioning moderation schema between 2007-2012, it failed because of the process of professionalization and geek culture practices that are further elaborated on in Chapter 3. The resignation of the moderators shows the lack of communication even within the administrative decision-making processes. It suggests that every decision depends on @ssg and rest of the few users who have ownership. In our interview, @ssg explains that he has always been searching for an automated self-moderation that is done by algorithms. The current phase of user approvals by the algorithms (at the time of writing) suggests that they were trying to use the user-leaving momentum (user exodus) as a gateway to create automatization on SD.

J. Sour Things

On March 4, 2016, SD launched *Sour Things*, a parallel SD platform similar to BuzzFeed/Mashable. This was an attempt by SD administration to compete with big corporations such as Facebook and Twitter. Paid moderation monitors highly-voted entries and selects them. After an editorializing process, they are re-published again as lists with images, as if it is a blog-post.

As Image 9 in Appendix III shows, *Sour Things* has a “modern” look and feel to follow SD content. The process began by choosing all the available entries for editorializing and repurposing them as blog posts. The titles of the entries are mostly used as the headline of the blog-like post. There was a major initial backlash, as *Sour Things* was functioning without the consent of the susers. The backlash stemmed from the fact that an important aspect of the SD-style participatory culture is the labor susers put into the platform. Interviewees argue that they gain visibility in exchange for their entries. However, when the *Sour Things* function was launched, there was uproar about the implementation of the editorializing process without the permission of the users. SD was able to respond to the backlash by offering to plant a tree in the name of the susers if they opted-in to let SD use their entries for *Sour Things* purposes. Although the tree-planting decision provided a buffer for the backlash, it did not solve the issue. Thousands of susers removed all of their entries and their accounts to protest at the way that SD aims to make money from their labor. SD admins replied by adding an opt-out consent button to the settings in suser log-in pages, where susers can choose to exclude their entries from the *Sour Things* selection process.⁶⁸

Sour Things was announced as an interactive way to engage with the SD content. What was not announced was that it was a novel way to manage the uncontrollably growing content on the SD. SD is pushing to market *Sour Things* as it significantly reduces the content that readers have to process. *Sour Things* can work in multiple ways,

⁶⁸ Terranova (2000) argues that the digital economy turns the commodity into a process which needs to be updated continuously and re-animated by the quality of the labor force (p. 49). According to Lazzarato (1995), immaterial labor “produces informational and cultural content of the commodity” (p. 1). The form constituted through immaterial labor is “immediately collective” (Lazzarato, p. 4) in the form of networks and flows as it builds social relationships.

the two most important are: 1) making an otherwise lost-entry visible; and 2) trimming entries on titles which have hundreds of posts.

For example, there is a post on *Sour Things* called *Oducunculuktan Ucak Uretimine, William Boeing'in Boeing sirketini kurma hikayesi (From Woodcutting to Plane Production: William Boeing and the story of Boeing Company)*.⁶⁹ The suser's explanation was taken from a title called "stories of how big companies established." In this title, @diesel1907 discusses the stories of Caterpillar, Ford, Boeing, Disney, Amazon, Nike, Lego, Coca-Cola, and Nokia in a 110000-word post. The *Sour Things* editorial takes only Boeing part and presents it as one story in a 5200-word post. The second way works in more subtle terms. *Sour Things* eliminates all the "unnecessary posts" in a title and chooses entries that tell a story about the title at hand. Most of the time, editorial staff also remove content from the individual entries to sustain a continuous flow in the stories (still crediting the susers).

In my interviews, there is a mixed feeling about how *Sour Things* works. Susers are mostly angry about how SD admins impose every new decision on them and expect them to adapt to new situations without prior discussions. Nevertheless, susers report that *Sour Things* helps them to follow only quality-controlled entries, which save them the trouble of reading all the posts. One suser stated that he is completely against the project and posted an entry about how he does not allow any of his entries to be used, stating that he deliberately did not click on the opt-out for the *Sour Things* button, and that he expects moderators to read his entry that says he is not consenting. This also shows the gap between suser expectations, unhelpful technological fixes, and deliberately unclear admin

⁶⁹ <https://seyler.eksisozluk.com/odunculuktan-ucak-uretimine-william-boeingin-boeing-sirketini-kurma-hikayesi>

processes. The *Sour Things* process creates an artificial consensus on suser discussions in the titles and makes them ready for a post-publishing process that adheres to government regulations and increases their shareability on other platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Sour Things works because it neutralizes the controversial content. It also shows that once-content-producer-SD imitates major social media platforms to infiltrate itself into other versions of content production.

K. Trolling

Trolling practices should be investigated within a techno-cultural framework, the former being the specific posting rules with the latter focused on how the Turkish socio-cultural context provides this practice with a certain edge that is specific to the SD-way-of-communication. In this dissertation, I follow Phillips (2017) and Marwick & Lewis' (2017) definitions of trolling as pushing the limits of the argument to emotionally impact others, to disrupt, and to upset. My fieldwork and interviews suggest that there is an ongoing tension between the susers and the administration: why do trolls exist on SD and why does the administration not act on it? @ssg even has an online article on trolling on Medium, in which he argues "trolls don't exist" (Kapanoglu, 2017) and that it is an expected internet behavior that we should get used to in our interactions.⁷⁰ He defines trolling as:

First, there are no trolls. Let's get this out of the way. There is no one that identifies themselves as a "troll." That's the name we give to an ambiguous class of people, even to some people who only disagree with us, or just whom we dislike...trolling is provocative or harmful act for the sake of a response. It's only successful if it generates a response. It's nothing else. So, yes, everybody trolls. Whenever we provoke someone, we make fun of them, we joke around, whenever "it was just a prank bro," we are trolling. So, there is a troll in all of us, but none of us are trolls because they don't exist.

⁷⁰ Sedat Kapanoglu, Trolls don't Exist: <https://medium.com/@ssg/trolls-dont-exist-9d879b960fd1>

Although he sees trolling as problematic in terms of effective online communication, the above quote and his Medium article suggests something else, too. He casually thinks “trolling” is just another way of labelling disagreement and interacting with some bullies in the neighborhood, but nothing more. The article reads more like a justification of the existence of trolling on SD rather than the ramifications of trolling actions. Although problematic information practices are further analyzed in Chapter 5, here I outline a certain trolling mechanism (deception with a social purpose) that, according to the trolls, was supposed to be empowering during the early years of SD (through my interviews and SD-participation with messaging and entry-posting). The below example is important, as 1) it shows another level in the tension between the susers and the administration; and 2) maps out the origins of what susers understand from trolling: sometimes in line with, and sometimes differing from what Phillips (2017) and Marwick & Lewis (2017) argue about trolling, especially in the US context. This second point is further elaborated on in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 with respect to different milieus.

One of SD’s important ways of having “fun” is to follow the “known” trolls. The major trolls as far as they are identified and mentioned by the interviewees are *author*, *peder zickler*, *owencan*, and *zenci*. There are also a few more susers who aren't completely verified by the susers whether they are trolls or not, such as *avasas* and *samatya*. There are also people who attempt trolling once in a while, but that is not what they are known for on SD (such as *loststone*). For example, *owencan* is a very well-known troll on SD who was famous, especially for a couple of years around the early 2000s. His tactic is to open titles to post an entry that contradicts a common-sense

acceptance of a point of view. For example, for the “Avatar” movie title, he posts “a movie which only the poor people who probably haven’t seen any 4k giant TV set might enjoy. Also, a movie of very poor special effects, probably worse than morning TV shows on an unpopular TV channel.” Although that movie’s quality is open to discussion by various groups, the point is to nullify lower class people and distance himself from the popular TV shows. It is claimed that he “hunts” people who would react to 1) a person who dislikes Avatar at the time when it was mostly well-received; and 2) a person who insults lower class people; 3) a person who doesn’t like pop TV Shows; and 4) a person who can openly post about all these three items on SD. The difference between SD humor and trolling is the insults, which technically violate the internal policies (and the seventeen rules mentioned before). However, they are rendered as humor as it is fun to certain “inner-circles” on SD. The tension between humor/trolling/insults is further evaluated in Chapter 5 with respect to problematic information practices.

Those people who are familiar with *owencan* are well-aware of the hunting-process, and they reported that they just “sit and watch” the catastrophe that happens afterwards: those people who post many entries about how *owencan* is wrong about all those four aspects listed above. Thus, “early SD-trolling” (deception with a social purpose, as is further discussed in Chapter 3) was only fun for the people who knew it was trolling and who expected to see a chaotic environment by hunting “gullible” people. However, there were also people who disliked this trolling, despite the awareness about the situation. Although *avasas* uses similar rhetoric in his posts, he mostly discusses socio-political issues in his entries. He is not considered a troll by the interview participants and by the popular users on SD. He can point out some well-known

misperceptions about the Kurdish Issue in Turkey and reports a hypothetical (sometimes completely fake) incident at the expense of the Kurdish people and victimizes the storyteller, who is mostly a vulnerable Turkish person. For those who know *avasas*, this is a classic trap which aims to force people to pay attention to the injustices within common sense discourses in Turkey, but for those who don't know *avasas*, this is a racist post that shouldn't be on SD.

L. Exoduses

In this section, I outline the events that facilitated key suser groups on SD to leave the SD in protest. Although it is much more complex to address the specifics of the susers' protests among the 20-year-history of SD, the following brief discussion is presented as a background for the disputes between the users and the administrators as guidance for the empowering/debilitating practices that this dissertation traces in the following sections. The ongoing tension on SD within the susers and between the administration resulted in six main exoduses in the form of collective suser account-closings. The incidents are: 1) protests after hate-speech issues around 2007 during the conversations about Turkish-Armenian relations that increased after the murder of Hrant Dink, a famous Armenian Journalist in Turkey; 2) the 2011 IP address declaration issues, where SD provided the police with the susers' IP addresses and almost a hundred susers were on trial (including the founder) for allegedly insulting Islam; 3) 12-volunteer-moderator resignations in 2012; 4) the major design change in 2014 5) the design change

in 2016 and, 6) the introduction of *Sour Things* in 2016 (as discussed in the previous section).⁷¹

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to turn these events into special case studies, as each case requires a dissertation-length investigation on its own. Rather, I discuss these events to illustrate the timeline of the introduction of new digital tools and how SD navigated the online arena in relation to socio-political developments in Turkey, especially after the Gezi Events in 2013.

The issues of hate speech gradually increased after Hrant Dink's murder on January 19, 2007. He was a well-known Armenian journalist in Turkey and former chief editor of Agos Newspaper. His murder facilitated discussions on the nationalistic sentiments to approach Armenian-Turkish relations, and almost always brought up the topic of the Armenian Genocide. Four of my interviewees stated that they remember heated discussions with curses, stereotypes, and discourses blaming the other side without any significant support, and how there were no explicit rules against such hate speech. This lack of policies around tensions on ethnicity discussions channeled key susers into leaving the SD, claiming that the spirit of early SD-style interactions was overshadowed by the administrators' poor platform governance during the Armenian-Turkish relations disputes.

In 2011, another group of thousands of susers left SD. The lawyer of Adnan Oktar, who is known as a celebrity-religious person, sued 112 susers on SD (including @ssg) based on alleged insults against Islam. According to my interviews, most of the

⁷¹ As people left SD because of the previously mentioned top-down decision-making processes, the original groups were broken, and susers started to be *individualized* with new tools such as likes, dislikes, favs, and removal of the definition requirement later on SD.

posts did not contain any insult; they were explanations on religion, sometimes in comparison with other religions and socio-political contexts. More importantly, they told me that, as opposed to their expectations, the SD administration did not provide them with any guidance of legal support. Two of my interviewees were among those 112 susers, and they stated that the minimum expectation was a compassionate message from the admins. One suser, who did not want to share their credentials, told me that @ssg did not even look them in the face during the trials. After the trials, some of the susers were found not guilty, but some of them were found guilty of the charges (including the two people I interviewed and @ssg). All of those susers, and most of their close groups, left the SD because of the feeling of a lack of support. The ones who were found guilty were released on the condition that they do not commit a similar crime in five years. The tension on this legal case was regarding the different interpretations between what SD is and what SD admins should do. This incident raises the question of how platforms should act in the discussions between the governments and the users. This question forms a sub-theme of this dissertation, whereby the following chapters (Chapter 3-4-5) address the platform-building steps of the SD-admins and how those steps created emergent interactions in relation to the Turkish socio-political context. I have previously discussed the resignation of the volunteer moderation, design change, and introduction of *Sour Things* as a supplemental platform further alienated the susers, who established connections through SD's amateur spirit through its early years. The steps that paved the way for changes in communication are further discussed in the following chapters.

M. Concluding Remarks

Sedat Kapanoglu states that he was thinking about *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams when coding SD. He wanted to create a place where "hitchhikers" of life could post their experiences about everything. Instead of explaining a word or a concept as in UrbanDictionary, the user provide a point of view, with their experiences under titles. Instead of an unformatted Q & A interaction on Reddit, susers engage with rigorous writing patterns regarding policies on language and style. Instead of a static search on Wikipedia with non-interactive information, susers jump into each other's conversations to advance their knowledge on various issues. Suser-experiences constitute a living and evolving online archive of knowledge.

Kapanoglu has always been upfront about his aims to turn his coding skills into a financial asset; he even states that it is implied in his nickname *ssg*, which stands for *sedat software group*. This statement has always contradicted the free spirit of posts that have been shared on SD. It "feels like" a platform that builds a community around shared sensibilities about the subjects, but it is fueled by contradictions among peers as well as sustained by ad-spaces at the expense of user-generated content. Owners, admins, moderators, and susers have learned what it means to use a social media platform on the go.

The initial user-agreement, disclaimer, and the motto of the website were also misleading. They suggested that this is a different arena where human-made rules do not apply, and we can just be ourselves with our like-minded friends. However, since the beginning, there have been rules to govern the SD-population. The format rules provided an excellent opportunity for susers to experience a rigorous peer-review process of their

arguments. Based on the participants' experiences on SD, I argue that it helped them to correct themselves and to continuously challenge the cultural and political norms. You are not just posting an entry about something; you are making your mind available for everyone to benefit. You are also making yourself vulnerable to any possible criticisms, and you use those criticisms to better equip yourself with new knowledge and skills. However, your account can also be terminated if you post something that was not a definition or an example.

A *see: x* button was introduced to let everyone know more about a topic they are reading by a web of hyperlinks. However, it turned into an empty signifier by the users with the help of the *debe* function and the relaxation of the format around 2016. The empty *see: x* does not retrieve any information when you click it anymore: it is used to create a joke; a meme without an image. The creation of empty hyperlinks, the *see: x* links that connect the discussion to somewhere that does not exist, was once an act that could cause your account to be removed. However, at the time of this writing, the empty hyperlinks are *encouraged* by the new design, the additional relaxation of rules, and new SD tools such as *agenda* and especially the *de-be* function. SD has gradually transformed from being an open and living archive of knowledge to a textual-meme generator that produces lines to share on Twitter. Although the *debe* function has been canceled, the joke-format of posting only an empty *see: x* hyperlink has persisted, rendering SD as a daily-joke-platform whose relevance quickly expires.⁷²

⁷² Empty *see: x* refers to a *see: x* link that goes nowhere when it is clicked. However, the *see: x* link might contain a language, a joke, a jargon; something that is not definitional but posted as a way of reacting to the title.

Design changes, content moderation, and professionalization provide further evidence of the tensions between the users and the administration. It suggests that each side has its own agenda. The users acted as if the platform was a non-profit institution and demanded continuous updates about the way the administration governs the platform. The administration aimed to turn the momentum into a business by imposing their decisions on the users (such as the major design change in 2014). However, the administrators' agenda revealed itself gradually: first through the Microsoft incident in 2004, and second through the Webrizzi incident in 2012. Content moderation shows that, at its initial stage, @ssg counted on himself, his friends, and volunteers to monitor the content as needed. This logic worked because of the low population on SD between 1999-2012. However, the informal content moderation which was mostly based on the morality understandings of the moderators rather than depending on concrete policies, also facilitated trolling on SD, which disturbed user practices. SD administrators gradually transformed SD from its amateur spirit to a professional social media platform at the expense of user experiences. In addition, they ensured that the platform was interoperable across Google, Facebook, and Twitter. Coupled with the professionalization developments, the exodus gradually changed SD culture.

In SD, users were supposed to post definitions for the topics they wish there was an explanation to. It quickly turned into a collaborative living archive. Under the parameters of dictionary-like communication, they needed to curate ways to convince each other about how they should define things and equip themselves for the better explanations of things they thought needed exploration. The joyful mastery of the cultural norms within this platform helped them to give an opinion as an unofficial definition of

what they think should be there. This would not work without the immediate presence of others. The affordances of the platform help the mediation between the web (and the internet at large) and the users. This platform activity distributes people rather than only being an enabler of discourses. Administrators use the digital objects to create contexts of attention in order to orchestrate interactions. However, the exoduses show that users are not passive users of the platform; they are aware of their active role in building it.

As geeks were the main contributors to the SD-momentum and were the catalyzers of knowledge-formation, the core geek group enforced the decision-making processes. He who held the power to code had the power to decide who stayed on SD under what conditions. A geeky momentum constituted the construction of a culture of resistance on SD. However, that momentum did not help the owners to become as financially independent as they aimed to be, especially in the socio-political environment that Turkey entered after the 2013 Gezi Protests. In the next chapter, I discuss the construction of the culture of resistance that paved the way for the production of activist subjectivities during the Gezi Protests, which is discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3

The Construction of the Culture of Resistance and Playful Affinities

In this chapter, I present how the culture of resistance within SD is formed.

Following Foucault (2003), I define resistance as the insurrection of subjugated knowledge. In the case of this dissertation, subjugated knowledge is knowledge that is disqualified by the Turkish military-state that gained its power over information channels, especially after the 1980 post-coup developments, as previously discussed. The top-down control of information channels nullifies local knowledge and assembles a structure of the hierarchy, the patriarchy of neoconservative culture formation that relies on Turkish nationalism and neoliberalism. As discussed in the Introduction, by the insurrection of subjugated knowledges, Foucault (2003) means the "historical knowledge of struggle" and "an insurrection against the controlling power-effect" (p. 9).⁷³ This discussion on de-subjugation is connected to the process of unlearning and crises of unlearning.

The practices of play and parrhesia coupled with the socio-political context of Turkey facilitates the formation of the culture of resistance. As discussed in the Introduction, the post-1980 coup environment in Turkey suppressed free speech on the issues of ethnicity and gender relations. In addition, after the beginning of the JDP government in 2002, the authoritarian governing structure produced laws that render conflict (with the Turkish State) and criticism unwelcome. SD provided a space in both periods to raise concerns over the daily socio-political developments, as well as question previously imposed histories (especially on nationalism).

⁷³ Foucault (2003) states that insurrection is the "reappearance of what people know at a local level of these disqualified knowledges, which made the critique possible" (p. 9).

This chapter starts with an examination of the lead up period pre 2011-2013, before the IP address issues and Gezi Protest (referred to hereafter as pre-2011). In this period, the Internet laws had not been fully imposed on the social media platforms, and the Turkish government did not recognize SD-style online opposition as a threat. The chapter traces the formation of the culture of resistance from the early-years (pre-2011). This discussion is helpful to address the ways in which the geek practices show themselves during the time the fieldwork was conducted in 2017, which I further explore in Chapter 5. That chapter highlights the sensibilities of the post-2016 failed-coup political climate related to the construction of the culture of resistance.⁷⁴

For the pre-2011 period, a practice that stands out among the users interactions is *parrhesia*, and sometimes a twisted version of it. This chapter uses tension within the exercise of parrhesia to articulate how the culture of resistance is formed on SD and what can we understand from that formation. Parrhesia, as it pertains to SD, consists of research and expertise, being mindful of previous explanations and of possible future discussions. The *enunciation* provides parrhesia with its distinct quality: the way that users post their explanations as if they are making a rigorous academic contribution to an ongoing debate. It helps users treat the posts as part of a larger encyclopedia rather than adding statements that interact directly with the previous posts as a regular online forum. I argue that the shared experiences about everyday concepts constitute affective bonds among users, not as a consensus but as methods of rebuttal. The relations of power within the SD are initially constituted with the forces of rebuttals users present to

⁷⁴ Chapter 5 discusses the problematic information practices, especially focusing on the post-2016 failed-coup era developments. The chapters emphasize threads: Chapter 3, the culture of resistance; Chapter 4, activist subjectivity, Chapter 5, problematic information practices. They trace the formation of different sensibilities addressing the socio-technical and political developments they are connected to.

each other. Parrhesia is directly related to speech, and the chapter explains how a certain form of expertise (or some experience about a particular expertise) within the embodiment of parrhesia facilitates the ethos of culture of resistance on SD. The formation of the culture of resistance should be investigated within the tension between unlearning and crises of unlearning. This chapter also addresses how problematic information practices were a part of the culture of resistance, that limits its empowering potential.⁷⁵

As discussed in the Introduction, susers embraced the to-and-fro play through the guidance of the dictionary format. The idea was to post on SD as if you are contributing to a larger encyclopedia. That is why every entry should provide something unique, even if it is just an example to support a point. Susers were posting as a result of being fascinated by the quality of the observation that the title suggests (especially in terms of questioning rote cultural practices), or when they were frustrated by an entry/observation/title and gearing up to refute the claim.

This game of truth provided a space of empowerment with mutual understanding at first, especially in the 1999-2002 period when the core of susers were mostly the people who shared similar dispositions (geeks, upper-middle class, the educated). The culture of resistance broke ground during the 1999-2002 period, in parallel to the geek culture of code-sharing and hands-on learning experiences, and constituted an emergent, carefully fashioned behavior. During the 1999-2011 period, affordances sustained affective attunement with the help of four clashing factors: 1) the availability of culturally

⁷⁵ Further investigation of crises of unlearning in relation with problematic information practices are analyzed in Chapter 5 in relation with the developments on the SD post-2016 failed-coup climate and the socio-political context of Turkey (the post 2016 failed coup introduced a variety of problems on authenticity on internet speech).

sensitive topics to uncover, such as Kurdish conflicts and the topics on Armenian Genocide; 2) conflicts created through Turkish Internet laws that opened the way for bans and trials; 3) SD voluntary, strict, and biased content moderation, as discussed in Chapter 2; and 4) admins' position on SD being a neutral platform rather than a community of people (as discussed in Chapter 2). In each factor, the momentum built upon the tension of fascination/frustration and provided a space of empowerment where the users embraced an ethos of opposition. This playful participatory culture also reproduced some of the cultural norms and created their own norms.

In the following sections, I outline the formation of the culture of resistance to point out the tendency of articulation of a rebuttal on SD. As SD has a humor-satire understanding, I also address how jokes help us understand the political and socio-cultural context. I then discuss the tensions created by the ethos of culture of resistance to argue that it was not as empowering as suggested by the users. The initial selling point of SD was trustworthiness in the community, and as SD gradually turned into a business platform which compares itself to Google, Twitter, and Facebook, the original SD spirit faded away. The formation of the culture of resistance provides insights into what this trustworthiness around the ethos of opposition means for the users, how it functions, and how it plays a role in the tensions between empowerment and debilitating practices. This chapter, and the following chapters, build on this tension around the ideas of empowerment vs. debilitating forces on social media platforms, and how to address such tensions.

Following the fieldwork and the interview process, I identify the following five main categories that determine the formation of the culture of resistance: 1) subjective

experiences, 2) feeling of connectedness, 3) sharing practices and internal checks and balances, 4) knowledge-power, and 5) play (subverting the definition-format to relay arguments and trolling as deception with a social purpose, that has existed since the initial early-years period (1999-2002). In each category, I show how the discussed practice contributes to a logic of *personal is political* and forms an immediate feeling of empowerment. I also show how the affordances discussed in Chapter 2 modulate the way users empower themselves while simultaneously nullifying resistance potentialities. Addressing the construction of culture of resistance is important to understand the contemporary post-2016 practice on SD. This is because, as I show in Chapter 5, the same mechanisms that prefigured resistances to everyday normalizing policies (the imposition of official Turkish nation history, negative sentiments against Kurdish and Armenian communities, discourses on Atatürk) turned into functions of anti-intellectual momentum, attacking “unacceptable” discussions, and a transition to consumer culture activism centered around isolated products and services rather than collective actions.

A. Subjective Experiences and the Feeling of Connectedness

The crux of posting entries is sharing subjective experiences about the topics. I argue that subjective experiences facilitate affective belonging to the production of facts and stories on the SD. The culture of resistance facilitates a feeling of connectedness. This usually happens around delicate topics that are not usually talked about in public: religion, nationalism, gender, and race issues. The SD network used to empower people who felt alone and who were excluded from such stories. One of the interviewees @country states:

Don't feel alone, we are not alone, we are many, we are just not aware. I promise you that there are other people like you around me, other people that can't tell.

Then you tell them there are people like you around you. And that produces a conversation on its own. I think the old SD was very beneficial for producing these kinds of topics back then.

Susers talk about their own experiences with products or events, and as you read downwards, you are invited to understand the background of discussions. This helps susers question their assumptions and encourages them to speak their voice—a process of unlearning through parrhesia.

Kemalism, republic, religion, and the formation of modern Turkey were the main issues susers discuss on SD. Topics on Armenian Genocide was one of the crucial topics that generated heated discussions. According to @biological, SD posts were spaces for anarchist souls. He states that “you could write everything on SD that you couldn’t tell anywhere else.” He further says that “SD was a place where every voice is heard, and everyone can have fun” which is how he defines being an anarchist. Although there was never an agreement on the issue, participants state that there was always a mutual understanding, a respectful conversation of both sides. @nodriver notes that during the early 2000s, there were few people on SD completely rejecting the genocide. However, there were people who claimed that it was a forced migration rather than a genocide. He states that he and his friends used to do some research and present the arguments with documents to those who denied the genocide.

The susers (participants and susers I interacted during my fieldwork) approach the issues on religion and ethnicity as forms of daily indirect conversations to articulate the histories imposed by the historic nation-state formation. @darkage talks about the early 2000s discussions between *nationalist* and *Islamist* susers on the SD. He states that he wasn’t a nationalist person; he was closer to the Islamist people but was not religious at

the same time. He used to discuss the issue with nationalists aggressively and was praised by the Islamist groups, as he was seen as a rebel against traditional Islamists due to drinking alcohol. He later started to question the Islamist people and he no longer belongs to that group either. The practice of indirect conversation is different to a forum-like discussion, as these posts are also contributing to a broader title/topic on religion and ethnicity through definition-format. This is a practice that does not find a correspondence in face-to-face conversations, as stated by the users. This especially applies to the topic of Armenian Genocide, which is one of the biggest taboos in Turkey and is used as a litmus test to render someone a true Turk or a traitor. At the time, SD provided a space for the voices of opposition and minorities.

The *feeling of connectedness* refers to how users construct affective bonds through a way of critical thinking toward issues, one that is usually prompted by their geeky relations to whatever their hobby/occupation is. The *feeling* is composed through their geeky relations, sharing and peer-review practices such as unpacking the cultural norms, and posting subjective experiences to support their arguments through their experiences around a specific expertise.⁷⁶ The interview participants stated that the pre-2011 era was more open to empowering practices through collaborative learning. One of the most important aspects of the connectedness is offline meet-ups, that were popular until 2011. Although participants do not state it directly, their statements in relation to my fieldwork suggest that their emergent practices were occurring within their

⁷⁶ Atlas.ti software provides associations about the codes and shows co-occurrences across codes. This means that whenever I coded "feeling of connectedness," most of the time I also coded being a "technology-geek." This finding is in line with the claim that the online connections between the users, especially in the initial early-year period (1999-2002), were built on the fact that they were coders who worked together or who already knew each other in already networked online environments (either in IT offices or Bulletin Board System networks).

in-groups that they built through offline connections. Participants refer to the idea that they have common sensibilities toward topics of discussions, which makes them empowered to deal with their everyday lives. @parameter states that "There was this power of knowing that there are people like you, people who think like you [misfits]." They are united around a sense of community whose function they cannot exactly describe, but they explain that it does not necessarily involve similarities and agreements. They talk about how it *feels*, like it fills a gap in their life to meet people who use a similar jargon and similar vocabularies within sub-groups such as Sour Politicians or the Sour Book Club. As stated, one crucial aspect (especially until 2011 – the time of the IP address issues and trials against 112 users for alleged crimes against Islam) was that they also used to meet physically offline at the meet-ups. They were able to solidify their online projections of selves with their physical interactions around their interests in these personalized/themed meet-ups.

The feeling of connectedness also brought users together to act on various socio-political events in Turkey. @biggeek mentions that after learning more about it on SD, he joined protests against censorship in Turkey years ago (referring to the 2007 YouTube shut down due to a video insulting the founder of Turkey, Atatürk). @pencilcase explains that SD can be used to reach a politician to raise your concerns about a particular issue, while @ownname mentions that you can solve issues about a particular problem, such as an abused animal, easily on SD with the crowdsourcing help. @womanlaw states that she uses SD to give away her old books to people in need. She notes that she trusts the users who message her to get the books when she asks whether they really need it or not. During the pre-2011-2013 period, the immediate online connections coupled with the

offline (meet-ups) trust networks helped them to validate the importance of issues and collaboratively raise concerns through their posts and offline actions.

Susers who joined SD before the 2011-2013 period say that the reason they wanted to be a suser was because of the feeling of community. In this significant interval (2011-2013), as discussed in the previous chapter, SD witnessed trials for alleged insults to religion, the removal of volunteer content moderators, Gezi protests, the dropping of the definition-format, and the acceleration of SD into a business. The feeling of community that was built in the pre-2011-2013 interval is described as follows by the interview participants. @themusician states that it was a privilege to be a suser on SD. For @tech, SD was a community of people who were excluded from society and gathered together to allow like-minded people in. @extheropod says that he cherishes SD because he used to feel alone with his ideas and SD culture transformed him. @downloadapp talks about how politically correct peer-pressure on SD triggered conversations to unpack the conditions in which the media is produced, such as movies; specifically the *Recep Ivedik* series. He states that you are not allowed to like it on SD as the movie was utterly anti-intellectual, vulgar, sexist, and racist, as it imitates the accent of lower-class minorities for the sake of comedy. The shared geek culture and experiences of *othering* united people on SD to cultivate a space where they could raise their voices against the mainstream topics, even if that topic was a popular movie in Turkey. More importantly, for the participants, shared sensibilities on SD during the pre-2011 period rendered the online space an imagined collective where ongoing empowerment was sustained. Susers were documenting their real practices into a platform. @tech states that “gays, sexuality topics, Kurdish people, *Alevi*s, even religious people, and liberals... SD was a

place that all these people can shout ‘*this is me, so what?!*’ and discuss their issues to protect themselves.” She adds that the underlying logic of all the posts for her is “what’s that topic’s effect on me. I think this was what made SD more valuable...you could read what the actual actors of that topic think... could read what the *insiders* say”. The anticipation that sharing their experiences would change somebody else’s life for the better used to motivate users to post entries on the SD. For @sillydunk, this could even be documenting how she felt during her dissertation writing period. She says when people read that post, they messaged her during their writing phase, and this practice created a connectedness. Sharing subjective experiences on SD unhinges time-as-present as a requirement for hanging out to discuss events. Participants used to post their experiences on topics as entries. This practice of sharing expertise-like-experience weaved SD-conversations into a how-to-do-something online encyclopedia. It differs from regular forums (such as Reddit), as you can read posts top-down as different paragraphs of the topic rather than Q&As. It feels like a chapter of a book you need to read at that point to normalize what you feel.

@reporter explains how, through her radio show on *sourberry*⁷⁷, people and herself shared "imperfect" relationships as understood by society. "People understood that there are different people in the world and *fat* people and *short* people can also fall in love." As an old-time SD-celebrity, @reporter believes that all the information on SD is correct, explaining: "it is the feeling that user lived it." This assumption is shared by most of the users; what is posted should be correct as it is an *experience*. An emergent connection is established when the intensity of experiences is shared, especially by showing *this is me*

⁷⁷ SD sub-etha online radio channel.

moments by the susers. The insider knowledge, experience, and their embodiment of dominant norms (such as a Kurdish person explaining what nationalism feels like) produce an immediacy through the articulation of truth-moments. The feeling of community that was unavailable within the dominant discourses shows various parallel operationalizations of the people's conditions of existence within the same terrain.

However, these same susers also point out that a posted definition, per SD policy, needs not be correct.⁷⁸ For @tomatopepper (a published author in Turkey), sharing experiences are significant because they show an intimacy, a relationship with knowledge that suggests trustworthiness. He employs this logic to create short-stories and connected-intimacies on SD. He has one entry that talks about his instant love for a woman whom he met in NY in 1993. He posts an entry about a famous New York 1993 HD video (same title on SD) that circulates among people. He narrates a fiction about himself and a woman he loves. He says that it is a fiction, but that people needed to believe it, and he receives numerous messages about it as if it is true. He states that "people own stories if they find any similarity with their lives, then it does not matter for them if it is true or false." He uses this observation to experiment with his writing on SD. This suser's engagement suggests that there is a certain point on SD where the authentic can be questioned. The intention of the susers could be to engage playfully (whether to improve writing in this suser's case or for sarcastic, humorous purposes), but the existence of a disclaimer on the website that does not guarantee the authenticity of the posts provides susers with another tool to play with.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ This contradiction is emphasized again in the section about play. Participants refer to the previous user agreement that is discussed in Chapter 2.

⁷⁹ The next section on play further elaborates on the questions of authenticity of the posts in relation to empowerment/debilitating tensions.

The practice of sharing personal life on SD in connection with the details about a particular knowledge posted as an entry help susers to rehearse and reinvent behaviors. At the moment that these subjective experiences are created, there is "not yet developed a sense of direction" (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 21). However, when these moments are juxtaposed with an ongoing political movement, it then creates interstices where it is impossible to locate true discourses to produce a sense of self. This can be seen from the suser @tomatopepper example, where the mere subjective experience can turn into a practice of telling a fake story; but even if it is done with the most harmless of intentions, fake-experience-based stories can create ruptures in the formation of a culture of resistance. This possibility is further articulated in Chapter 5.

In addition to the tension between the culture of resistance and authentic information sharing practices, I argue that SD's first geek culture united well with the latter suser groups of other minorities in Turkey, such as Kurds, Armenians, nerds, and LGBTQ people. However, since geeks have their own cultural bias toward interpreting daily events, the groups started to diverge. In addition, because of the frequent meet-ups in the early 2000s, susers used to know each other better. This amplified the feeling of community among the susers in the pre-2011 period. The next sections highlight the practices within SD in relation to norms created through those practices.

B. Sharing Practices, Internal Checks, the Geeks, and Claiming Expertise

Ethnographic fieldwork and the interviews revealed patterns on suser practices that are embodied by most of the susers but manifest themselves differently. These subcategories that form practices on SD are humor, lingo, word-play (puns), a reaction against cliché explanations and myth-making, believing in searching before posting, anti-

plagiarism, fact-checking, and providing references for the sources. In the following paragraphs, I also argue that the geek culture sharing practices, coupled with the claims on expertise, facilitated *sensibilities on critiquing* among the susers, such as critiquing the topics on the Armenian Genocide, gender roles, and popular culture (movies, music, etc.). Before the 2011-2013 interval, inner practices on SD prevented misinformation, disinformation, and other unwanted information-sharing practices such as disseminating myths. Moderation was very strict between 2004-2012. @oldfriend says that you couldn't just say that something was a good mouse for the Logitech M280; mods would send it to the *trash* and ask you, *please provide us with a definition*. In addition to the content moderation discussed in Chapter 2, susers mention that the community itself internalized checks-and-balances to monitor themselves as community-driven self-moderation. @bestmusic states that "there was a mechanism of content moderation that susers established themselves even though it is not an official moderation. It was like, societal norms, like them, no written rules or anything. If you did this and that, people would be uncomfortable, and you were excluded." The geek culture practices on expertise and experience on certain issues provided a space for them to monitor others who did not participate in the interaction protocols. This practice also further created some segregations between some suser groups.

Although the participants share self-monitoring experience as a quality of respectful interaction, the mechanism of imposed control for definitions, coupled with ongoing peer-pressure on how to articulate your ideas, provides tension between expertise knowledge (however it is defined) and layperson knowledge. My fieldwork, especially on the titles where most of the interaction is among old-timers, provides

evidence that suggests that the SD-norms built defenses against sharing problematic information practices. However, as those norms are part of the geek culture (mostly male, and upper-class), they also reproduced a form of dominance over the discourses through in-group claims on authority over knowledge.

One of the members of the *karagoz/hacivat* team, @oldfriend, says that his expertise was on Iran politics and he used to post about it in the daily language without any jargon. People who are interested in his entries used to message him asking for further references/guidance on the topics, and that Susers used to trust each other to link them to proper sources for knowledge. @oldfriend says that there was information about general Ottoman history on the Turkish internet, but not very specific things. He notes: "I read Ottoman documents for example, is the city's name Membic, or Mumbic or Mimbic? I cross-check all the six history dictionaries I have, and we discuss it with each other on our google group to decide which translation we should use in Turkish." You have to follow Turkish grammar rules on your posts, and Hacivat-Karagoz team would monitor it. The team would discuss with each other how to make sure a word posted on SD was in its most accurate form.

@oldfriend explains that people used to bring their knowledge and fight with each other all the time. However, ultimately, when you read it from the top, you used to learn something. He states:

For example, let's say it is about Byzantine history. When you post something about it, somebody else will find something to add to there; some other suser would share a link, another suser who absolutely knew nothing about it would google it and add humbly, saying that there is something like this too. Because this is how you used to contribute.

He adds that “we used to trust what they [susers] posted because we physically spent time together having some drinks together, we know that person's deepness.” The practice of cross-checking and verification through an exchange of information between the expert groups provided important checkpoints on SD for people to find the accurate information they needed. However, this practice also assumed that when a certain argumentative threshold was met within a post, it was perceived as an authentic post. This assumption stems from the intimacy and proximity of susers, especially in the pre-2011 era, when they 1) already knew each other; 2) met in meet-ups frequently; and 3) could use a person they already know as a reference for the susers who posts an entry. The challenges of verification were not immediately accessible for the susers I interviewed because of the trust-networks built during the early days of the platform.

At the intersection of issues on ethnicity and availability of diverse discourses, @oldfriend brings the topic to the Armenian Genocide and states that people used to learn something from the discussions, as there were limited sources about this topic. He states:

You bring the census documents starting from 20th century Ottoman Empire during Sultan Amdulhamit period stating that the population of Bingol providence was 65% non-Muslim. It is also known that there were no other non-Muslims than Armenians there. So, people check the documents and say, ok then where did those people go?

He further notes that “someone brings information from one book to argue about something, someone else brings some other data to argue against it, someone blames the other for being ignorant, he blames back” According to the susers, this process helped SD grow as a trustworthy encyclopedia. In a parallel vein, @tech talks about how they as a group investigated alleged crimes that the left-leaning people reportedly committed in

official Turkish history, and aimed to uncover its origins. She says that “if there was such a thing, we wanted to acknowledge it and talk about it too.” Doing their research, posting on SD was important for users to protect that feeling of connectedness through their trust networks.

The definition-format and the logic of dictionary-style communication coupled with the pressures on freedom of speech in Turkey rendered SD a productive environment in which to challenge the normalized discourses on issues on ethnicity. However, during the interview process, participants were attaching themselves to a nostalgia about SD through affective bonds that were established among their peers in the early years on SD. They romanticized the past through their subjective positions on SD, that sometimes worked as a force of empowerment. Participant nostalgia has two levels: 1) During the interview process, they were romanticizing the era when they were comparatively more active, during the pre-2011-2013 period 2) Their actions on SD during the pre-2011-2013 period were also about romanticizing the initial early-years period (1999-2002) of geek culture practices and collaborative learning and sharing. In their statements, there was an assumption of the uncontrolled (and unmonitored) trust between the users, suggesting that with the power of social media and the community-momentum on SD, they had the capacity to build actions.⁸⁰ This position ignores the SD’s existence as a commercial social media platform from the start, which was mostly blurred by the temporary amateur spirit during the initial early-years period (1999-2002). From the above paragraph, there are three points that need to be discussed: 1) participants are romanticizing the past; 2) they have their own privileged status on SD; and 3) there is

⁸⁰ Chapter 4 builds on this momentum of resistance capacities and how they produced activist subjectivities around the Gezi Events in Turkey.

a *feeling* of empowerment in their practices. As discussed in Chapter 2, although there was an intension of susers to foster a community of empowerment, administrators never imagined SD as a space for empowerment. Administrators had their own goals for transforming SD into a business platform. The interview participants mostly fail to register that goal when talking about the pre-2011 period on SD. They are remembering it through their cultural practices, not through the suser-admins dynamics I introduced in Chapter 2. Second, the interviewees were mostly among the influencers on SD, who had intellectual connections with the @ssg's inner circle that generated the geek culture interests on SD. Participants are attributing their attachment to an idealized past that they did not actually experience themselves. Third, they report that they are empowered because of the trust-networks they built on SD. However, they don't discuss evidence of that empowerment (however it may be) except to say that they are empowered. The idealized geek culture practices render SD-style discussion-based conversations empowerment. This feeling of empowerment suggests that rather than an application of the *parrhesia* which was a potential form of equipping the self with true discourses (in the early years of SD), they instead lean on an imitation of *parrhesia*.

In order to explore how *parrhesia* could not be fully exercised to meet its potential, I explore the geek culture practices, even mundane ones, that address the tension within the susers on enunciating their truth. For example, susers do not like spoilers. SD even added a button to the entry-posting interface as a tool so that you can put your post in spoiler disclaimers and protect your integrity on SD. In the 1999-2011 period, you could be kicked out if you spoiled a movie's ending. The interview process suggests that this is one of the oldest practices on SD. In 1999, they used to have

insufficient access to the movies, and not everyone was able to see some movies right away; they had to spend some time saving money or waiting for the film to come to a nearby theater. So, when someone shared something about a new Star Wars movie, it would ruin the experience for users who hadn't watched the movie yet. The practice around the spoilers supports the claim that a close community of users was built in the early-years (1999-2002). However, it also creates geek cultural codes which might not be accessible for the latter generations on SD (the confusion regarding whether it is was a practice to add a spoiler button or an imposition from the administration on SD).

Users also respond to each other by pointing out what is problematic to create a space for discussion. @scientific says that SD has had a significant effect on him, as users and entries helped him unpack the caricaturizing of movements that are not discussed on mainstream channels, such as veganism and feminism. He says that contrary to the available stereotypical depictions of feminism as women who hate men and witch-and-bitch-women, he was able to read first-person experiences on issues that still exist on SD somewhere, unhinged by time or any event. "Completely unexpectedly I realize that there are strong caricatures about every social movement and I realize that these contents are helping me develop myself. So, it [SD] still can be helpful, especially with titles as *'having to work all day for a career and cook for your men at the same time'*". There is an element of the process of unlearning in terms of unpacking what gender norms are and how feminism is related to that understanding.

The playful participatory culture provided a space for people who did not have an education in social science and humanities, and who did not have the resources to address the way the Turkish mainstream media framed events. Participants' experiences and the

fieldwork part that took me to the discussions of *Sour Dictionary* in its early-years suggest that definition-style conversations made social movements (such as feminism) more visible. In addition, taking an online discussion to a possibility of a practice, such as the title shared above on women's career-making struggles, shows the empowering potential of such participatory actions. Although, from the participants' stories, it is difficult to generalize how these playful sharing practices that clarify everyday gender norms are applied in their lives, I nonetheless argue that susers on SD (pre 2011-2013) were able to create counter-narratives of the dominant discourses in Turkey about work and women. These counter-narratives helped the interview participants to better equip themselves for the top-down discourses in Turkey.

@ios says that it was cool to know something before everyone in SD, so you needed to do some research and post your entry. Beyond that, SD used to work as if susers shared classified information with each other which made them look *cool*. Also, susers have their style of posting entries. @redditguy, for example, exercises his expertise in music and posts release dates of albums, discographies, and song suggestions under artists' titles. The motivation is to make comments about the record available in the Turkish language. Susers claim that SD provides a diversity of opinions through its intrinsic welcoming of diverse groups. However, @continent states that people are emotionally attached to what they post on SD; that is why it was harder to let go of arguments. On the other hand, susers used to post investigative entries. They used to check all the posts twice and made sure to find sources to relay the most accurate information available. However, this also results in many community-driven assumptions.

@redditguy states that if he knows that the person who posts an entry is an academic, he assumes that he already did their job as investigators; and he doesn't go further to look into the content. @continent states that even if a suser posts a negative entry about something, you could do a search on that suser on SD. Maybe you would understand that at some level, that specific thing might not be working for someone, but it might work for you at another level. Susers' claims suggest a collaborative learning experience, where they gather evidence from each other's practices on the assumption that other people are *mindfully* contributing to SD.

Sharing practices on SD suggest that every suser used to have an expertise, which concurs with what the interview participants told me about what they do on SD. So, what does this expertise mean and how should we interpret the pattern? First generations susers, including the founder and his immediate network of friends, were coders. They had already met each other and already shared coding practices in various mediums such as BBS networks, ICQ, MIRC, and in-person meetings. @boy talked about 1999 as a moment where he met a dream team of coders and was introduced to SD in its infancy. He stated that when you understood and embodied the coder-lingo, and started to use it, you were welcomed into the coder-community. In a parallel vein in terms of gaining acceptance from the geek culture, @metu said that they already had a roleplaying game group in college in which everybody was also a suser during the early 2000s. There was a respect-network in early geek culture, as the geeks were influential because of their expertise in coding. That expertise also provided them with the cultural upper hand on SD as the *cool kids*. The coder-lingo based trust-networks showed a parallel with the formation of a *suser lingo* and the building of trust-networks within the SD.

@themusician stated that as he read SD content, he tried to understand people's reasoning more than their actual opinions. He posted only when he thought that he could add new value to the existing posts. Meanwhile, @oldfriend noted that the sensibilities on critiquing came from knowing things in detail, such as being an expert on technological gadgets. Susers used to prepare themselves to post for everyone; they simplified knowledge for everyone to consume. Susers also used to discover their expertise while reading about other people's expertise. @newdirector stated that he kept reading posts about cognitive science, and gathered all the sources for his library and studied it in his spare time. He then started to post about it, especially the philosophy of mind and science. Sharable expert knowledge also brought different daily practical knowledge to SD. @newdirector stated that when he was about to install software on his laptop, he always checked SD for input and followed the software suggestions. Sharing practices on SD, coupled with shared sensibilities of the geek culture, facilitated a feeling of connection where susers embraced the spirit of collaboration. Although they claimed expertise, there was no process where such a claim could be verified except when another suser endorsed or invalidated it (which necessitates its own level of verification).

@continent stated:

There is a continuous effort to improve yourself if you are a suser, you always think how you could enunciate this better...you start to own what you say and pursue further research to educate others. And, if you are convinced otherwise through discussions, you go back and edit your original post to reflect that.

To explain how deep posts can go regarding expertise, @ios mentioned a time when people posted about how to find a pirate copy of a movie online to help others save money. @continent states that SD provided you with the pre-filtered opinions about topics, which is the feeling you experience when you are reading entries under a title on

SD. “Somebody worked for you, brought their expertise, and flavored it with possible criticism in humorous ways.” The process of pre-filtering might have worked when the group was a close-group, as it used to have a common ground through similar backgrounds and occupations (white-middle-class male).

The geek culture helped people communicate efficiently through sensibilities on critiquing in the initial early-years period on SD, especially between 1999-2002. It also helped other new users realize that they have to be an expert on something to be welcomed into SD-discussion culture. The sensibilities on critiquing that were built around the feeling of connectedness support the observation that users were mostly geeks and upper-middle class people. For example, one of my participants previously joined the SETI-at-home project in which people let their personal computers be used for CPU power to compute the necessary calculations to listen to Outer Space. This behavior earned him an SD-CPU-Power badge, which only a group of people have on SD. However, these geek culture practices only continued by creating SD-celebrity in-groups, where regular users, depending on what SD influencers said about socio-cultural issues, expanded on their original expertise of coding and technology.

The expertise, at least as it manifested itself on SD (claiming knowledge of something in detail) also paved the way for establishing relations of power between those who can prove they know something and those that can't (in the eyes of the geeks). For many years, this knowledge-power held SD intact with almost-correct information (yet this was information with limited depth). Gradually, after the 2011-2013 period, the imposition of "expertise" also accelerated the process of the production of misinformation, disinformation, deliberate antagonizing, and insults. Chapter 5 further

discusses how susers began to imitate the knowledge-power mechanisms in the post-2016 era, without necessarily leaning on factual discussions; stripping the mechanism of knowledge-sharing only to bully others as if they know something. The presentation of tension that is created with claims of expertise knowledge is not to downplay the episodes of opposition and the process of unlearning within SD. It is instead to show that even in the claimed moments of empowerment, a playful participatory culture also built its own norms and cultural codes, and a set of practices that prioritize certain groups over others. In the next section, I discuss the construction of knowledge-power as a component of the culture of resistance and how it also created a space for bullying.

C. Construction of Knowledge-Power

This section addresses the inter-suser dynamics on relaying arguments, potentially as a form of the unlearning process. Is it the knowledge or the forms of interaction and community building that matter? This section also addresses how the construction of knowledge-power sustains an ethos of opposition among the susers. @boy, a first generation suser, states that "knowledge was more important than the delivery of knowledge, so if another suser was being a snob, it was insignificant as long as you learn something." However, @ios, a sixth generation suser, notes that "SD was a place of oppression where people-with-knowledge crushes people-who-just-don't-know. You weren't allowed to be ignorant on SD...we were having fun with people who share urban-myths without any source or argument." @tech says that "old SD" was a close-knit group and they kicked out other people who did not belong to their group so easily. As far as first-generation users reported, there used to be sarcastic messaging to each other in 1999, even before posting entries. When a definition-format was established, the logic behind

the sarcastic messaging permeated into susers' entries. They gradually cultivated a practice of posting entries in the spirit of sarcasm and *burns*. Susers with knowledge-power used to bully those who were assumed not to be competent about the subject. Expertise, or claims of expertise, turned into a process of closing off the community rather than opening it up. Susers' bullying kept misinformation out but allowed their way of trolling (SD-trolling) that was aimed to provoke discussions on sensitive subjects and to generate laughter.

Even the susers themselves normalized bullying with knowledge, as long as it communicated something to them. One could also argue that susers who were approved after 2013 especially do not like other susers who claim to know too much about an issue. For example, @ios stated that when he posted an entry that explains how open-source coding works, he saw another entry as a see: x post that said (*bkz: fularimi taktim yine de anlamadim*) (*see: I wore my fancy-male-scarf, but I still don't get it*). This see: x is a reference to hipsters who wear scarves all the time to demonstrate their superior intellectual knowledge. The user who posted the see: x assumes that knowing technical details is elitism and it is a kind of elitism that is performed by so-called hipsters. The geek culture (expertise of the technical, literature, sociology, history, etc.) aims to empower those with experience on some topics by simultaneously creating alienation from the discussions for those who are new to the issue. The construction of geek identity is related to (technical) skills and importantly to showing arcane knowledge of (technical) matters (Dunbar-Hester, 2014). On the one hand, the geek culture aims to alienate the group of people who show signs of a lack of knowledge on topics (but insist on the

truthfulness of the entries they post); on the other hand, their knowledge-power creates a segregating momentum on SD.

The specific expert knowledge, and construction of knowledge-power, which excludes people who don't study their arguments before posting, also parallels the user-self-stereotype that *susers don't like anything* or the *SD-not-liking-anything-team*. This is a hypothetical team that does not exist as a group or as an SD-generation, but only as a label. Some user groups generate this label to criticize the behavior of other users who criticize everything. This label applies to users in general, as SD is known as a place to critique which is mistakenly translated as not-liking. This "team" used to work in the spirit of providing detailed explanations, but at the time of the fieldwork, users appear to show off by simply stating that they don't agree. This rhetoric used to spoil memorizations of normalized race and gender tropes in Turkey, but beginning in 2016 with the failed coup, it has been experienced through problematic information practices. Participants state that users follow an ethos of being against *everything*. My fieldwork, and my own participation on SD also suggest that an important part of the geek culture is to oppose *everything* which is not defined concretely by the participants or other users I interacted with online during my fieldwork. It is related to being dissident through an *ethos of opposition*. @bold states that "Being dissident on SD means you are a clever person, and a clever person is a dissident person, inclusive of left or right wing politics." The interviews and the fieldwork indicate that there is confusion regarding the application of being dissident in terms of the perceptions of criticism vs. critiquing on SD. The early-years spirit of critiquing (1999-2002) turned into a logic of criticism (2002-2011) through mimicking the argumentative format of the definition-style policy,

where not-liking-something renders a suser a true suser, and a dissident person. The continuous and vague content-moderation also facilitated the logic of criticism at the expense of the deterioration of ethical opposition, which used to contribute to unlearning.

Where do the suser sensibilities on critiquing come from and how do they foster an ethos of opposition? As discussed above and in Chapter 2, there is an ethos of opposition embedded in suser practices. The geek culture sharing practices such as researching before posting, forming an argumentation, and affordances of the platform such as definition-format, along with continuous moderation by peers, provided a beneficial environment to critique stereotypes. The daily critiquing practices render SD an environment where it is as if all the people here oppose everything and as if the assumption of opposition itself facilitates the conversations. @wine states that there were people who went to the *Feto*⁸¹ schools and then later joined *anti-feto* politics. She says that SD was the only place that you could meet those kinds of people to learn more about the underlying criticisms and reactions against those groups. *Sensibilities on critiquing* also brought specific contentions about a *taste*, which also imposed upper-class dispositions onto other susers. It also made SD susceptible to insults in the guise of criticism against Islam and Turkishness (via nationalism). @reporter reminds us that “There is this certain embodiment about susers, they think they are brilliant, humane, and defend human rights and shit. But, if they don’t like something, anything, they can just be horrifying about their reactions, sorry, *we* can be horrifying in our reactions”. The self-criticism also fuels the fluidity to define SD (across its timeline) in terms of empowering/debilitating practices. Susers utilize the same discourses (such as

⁸¹ She refers to the Muslim cleric in Turkey blamed for organizing the July 15, 2016 coup attempt in Turkey.

connections, critiquing, and opposition) to emphasize their closeness and distances to the idealized community of susers. However, even when they are self-criticizing, they are also using the negative aspects they point out to show their closeness to the sub-culture practices (for example rendering *being horrifying* as stated in the previous quote as an important aspect of suser-identity).

So, how do suser expertise and experiences play a part in the way they relay their arguments through knowledge-power? The structure of their argumentation is an important component of the practice of the culture of resistance, as it provides a perspective to trace the tensions within the susers. For example, there is an affective embodiment in which participants relay their arguments, which manifested itself better during the one-to-one interviews. When asked about how they experienced trolling as it happens on SD, @metu answered the question by pulling himself back a little with surprise, as if it was something everybody should know. He then he smiled and smoked his cigarette comfortably, preparing for what he was about to say by putting his hands and body gestures in a lecturing-mode, and briefly replied with "wolfpack" as an answer. He assumed that the listener must know what this meant but he was also happy that I followed-up with a question asking what he meant by the *wolfpack*. He was then even more dedicated to the lecture, and started to explain a tactic used by Germans during WWII, comparing this to trolling. As can be seen from the @metu example, susers like to think that they know everything, which is also criticized within SD, calling susers (themselves) know-it-all people.⁸² Two of my interviewees actually called all the susers

⁸² There is an interesting vicious circle on SD: susers criticize and challenge everything, including the way they criticize and challenge everything. This will be further explained in relation to problematic information practices which introduces tensions between authenticity vs. fake (not false) information.

"snobs," stating that they think they know everything about everything. This situation suggests the accessibility of the subjective positions of the susers by themselves as well as building an alternative subjectivity that intrinsically negates this accessibility by continuing the actions they devalue. On the one hand, the affective embodiment manifests as care of the self, as it embraces a practice of being self-reflective by the way they enunciate a truth; on the other, it presents challenges to the subjective positions of the susers that shadows their articulations and renders them insignificant.

Suser interactions during the fieldwork indicate that susers hijack conceptual tools to strip away their meaning and use them to explain and generalize policies without fundamental knowledge, in order to insult others. They then use the insults as *memes* to render them part of the argumentation process. This specific way of insulting invites different suser groups to provide evidence for their presentation of the arguments. For example, the term "freshwater leftist" was created on SD and is used to describe those on the left who are accused of not being as leftist as they claim. So, from the point of view of the susers who criticize other susers about being leftist or not, the *freshwater leftist* label then applies to left-leaning arguments without actual structure or activism. Another concept, "Tribeca-leftist"⁸³ is used to describe people who seem to defend leftist policies but do so from a very privileged position. However, these left-wing criticisms toward hipster-leftism gained further momentum, and now left-wing people are criticized as a fresh-water-leftist, which is supposed to neutralize their arguments. Repurposing the insult-memes as part of the knowledge-construction process shows another inter-suser

⁸³ My translation of *cihangir-leftist*. Cihangir is a place in Istanbul in which celebrities are located or would like to visit, not because it is fancy but because it has cultural inheritance. Pierre Bourdieu would argue that celebrities misrecognize being in this place as having the culture itself.

tension (familiarity to suser lingo vs expert knowledge on politics). This practice also suggests that a playful participatory culture may not always contribute to empowering practices; it also creates its own set of norms and alienating environments through an ethos of opposition. This opposition presents others (people on the other side of the opposer's argument) as targets and renders the opposing side superior.

The mechanism of *burn* gradually turned into looking down on people.

@themusician states that “there is a competition of knowledge when it comes to a mic-drop moment. The suser needs to show that he knows better than others, but this can also happen as a perception of better, not factually more correct.” This shows us that burn is a status marker that maintains how knowledgeable a suser is. It necessitates extreme comfort with SD lingo and knowledge of audiences rather than knowledge of an issue, so that you can knock-out your opponent by aggressive persuasion. @wine says that “mic-drop is about making people feel they don't know enough and making others feel silly even just pointing out that part of the issue.” This practice raises the following question: when there are not enough experts on SD (especially in the post-2016 era compared to the entire population on SD), what would it mean to look down on other people's posts? This question is further explored in Chapter 5 with contemporary developments on SD coupled with Turkish politics.

D. *Goygoy*: Affective Play, Definition-format, and Trolling as Revealing

In the initial early-years period (1999-2002), there was a sentiment of SD being a fun place, where all the *cool* people *talk casually and humorously with each other, sometimes absurdly in an unexpectedly meaningless way* (*goygoy* in Turkish slang). This has been working as an attraction that draws people into the SD environment since 1999.

Goygoy builds the main and essential part of SD. For example, a first-generation suser @oldgeek says that instead of reading dry-content for policies on SD, somebody came up with the title "*hatali entry ordekleri*." This title should be read as "*incorrect entry examples*" so that susers can learn how to post on SD. However, the title reads as "*incorrect duck entries*" (translation of the word *example* in Turkish is *ornek*, and there is only one letter difference with the translation of duck in Turkish, which is *ordek*). Therefore, the explanation in the titles is as follows: if one duck quacks in the first entry and the other duck also quacks in the second entry, then the second one is an incorrect duck entry as it refers to the previous entry by quacking again; it should be a definition that amplifies the first quacking in some productive way instead of just quacking again. These well-played examples facilitated an environment in which susers unconditionally accept whatever the policies and format are, as they want to be a part of this sub-culture. There is an established lingo on SD which was created through humor, that is usually a play on the definition format. Understanding the jargon creates affective bonds across geek cultures on SD.

In line with the feeling of connectedness, sensibilities on critiquing, and ethos of opposition, there are mainly two types of play, but each play has its own categories; as many as the players in the game. The first is the process of an embodiment of the definition-format to play the game. The second is trolling, that is mostly centered around the main trolls on SD. This type of practice is called trolling on SD, which is a blurred conceptualization; it is actually *deception with a social purpose*, which is perceived as part of the trolling practices. For the pre-2011 period, the key players of the trolling game were, @avasas, @samantya, @zenci, @lara gofret, @author, @peder zickler, and

@owencan. The two processes should be interpreted within specific SD time intervals. The first is about the subversion of SD internal policies to make room for adding personal opinions and experiences in addition to the knowledge that is shared. This is a practice that started in the early years (1999-2002), and continued throughout until the definition-format was relaxed around 2016. The second is a practice that was dominant between 1999-2011. It was created through early-years geek culture practices by playing with the socio-political tensions to potentially disturb the normalization of discourses.

The first pillar of play, (subverting) the definition-format, worked as a gatekeeping mechanism to allow more educated people in, who could understand the game and play with the words efficiently to relay their arguments. If you couldn't play the game, you didn't belong there. This initial filter rendered SD as an environment of higher SES people, who are mostly between 18-25 years old, mostly in college, and engineering students. Checking the definition-format in the first ten entries of new suser applications was also a quick test that could provide indicators for whether the person was compatible with the SD culture. The definition-format also provided a sense of systematics; a kind of "academic integrity" in suser entries. Moderators also learned about the definition format as they went.

@wine says that they learned about the way that the *definition* could be too broad: "as long as it communicates the information to the reader about the subject, about that question, about the matter." The susers unanimously state that it has to be a definition, but the definition does not need to be correct. This immediately builds contradictions across entries, titles, and suser statements on what it is that they do on SD. On the one hand, it is a place of fun where you help others to teach something new, and bring new

perspectives as probable insiders of the very subjects the titles suggest, but on the other hand there is a disclaimer that it might not be true. This immediately opens up possibilities regarding how facts and sentiments were blurred simultaneously, opening up productive spaces of discussion for otherwise silenced voices. This disclaimer used to help a user get away with their comment, say, on the topic of Armenian Genocide if it was attacked heavily by the community or by the Turkish law. The disclaimer brought a contradiction that users faced, and they had to find workarounds to address what was at hand efficiently, mostly this double-nature of the platform. This shows us the instantaneous intensity on SD, and thus affectively charged posts on the process of SD-style knowledge production.

@architect explains how playing with the definition policy helps them articulate their points to open up new conversations. He states:

For example, let's say you want to post something under capitalism title and you say it is the main accelerator of a society as it helps to develop technological advancements. As an anti-capitalist myself, I read your post, and I define capitalism as something else, but I also want to say something about your post, so I say it is a system that produces products at the expense of exploiting human labor, developing, and underdeveloped countries in the world.... There is always a battle in the posts.

The definition-format and strict policies on not allowing a direct message under the titles motivated users to develop a debating culture where others had to be listened to (and previous entries had to be read before posting their own contributions) and facilitated sensibilities of critiquing together. It also used to trigger the imagination, so that you could put things in perspective. It also worked as a playing field for taboo topics, as they could not be discussed very openly in the society, so you had to find a humorous and

playful way to discuss off-limit topics on SD. Susers gradually embodied playfully negotiating other people's opinions while keeping the encyclopedia style intact.

The second central pillar of play is trolling as deception with a social purpose, through playing with socio-cultural constructs and taboos. Following the discussion I presented in the Introduction through Phillips (2017) and Marwick & Lewis (2017) on how trolling behavior can illuminate the interactions within a culture, I call this trolling-as-revealing.

The main trolls on SD used to pick a controversial title that speaks to already polarized groups in Turkish culture, such as religious-secular debates, or Kurdish-Turkish relations.

They used to choose a title that would support the mainstream agenda in the most vulgar, vivid, and unapologetic way, to generate discussion.⁸⁴ According to susers @biological

and @realplatypus, @samatya and @avasas were the main trolls that manifested a criticism in their trolling actions. They knew that some people would be entirely against them, and that was their point. According to susers, they aimed to make people argue about very sensitive subjects on religion, race, and gender to make people aware that there might be real people who might say what they claim and they should be aware of their privileged position and prepare themselves for such debates. On the other hand, this type of SD-trolling paved the way for producing problematic information that I will

further elaborate on in Chapter 5 in relation to authenticity and trust.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ The main trolls I noted above either did not reply to my requests for interviews or refused to conduct a recorded interview. The details on trolls mainly come from the undertaken ethnography and those trolls' closest friends. For example, @samatya, @avasas, and @realplatypus are three best friends, but I was able to interview @realplatypus only, not the trolls. I was only able to conduct interviews with three trolls, and I quoted them as such wherever appropriate in this chapter. It should also be emphasized that although @realplatypus contributes to trolling too, he does not define his practices as such. When described as such by his friends, he humbly accepts it only partially, as if it is a very high honor and he does not deserve it. It should be noted that all the above-explained trolls are male.

⁸⁵ Chapter 5 further elaborates on how early-years playful geek culture practices prefigured the problematic information practices in the post-2016 failed-coup climate.

@oldfriend remembers a troll:

That troll used to imitate a very old long-bearded *Kurdish-Alevi* person who was very conservative, and depicts himself as if he was wearing a fedora. You were just puzzled by him: a left-leaning conservative, religious, Kurdish and old grumpy person discussing very humanely about everyday politics. Then you realize, these people were approachable if you were able to strip away from your stereotypes.

In a parallel vein to the above explanation, @tech's troll friend embraced a Kurdish identity and posted discourses about Kurdish stereotypes "to show that there is the Kurdish person that you have been dreaming about with your nationalistic ideas, come and say something now." @funhuman admits that she wondered how people would react to her posts, so assumed male-female identities interchangeably on SD. She says that she posts sports entries to make people feel like she is a male, or make-up entries to make people feel she is a woman. Then, when she receives a message for a follow-up to her arguments about make-up detail, she says that she is only posting what "his" cousin said, and the user apologizes as "sorry brother." She says that she was doing this to make people aware that, regardless of their gender, people can have opinions on topics. Users use the notion of trolling to explain how they are playing with the cultural norms, using deception for a social purpose: to demonstrate that a Kurdish person is also one of "us," to unpack gender roles, and to create a space to critique nationalism.

@ios says that a real troll used to function as follows: he could be an utterly humanist person who profoundly believes in peace and equal rights. However, he would post a title such as "*Hitler's great success as a respected person*" and users mostly used to *lose it*. According to @ios, who also engages in such trolling but does not call himself a troll, this was meant to trap people into their *ad hominem* logic so that they would see the internalized oppression, racism, sexism, and othering practices. According to these

trolls, somebody had to be *that person* on SD to remind others about the realities of the world. @ios talks about his troll title: “*how anti-Islamists groups beat praying Muslims and killed them.*” He then says that he posted a definition for this title, explaining how this incident happened. The key for expert susers to understand that this was a trolling practice was that 1) there was no source 2) whenever there was a source it was a doctored news website claiming breaking news. He would organize other friends to post as if they were there witnessing the incident, and they shared their experiences as posts. According to him and other such trolls, this plays with two opposing extreme poles in Turkish politics: how Islamist people are only portrayed as backward, vulgar and anti-modern and how anti-Islam groups are not too different from the stereotypes they created for Islamist groups. The deception works, as it speaks to an affectively charged authoritarian political environment which lacks rigorous free speech policies.

The affectively charged titles produce an *intensity*. This intensity hosts contradictory affects that are simultaneously empowering and disempowering, especially due to the ambiguity within the ethos of opposition. Trolls and those expert susers who can catch this trolling, register incidents as moments of spoiling memorizations. As I discussed in the Introduction, it is potentially a form of insurrection of subjugated knowledge as it applies to topics on issues on ethnicity, and gender: Those who can read the deception *unlearn* the mechanisms of how power functions in a society, and how stereotypes on gender, race, and class are made available. From the way that they tell these stories, the process of spoiling memorizations (a process that functions as part of the unlearning mechanism in Turkey) is full of laughter, and it involves deciphering coded messages behind the titles and entries, an organized entertainment that augments

and challenge mainstream discourses. On the other hand, this experimentation with deception for a social purpose also suffers from a flaw: it has the potential to make people tired of fake stories that confines the potentiality of empowerment to limited places and erases it from public attention. *Goygoy* works as a mechanism that lures people in, but when they are in, they are not in a different world (i.e., the virtual world), they are still producing discourses within the cultural codes of the society they live.

E. Augmentation/Diminution of Resistance

In this section, I present how the above categorizations helped form a culture of resistance and simultaneously silenced users through embedded norms created by the playful participatory culture, new platform policies, and Turkish socio-political context. Key users from my interviews and the ones I interacted with during my fieldwork claim to be dissidents without clearly defining what this entails. My interviewees remember how they were dissidents during the pre-2011-2013 period, and the ones who are still active users claim that they are still dissidents (at the time of the fieldwork). Being dissident can be categorized mainly in two aspects: 1) opposing everyone through an argumentation process, 2) opposing state institutions and how the state functions across countries. The participants unanimously stated that there was a *feeling* built around the ethos of opposition in the pre-2011-2013 era: if they follow this logic in their actions, they are dissidents. This is not particular activism or opposition to a specified target; this is self-mythologizing, claiming to reject *everything* as an exaggeration of opposition. Before the 2011-2013 era, this feeling used to correct people and make them reject assumptions and interrogate every argument and text. This was the second quick test to become included in the geek culture (the first one was to understand the play): you

needed to be expert on a topic to relay the reasons for your rejections. This also used to require observation skills: you observe, reject, and post a justifying argumentation.

It should also be emphasized that although susers claimed that this is a general rejection of everything, it shows parallels to left-wing politics in terms of creating awareness and deciphering hegemony. Some examples are discussing the history behind Turkish nationalism and top-down governmental changes; the contribution of subjective experiences of local issues such as the *Maras Incidents in 1978* and how it was deeply related to rising nationalism and ethnic dualities such as *Kurdish vs. Turkish* and *Alevi vs. Sunni* (in terms of religious beliefs), and discussions on the differences of Islam as a religion and as a way of life politically imposed by the conservatives.

However, there is an inherent affectivity on SD created around the feeling of connectedness, sensibilities on critiquing, and the ethos of opposition with respect to Turkish politics. The affectivity stands for a field and increases and diminishes people's capacities of action. The tensions within the culture of resistance blurs the directions of the probable actions. Online resistance capacities work as a buffer zone for the contentious posts of the susers on the ongoing events. Because of this inherent affectivity, it is not clear whether this sensibility on critiquing things creates social change or imposes a certain way of *thinking* to others. SD only reflects a part of the society that is mostly highly educated. Participants' reactions suggest that this segment of society is perceived as society as a whole (Turkish society). @wine states:

I had so many entries against Islamist people... I mean my family is Muslim, ... it is not the point. The point is their weirdness... I mean, I don't care about a person [a reference to the Muslim prophet] who died years ago. I don't care. But other people care and, also, they [conservatives] care. They use this [the "rules" of Islam] to bully other people. That is the problem. ... I mean I don't also care if somebody insults Ataturk. ...you can say that *hey you know what, he was a*

bastard. I couldn't care less. Or *you know what he was a Jewish*. I couldn't care less... But there are people who care, and I am so mad, I mean I ask why do you take these people [bullies] so seriously? So, they insulted Atatürk. So, what? Where is the actual harm?

The above quote illustrates what is meant by the affectivity. There is an inherent libertarian impulse (subtly accepted by the users) that governs the topics about free speech. It is also not clear whether they are utilizing free speech or using free speech as an excuse for humiliating others who do not know much about these issues. It is also not clear whether they are extending the definitions of free speech (libertarian impulses and affects) in a manner that creates inertia and allows the simultaneous circulation and unquestioned acceptance of too many arguments. As it is getting gradually harder to follow every possible libertarian impulse because of the developing popularity of the platform (even in the pre-2011-2013 period), it is gradually harder to filter content that is beneficial from the information abundance in the post-2016 era. This latter point is further discussed in Chapter 5 with the contemporary developments on SD.

The culture of resistance produces discourses of masculinity by gendered curses in entries (such as: the son of the b...). Furthermore, when a male user shares stories about himself it can be glorified; such as the title "*the issue of huzursuz and his penis*." This title was created in 2004, but it is still one of the most important titles that were also turned into a word-meme as see: x link for the lulz. @huzursuz took a photo of his penis and shared it on SD.

The culture of resistance is also idealist. In line with early SD-trolling, @wine states that she completely disagreed with anything the troll user "author" says when stereotyping women. @author used to be a very well-known troll who assumed a female

identity to stereotype woman, and posted provocative entries. @wine says that the author was attacking women and women's rights, but he was a troll, noting that:

I am against kicking him out of SD. I mean there has to be that content too. Do you know what I mean? We were already posting rebuttals against him that he can't argue with. He was pushing it too much. I might be over-liberal about this. But I say let everything is said on SD but with brilliance. It has to be the standard.

In a parallel vein, @biggeek states that he is fed up with the insults, but he mentions that he no longer feels upset about insults to his mother, or any other women on SD; he simply replies "freedom of speech." The above two examples show the over-correction on SD, especially with old-timer susers. There is a discrepancy between the affective state of the susers and their ideas and actions. There are no guidelines in Turkish law for the protection of freedom of speech, as discussed in the Introduction. The gradual increase in the suser population, coupled with the vague content moderation policies, provided a space that enables various definitions of freedom of speech possible on SD. However, suser motivations (as suggested by the previous two quotes) suggest that the user willingness and inherent intelligence would bring empowerment, no matter how far the issue is taken in any discussion.

The culture of resistance is also tech-deterministic. To relay their arguments, susers assume that the others will have computers, an internet connection, the patience to read their posts, and the readiness to change their actions. The culture of resistance consists of already established physical, social networks. SD's internal meet-ups created simulations of this process for susers. However, it could be argued that the long-standing susers are on SD because they heard about it from their friends. Construction of cultural resistance was also an important component of the production of a kind of an *activist subjectivity* that aims to rebel against everything without clear-cut policies and agenda.

This is further explored in Chapter 4 when studying the promises and failures of the culture of resistance during the Gezi Protests in Turkey in 2013. Papacharissi (2014) notes that "... affect resides in the fluidity presented by the convergence of actual and virtual, as it is aided by the confluent weave of reality and fantasy presented as a technology suggests what is and what could be possible" (p. 15). The complexity of networked forces harvested within the SD environment turned it into a mediated ecology of "circus of affective responses" (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 16). This affectivity also faces a dramatic challenge due to SD admins' changes in how SD functions. The momentum on SD (during the fieldwork in 2017) suggests that there is an anti-intellectual sentiment, as if *knowing* is something to be laughed at. This has been partly initiated by the right-wing trolls (political propaganda accounts). However, the spirit of opposition has turned into hater-rhetoric. This latter stance is further discussed in Chapter 5.

F. Concluding Remarks: Affect, Parrhesia, Tensions of Culture of Resistance

Suser practices of posting, subjective experiences, sharing practices, internalized checks and balances, geek culture, construction of knowledge-power, affective play, and sentiments on protecting free speech constitute the central pillars of what I call the emergent *culture of resistance* of early SD. These practices built a once-closed community through feelings of connectedness, sensibilities on critiquing, and ethos of opposition. The performativity that emerged around argumentations created short-term movements, which suggest that these affective publics "were connected or disconnected through expressions of sentiment...they are affective because they suggest a particular movement toward a certain direction but have dissolved by the time that direction has formed" (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 128). Their practice of self-archiving, of documenting

their drama as a layer of the facts they are sharing, creates an immediate ambivalence as to how one should interpret their posting-actions. On the one hand, it is constitutive, as it helps in taking care of the self; they need one another to verify their joys and sufferings in order to strip bad assemblages away to produce empowered subjectivities. On the other hand, it blurs the shared information as 1) the information on SD need not to be correct per the disclaimer; and 2) there might be a trolling practice.

They practice *parrhesia*, an action of telling the truth, by building a history of self, interlinked within the arches of the social platform codes, and visible through a network of see: x connections. Internalized resistance, the immediate reflex of rejecting assumptions and relaying an argumentation through research and verified sources, shows the present in which the subject [i.e., susers] fail to experience. The moment they accept the premise of definition-format, debating, and rebuttals, they qualify the other [the susers who will post, the users who will read] as a constitutive element of the truth-telling subjectivity. The fluidity of affect in addition to the play and norm-reversing of the culture of resistance within a complex network of co-occurrences facilitated a momentum of learning (to be “good” susers) and unlearning (norms). Beyond any conscious decision of vision or mission of the platform, SD was built on the idea of the collection of information about everything in order to resist misinformation, disinformation, cultural misconceptions, and stereotypes. The practice of *parrhesia* was potentially available on SD, especially in the pre-2011 era, and was prevented by the conflicts and tension within the culture of resistance: masculinity, tech-determinism, idealism, and creating its own norms that facilitated in-group and out-group formations.

Following the tensions of the culture of resistance, there is a contradiction between what users tell and what they do about trustworthy information. They say that you don't have to post an accurate entry as long as it is a definition, yet they also tell you that you can trust everything on SD. I argue that the intersection of unlearning momentum and the feeling of connectedness within the community is more of a *haecceity* which empowers, resists, creates, and questions. The practice of truth equips the subject for him to constitute himself (Foucault, 2005). On the other hand, the delivery of content provides a rupture that manifests itself on future possibilities as confining or constitutive information. One could argue that text (discourse of entries on SD) is not about meaning; it is about equipping yourself with true propositions. However, if the true propositions are born in an environment which invites trolling and fake stories from the beginning, how does one unlearn and practice truth?⁸⁶

It should be emphasized that, no matter what the participants discuss, they are discussing it from the point of view of a higher social class status. This is especially valid for the users who joined during the 1999-2002 period, where SD acted as an amateur forum-like meeting website for those people who are tech-savvy and their college-related networks. These people had access to computers, living in big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, and Eskisehir in Turkey. Within the conglomerated closed media circuits of the late 1990s in Turkey, these people were able to remove the barriers and norms of conversations by attracting other users with humor and a culture of resistance. An important part of this affectivity is influenced by geek culture sensibilities. This refers to

⁸⁶ This stance will further be evaluated in Chapter 5 within the framework of crises of unlearning.

how users collectively analyze an issue and create immediate affective bonds toward that issue to fuel enthusiasm in others.

The already controversial feelings of connectedness and community on SD were further silenced by SD admins' and lawyers' representation of SD as a neutral business platform during the IP-issues trials, as addressed in Chapter 2. The SD administration creates an environment of *technically* correct over *ethically* correct. Admins argue that SD is nothing more than a service provider and is obliged to disclose information to the government about users when required by the law. Users argue that, given the spirit of the SD history of resistance, admins should provide legal consultation, or at least a notification of what the admins do with IP data. This situation shows that every actor in episodes of conflict revealed their definition of SD. They were able to do so because SD grew as an independent platform until the post-2011 ruptures, in which admins copied the discourses of neutrality from Facebook and Twitter to stay in business.

Hardt & Negri (2011) discuss how acting together becomes singular through recomposition with other singularities. Becoming singularity is crucial because merely disseminating information is not sufficient; people need to communicate actively to create new patterns and new networks. Hands (2011) argues that consciousness exists among subjects as an ongoing thinking dialogue which will reveal the *no*. He posits that thinking interrupts; thus, it is anti-power, which does not totalize but addresses the multiple and the collaborative policy. According to him, rebellion is an act to bring mutual recognition. However, what would mutual recognition mean when the foundation of this recognition does not guarantee the authenticity of trustworthiness?

On the other hand, the very act of re-defining constitutes an important part of taking care of oneself, such as redefining the denial of Armenian Genocide as nationalist propaganda. This redefinition works for the enunciator as a relief, as they can talk about it, and for the readers as a rupture, a moment in which they can start asking questions about populist propaganda. Despite the tensions within the culture of resistance, in Chapter 4, I argue that the the feeling of connectedness, sensibilities on critiquing, and ethos of opposition facilitated an environment that produced activist subjectivities (with its own tensions). The very moment of conflict and confrontation with other histories is possible because of the way users demonstrate a truth; the way they enunciate that creates a rupture and the possibility of asking further questions. It establishes affinities with *othered* publics on SD to build new webs of information, and creates a practice of truth in which no one should be the only authority.

When we are theorizing a process of subjectivation through inter-suser tensions, we should keep in mind the internal mechanisms on SD that afford certain behaviors which cater to those who develop particular skills, either democratizing or debilitating. For example, as discussed previously, every single user on SD was once a rookie suser. They have to spend some time reading and understanding how other people post. They need to understand the logic of this culture and admins need to approve their first ten posts to give permission for them to post as a suser. However, this transformation does not necessarily make them experts. Susers imitate each other's posting behaviors to fit in, as if they are constant apprentices. It is this apprenticeship that guarantees a virtuosity in the way that they innovate non-hegemonic alternatives, which was immediately complicated by the geek culture's own tensions, as discussed above. It motivates susers

to curate themselves by cultivating daily agendas. The discussion of the culture of resistance is important in order to understand emergent activist subjectivity on SD (Chapter 4) that can be traced back to the formation of the internal entry-posting format, as well as the interface, likes, and filters such as *debe* and *popular* within the algorithm.

Tracing the formation of the culture of resistance highlights steps that cater to the production of dualities, which manifest themselves as episodes of empowerment or debilitating practices. The following chapters continue to trace the simultaneously empowering and debilitating potentials (as well as the internal cultural tensions between the early-year geek culture and the emergent problematic information practices), in order to look for the moments where the social media platform repurposes existing momentum for greater activity by transforming that activity into profitable form, and what it means to do so for resistant capacities. Next, in Chapter 4, I present how the culture of resistance prefigured an episode of activist subjectivity during the Gezi Protests that challenged state-centered Turkish history. I also address its limitations, through the tensions discussed previously in this chapter.

Chapter 4

The Culture of Resistance and the Gezi Protest:

Affective Telepresence and Construction of Activist Subjectivity

In this chapter, I discuss how the Gezi Protest (GP) is defined within the Sour Dictionary platform and elaborate further on what Gezi means for the users.⁸⁷ On May 28, 2013, a group of environmental activists initiated a protest to protect the Gezi Park from planned destruction in order to build a mall. Gezi Park in Taksim is one of the few open spaces left in the city, located at the center of Istanbul. In the first few days starting on May 28, police forces tried to silence the local small-scale protests using attacks. In a few days, it turned into a larger movement against the perceived injustices of the government in terms of the government's handling of freedom of speech, censorship, Kurdish-Turkish relations, and gender issues (Tufekci, 2017). According to Navaro-Yashin (2013), the government's aim to control the present and past of Istanbul (through reconstruction) with re-imagining the Ottoman past and diverting future possibilities of memories with building a shopping mall unexpectedly triggered the emergence a movement in Gezi Park. The GP became a field of questioning politics of the state apparatus. The peak period of the GP was between May 31 and mid-June 2013. Although

⁸⁷ There have been many protests all around Turkey during the time after the protests started in Istanbul. For grammatical purposes on singular/plural agreement, the protests will be referred to as the Gezi Protest (GP).

the encampments were destroyed by mid-June 2013, there were on-and-off protests until August 20, 2013.⁸⁸

The Gezi Protest in 2013 is important in addressing the socio-political changes in Turkey in relation to the control over the production of online discourses. In 2013, the SD title on Gezi was second in the then available statistics list called *titles with too many entries*, right behind the *confessions* title where users were adding personal stories on a daily basis over the years. My fieldwork suggests that it was the time interval in which the government also realized the importance of online communication (Facebook, Twitter, and Sour Dictionary) and built its own teams to ensure that *its* version of the truth was also available online (such as increases in accounts that just post items in favor of the government).⁸⁹ During the GP, SD functioned as a hub of resources that were organized by the “online” people for “offline” people. It worked as a buffer zone to mediate the emergent opposition sensibilities of users. The GP was important to address the sensibilities built around the opposition, criticism, and resistance on SD, and what they did with that momentum. It is also important to address the transitions on SD from an amateur collaborative presence to a mainstream social media platform.

This chapter highlights how the pre-Gezi culture of resistance on SD helped shape the role of SD during Gezi.⁹⁰ The culture of resistance discussed in Chapter 3 showed its peak potential during the GP. I also investigate how SD was an important information platform during the protests. I argue that a *feeling of connectedness, sensibilities on*

⁸⁸ Amnesty International, October 2013, Gezi Park Protests: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/files/eur440222013en.pdf>

⁸⁹ Two of my interviewees used to work in media agencies known for their closeness to the government. They stated that they were required to populate titles with pro-government entries to balance the discourses on those titles.

⁹⁰ I do not argue that SD created GP. I show how the SD culture of resistance worked as one of the components of Gezi, such as the communal kitchen and the library in Occupy Wall Street.

critiquing, and *ethos of opposition* (discussed in Chapter 3) rendered people activists, especially those who could not physically attend the protests but witnessed them through the help of the continuous entry flows. I argue that susers (participants, the susers I interacted with during my fieldwork, and susers who posted on the Gezi title) claimed episodes of freedom from biopolitics through the construction of activist subjectivity during the GP. However, they created reactions against a hegemonic order (rather than creating ethical actions that would produce productive affinities for sustainable collective actions with the goal of policy change). Those reactionary stances failed to actualize the counter-conduct.

In this chapter, I discuss discourses that were prevalent on Gezi within SD through in-depth interviews with the susers and through analyzing the entries on Gezi title on SD. I present this discussion of *how SD defined Gezi* by connecting it to the techno-social components of Gezi that I discussed in Chapter 2, and to the geek culture practices that led to the construction of the culture of resistance that I discussed in Chapter 3. The production of the culture of resistance addressed emergent sensibilities around topics on the freedom of speech on SD about Turkey. The SD sensibilities on resistance premediated a certain flow of opposition discourses against the government's actions on building a shopping mall in Gezi Park. The GP turned into a catch-all activist theme where people began to be more outspoken on the gradual authoritarianism in the country.

I argue that the stories shared on SD were connective in the sense that they were shared by people who susers already knew on SD. I trace how the shared subjective experiences about the GP during the time reactivated the early sensibilities on SD where

the platform functioned as a communication channel and a living document of suser stories because of its trustworthiness. I discuss how there was an inherent tension regarding physicality and virtuality regarding GP entries on SD. They *feel* real, and they do not require a body but a networked presence. The entries continuously reconstitute the meaning of the GP with diverse definitions and live entries posted to boost morale for the crowds in the protests.

The following analysis presents how SD as a sociotechnical system played a role in the production of intensities in relation to platform affordances, posting policies, and geek culture practices. What were the possibilities for SD during the GP that were prefigured by the feeling of connectedness, sensibilities on critiquing, and ethos of opposition? How were the tensions within the construction of the culture of resistance (geek norms, masculinity, idealism, and libertarian impulse that were discussed in Chapter 3) affected by the susers' relationship with the GP? The analysis shows the promise of SD for the GP and its limitations. The discussion of the success and failure of SD during the GP will further help trace the tensions between the perceived alternative media status of SD by the susers and its commercial social media platform presence. As discussed in the introduction on the relationship between activism and media technology, this chapter follows Gerbaudo's (2014) points on how emotional choreography sustained identity formation, in this case, with bonding through the ethos of opposition. Juris (2012) noted that it is also important to address the significance of the existing horizontal ties to address the circulation of information. This chapter also follows Wolfson's (2014) arguments on prefigurative politics of the cyber left, informing Indymedia movements, decentralization, and technological determinism. In his case, he

argued that decentralization built weak organizational ties among activists, and they viewed technology (in my case SD as a social media platform) as the motivator for social change.

The emphasis on the notion of collective action, as used in this chapter, should also be clarified. According to Sydney Tarrow (1994), interaction among “contentious actors” (p. 28) should be specified explicitly to understand social movements. The concept of “the repertoire of contention,” which comes from Tilly’s (1986) research, is useful here. Tarrow (1994) argued that utilizing repertoires of contention that are familiar to the cultural routines helps reduce the costs of participation (as it increases emotional attachment and solidifies networks of trust). He stated that contentious politics become a social movement when collective action frames and repertoires of contention are employed to claim social and political change. Rather than merely focusing on frames, he suggested that we should examine “how movements intersect with their contexts” (Tarrow, 1994, p. 156).

Following Tarrow’s (1994) points, in this chapter, I will show how there is a vagueness of intersection between the GP, SD, and Turkish socio-political context. This vagueness of intersection is what I argue to be a lack of sustained collective action with policy-changing goals in Gezi and post-Gezi discourses, which I will further elaborate below. Research on social movement media that I previously introduced (Gerbaudo, 2012; Wolfson, 2014) suggested that movements need strong governance, structure, and education that would solidify leaders’ strategic positioning and commitment. I show the promise and/or failure of SD as a component in Gezi as part of the *ambivalence* I introduced in Chapter 1. As I show below, although there are user groups who criticize

leaderlessness discourse and the lack of policy goals, I argue that the *ambivalence* of the platform prevented the contention politics from transforming into sustainable collective actions.

I include notions of milieu to address how the culture of resistance in pre-Gezi SD prefigured the activist subjectivity during and after the GP with respect to the 2013 socio-political climate in Turkey. As Michael Foucault (2003, 2007) emphasized, a milieu involves action and the circulating elements within it. Thus, a milieu guarantees circulation, as it is a field of intervention affecting a population through the diverse functioning of entities circulating within it. Papacharissi (2015) discussed how *affective attunement* converges diverse publics. She argued that affect is mobilized within an ecology (a milieu) in which the affective intensity of digitally enabled connection helps the networked public to create an “electronic elsewhere” or “third places” that are discursively established, not necessarily the place they want to be but where they are. In addition, I show how the post-Gezi discussions on the GP help susers (interview participants and susers who posted on the Gezi title) remember the protest as a moment of *spoiling memorizations* (borrowed from Navaro-Yashin, 2013), rendering taboos in society criticizable and increasing the capacity for reactions. In the next section, I discuss how the susers remember Gezi and how their *situatedness* within SD informed their actions, online and offline.

In the following sections, I present three steps of analysis on how the GP is discussed within the SD platform. I show how the interviewees discussed Gezi regarding the connections with the SD platform. Second, I present a qualitative analysis of the Gezi Events title on SD. I address how the susers’ actions during the GP were informed by the

practices of the culture of resistance that was discussed in Chapter 3.⁹¹ Third, I address the ambivalent contentions created through affective discourses on social change and Gezi.

A. Culture of Resistance, Activist Subjectivity, and Affective Bonds

I narrowed down nine themes (three main themes and six subcategories of the themes) regarding the GP as discussed by the participants.⁹² In connection with the discussion in Chapter 3, the three main themes that prefigured the Gezi sensibilities of the susers are *the feeling of connectedness*, *sensibilities on critiquing*, and *ethos of opposition*. There are also six complementary themes that must be addressed to contextualize the main themes. The following six themes correspond to the ways the geek culture practices discussed in Chapter 3 were presented with respect to the GP. These are 1) being a dissident suser, 2) acting through old SD spirit, 3) reacting to authoritarian pressure, 4) raising the voice, 5) trolling (the government-propaganda accounts called *ak-trolls*), and 6) the Turkish way of doing politics. In the following sections, I first present how the participants discuss Gezi Protest. Then, I discuss the main themes (and complementary discourses) that are connected to the way the susers discuss Gezi events in relation to the previous analysis of the culture of resistance.⁹³

⁹¹ The sections are divided to provide further clarification on what this chapter means according to *the susers*. In the first section, I present interview participant accounts on the GP. In the second section, I present susers I interacted with during my fieldwork about the GP, and I show their entries posted on the Gezi title during Gezi and post-Gezi periods. This clarification will be helpful as I explore how the culture of resistance discussed in Chapter 3 was able to produce activist subjectivity during the GP and its limitations.

⁹² In this chapter, excerpts from the Gezi title on SD are presented to support the discussion. However, to further protect the anonymity of the susers, the post details, such as time/date are not shared.

⁹³ In the sections below, I analyze interview participant accounts on Gezi. As they were talking through 2017, regarding the perceptions of the SD timeline, a clarification must be made. In the below explanations, the differentiation between *old SD* and *SD now* refers to the emic understandings of the SD timeline. This perception occurred among the susers because SD admins gradually removed the definition format around 2015. It was further solidified after the founder @ssg removed himself as SD administrator and moved to the US in 2015 (@kanzuk began as the CEO of the company). Then, the differentiation was official and

I discuss the three main themes that are associated with the *affective bonds* created during the Gezi events within SD. I elaborate on how the affective bonds created in the pre-2011-2013 era allowed these bonds to take a new direction as activist subjectivity with the GP. I discuss the affective bonds (and their association with the feeling of connectedness, sensibilities on critiquing, and ethos of opposition) in relation to the socio-political developments in Turkey.

I also show that the affective bonds are associated with particular sensibilities of early-geek culture practices that are idealized by the susers (participants and susers I interacted with during the fieldwork) as spaces of empowerment. Those early practices of connectedness, sensibilities, and opposition were influential to produce activist subjectivities. However, the tensions within the culture of resistance also must be considered. Following the notion of *ambivalence*, there are two important points that I emphasize regarding how the early-years practices and GP activisms were connected but 1) not as much as they could have been as promised by the geek sensibilities on the ethos of opposition, and 2) not enough to organize sustainable collective actions with policy-changing goals after Gezi was evacuated.

widely known after the introduction of Sour Things (a BuzzFeed-like side platform) in March 2016. Although the removal of the definition format was not kept a secret, it was not officially announced. Moreover, SD admins gradually became more flexible about the format. Interviewee statements about the 2017 policies on the format suggest that they do not actually know whether SD imposed a format restriction at that time. This emphasis on the turning point within SD creates the duality of the *old* vs. *new* as a nostalgia for the culture of resistance.

1. The Feeling of Connectedness and Platform Affordances

Participants discussed Gezi in connection with their support and contribution to the protests. Moreover, 42 out of 47 participants explicitly stated that they supported and joined Gezi. They stated that 1) their SD-based connections facilitated communication, that 2) Gezi was a litmus test to understand suser opinions, that 3) Gezi was SD, and SD was Gezi, and that 4) their empowering communications on SD helped them to be more aware of the top-down political impositions during the GP. I address these statements regarding how SD became a place of nostalgia, especially after the encampments were destroyed around mid-June 2013.

Geek practices, especially during the pre-2011-2013 period, facilitated their sensibilities toward building an “electronic elsewhere” (Papacharissi, 2015). For example, @lawyermen stated that “I think that if it weren’t for SD, Gezi wouldn’t have been this big... [during Gezi], we posted everything on SD, like we’re going over there to that place now, etc. kind of stuff. When people saw our posts, they joined us...” The feeling of connectedness helped susers during the Gezi events as a protective shield to detect problematic information practices and build trustworthy communication channels. On the communication aspect within the intense moments of GPs, @lawyerwoman stated:

SD was one of the earliest places that Gezi was heard. I remember seeing that title on the first day when a group of people built tents in the park before all the violence. Friends on SD, from the tents, posted that they build tents and they are on a watch. They said come here if you want to support. I remember, there were only a few entries back then. I remember that it is very beautiful that people are organizing such actions in Istanbul [She lives in Ankara]. I said I wish I could go there and participate.

The SD-style engagement with the Gezi events facilitated a feeling of connection among the susers. The possibilities of action, sensibilities on critiquing, and identifying themselves as dissidents (as discussed in Chapter 3) invoked an affective telepresence. Susers bonded through the ethos of opposition. Another feature of feeling connectedness came from a shared assumption of protection via anonymity. As discussed in the previous chapter, one of SD's defining features (differentiating it from most of the other social media platforms) was anonymous susers. The previous user agreement introduced in Chapter 2 stated that, under no circumstances (except extreme conditions related to law), would user identities be revealed.⁹⁴ Following that premise, @library stated:

When you post on Facebook, you are exposed, or on Twitter, let's say you posted "police are coming," then, there were many people who got themselves into trouble because of that, because you are saying "police are coming" and it is a problem for the government. But, on SD, you are anonymous, you can post "hey on the Tunali Hilmi Street there is still something going on," susers, we, posted things like that. It is a long process, I mean, the identification of the nicks on SD, they have to file something to the court, it has to be processed, your IP needs to be found, it is a bit harder on SD SD was anonymous.... you can warn people on SD about the police during the events...

The culture of resistance that was constituted around the SD norms, format, and protocols fueled people with *imagined* protection from governmental surveillance. The activist subjectivity produced through the affective bonds between the susers made SD as if it were immune to any governmental action.

Susers organized their networks on SD. For example, @lawyerwoman stated, "we organized about 100-150 people through SD and we went out to the streets. There were also a series of detainments that day, and I defended most of the susers there [as a lawyer]"

⁹⁴ There are two important issues at play here: 1) user anonymity when posting entries and 2) an assumption by most susers that the platform will protect user identities from external authorities because of the way the previous user agreement was framed (as explained in Chapter 2).

and got them out of jail.” Moreover, @metu stated, “our common denominator was SD, we organized through SD, we communicated through SD. @traveler came and picked me up with his car during the protests, he also brought so many supplies, and we went together to the barricades on Gezi and joined the protestors until morning.” These small organizations show that only people who already knew each other on SD were able to channel the activist momentum into a form of action. There was also isolated help, such as suser lawyers defending people’s rights pro bono.

2. Sensibilities on Critiquing

As I laid out in the Chapter 3, susers’ analysis of everyday life is a sensibility that is generated through the knowledge of their expertise areas (such as history, literature, cinema, and music). When they were able to build on their knowledge, they presented cases against cliché understandings. They criticized how nationalism is embedded into daily routines through their support of Kurdish and Armenian communities. They criticized government politics and especially the JDP government. Their notion of *criticizing*, even an external hard drive on e-Bay, so that the other people know what they should look for, is sometimes connected to being a snob (as one of the participants called herself), such as leaving a movie in the middle to say that it is a bad movie. Although they usually support left-wing topics, they criticize “the left” in Turkey and how weak it is. They criticize daily Turkish conservative, traditional routines, such as having a non-used and clean guest room ready in the house, TRT (national TV), and how it produces normalized behaviors, and nationalistic high school curricula, such as respecting the founder and the flag.

The complex sensibilities of critiquing were repurposed during the GP to channel the energy into demonstrations in Gezi Park. Some susers stated that they (along with some other susers) used the Gezi title to understand who belonged to their “group” and who did not. In addition, @purpleobject argued that Gezi events show:

The existence of societal reflexes...some people think this is a foreign conspiracy and some other think it is a resistance reflex of regular citizens. These two groups clashed on SD. Most of the entries show that some people posting for the sake of government propaganda, and some others for commemorating who were killed.... Some titles on SD provides others susers with some information about the “profiles” of other susers. If you check those titles, you can learn political, gender leanings of the people and where you belong, and people build ‘profiles’ for others with the help of such entries/titles whether they can safely add those other susers to their buddies, etc. The title on Gezi Events is a touchstone about this “profile-making”.

The above quote in particular suggests that some susers were not only commentators of the GP, they were also analysts who aimed to present contentions within the title in their own language on SD. This participatory-observant mode by the susers (especially those who felt connected to the early-days geek culture) provided signposts for other susers on SD to let them know what was going on in Gezi Park. The definition-style logic rendered these types of interactions as episodes of continuous redefinitions of what Gezi was and what it could have been. The posting policies navigated a certain kind of embodiment, an appropriation of Gezi as it pertained to susers’ emergent contentions with respect to their positions on SD (authors, lawyers, white-collar workers, and students).

The sensibilities on critiquing were also used against new pro-government accounts that disseminated political propaganda and disinformation about the state of politics during Gezi events. Moreover, @banker stated, “I mean, SD has a great significance during Gezi Events as a platform of knowing about things [within the great

load of disinformation], there was no other such platform in Turkey, ... no other place to increase the probability that someone actually reads the things you post...” In addition, @downloadapp stated, “We did not know what was correct, but we knew what was wrong. We reacted against that. Other than that, we did not have a game plan for a revolution or anything like that. That was one of the important aspects of why it [Gezi] failed.” These two aspects suggest the ongoing battle over meanings and truthfulness on SD, especially during the GP. Before the GP, the enemy that they were fighting was the administration practices. During the GP, it was the pro-government accounts and perceived injustices through the authoritarian practices of the government.

Additionally, @youngleftist criticized that some people tried to organize meetings with the Istanbul governor, and he harshly blamed those groups of users who tried to contact “the enemy.” It is interesting to highlight that one of the other participants was the head of the organizers who negotiated with the governor during the GP and sought to find a way to protect people from violence (and that user criticized others who did not support the group’s efforts). I argue that sensibilities on critiquing were one of the main modes of conduct on SD and thus provided users with the necessary skills to demystify the norms and expectations about activism. However, it also created vicious self-criticism and blaming cycles where users continuously criticized their disorganized behaviors. This vicious process also shows that they were not able to transform the decision-making processes into sustainable policy-making strategies.

The motivation to criticize everything is the over-actualization of critical thinking mechanisms. The way that they transferred critical thinking to analyzing everyday practices (e.g., movie-going and guest rooms) shows that there is a tension between

critiquing and criticizing. During the GP, the tension between critiquing and criticizing facilitated another level of *ambivalence*. Although the pre-2011-2013 era reflects practices of critiquing to provide context (with advantages and disadvantages of the item that was discussed), it gradually became criticizing (finding and emphasizing a negative aspect of something).

3. Ethos of Opposition

The ethos of opposition is associated with the already existing dissident users on SD, pre-2011-2013 geek culture norms, and geek culture practices, as discussed in Chapter 3. It is deeply connected to the aforementioned sensibilities on critiquing through its emphasis on *raising the voice*. This practice shows the way users defined themselves as dissidents, as people who are ready to oppose anything that even remotely limits or threatens to limit their capacity to act. As discussed in Chapter 3, the most visible discourse in participant conversations is that SD consists of groups of people who *oppose* (without any clarification about what they are opposed to).

The opposition reflex within the production of the activist subjectivity of users provided them with the affectivity to channel that opposition for the GP. The participant @newsuser stated, “People from different political parties united against JDP during the Gezi Events and SD opposition is a little bit about that kind of opposition, it is an opposition of diverse groups, from each section of Turkey.” As people united against the JDP government, the ethos of opposition also rendered users to generalize their actions as if they were the monolithic actions of all the users. For example, @biggeek stated, “Users who joined SD are people who don’t like impositions on them of any kind... as far as I can tell no [true] user would vote for [the] JDP government.” On one hand, the

promise of early-geek culture practices was to not to blindly accept any discourse. On the other hand, some of the participants rendered SD (through the affectivity produced during the GP) as if all the users were unanimously opposed to the JDP.

Besides the communicative framework that SD affords, participants' statements on the GP show parallels to the ethos of opposition on SD. For example,

@flamenkoplayer stated, "Gezi is the perfect outfit that fits SD" to say that people were already available to channel their resistant affectivity to each other to act on *something*.

Moreover, @funnygirl stated, "Spirit of SD is the spirit of Gezi. Gezi people are actually SD people." She also added:

People enunciated the things that I couldn't think before.... it [Gezi] made me say these people [supporting Gezi people] exist, and I truly believe that it is because of the significant contribution of SD. I think it was very normal that those people in Gezi are SD people. Back then, they used SD as a supporting platform to help each other. We even organized pizza orders to the park even from the US.

The ethos of opposition was an important component that facilitated the production of activist subjectivity about the GP. Gezi meant SD, and SD meant Gezi for the participants. In a parallel vein, @reporter appeared very confused by my question on Gezi and SD, and she just said, "we were there..." to emphasize that it should not even be a question to a user about their contention to joining the events.

4. Geek Culture Sensibilities and the Gezi Protest

Participants were referring mostly to the period before the change in the user agreement (before 2010) when they emphasized the trustworthiness of the information shared on SD. According to them, this feeling of security that was developed within the SD provided them with the courage to share everything without any internal or external censorship. For example, @oldfriend stated:

Susers joined the Gezi events themselves, they followed everything live, reporting whether there is an issue somewhere or not, SD helped a lot in that matter. People even used SD to reach doctors, for example. SD was more reliable because you don't know the people on Twitter, you could be easily manipulated there, who knows.

There is also an immediate tension in the participants' accounts of SD as a trustworthy place because of the suser-administration dynamics that I explained in Chapter 2 and the creation of geek culture norms on expertise, experience, and the way trolling (deception for a social purpose) worked, as I explained in Chapter 3. This tension is related to the *ambivalence* created in the platform, which rendered the perception of the SD platform as if it was alternative media that created the potential for the production of activist subjectivities. However, it did not let them be fully articulated, as SD was a commercial social media platform.

In addition, the authenticity of the information shared was important for the susers as was making their voices heard within the channels of disinformation that were made available through Twitter and Facebook with the government-propaganda accounts.

Moreover, @metu stated:

You did not hear from anywhere about what those Gezi protestors demand...but, there were susers, who posted entries from the barricades on what Gezi means....SD was the only place that you could know the demands of Gezi protestors from first hand If you want to learn more about Gezi, you should definitely check SD, you will find the most authentic information.

The above quote shows how, for certain participants, a feeling of connectedness through SD networks of communication rendered shared information trustworthy. It stems from the way that the early-days geek culture practices encouraged sharing subjective experiences, which rendered such networks as a place for first-person accounts. This created an immediate tension across participants, as they also shared their concerns about

the trolling on SD. However, when they discussed the GP, they portrayed it as a truce zone, as if suser-administrator dynamics (Chapter 2) and inter-suser tensions (Chapter 3) were suspended, and as if they officially united against broader problems. The popularity of the SD title immediately rendered the platform as a sanctuary space for susers in the protests to relay accurate news to the outside world. Although it is perceived as a general practice of the suser, the sensibilities on trustworthiness (explained in Chapter 3) were highlighted through their own offline networks that they gradually built over time through meet-ups and extra-SD regular daily activities.

Participants discussed the GP within a logic of nostalgia. Moreover @einstein stated: “Gezi was a turning point for most of the people in the SD.... Some people got hurt, some people enthusiastically joined, some people got fired afterward for supporting Gezi.... It makes me happy to look over those entries on Gezi, and it makes me remember those days.” In a parallel vein, @lawyerwoman stated:

During those times, you wanted to tell what was going on. I mean, during the protests, etc. there was always something happening to the group, and you were worried, you know. That is why you had to post it on SD.... There were so many discussions about whether Gezi people are traitors or not, and whether they want to ruin the country or not, etc.... I don’t think there was another event that got SD people involved so much since 1999.

These two quotes show that the geek culture sensibilities and early-days opposition helped form a feeling of connectedness that gave SD a prominent role in the GP. For the susers, SD was important to relay the events on the park as accurately as possible, as this was a practice that they gained in the pre-2011 to 2013 era (discussed in Chapter 3). The construction of the culture of resistance through geek culture practices rendered SD as a trustworthy place for susers to follow the GP. Their earlier practices of engaging with the title in a subtle way to relay their arguments manifested as an important component that

prefigured their contentions during the GP. The geek culture practices of posting analytical entries and their observational skills through contextualizing events helped them to define the GP in their own terms in resistance to media frames of the GP during the period.

The platform affordances, such as the meet-up organizations that I explained in Chapter 2, helped them organize small action groups to join “offline” occupations. The affective telepresence during the GP was sustained with the bonds among the susers through the ethos of opposition. The nostalgia on the participants’ narration of events further supports my claim on *ambivalence*. The culture of resistance, the early-years geek culture, provided them with a promise to change the discourses. However, tensions within the culture of resistance (norms, idealism, technological determinism, and masculinity) prevented the further potential of their contentions (in terms of sustained collective action with policy-changing goals).

The next section unpacks the affective bonds built around interactions during the GP in relation to the available authoritarian pressure. The categories of discourse that suggest the construction of affective bonds are helpful to unpack susers’ nostalgia and its significance in suser sensibilities during the GP. The process also adds to this chapter’s aim on unpacking activist subjectivity and the way it refers to the emergent actions of oppositions that might evaporate before their actualization.

B. Affective Publics, Gezi, and Ambivalent Contentions on Social Change

As stated previously in this chapter, it is important to lay out how the geek culture practices prefigured activist subjectivity during the GP. Another important layer is analyzing the suser entries to trace that prefiguration. How did SD as a platform generate

a promise during the GP, and how did it fail? This section analyzes suser entries on the Gezi title: *28 May 2013 Taksim Gezi Park Resistance*. The discourses in the title provide further evidence to address the empowering and debilitating tensions that were simultaneously created on SD. I present a qualitative analysis of the entries in the title. Before the qualitative analysis, I conducted a word-frequency analysis of all entries under the title for an overview of the topics discussed to further clarify the categories in the qualitative analysis.

There were 12,164 entries under this title as of October 25, 2018, and Atlas.ti was used to compute the word frequency. After producing the computational outcome of the distribution of the words used under this title, any non-relevant words, such as today, upside, etc., and any conjunctions and pronouns were removed manually. The plural and singular versions of the words in Turkish (such as *the police*) were merged to produce an effective outcome. Appendix IV shows the distribution of word frequencies on *28 May 2013 Taksim Gezi Park Resistance* title on SD.⁹⁵ The words that have been used over a thousand times are *resistance, police, Taksim, gas, activism, government, and AKP*⁹⁶.

I conducted the qualitative analysis of the 12,164 entries by selecting a 732-entry sample. There are 100 entries per page, and I chose the first three and last three entries of 122 pages of entries to provide an overall understanding of the themes in the entries. Appendix V shows the main coding categories (discourses and practices) for the qualitative analysis of the entries on the GP. This discussion provides further context on

⁹⁵ Words with a frequency under 150 are omitted from the research. At that level, the automated process generated regular daily words that do not contribute to the discussion on Gezi.

⁹⁶ Abbreviation of the Justice and Development Party in Turkish.

the ambivalent momentum of the culture of resistance (as discussed in Chapter 3 with its empowering and debilitating potential) on SD, as reflected during the GP in Turkey. The way that users defined Gezi is important on two levels. First, it was an effort to fight the mainstream media to define SD without the frames of the Turkish media (such as labeling protestors as terrorists). Second, it provided ways to articulate the geek culture practices for the sake of the GP.

In the following paragraphs, I first discuss the discourses in the entries: *affective belonging*, *affective storytelling*, *critical reflection*, and *calling for action*. Affect is an important facilitator of the users' interaction. As Papacharissi's (2014) discussion of affect shows, affect is an articulation of intensity, immediacy, and emergence. Its fluidity helps constitute event-making technologies of sociality. After I show how the discourses of the entries are related to the platform affordances discussed in Chapter 2 and the geek practices discussed in Chapter 3, in the following section, I present the analysis of these categories with respect to the GP timeline, during the Gezi and post-occupation sentiments (of the users who posted under the Gezi title and the interview participants).

1. Affective Belonging

The discourse of *affective belonging* complements the users' *feeling of connectedness* that was discussed in the previous section. It comprised three main affects: anger, fear, and hope. It entails a user attachment to Gezi: they were critiquing government policies and showing solidarity on gender issues. Users posted entries on how they belonged to Gezi Park and how they were stronger together. For example, @sepsiloniki posted the following:

so you [prime minister] say it is immoral to talk about lgbtq rights... and those women who were raped, it is their fault, right? so much, so much disinformation

.... it's been years, organizing such a magnitude of disinformation, i mean i sometimes even doubt myself. so, it all breaks now for the sake of these *few trees*, you know... c'mon, find an excuse for it [gezi park]! c'mon baby, c'mon lovely, just label the protestor who hugs the tree and accuse them of being a terrorist, say it is the game of foreign powers, say it is all because of the opposition party! you can't say that! if you are man enough, just come to taksim [gezi park] tomorrow. leave your bodyguards, leave your mask, let's see who is a man, you little cookie tayyip!⁹⁷

The above quote suggests a way that anger, fear, and hope penetrate into sensibilities on social change. Susers' sensibilities on critiquing transform into reactions to the government during the GP. The affectivity rendered SD as a complaint zone where the susers motivated each other by presenting their own suppression.

Another layer is the courage that assumes the moment of the GP to be a break by presenting a direct communication with the government. For those susers who could not join the protests, SD acted as a buffer zone for them to post their contentions. One could also ask whether SD worked as buffer zone where susers seemed to reach a level of fulfillment by sharing their affective outbursts (as the previous quote suggests).

Moreover, @redlemon stated:

gezi is a start of something else, a new history...we all felt every gas canister explosion, we all smiled when we see *#resistgezi i am coming* as a tattoo on the belly of a pregnant protestor, all the mothers hugged all the kids in gezi park, there was this big love and the resistance was so impossible that we stayed up all night and watched the available cctv⁹⁸ just in case it might end if we didn't.

The above quote reflects the affective belonging on a different level. Susers shared how they *felt like* they were in the Gezi Park as they were following the events with the live-stream footage of the susers (and their explanatory entries). The feedback loops (and the

⁹⁷ The Sour Dictionary posts are lowercase.

⁹⁸ The SD has no live-streaming option. However, susers who were in the protests shared live-stream links with each other to provide perspectives from the protests. Other susers followed entries where a live stream was shared to be connected to the GP.

corresponding affects: anger, fear, and hope) between online and offline events rendered their connections tangible for them, as if they were following a reality show with suspense and drama. In addition, @sehameray stated:

it is not the occupation of gezi park; it is the occupation of unaware sleepiness of the people! so thankful that we saw it! it is the first protest that was turned into collective willpower without any organization.... it is a transformation that reminds us that we are all human, not left, not right, not religion, not atheism, not kurdishness, not turkishness: it is the protest and resistance to protect our individual humane spaces.

The above quote represents how the early-years practices of diversity was presented in terms of understanding and addressing conflicts on religion, ethnicity, and gender. Concerning diversity, susers mentioned how they were resisting together with the Kurdish and *Alevi* people, the LGBTQ community, nationalist parties, leftist parties, revolutionaries, and extreme soccer team fans. This emphasis on diversity by the susers further channeled their hopeful reactions through posts such as “this is the start of everything, a new Turkey!” “despite everything, it [Gezi] shows that there is still hope,” “...if we can sustain this spirit, even the media owners cannot save JDP,” “a refresher for those who previously lost in hopeless politics,” and “the great event that will take us to the beautiful days.” Affective belonging channeled through early-geek culture practices provided the susers with the hope they had been cultivating with their entry-posting practices on SD.

The emphasis on acting without an organization is also an important component to address whether there was a particular kind of romantic embodiment of the GP to render them powerful because it was leaderless. Following Gerbaudo (2012) and Wolfson (2014), the assumption of some susers on leaderlessness and spontaneity downplays the

organizing efforts of various groups, such as women's rights defenders and the LGBTQ+ community during the GP.

The *affective belonging* discourse provides us with the instances where users rebelled against cumulative historical oppressions by building a collaborative memoir of affective outbursts on SD. For instance, @kazimisgzasvorert stated, "this is one of the most important resistances ever ... as people constituted one heart that created a giant hope." In addition to that, @mems stated, "it is a resistance that shows how to transform anger into a collective love of connections." As it was not possible for some users to join the protests in the park, SD provided a battlespace through affective telepresence. This affectivity was built through hope, love, and wisdom, which were channeled by the culture of resistance that I discussed in Chapter 3.

2. Affective Storytelling

Affective storytelling refers to lyrical explanations by users of their experiences regarding the GP. These are rather long entries (more than 500 words) that depict the history of participation in the protests regarding the moment they joined, built tents, were exposed to tear gas, fought with the police, ran into the streets, and helped other protestors during the clashes with the police. They either shared a poem after the initial one-sentence definition of the GP or wrote their composition of emotions. This practice is in line with the way the early-years geek culture posted subjective experiences to relay their point on the topic they were discussing under the titles. For example, @strawberry fields posted the following:

...just the time we arrived there, they [the police] began shooting us with plastic bullets and pepper spray. there was nowhere to hide, and we had to break into one of the istanbul technical university campus buildings. at that moment, a girl started to shout *c'mon boys, c'mon courageous people, you are here because of*

today, and more people motivated men to break the doors. after we entered the building, there was chaos, and some people ran as they climbed the stairs, there was all blood on the floors. we waited in the building in silence then, and we heard there were detentions, and some people came toward us sometime later to tell us that we can leave as the path is clear to escape now. as we were returning, the red scarf group were still there.

This is only a section from the suser's entry, which she connects to her motivation to keep the stories going by adding a brief to-be-continued mark below the entries. From the edit marks on the entry, it could be seen that she edited the entry several times as she was reporting and recording her resistance to the oppression. There are also statements such as those by @phokaian wind who wrote "we were bombarded with the tear gas as we were walking down the street yesterday" and as @paranoyaklar takip edilmiyor mu sanki wrote "... was just there yesterday to witness the beautiful women and men resisting together." Although it is hard to determine the authenticity of the shared experiences, these posts provide further fuel for others to feel connected and heard.

3. Critical Reflection

As people were defining Gezi with their posts, they also followed the early-years geek culture practices through the sensibilities on critiquing for *critical reflection*. For example, susers exercised the practices of parrhesia and reflected on the way the GP had been occurring at the time when they were posting the entries. Their posts were analytical in the sense of informing others about the GP. For example, @asabi liberal posted an analysis stating the following:

it is one of the practical demonstrations of how spontaneous movements cannot be successful. those who did not want to be limited regarding their rights, political or apolitical, colorful gezi protestors couldn't make the gezi more than white-nationalist turkish masturbation. it is neither a passive resistance (as there was some violence), nor a revolutionary action. it [gezi] is so much important to be underestimated, but also insignificant to be exaggerated.

As the above entry suggests, there were users who aimed to situate Gezi within larger movements in the world, sometimes contextualizing it to provide historical context, sometimes criticizing some users for slacktivism. An important distinction in the tone of their entries is that they are analytical, and from time to time, they refer to academic research to support their arguments. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, the experience of expertise in early-years geek culture had the potential to become condescension toward others who were not as qualified. The harsh tone of the above entry suggests a certain kind of exaggerated expertise by lack of elaboration on the presented arguments. This point is helpful to address the thin line between being knowledgeable to provide analytical suggestions and bullying others with an assumed superiority. In a parallel vein on critical reflections about GP, @thedadaruh stated:

i can't understand the *phobia of politics*. there is always this portrayal of frustration, distancing, exclusion of political organizations. dear chapulcu⁹⁹ people! those people with flags of political parties in gezi park, they are not from outer space, we live in the same country! ... they are the ones who already build important actions against the government.... when you are arguing explicitly to exclude those movements, you are no different than the mainstream media and the hegemony you are criticizing! can't you see?

The above quote shows the criticism that Gezi cannot be successful with only online activism or impulse-driven gatherings without organized actions. It also criticizes the so-called activism that is distanced from already organized activists of a variety of movements, such as LGBTQ, Kurdish, and/or women's rights groups. These kinds of critical entries suggest that the early-years geek practices fueled user reactions during the GP. In a parallel vein with the critical reflection on the GP, @lunabike posted, "this resistance should be supported by tactics of civilian movements as everybody else

⁹⁹ Chapulcu was condescending phrase President Erdogan used which was reclaimed by the Gezi supporters as an important badge for the protests.

agrees.... We need to think about more alternative ways to continue our actions.”

Furthermore, @ahminelaskveminelmevt discussed how they need to determine a way to challenge the discourses of “revolution” and “overthrowing the government” and “turn this into an organized election campaign.” There is no evidence in the post-Gezi entries or from the interview participants’ responses regarding whether these critical reflection entries were accounted for to build sustainable collective actions.

4. Calling for Action

Early-years geek practices on the feeling of connectedness, sensibilities on critiquing, and ethos of opposition facilitated the susers to convince each other to support the GP. For example, susers shared the moments of police brutality with their actions. During the intense moments of the GP (before mid-June 2013), they also used SD to share tactics, such as stating that one street was safer than others. Pre-2011-2013, SD was able to build a level of trustworthiness in terms of the authenticity of suser entries. To depict the police brutality in relation to tactical entries, susers shared posts from their point during the protests, such as “Besiktas is all under smokes of tear gas bombs now,” “they are aiming towards the press section with military vehicles!” and “just as we tried to have a conversation with the police, they started spraying us with the high-pressure hoses.” As for more detailed tactics, they posted entries, such as “do not come to the Levent side,” “Harbiye section is tough, run toward Cihangir, it should be safer,” and “The soccer fan group is throwing black-paint to the police which forces them to remove their masks.” Protestor-susers (such as the 24 participants who joined the protests) mostly relied on SD, as the information on SD was believed to be more trustworthy (compared to what was shared via Twitter and Facebook). They reported that they realized the

government hired people to populate Twitter with fake accounts that imitated and manipulated the protestors by directing them toward the police. However, on SD, they were learning from their peers.

The geek culture practices also motivated susers to fuel enthusiasm within each other to join the GP. Some susers posted entries that contained phrases such as “Taksim at 12 pm today!” “those people who are still at home, why are you still there?”, and “just get up and join! Make a voice!” Besides suser contentions during the GP, one issue about the platform affordance was that susers began to break the definition-format rule for the sake of immediacy. This point is visible from the previous entries shared above (such as tactical entries, motivational entries, and the long entry about political action in the previous subsection). In a parallel vein, some susers preferred to share just news links as entries to help other susers and readers understand what was going on in the park and why they needed to continue to resist. These were mostly op-ed pieces that analyze the GP, and the reasons motivating people to join the GP. What is more interesting than breaking the definition format is that these entries are still available on SD at the time of writing this dissertation. It suggests that, during the GP, the administrators either relaxed the moderation (which was a professional moderation at the time because the volunteer moderation group quit in 2012) or they noticed an emergent momentum on SD. When there was no definition format, SD had even more visibility as a commercial social media platform. This second point will be further evaluated in Chapter 5.

Live streaming was also another important dimension that supported susers’ claims about their presences in Gezi Park as they also acted as reporters to broadcast events as they were happening. There is no live-streaming feature on SD, but suser-

protestors shared the link of their live streams as an entry for others to join their broadcast. They also shared *#resist* as a motto at the end of their entries as a badge of honor to identify their entry as a support entry.

C. Post-Gezi Sentiments and Reactions to the Socio-Political Context of Turkey

As Gezi Park encampments were almost dispersed around mid-June 2013, I divided all entries into two periods: occupation in Gezi Park and post-Gezi entries. Appendix V shows the distribution of discourses with respect to this period. For effective interpretation of the categories/discourses, the intensity of entries should be considered. There are comparatively more entries during the occupation than post-Gezi entries. For example, users discussed *diverse groups in Gezi* during the occupation more than during the post-Gezi period. However, as there are fewer entries in the post-Gezi period, this is not a significant result. In the following, I focus on only categories/discourses on the Gezi title that have been more frequently discussed in the post-Gezi period compared to those during the occupation. These are *affective belonging* and *hope*. Then, I present how the tensions of empowerment and debilitation produced an inertia in the post-Gezi period using the interview participants' discourses on affective bonds introduced earlier in this chapter. The tensions between the simultaneous existence of inertia and hope are further interpreted in the next section (Chapter 4 in the concluding remarks) by connecting them to the notion of *ambivalence*.

1. Affective Belonging and Hope

Appendix V shows that users significantly contributed to the discourse of *affective belonging* more in the post-Gezi period. After the encampments were destroyed, an important dimension of user sensibilities is to address the authoritarian pressure as

perceived by the limitations of free speech by the government. For the post-Gezi period, posting about authoritarian pressure was presented as affecting the belonging to the early-years geek culture practices of critiquing and opposition. Moreover, @nawar stated, “as soon as encampments were destroyed, the government started a witch-hunt. This is the Erdogan policy, completely based on revenge.” Susers discussed how President Erdogan would not step back from demolishing the park and how the police started to act on their own with unlimited power bestowed upon them from the government. According to the susers, this situation legitimized the acts of violence, such as running over pedestrians with police vehicles and detentions of volunteer people, such as doctors. In addition, @sarge stated:

this [gezi] is a necessary attitude toward the repressive policies of the government that imprisons elected representatives of the national assembly with the select journalists who still do not know the crimes they allegedly committed, and how they [jdp] restructured the justice system with their networks. it is not about not being able to come to power, it is about the uncontrolled power of the people in power.

The above entry suggests that susers discussed the specific policies of the government that ignited the GP in the post-Gezi entries, such as President Erdogan’s announcement of building a shopping center inside the proposed reconstruction of a historical Ottoman military campus (Taksim Military Barracks). The suser sensibilities on critiquing facilitated an environment to discuss the ongoing issues at the time. Susers discussed the perceived government mistakes of opening an unfinished railway system that resulted in multiple accidents. Susers also discussed politics against Kurdish people in the southeast of Turkey with normalized bombings and attacks.

In the entries during the post-Gezi period, especially after 2013, susers embraced a nostalgia of togetherness in Gezi Park, and they referred to their own previous experiences to generate *new feelings* from the *old practices*. In a 2018 entry, @aslindageckaldim stated:

it is a resistance that i am proud that i joined actively. it was great, and some people left their classes, some people left their jobs, families... but they [government] learned that they couldn't torture us just by having more votes. they saw that we could not be intimidated by pepper sprays or police batons.

In a parallel vein with the intensity of the affective belonging in the post-Gezi period, susers began a practice of continuously redefining the GP. Their entries present a hopeful nostalgia, containing sentiments such as “it will last forever!” “Start a strike!”, and “still continues!” This practice suggests that, after the encampments were destroyed, people sustained the affectivity of the GP through posting recursive entries that redefined their original posts and experiences. They also posted comments that were not analyzing the GP per se but were about their enthusiasm, which was triggered by the GP. This practice is prefigured by the feeling of connectedness discussed in the previous chapter that cultivated susers’ affective belonging, which was built through the GP that permeated even into the post-Gezi period.

I argue that the dominance of the discourse of affective belonging is the result of bonding through opposition during the protests that is prefigured by the early-years practices of the culture of resistance. Discourses of affective belonging and hope facilitated the potentiality of the resisting bodies, which converted people who embody practices of counter-conduct for future actions through affective facts of the resistance. There are continuous “feedback loops” (Gibbs, 2001) between the experience and the observer. The

level of sensation about what was going on in the scene was increased through the affective telepresence. The geek culture practices that I discussed in Chapter 3 (sharing subjective experiences, the feeling of connectedness, sensibilities on critiquing, ethos of opposition, and knowledge and power formed around expertise and experience) helped form affective belonging that gave SD a prominent role during the GP.

2. Post-Gezi Inertia

An important dimension of affective bonds is the political climate in which these bonds were created. While the previous section addressed the discourses online, this subsection investigates the susers' actions regarding the perceived *authoritarian pressure* in connection with sensibilities during the GP. For example, @architect stated:

Let me tell you something about it [Turkish politics], it is about this entry under [the] *Quran* title. It says it is an object which people use as a pillow in Saudi Arabia. They [the government] took this suser for the reason that it allegedly insults Islam. This entry is factually correct! Because, it was talking about the fact that, as it was very hot in Saudi Arabia, people used to sleep in the Mosques as there are ACs in there. And, between two prayer times, they put *the Quran* under their heads.

The above quote also shows one of the suser's positions during the 2011 trials on the alleged insult against Islam. The suser is arguing that the definitional aspects of sensitive topics are open to various interpretations in the socio-political climate in Turkey.

Moreover, @tourist stated:

Yes, I was posting about risky topics, but I was trying to do it in occult ways so that it complies with the law. If you obey the laws, you *should* be fine. However, there is no such thing in Turkey right now. It does not matter how much you pay attention to your language; if you oppose the mainstream [JDP] politics, you might get jailed.

The above quote is important to understand how the actions during the GP are perceived by the government under the ethos of opposition and sensibilities on critiquing.

It connects well to what @downloadapp mentioned during the interview: “After the GP, we lost our hope to correct things. Then we have this *Feto* situation [referring to the coup in 2016].... I was already outside of SD at that moment, I mean I was like, *do whatever*.... I mean yes, there are still things I am against, but I don’t join any kind of action, I don’t care anymore”. The GP and how it was communicated on SD points to an important turning point on inaction. Susers gradually disguised their critiques under complicated argumentations or filtered their opinions to protect themselves from governmental action. My fieldwork suggests that the pro-government accounts, which are called trolling, on SD at the time of writing this dissertation, started to show themselves just around the GP in 2013. Although I further elaborate on the problematic information practices in Chapter 5, it should be stated that the promises of early-years SD culture did not fail on their own, as SD started to be infiltrated by various political groups only for political purposes.

To illustrate the point of infiltration, @downloadapp discussed a lawyer when he was still on the Ankara side of the Gezi events later in the summer of 2013. He discussed how this lawyer picked two Islamist and conservative susers from SD and appeared on the TV news. As he pointed out, they all blamed SD for its support for Gezi and accused susers of being atheists, villains, traitors, etc. He stated that he called the TV channel, but they did not let him on air. Then, he posted his reactions on SD only to find a few years later that he was sued by that lawyer because he allegedly insulted Islam. He stated that he was found guilty and sentenced to one year in prison. However, since this was his first offense, he was released on the condition that he not be sentenced to the same crime within five years. He says that he pays extra attention to what he posts during the post-

Gezi period. In a parallel vein, @newleftistsuser stated, “I was scared during the first parts of Gezi Events, I can't lie. Because I mean, if they took you, it would take at least a month to explain that you are right, and nobody would listen to anything about whether you are innocent or what.” He added that nobody can criticize the government in the post-Gezi period right now and that susers cannot mention the names of the politicians explicitly when they want to say something against them.¹⁰⁰ The infiltration by the pro-government-propaganda accounts is called ak-trolls in Turkish social media, and these accounts are vulgar, harsh, and insult others. The link between the early-years SD trolling (deception with a social purpose) and this pro-government trolling will be further evaluated in Chapter 5.

The dissident susers on SD posted entries against such pro-government discourses, rendering them the *Turkish way of dealing with politics*. Susers discussed how everything is tied to the JDP government and to one man in this current political system in Turkey. They are also concerned that, even if they criticize something, they might be subject to legal action (that is also enforced by the SD platform in the name of complying with Turkish laws). The Turkish way of doing politics refers to the idea that anything can happen in Turkey, and there is always a possibility that laws will not provide protection. This situation creates a duality in susers. They raise concerns about it, as influenced by geek culture practices, but they also contribute to inertia with self-censorship.

¹⁰⁰ Susers also mentioned trolling when they discussed Gezi events. This trolling mostly refers to government propaganda entries that arose during Gezi events as a counter-reaction to Gezi susers. They are called “ak-trolls,” and are vulgar, harsh, and insult others. Deliberate antagonization for the sake of government propaganda will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

D. Concluding Remarks: On Tracing Gezi Activism within the Culture of Resistance

The above analysis addressed the tensions in the political realm and people's romanticizing sensibilities and reliance on technology to fuel change. The celebration of electronics elsewhere (such as SD) to channel a possible social change is a product of a certain threshold. I argue that the embodiment of geek culture practices rendered the SD-GP coupling as a milieu where the technical and emotional aspects are woven together. The affectivity simultaneously motivated and suppressed the circulation within the milieu. Between SD and GP, I showed how affect worked as a fluid-intensity binding of the emergent sensibility for the production of activist subjectivity.

Following Papacharissi (2015), I argue that the hybrid places blend the dualisms of commercial or alternative, public or private, work or leisure, and individual or collective. At this point, the notion of *ambivalence* is important in addressing the empowering and debilitating practices, online or offline and then or now (early-geek culture and/or activist subjectivity). The notion of ambivalence is also helpful to address the limitations of the process of unlearning that was signaled by the inter-suser practices of early-years geek culture.

The possibilities of SD during the GP were informed through the culture of resistance and how the feeling of connectedness, sensibilities on critiquing, and ethos of opposition were presented during the GP. Susers (who participated in the interviews and/or posted on the Gezi title) aimed to define Gezi in opposition to the Turkish mainstream media and continued to redefine it to challenge the government propaganda and the labeling against the protestors. They posted analytical entries to help others to

demystify the norms and expectations about the GP in line with the early-years posting practices (such as posting contextual rebuttals, as discussed in Chapter 3, which also constituted possibilities for moments of unlearning). The ethos of opposition connected them against the perceived injustices of the government. The geek culture sensibilities (especially when calling for action during the GP) were fueled by the network of trust that was established with the culture of resistance formed during the pre-2011 to 2013 era (despite its tensions). Susers were able to motivate themselves through affective telepresence. Those who could not join the protests in Gezi Park joined the moments of producing discourses about Gezi (such as the cooperation across diverse populations previously mentioned in this chapter).

One of the promises that can be translated from the early-years geek culture practices was to raise awareness of the GP, which was successful. The activist subjectivity was about resisting. It was about seeing diverse people acting together (without any attachment to ethnicity, gender, race, class divisions, or liberal, conservative, religious, or nationalist views). It was about building a capacity to act against all of the rote practices in Turkey. It is also about remembering bodies in resistance in Gezi Park, and never forgetting what it means to fight against enforced truth practices. The word frequency in relation to the Gezi title discourses showed that one of the dominant discourses on the GP on SD was to convey that there was a resistance going on that was not broadcasted from anywhere else. Susers collectively posted on the title to make it visible on SD so that others would recognize that there was an issue occurring. However, the promise of SD was not able to be actualized to its full potential because of the platform affordances and tensions in the culture of resistance. As discussed in Chapter

2 on platform affordances, SD never promised to be an alternative media (in the sense of a medium that might be community-funded or non-profit). Moreover, SD has always been a commercial social media platform. The amateur spirit (discussed in Chapter 2 with especially volunteer content moderation and libertarian impulses) shadowed SD's commercial status. The point of SD's commercial status is not meant to downgrade its role during the GP. It is to argue that the role was not about the administrators or how they wanted or did not want SD to be prominent during the GP. It was mostly the culture of resistance that was able to employ the affordances of the platform to promote the GP and to use SD to communicate issues related to the GP (affects, tactics, updates, and subjective experiences). However, affordances can also be employed for different measures by different populations. As discussed in the previous section, some changes had already begun on SD during the GP, such as the growing population of ak-trolls and the moderation's indifference to insults. This last point on the SD developments will be further evaluated in the next chapter, which is related to the rapid rise of SD as a commercial social media platform in post-Gezi Turkey.

The tension of the culture of resistance also complicated the intensions concerning empowering practices. Although there were analytical entries to understand GP, one could not be sure whether they were articulated by the protestors. It is not clear how much those analyses helped inform the protestors about the movement potential. The mostly celebrated trustworthiness was already built on the possibilities of trolling (as discussed in Chapter 3 regarding deception with a social purpose). I also showed that SD was infiltrated during the GP by pro-government accounts that mostly mimicked the trolling practices (and the practices of a playful participator culture that were discussed in

the previous chapter). The geek norms of imposing superiority, their idealism, libertarian impulse, and technological determinism were other factors that channeled the cultural tensions to the GP. Especially the idealism and libertarian impulses rendered SD as if it were a sanctuary that was immune from any governmental action during the GP. Affective belonging, discussed in the second section above, further facilitated an interpretation that embraced spontaneity and acting without organizing (despite some entries criticizing this point). Critical reflection showed the tendencies of forming knowledge and power about experiences and expertise that sometimes condescended the actions of the protestors. Post-Gezi sensibilities were mostly about hope that did not continue to define SD or post definitions about it (the definition format was relaxed later, which will be discussed in the next chapter). I argue that there was a connective action during the GP; however, the promise of SD was not able to be fully actualized because of the ambivalence facilitated by the platform affordances and geek culture practices. The momentum created with the production of activist subjectivity was not able to form sustainable collective actions with policy-changing goals in the post-2013 era. The mostly celebrated leaderlessness was another factor that showed that what was needed was powerful education that would solidify the sustainable strategic positioning and commitment.

For SD, the posting and acting for Gezi is a mechanism of future actions in which people are expected to act according to the values produced during the protests. However, I argue that those “values” are always vaguely mentioned and never discussed elaborately by the people. Despite producing energetic vitality, constructing abstract concepts for the sake of an activist encounter did not create “liberated” spaces, as the protestors

anticipated. The GP turned out to be a signifier of what is remembered from the protests through nostalgia (especially suggested by post-Gezi entries). It is correct that it demonstrates a *way of being* despite the violent actions against bodies, and it stands as if it were an invalidation of the authorized fictions of governmentality. However, the momentum was not able to be turned into a prolonged action to promote ethical spaces (in which trolling and authoritarian pressure also contributed).

Rather than prioritizing Gezi within the already established struggles of ethnicity and gender in Turkey and within similar movements, such as OWS and Arab Spring, this chapter traced those continuities of antagonistic expressions across the formation of the SD and how the construction of activist subjectivities within the SD culture of resistance leaked into the event-generating mechanisms of #occupy (Bratich, 2013) with the GPs. Bratich (2013) stated that “Our theoretical and empirical attention to resistance-based dispositifs thus needs to go beyond local and episodic research to elaborate the mechanisms that persist across and connect them, to explain the ‘continuity of antagonistic expressions’” (p. 66). Belief in solidarity in the occupy-style gatherings emerges through the affective feedback loops through the circulation of entries posted during the Gezi events. It helps to constitute a mediated ecology of technology and human mobility.

This discussion introduces further cases to analyze how people aimed to collect their energies under one umbrella to protect the freedom of speech yet could not build a platform to overcome the optimistic understanding on the use of technology to subvert government actions. Early-geek culture practices amplified the reality of resistance through the centrifugal effects of the affective attunement emerging during the intense

moments of the Gezi. While the discourse of Gezi was protected by susers' discussions, the discourse was unclear on how to take future action and thus left Gezi to remain a fond memory.

Entries posted as subjective witnessing brought susers closer to the "lived experience of crises-event" (Anden-Papadopoulos, 2013, p. 766). They were "mementos of a lived, embodied experience of a critical historical occurrence" and susers' role in the GP. They are testimonies "not to 'fact,' but to intensely subjective experience" (Anden-Papadopoulos, 2013, p. 766). Anden-Papadopoulos argued that the citizen-camera witnessing blurs the boundaries of the intelligible with the sensible. This point is in parallel with suser entries such as "I was there, too." These kinds of posts produce ambiguity about the authenticity of actions as "subjective witnesses can exert a form of 'dictatorship,' in that the primacy of subjective experience 'makes reasoned debate impossible'" (Anden-Papadopoulos, 2013, p. 766).

The intensity in these hybrid venues (such as the hybridity between SD online Gezi supporters and susers in the GP) promoted connective action, which was claimed affectively through liking, sharing, uploading, and tweeting. The construction of activist subjectivity (through the counter-cultural ethos of the pre-2011 to 2013 SD) depended on the crystallization of heterogeneous processes that traverse affective charges. Activist subjectivity showed an assemblage of conditions for an individual or collective, constituted by the logic of affect. Although affective flow emphasizes the openness of the intensity of events as they are experienced – acted or not yet actualized – it is confined to the event space where it has been taking shape, as a body that is a collective-moving technology. Affect emerges too quickly to be actualized, which makes it a virtual

potentiality. The next chapter investigates the cultivation of problematic information practices in relation to the platforming developments and the post-2016 failed-coup climate in Turkey.

Chapter 5

Crises of Unlearning:

Information Flux and the Construction of Toxic Techno-cultures

In the wake of the Gezi Protest, SD gradually solidified its presence as a commercial social media platform. This chapter examines that period as a crises of unlearning, where the early versions of SD, having gone through changes in design, moderation, posting-policies, and administrative changes, coupled with socio-political developments in Turkey, ended up playing host to a culture of toxicity among susers. Milner & Charleston (2013) state that “the line between playful (if antisocial) irony, satire and parody and ‘earnest’ racism is difficult to differentiate” (p.9). In this chapter, I address how the logic of participatory culture is exploited by the features of “toxic techno-cultures” (Massanari, 2017) within the realm of “problematic information” practices (Marwick, 2018) and its conditions of existence through platform politics. Marwick (2018) uses the concept of “problematic information” instead of *fake news* to expand the definition, usage, and ramification of the fake news processes. I define problematic information practices as misinformation, disinformation, trolling, aggressive political propaganda, insults, and judgements, focusing on the 2017 fieldwork period. Following the Phillips & Milner (2018) concept of *ambivalence*, this chapter addresses the conditions of existence of such problematic information and toxic techno-cultures by presenting three factors that globally facilitated an environment that is susceptible to such actions: 1) *platforming developments* (design, governance, content moderation, format changes) on SD; 2) the post-2016 failed coup developments Turkey; and 3) the rise of toxic online cultures. The following analysis and discussion follow the tensions of

empowering vs. debilitating practices that inform this dissertation. Specifically, in this chapter, I explore how the process of unlearning became undone through the dimensions of play, participatory culture, and subjectivity.

In order to address the problematic information practices, I emphasize the confusion potential of information, especially regarding misinformation, disinformation, and information overload. Misinformation is the "spreading of inaccurate or false information while mistakenly thinking one is sharing accurate information" (Mukherjee, 2017, p. 9). Disinformation is "deliberately spreading false or inaccurate information" and "disinformation may produce misinformation" (Mukherjee, 2017, p. 10). Information overload refers to changing information sharing practices on SD, where users posts entries without the format. In addition, as Frankfurt (2005) notes, there is also a "bullshitter" user, who does not care whether the information she/he shares may be true or false.

In addition to thousands of new suser approvals, vagueness of content moderation paved the way for an abundance of entries on SD. I show that, when coupled with information overload, mis/disinformation practices fuel inconsistencies on the platforms that "produces confusion or disorientation – a structure of feeling deep in the core of post-truth" (Mukherjee, 2017, p. 11). Problematic information practices gradually blur the distinctions between authentic and fake entries. I argue that a lack of early-days rigorous geek culture practices, platforming developments, the post-2016 coup environment of distrust, and the global rise of right-wing propaganda practices further facilitated inaction on SD.

There have been several changes on SD up until the period under discussion (2017) to address social and technical issues. As discussed previously, some of these changes are as follows: 1) the 2011 IP address issues and release of hundreds of users' information to the legal authorities in Turkey. This case was a turning point at which some of the core SD users realized that SD is not an organization that will provide legal support for the users; it is a company and commercial social media platform. 2) The disintegration of volunteer moderation in 2012 because of the disputes with the administration over how to moderate. This incident accelerated the move to switch to professionalized moderation and platforming developments. 3) The two design changes in 2014 and in 2016, which were top-down design changes. In particular, the first one was a necessary design change to navigate online communication easily, and to enable a better interface. It replaced the fifteen-year old interface for the users. This change also needs to be addressed, with the aim of being compatible with Google Search Analytics so that the platform will not be automatically punished because of its dated coding structure. The second design change was visible in two aspects: readability issues (despite the administrator's counter-arguments) and subtle changes in flow (such as adding a *read-the-rest* button to long entries).

4) The formal legal-framework update to the user agreement which made SD officially a social media platform (rather than an alternative media platform). Despite its introduction in 2010, it was updated in 2015 and in 2016 to be compatible with the copyright and legal framework, especially with the introduction of the Sour Things parallel platform. 5) The establishment of Sour Things in 2016, in which selected entries are processed through editors and republished with images in an online magazine style.

This development especially suggests that the administration was aware of the increasing information flux and created a way to "sell" entries in an entertaining way. A group of susers protested SD's top-down entry selection process without notifying the users and left the SD (before the administration's opt-out introduction).¹⁰¹ 6) Gradual flexibility on the definition-style format, which changed the way SD is experienced for the new susers as it discouraged the debating format and welcomed comments without structure. 7) Algorithmic suser acceptance in which rookies are automatically made susers through a computerized system.

The changes in the design, policies, and the governance in line with the approval of too many susers without proper posting guidelines and moderation facilitated an information flow that created a space for the distribution of problematic information on SD. This space of information overload coupled with the post-2016 Turkey climate of distrust, and the rise of right-wing populism online (such as through Reddit and 4chan, as discussed by Massanari [2017] and Marwick & Lewis [2017] facilitated the production of toxic techno-cultures.

In the following sections, I discuss the tensions within the participatory culture, play, and subjectivity.¹⁰² Specifically in this chapter, I examine how each of these developments (1 to 7 presented above) produce conflicting forces that create a crises of unlearning. First, I discuss how the changes on posting policies within the participatory culture practices coupled with the post-2016 political climate in Turkey facilitated the uncontrolled flow of information on SD. I discuss the top five categories of conversations

¹⁰¹ It should also be stated that the 2016 design change and introduction of Sour Things were established by the new administration under @kanzuk (former official lawyer and co-owner of SD), beginning 5-27-2015.

¹⁰² Although it is difficult to separate practices into the participatory culture, play, and subjectivity respectively, in the following sections, I emphasize each category in relation to the others.

on SD to address the ramifications of posting entries that were too opinion-based. This discussion intervenes in the debates about the democratic possibilities of the social media: when there is too much information to manually filter, "new" information brings inertia with respect to social change sensibilities. This analysis demonstrates that the conversations on SD are politicized, which makes it difficult to understand the background of a given issue.¹⁰³ Second, I discuss the creation of toxic techno-cultures through play, specifically how humor and irony in geek culture playfulness reconfigured into judgments, insults, government propaganda, mis/disinformation, and trolling. Third, I discuss the ways in which early-days activist subjectivity can be traced in the post-2016 environment. I also show how this activist subjectivity is similar and different from the early-days periods with its temporary activist engagements and gradual disfiguration. The chapter ends with a discussion on how an experiment in alternative media such as SD fares in an environment of practices of mis/disinformation and continuous information flux.

A. Participatory Culture within an Environment of Information Overload

In this section, I outline how the SD environment (composed of moderation, policies, design, and interaction) in 2017 facilitated the increased flow of information compared to the early years. This is not to say that it is unexpected to observe thousands of entries on SD. Rather, this is to say that the early-years geek culture norms and SD policies sustained coherence among posts. The administration's top-down policy changes

¹⁰³ Dagtas (2016) states that "resistance and symbolic appear as two modalities of power that rely on and complement each other, rather than as two contradictory effects of political humor. In the Turkish context, both modalities are defined by whether humor positions its message against, along or beyond the divide between secular modernity and Islamic tradition and its historical reference points" (p. 28).

relaxed the format and alienated some of the core geek groups. The rising number of users were able to post entries that made SD no different than any other social media platform. In terms of what is shared and communicated, SD turned into a similar venue as Facebook, with only one difference: SD as a company is still benefiting from the perceived status of being a *subculture* platform, even though it is not. The uncontrolled flow of information introduced some reliability issues to SD's inherent reputation, per their previous motto, of being a "sacred source of knowledge."

The availability of various opinion-based unstructured entries introduced a problem on SD: how can people find their ways to a truth when everything is shared without any structure? For example, when there are thousands of entries under the "Kurdish-Turkish relations" title, how can people read all the entries before they post a new one? How do people interact when the core of the entries deviate from providing information and facilitating debate to opinion-based comments, judgements, and insult? I argue that this uncontrolled flow of information (intentionally or unintentionally) makes the platform susceptible to misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda accounts (known as a form as trolling on SD).

It is not the mere continuous flow of information that makes discussions questionable in terms of their reliability; it is the lack of cultural (or administrative) filter mechanisms and the political climate of distrust and polarization. SD gradually turned into a platform that does not invest in information but rather the flow of information as an asset. The discussions turned into forum-based ones that are about that specific point in time, which brings SD closer to a regular social media platform, stripped away from its emancipatory possibilities. In order to explicate what this study means by the increased

flow of information mostly through opinion-based comments, I present popular themes on SD during this period of crises in 2017 below. The logic of a participatory culture, as introduced in the Introduction, still exists on SD. However, the momentum is mostly facilitated by a daily agenda or conversation, rather than issue-based debates: susers post mostly on what they see on the left frame under the agenda button. This position has gradually made SD similar to any other social media platform, especially Twitter.

1. Participatory Assumptions on Society in Regular Conversations

I define regular conversations as discussions that seem to be observational but lack the contextual articulations that the subject necessitates. As discussed in Chapter 3, susers can come up with titles to debate how to define a certain issue, such as in the previous *dominos* and *sociology* title examples that I discussed. The logic of dictionary-style debates gradually changed into posting opinionated entries on gender, religion, and taste, that prioritize the first susers' viewpoints. We then see the phenomenon of other susers coming in and posting entries directly responding to the original entry. This renders the title the topic of a forum page discussion, and it renders the contributions no different from a conversation on any other online forum.

For example, under the title, *the reasons why there are no women poets (170)*, the first suser posts:

women ease their pains by making love with other men; men write poems. so, the women, those you wrote the poems for, will forget you in some other men's arms. wtf, if a woman comes back with a poem, umit yasar oguzcan's ayten would return in the first place [...] so, the bottom line is, women make love instead of trying to be a poet and fail, women are more rational than men.
(213 favs, 18.10.2017 19:22 ~ 19.10.2017 01:10 biyolojik saat tamircisi)

This entry offers an idea about the "lack" of women poets. The belief that is frequently posted under this title in many versions is that men think and women make men think; women are objects of men's thinking as they are not capable of the kind of thinking needed to write a poem. The 213 favs under this entry suggest that this discussion is followed by that many users.¹⁰⁴ In *response* to that claim, there are a few entries which provide examples of women poets to nullify the assumption of the first entry.

on the top of my head now: gülten akın, fûruğ ferruhzad, didem madak, nilgün marmara, yaşar nezihe, birhan keskin, and we can just extend the list forever. i do apologize for those i missed here. i think this is a very meaningless conversation. another similar conversation is that only men fall in love. these are all popular culture.

(75 favs, 18.10.2017 19:33 hejro)

There is another entry arguing that women did not have a chance to become anything back then, and we should watch future generations for women's empowerment. As a daily conversation, a user posts an entry that contains biased assumptions about literature and poetry and makes that misinformation available. There are usually other people who attempt to correct the misinformation, yet those entries are mostly either lost in this information flow or they blur the conversation further. For instance, in the above entry, users brought in another mostly misguided conversation on men falling in love. In addition, as all the entries have *fav* frequencies under them, we can see the interactions they populate. Fav frequencies show that only the first entries in the first-page usually get the favs (mostly the first 10-15 entries) and the other ones are not always well-read by other users. For example, for the above title, the fav numbers of the first few entries are 213, 75, 33, 10, 6. In addition, some (first) entries which produce

¹⁰⁴ The fav button is used to favorite an entry. However, my interview participants also stated that they are using it to follow the responses to an entry, so it does not necessarily mean that all the people who *faved* an entry agree with the entry.

misinformation/disinformation (as in the above example) are usually deleted by the user a while later. This practice leaves disconnected entries under a title that do not add anything to the topic in question. When rechecked on February 2, 2019, one can see that the first entry and the several other entries that support the biased claim disappeared but the title and the rest of the entries stayed. This issue suggests that, without the definition format, when an entry is deleted there are only some traces of information left under the titles without any context (as the other users replied to the first entry as if they are in a forum). This blurred conversation also makes the environment susceptible to misinformation, as it produces confusion.

Under the title, *religions come from Sumerian traditions (201)*, users talk about the Sumer civilization and whether their practices prefigured the religions practiced today. The first entry is:

as far as it is known, sumers was the first civilization who founded writing, and their records show similarities to most of the religious texts. in this civilization which lived 3-4 thousands of years before any religion, there are records of a veil, sacrifice, the flood, adam-eve. it is tough to say that the religion is sent by a god, given this scientific evidence. in fact, the veil was worn by legal prostitutes in sumerian and assyrian civilizations, and it is very ironic and funny compared to today's culture. (please see muazzez ilmiye cig, sumerian traces in quran, bible and old testament).
(445 favs, 20.10.2017 21:15 enbadchild)

Although the above first entry was deleted later in 2017, and the user was downgraded to rookie status, most of the users are urging caution about such claims, and some of them ridicule the first post as premature. The difference between this title and the geek culture that I discussed in Chapter 3 is that this title is still on SD without the original claim. Although the users' momentum presents similarities to the pre-2011-2013 period regarding removing questionable facts on SD, the way that SD stores this

information further complicates the concerns on reliability about information. For example, what would a person think when she/he comes across this title? When the original claim is gone, what does the presence of other reactionary entries tell us? What should we unlearn when the actual subject of the unlearning is deleted, and we are left with unstructured opinions as anti-thesis to something that is not there? The disconnection between the debate and presence of an abundance of comments-style entries further blurs the conversation and turns into either pro-religious or anti-religious statements or just random personal comments without any claim of truth.

The following title is helpful to illustrate the judgment and hostility toward people's lives: *assuming a life change after reading a book (148)*. The first entry states that:

those people in the y generation have to understand that it does not help to load information on people anymore. it is a technology era. people can become *someone* with the help of social media, and they earn so much money that book-lovers won't even imagine. just look around: you see lots of dostoyevsky, nietzsche, tanpınar [...] but what's the outcome: nothing! it is just to be an intellectual snob, it is a cheesy romanticism. [...] if others plan vacations on mars, and if we continue to talk about literature and philosophy, then, there is something wrong.
(44 favs, 17.10.2017 08:49 edgarallanpoenunkuzgunu)

The first entry (owner of the title) claims that it is very romantic to assume that reading a book can change your life, and instead argues that what is most important is experiencing real life.

The latter entries are somewhat torn between real life vs. reading a book, with a small preference toward the latter. The reading-matters side suggests that you reorient yourself when you are reading, and that is something that can change your life. The real-life side indicates that it is what you make with your life that counts. The title is filled

with entries that present the advantages and disadvantages of both parties and that help the readers to orient themselves within the conversation. However, this title and the first entry is attached to an affectivity about an issue, not addressing the problem itself. It does not invite people to have a conversation about book-reading, or *define* book-reading. It sets the stage for people to talk about feelings and personal judgments, not understandings of people's own practices about reading (otherwise, the title could have been: *reading a book or the debate on reading a book vs. experiencing the real life*, rather than a judgmental position embodied in the title itself). It generates *affect* and uses that affect to sensationalize a topic. Susers are *reacting* to an assumption with adamant tones rather than collectively producing a conversation.

2. Participatory Politicization through Affective Engagement

One of the differences in titles on political issues is that the post-2016 titles are usually breaking-news style titles that provide a link to a news source and add a brief description of the news. This allows susers to comment on the news within the SD platform.

For example, under the title, *8 october 2017 suspension of US visa application (873)*, the first entry is:

just a while ago, a breaking news statement. the usa suspends all the visa applications from turkey indefinitely. who knows what is going on behind the closed doors. it's just always us who gets hurt. it is said that the decision is made after the conversations about syria and iraq.
<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/...nu-askiya-aldi-40603924>
 (77 favs, 08.10.2017 20:22 ~ 09.10.2017 11:33 agluna)

Most of the susers argue that there is a suspension because Turkey attempted to prosecute a staff member of the US embassy. There are also posts about rumors which claim that this happened because of a disagreement in the Kurdish referendum and Turkey's

military operation in Iraq, and Turkey's agreements with Russia on purchasing armor.

Susers post on the need for Turkey to retaliate (which happened hours later when Turkey suspended Turkey-visas for US citizens), some susers post about how this is a failure/success of the government, and some susers post about the economy and how the Turkish Lira had already begun to lose its value against the dollar after this news. People call out entries that are right-wing and supportive of JDP government as conspiracy theories, and some people aim to provide historical explanations, trends, and statistical details unsupportive of the JDP government's actions. Here are some of the entries:

it is the outcome of turkey's distancing itself from the modern world of democracy, human rights, freedom speech. i don't like the usa at all; i see them the prime responsible actor of what happens to the middle east and turkey. but, i can't penalize us people here just because of what us deep state and pentagon do to other people. this situation is about how turkey is seen from outside. they see us as authoritarian [...]

(810 favs, 08.10.2017 20:24 ~ 20:41 morales)

...if the us government, which does nothing about fethullah gulen and feto group leaves everything to the law, uses this tactic when turkey arrests one of its citizens; then turkey is doing right...

(13 favs, 08.10.2017 22:44 ~ 22:47 the popperist)

the news in which sour dictionary feto group clearly supports the usa. if i were a prosecutor, i'd just look at this title and arrest at least 10 feto people

(8 favs, 08.10.2017 21:01 gelecegi olmayan adam)

Entries such as the first one above do not support Turkish government decisions but defend the anti-US government stance. The second entry above portrays how susers supportive of the Turkish government present themselves, and the third entry above shows evidence of the witch-hunt based on labeling dissidents as part of the *feto group* who allegedly belong to Fethullah Gulen who conspire against Turkey.

As can be seen from the entries, there are no details about what this decision might mean socio-politically: no or little contextualization, biased sources that either support the USA or the Turkish government, no or little prioritization of suser contributions with expertise (such as on sociology, political affairs, political science, etc.). These entries are reactive personal opinions about an issue. This is representative of the conversations around *breaking-news* style titles on SD in the post-2016 climate.¹⁰⁵ Here, SD helps provide a place where people's diverse opinions are collected and recorded, but not a place where they discuss a particular topic in a manner conducive to productive debate. The entries further complicate understandings (to the point of paralysis) about US-Turkey relations, and global politics in general, rendering any shared information obsolete.

An important title to illustrate the ramifications of problematic information practices is the title, *iyi parti* (772). Susers talk about the establishment of a new political party called "Good Party." Here are some entries:

it is a fethullah party. it is the new hope of the usa after they were defeated on july 15th

1 fav, 25.10.2017 10:42 katechon

a party that triggered the migration of new trolls to the sd. you check out the credentials of the susers blaming this party as a feto group, and you see they only have one entry:

<https://eksisozluk.com/biri/katechon>

6 favs, 25.10.2017 10:50 glmaster

enough with your ridiculous analyses. it is a great name and a great logo. why? simple! yes, it is simple and understood well. the public does not get intellectual jargon. you have to approach them as simple as you can. isn't this our problem? people don't get it. the word "good" reminds goods stuff on people's hearts, and the motto is simple: turkey will be good....

¹⁰⁵ Social scientific methods might bring different rigorous statistical tools to argue about the more accurate position on representation. My claim on representation is based on the practices that I recorded during my fieldwork.

17 favs, 25.10.2017 09:11 ~ 09:38 zifir nikotin karbon

The ghost of the SD early-days participatory culture is still evident here, mostly visible in the form of some susers' teasing practices on the name of the party. Some other susers point out that it is named after Turkish history (referring to *Kayi Tribe* of *Oghuz Turkic* people) which might be a selling point. The above entries also suggest an emergent tension in 2017 introduced on SD: susers accuse each other of being trolls. There are entries which suggest a connection between the İyi Parti and Feto group. Also, those entries that are not in favor of the new political party or that directly criticize it without any merit (just saying it is terrible, laughing, etc.) are deemed as trolling. By trolling, susers mean political propaganda in favor of the JDP government. The opposition is considered to be trolling by pro-government and anti-government susers. Calling each other trolls on SD is a process that undermines the capacities of the process of unlearning as it caters to the inundation of conflictual elements. This situation brings further distrust on the information shared on SD facilitating misinformation and disinformation practices. The practice of calling each other trolls has turned into a regular practice on SD. This practice further complicates the process of unlearning when it is introduced into discussions at the nexus of religion, gender, and politics. For example, under the title, *the reason why religious un-veiled women do not opt for veils (133)*, susers exploit the discussions on political Islam and gender in Turkey. Here are the selected entries:

[First Entry] there are many religious women in our society and half of them do not cover their hair with veils. some of them fight for the veils, but they do not wear them. some of them only wear them during praying. i wonder why.

important note [edited after the above first posted entry]: wtf! look at those morons on sd... ignorant schooled susers...there are 44 favs for the entry "why not." some of them told me i am the son of the bitch. some of

them understood my question, thanks to them. i did not point out an opinion; i just stated a fact. you know [...] fuck you [...] fuck the people who let you into the sd.

56 favs, 14.10.2017 10:36 ~ 12:48 no country for old men

[Second Entry] it is an act of free speech. they might just be thinking that being a muslim should not only be justified by covering some of your body [...]

60 favs, 14.10.2017 10:49 ~ 10:53 schwarzeagle

[Third Entry] it is because there is no open statement in the quran that enforces to cover the head or the hairs... (see: nur 31st section of the quran)

54 favs, 14.10.2017 10:56 ~ 11:51 chuckal

This is a title that further complicates understandings about the thin line between being a political troll and simply asking questions and making/inviting definitions. The first entry raises a question about women who do not wear veils. The entry's position is not clear, especially because of the way the title is framed: does she/he assume that everyone needs to follow religious orders or does she/he want to understand the practice of defending something but not following it? Another layer is the way the question is framed: it is a forum question and a forum topic—it is not written using early-days SD norms. It generates a conversation on a topic which has the potential to be lost on the SD database as it does not connect itself to any prior conversations about this topic (2017 was not the first time that someone asked a question about veiling). The unstructured positioning of the question and the seemingly naïve perspective of it facilitates an environment for other users to directly attack the first entry, sometimes even through mutual cursing, raising points on free speech, and social pressures. Also important is that some users highlight the fact that veiling is a cultural option, not a rule of the religion, as shown in the third entry above with citations to the Quran.

The discussion on religion, veiling, and interpretations of the Quran are beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, the debate is added here to show that there are still users who aim to cite some sources when they raise their arguments. However, the citations are mostly selective and posted there to support the users' point of view, not to provide a critical thinking discussion as used to happen on SD, with many citations and engaging counter-arguments from other users with other citations.

As there are no internal checks for whether or not any statistics or any provided information is correct, the way is opened to biased discussions on politics, religion, gender, and culture, especially in the post-2016 climate in Turkey. Users post their own opinions, and those opinions are sometimes connected to bits of "true" statements, such as the section from the Quran above. However, there is no supplemental discussion on the mentioned section, and it is also not clear whether users go further to click on the *see: x* link to learn more about it themselves. In addition, in the above example, shared opinions usually miss the addressing of pressures faced by women, especially in traditional settings. These kinds of titles resemble early-days geek culture practices of fighting for the right to veil or not veil and use a similar discourse to "analyze" veiling. However, the tone, assumptions, and the language do not create effective language to investigate an issue; they create an *affective* language that sets the tone as being either on the one side or the other through facilitating cultural sensibilities. This practice makes the dialogue resemble a forum discussion rather than a "dictionary" entry by blurring a critical conversation in Turkish culture within an environment of misinformation.

3. Participatory Mediatedness through the News on Celebrities

The engagement with the news on celebrities is important as it has three levels: 1) The way it occurs on SD is mediated because of the inherent tensions that are explained in Chapter 2 (user-administrative tensions on what should be on SD and how) and Chapter 3 (inter-user tensions within the production of the culture of resistance, such as idealism, tech-determinism, masculinity, and geek norms). 2) They talk about the way the celebrities are discussed in the media, which makes their discussions hyper-mediated. 3) The comment-style entries facilitate an environment of reactionary bubbles rather than critically engaging in an issue.

These titles refer to topics about famous people, usually in Turkey but sometimes worldwide. For example, the title *the fact that ahmet hakan couldn't recognize aamir khan (146)*, concerns the way an anchorman presented the news and is populated with judgmental opinions.¹⁰⁶ The first entry states:

just saw it on channel d evening news, there were these girls screaming and crying with excitement as aamir khan arrives in turkey, and he said something like "i don't know who this person is and why these girls are crying over him." bro, i can't say that it is your ignorance, but it is lack of knowledge. and you are ahmet hakan; and you are presenting the news, and you said something like that, not cool. [...]
edit: people are asking me who aamir khan is. i am sure some people criticize 18-year old aleyna tilki's¹⁰⁷ asking who behsat uygur¹⁰⁸ is!
243 favs, 04.10.2017 19:55 ~ 05.10.2017 07:01 bi sus la motorun sogusun

The entry judges Ahmet Hakan for not knowing the Bollywood star Aamir Khan. Some entries judge the fact that some people know who Aamir Khan is and question why that information would be helpful. Some other entries judge the way others talk about this

¹⁰⁶ Ahmet Hakan is a journalist/anchorman, and most users dislike him and blame him for, as many users believe, supporting the government

¹⁰⁷ A popular culture YouTube celebrity among teenagers in Turkey.

¹⁰⁸ An actor in Turkey who is also known for hosting game shows.

kind of “intellectual knowledge stuff.” Some people judge everyone else and claim that the level of intellectuality in Turkey can be interpreted by the level of support Ahmet Hakan can get. If we are the users who are reading the entries under this title, we do not learn or unlearn anything about being an anchorman, what Bollywood is, or who Aamir Khan is. The title is filled with aggressive mutual opinions about the way people enunciate their judgmental logic.

Another level concerning the topics on celebrities is when they are coupled with issues on gender, ethnicity, or social class which casts doubts on the way they are experienced. For example, under the title, *elifsafak's outing herself as bisexual (259)*, users discuss Elif Safak’s 2017 TED Talk (and the circulated news about it in the media) and how she outed herself as bisexual for the first time in public. Here are the first two entries:

[First Entry] it is a statement that is of interest to me. she was the most prominent supporter of the government back then. she was working hard to legitimize the government’s actions. so, she is bisexual, why couldn't she declare it back then? why did she scared? if she thinks there was a non-supportive environment for such declarations, why did she support the people who created that environment? she read her love novel to the people from the jdp within the context of "library talks." she should have declared it back then, or not declare it all forever. did she think about coming out when she does not have relations with the government? this is not sincere to me. [...]
679 favs, 14.10.2017 21:19 ~ 22:51 santradauclusex

[Second Entry] here is the interpretation: “i benefited from postmodern islamism for a long time. i even turned mevlana rumi into an object of white-collar depression. i even got closer to the government, wrote on islamist newspaper and benefited from islamic circle nepotism and promoted myself as an intellectual. but now, i am outcasted because of the general look on islamic circles [feto], and i will play with western consciousness by bringing my sexual orientation to the front.” this woman disgusts me more than tayyip erdogan.
13 favs, 15.10.2017 10:12 ni dieu ni maître

In the following approximately two-hundred entries, susers mostly don't believe in her sincerity. They claim that she did not support the LGBTQ movement for those times that she could have or she seemed like she was supporting the current government, which most susers find to be unrelatable. The above entries and the momentum of criticism against Elif Safak is similar to the early-years geek culture practice. It presents the layers of criticism but it also creates an "us" vs. "them" discourse that is blurred with bits of facts and speech rights. The above entries with respect to the ethos of geek culture practices further complicate the interpretations of the rights of a person to self-determine the timing of their coming-out, the outcomes of political orientation, authoritarian pressures, and gender issues in Turkey.

Another important element in the hyper-mediated discussions is the combination of understandings on the history of knowledge-production (such as in Science) and the way it is represented in the news media. For example, under the title *don't get involved in daily politics, learn science (97)*, susers discuss Aziz Sancar's comments on politics.

Sancar is a Turkish scientist who won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2015 and experienced some fame afterwards. Here are a few selected entries:

[First entry] aziz sancar's suggestion to turkish youth.
<https://youtu.be/xanvwie9cw>
 as if we have an environment in this country to deal with science and get distanced from politics [...]
 140 favs, 14.12.2017 09:31 perebron

[Second entry] an explanation where we see aziz sancar does not follow the turkish agenda. it shows that the professor does not know how daily politics affect children's lives here. for example, a child does not follow day-to-day politics, but reads, travels, and someday wears a t-shirt that writes "hero" on it and got arrested [because of alleged connections with the word to the fetö group] [...]
 21 favs, 14.12.2017 10:00 fullcontact

[Third entry] so if you ignore politics and just be a geek about school, then your child cannot perform well. aziz sancar is an expert on his field, but it is evident that he does not apparently think about other areas. he owes his success to the turkish republic as a poor boy from the southeast. as the republic is precisely on target, and as neoliberalism is penetrated to all aspects of our lives, you cannot just say i'll just do whatever. [...]
42 favs, 14.12.2017 10:00 santralin

[Fourth entry] when you try to learn science without dealing with daily politics,
it is humiliating the public in the country where evolution theory is forbidden to be taught, and access to wikipedia is banned. somebody close to him should inform him that the government thinks that educated people are dangerous. [...]
5 favs, 14.12.2017 10:44 ~ 11:22 aziz bagirsaksiz

Some susers aggressively point out the accuracy of this and how Turkish people should be invested in science. Others equally aggressively highlight that this means nothing, as science is already politicized in Turkey. Even though the statement is about studying, affective statements about experiences of the politicized education system in Turkey are also visible across entries. Considering the above entries, one could argue that the susers aimed to bring context to Aziz Sancar's statement (not the argument in the entries), and they demonstrated their arguments against him (as if they were talking to him) regarding the relationship between politics and science, which is reminiscent of early-years geek culture practices.

The important aspect of these conversations is that in titles like these, susers usually orient themselves against the title, not against one another as used to be the case on SD.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, the new unformatted integration on SD results in more comment-like entries rather than definitions of issues. As a reader, you will need to process these

¹⁰⁹ In early-years SD, orienting against another suser was mediated through the definition-format. There was an underlying practice of adding posts to contribute to a general encyclopedia-style guide. Here, I show how it turns into an orientation against a title.

comments as fast as they are written, and this creates a reactionary criticism bubble, rather than generating the productive momentum to do something about the issue that is being criticized. The reactionary criticism bubble is representative across different topics on SD because of the sensitive web of connections between the interface, posting policies, and the post-2016 political climate. Compared to early-years geek culture (with its own limitations), it could also be argued that the encyclopedia style facilitated more open conversations that had contextual anchors for the user to carry and apply the dialogues elsewhere. Post-2016 discussions have their expiration dates that do not connect well with the culture of resistance.¹¹⁰

4. Participatory Distrust through Popular Sports Discussion

In this sub-section, I present selected conversations on sports which dominate SD weekly because of the sports events scheduled on the weekends in Turkey. The users follow the events (sports or news related to the sports) through live entry-posting, which is a practice copied from Twitter usage. I show one example below as a representative of such conversations.

For example, the title *arda turan (268)* is about a famous soccer player. Here are a few selected entries:

If we can't switch to a professional system from the brotherhood system in our national team, arda and similar people can continue to be captains, and they let him play even though he hasn't played almost a year. [...]
13 favs, 06.10.2017 21:37 ~ 21:38 muhafazakar devrimci

¹¹⁰ For example, the Aziz Sancar conversation did not continue the next day or the following days. However, one can see that people still continue to post their discussions under the *sociology* title at the time of writing (although not as many as there used to be). This situation suggests that 1) early-years geek culture still contributes to discussions according to the posting policies that they were used to follow; in this case, if you have anything to add something about sociology, you go to that title to add it, you don't create another title that sounds like an observation about sociology to convey your points 2) a form of the activist subjectivity is still visible, which is further discussed in the third section.

“Arda is the representation of Turkish soccer, and Turkish soccer is a representation of Turkey in general.”

4 favs, 07.10.2017 12:28 feragunes

Turan is mostly discussed through his perceived closeness to the JDP government according to the susers. People post about how the crowd cheered against him at the game on October 5, 2017, as he left the soccer game the previous day smiling despite the fact that the Turkish team was behind 3-0. There are entries which bring attention to the “brotherhood” system in the Turkish national team.¹¹¹ Susers mostly criticize him for being a bad player (as well as a badly-behaving-player). Susers also mention how Bilal Mese (a journalist in Turkey) criticized him in a newspaper column, and Arda Turan attacked him because of his criticisms. Some susers imply that even in a soccer game, they see a JDP-style-government in which coaches and other high-level people have to do whatever the government-connected people ask them to do. With the gradually increasing suser approvals in 2017, the dominant entry topics began to be mostly about sports events. It also introduced an emergent way of following SD through live entry-posting, as there were no posting policies on SD in the post-2016 period. It should also be emphasized that susers use the discussions on sports as a segue to discuss political parties and their policies. However, a sports title, especially if it is about a game, can contain more than two-thousand entries that are posted within hours. At that point, SD is no different than any other social media platform that provides an online space to share

¹¹¹ According to the susers, this system has some age-specific, religion-specific and Muslim-cleric-specific connotations. In this system, the elderly player dictates other players’ behaviors and choices.

feelings about any event. It is generative of collective attention, but not sustainable collective action.¹¹²

5. The Participation in Discussions of Topics on Technology as a Form of Bullying

Topics on technology resemble the topics of the news about celebrities. Susers usually gather around a piece of news about a technological device and provide their opinions about that technology. As I have shown in previous chapters, the early-days of the culture of resistance within geek practices had their own tensions around issues on masculinity, tech determinism, and bullying with knowledge power. However, it could be argued that, because of the way the debates were framed, those early-years saw more elements of facts in discussions rather than assumptions based on personal opinion. In the early-years geek practices, the bullying was formed around having knowledge about issues while looking down on other susers who did not know anything about an issue or knew less. In the post-2016 period, that kind of mechanism was less visible because of the continuous information flow. Instead, we see personal opinions and trolling. The number of entries in the title, *bitcoin (1207)*, demonstrates that it is one of the top discussions in which susers exchanged investment strategies. One of the entries discusses different investment strategies:

turkish stock exchange market volatility makes much more sense when you see people on sd are randomly talking about why it increases its value. whatever, let's see today's developments on sd. [...] the lightning network development team has just announced test drives on bitcoin network...[...] also, tokyo stock exchange also announced that they would open bitcoin for fix term investment, us cme group's and chicago board options exchange, and wall street's announcements [...]

¹¹² This last point is further explored in the third section on subjectivity. There are collaborative titles that are aimed to provide help for people or to unpack a societal issue collectively, however they do not usually turn into sustainable, ethical actions, and mostly stayed online as complaints.

increases its value. [...] if you want to follow this kind of announcements, you can follow it on this link [...]

76 favs, 07.12.2017 00:02 ~ 07:19 razzraziel

Although the above entry aims to explain the ways in which investments on bitcoin can function, it also raises two questions about the sensibilities of the users who post on these kinds of titles: 1) it is not about bitcoin, it is about how to make an investment. It makes the assumption that bitcoin *works* (whatever it is), and provides investment strategies (participatory part). 2) There is no or very limited discussion on what bitcoin actually is and *how* it works. 3) Users also talk about the bitcoin trend in relation to how the Turkish government might support it or not, and possible issues with the technology and investment tactics. They are mostly concerned with the *day-to-day translations of bitcoin*, rather than a collaborative encyclopedia building practice. They mostly share long analyzes with links, in addition to entries that only provide whether they earned or lost some amount of dollars, *see: x* links with jokes on how bitcoin is just a temporary investment and a meaningless hype.¹¹³ Among these entries, few people post guide-to-understand-bitcoin-style long entries (about 1000 words) that aim to help people. Titles on technology show that there is an essence of collaborative learning coupled with joke-posting and comment-style entries on SD. While those entries provide an introduction to the vocabulary of what is discussed, such as how bitcoin functions, it usually assumes its readers already know what bitcoin is. The technology titles also then turn into comments about the bitcoin exchange rate and daily investment strategies, rather than contextualizing discussions. The number of entries also present another challenge for the

¹¹³ The first entry is added here just to show the way language and argumentation is shaped. Other details that users provide are not translated, such as links to the sites with good advice, buying and selling opportunities, learning opportunities, etc.

readers, requiring them to read everything before they post a new entry. This situation further creates an abundance of similar entries, personal comments, and trolls who aim to steer the conversation toward one particular investment-type over the others.

6. Addressing Participatory Practices in relation to Sour Dictionary's Fluidity

In the above sub-sections, I presented post-2016 styles of conversations centered around topics on regular daily events, politics, and hyper-mediatedness via celebrity discussions, sports, and technology. These discussions are at the nexus of platforming developments and post failed-coup climate in Turkey. The presence of polarization through opinionated entries, hostility, and blaming each other as trolls demonstrates that the SD environment is gradually becoming more available for the production of problematic information sharing practices. These practices are also coupled with the inundation of entries because of the increase in the approval rates via the automated algorithmic approval process and relaxed posting protocols. I argue that the combination of these practices prevented SD from sustaining the potential for the process of unlearning, as it caters to ambivalence about the topics under discussion.

On the one hand, there are still entries that aim to explain the issue even if they are not in a definition format. On the other hand, they are mostly lost in the practice of treating SD as a means to follow up the popular (through agenda title) specific entries geared towards commenting on a piece of news (such as the sports titles and celebrity titles I discuss above). In addition, the climate of polarization and distrust facilitates further politicization around party-politics. The tendency of geek culture to make everyday topics political in order to question issues on social change has turned into a tendency to make an everyday topic about political parties and their policies guided by

rumors on selective *actants* such as Fethullah Gulen, President Erdogan, JDP, opposition parties, and the deep state. The early-years practice of hyperlink connection does not effectively work as it used to do by linking corresponding topics to each other. Some people might follow some topics if they encounter them during their presence on SD. However, SD provides more of a space to moderate the "now" rather than providing indexes to navigate accumulated knowledge. To further zoom in and address how platforming developments within the culture of SD (coupled with post-2016 political climate) opened the way for problematic information practices, in the next section, I investigate the construction of toxic techno-cultures through play in relation to the above analyzed conversation threads.

B. From Playful Geek Culture to Toxic Techno-culture

The concept of toxic techno-cultures refers to "... cultures that are enabled by and propagated through sociotechnical networks such as Reddit, 4chan, Twitter and online gaming. ...tactics used within these cultures often rely heavily on implicit or explicit harassment of others" (Massarani, 2017, p. 333). Massarani's (2017) and Marwick and Lewis' (2017) research points us to an intensification of toxicity in terms of trolling, disinformation, and misinformation through practices on social media platforms such as Reddit and 4chan. Following the research on the global rise of online toxicity, I argue that there are three elements at the nexus of the construction of toxic techno-culture on SD: platforming developments on SD, post failed-coup sensibilities in Turkey, and global tension in rising right-wing trolling. In this section, I discuss the ways in which toxic techno-cultures are systematically produced intentionally and unintentionally on SD through playfulness inherited from the early-years geek culture practices.

In the following paragraphs, I discuss the problematic information practices such as speculations and hypothesis about state intrigue, deliberate antagonizing, political propaganda trolling, conversation-style entries, insults and name calling, and unpleasant jokes. I argue that the flux of information, coupled with the emergent conversation style that blurs the discussions, facilitates an environment that raises more questions about the "truth value" of statements and comments. In addition, a lack of clear content moderation policies, governance, and guidance on hate speech further makes the environment susceptible to problematic information practices. This situation creates a climate which supports a crises of unlearning, where the difference between true and false does not matter anymore, leading to inertia of information. Coupled with reactionary discourses, the information-inertia renders once activist issues passive, facilitating an environment of inaction.

1. Blurring the Boundaries of Discussions through Speculations and Deliberate Antagonizing

There are entries on SD that structurally look like critical reflections on a piece of news that develops at the time of the posts, but are also extended as speculations. For example the title *our invitation for resignation was sent to Mr. Melih (237)* refers to President Erdogan's direct orders to assign new staff to local governmental positions across Turkey. A user states that:

this statement obviously shows us that melih gokcek will be vice president. as you know, with the recent changes, there can be an unlimited number of vice presidents. they probably said we'll just assign a new position to him; then negotiations are made.
9 favs, 19.10.2017 04:29 gargagar

This topic resurfaced every couple of days with different title variations. In the entries, susers discussed the official news that President Erdogan stated that his office let Mr. Melih know that he should resign. Susers were suggesting that this was some form of power struggle between them. In the entries, we see that susers were discussing either the context of why M. Gokcek would accept this invitation of resignation as well as why President Erdogan would publicly announce this invitation. There were also speculations about the deep state and how this up-and-down relationship was allegedly a deal between the two, as some promises were made. These discussions show that although the public forum provides a space of conversation to understand the topic regarding the current dilemma about Turkish politics by providing many views at the same time, it also causes more confusion because of the production of misinformation through speculation and gossip. When we are reading about the developments on this issue under this title, we don't know the facts, except for the fact that President Erdogan asked for his resignation. The following discussions on secret negotiations between the two suggests a plot to ensure a space is made for the vice-presidency (such as the above entry) or speculations about how the deep state blurs the news.

In a parallel vein, there are also titles that exploit discourses on political Islam and religious values, such as *if you are drinking beer why don't you eat pork too (118)*. One suser states:

a question that is a product of religious people seeing the world as muslims vs. others. according to their scenario, if you are consuming alcohol, you are a frontrunner atheist, christian, etc. as a non-muslim, you are supposed to do whatever islam prohibits. their world is this big. they are far from knowing the world with their biases, and they live like a robot.
8 favs, 19.10.2017 21:09 ~ 21:11 umberto d

The above entry is not the first entry of the title. The first entry was posted to shame the Muslims by building Islamic sensibilities through a particular kind of SD-trolling, as discussed in Chapter 3. In the early-years, users used to practice deception with a social purpose (with its own tensions, as articulated in Chapter 3). They used to come up with a title that would attract people from opposite views (religious vs. atheists) and would invite them to participate in the discussions. A culture affordance of this early-years trolling practice has been employed in the contemporary versions of trolling, such as the original author of the above entry practiced. The early-years trolling was not immune from its own tensions that potentially legitimized the availability of gendered and raced discourses, especially for those users who were not familiar with the troll accounts. The contemporary trolling diverted the purpose of early-years geek culture trolling from arguing for a social purpose to just irritating, insulting, and disturbing the cultural sensibilities in the Turkish socio-political context. This mutated into judgments about people's choices that are mostly influenced by the polarization climate in the post-2016 failed-coup era in Turkey.

The above title playfully uses the logic of early-years trolling to start deliberately antagonizing religious sensibilities. It uses the logic that Muslims are not supposed to consume alcohol, but some of them do anyway. So, if they consume alcohol, why wouldn't they also consume pork, which is also forbidden? These kinds of titles aim to interfere with everyday life by injecting discourses about "true X." acting as the morality police to exploit perceptions of Islam in order to cultivate conservative pro-government policies. This latter stance is the difference between the early-years trolling and the contemporary trolling. The early-years trolling used to target all segments in Turkish

society to make a point. The contemporary trolling targets only leftist and libertarian sensibilities, providing a monolithic moral compass of the government. As occurred within the title above, most of the entries argue against the logic in the first entry and argue for privacy. However, even posts about rejecting the discourse contribute to the discourse, as it makes the “troll” title visible and popular, as well as building an environment that encourages further disputes.

As discussed previously, users also accuse each other of being trolls. An important aspect of this blaming can be seen through titles about political speculations. For example, under the title, *the fact that it is needed to remove the law that protects Ataturk* (195), a user states that:

definition: the removal of a law number 5816 that makes me think, once removed, our country will level up.
138 favs, 01.11.2017 00:01 ~ 08:57 komple insan

The above title is registered as an insult in Turkey through nationalistic sensibilities. It suggests that without the law, everyone would be welcome to insult Ataturk. That is why most of the other entries criticize the first one, as they argue that this is hatred against Ataturk. One mostly *faved* entry starts with how it would be a bad decision for Turkey:

not in a country full of *comars*¹¹⁴. sorry but if you open a way for the insults, then you will start to criticize his [ataturk's] revolutions, and then you remove all of them. i can understand it if we lived in sweden or norway. fuck your manipulation entries.
369 favs, 01.11.2017 00:13 ~ 00:18 belkigelmezyarin

Here is an entry accusing the first entry owner of being a troll:

this is a provocateur aktroll shit as the title is created right after 12 am¹¹⁵. also (see: full of shit) edit: just look at the people who favs that entry, shit enemies of ataturk.

¹¹⁴ Comar is used as a denigration such as hill-billy to look down on people who vote for JDP.

¹¹⁵ This makes the title on the top of the other titles and makes the entry visible as the first entry for everyone who clicks on the title for that day.

92 favs, 01.11.2017 00:16 ~ 01:47 eski peace

As can be seen in the above entries, the discussions revolve around blaming, insults, and personal opinions. In addition, *@komple insan* seems to be quite new, and he uses misogynistic language. Most of his entries are about Atatürk; the entries question Atatürk's social and political life and what people take from it. Other entries he posts criticize a lack of belief in God, claiming there are no atheist persons right now, make arguments using the Quran to provide specific prayers to accuse atheists of being illiterate, make statements about and criticize Atatürk's yacht and wealth, criticize atheists who criticize incest but not LGBTQ, etc. The first entry copied above was *faved* by 141 people, and more than 131 are rookies. The high numbers of rookie favs is an indicator of a possible strategic trolling practice in which a right-wing ideology is supposed to be made available. The majority of the favs are from those people who post similar topics as listed above. Some users and moderators put these kinds of posts under the umbrella of freedom of speech, and some others argue that when posted within the Turkish socio-political environment they might be interpreted as troll posts because of their intention to irritate Turkish-nationalistic-religious sensibilities.

The above three titles suggest the lack of clear governance rules on SD coupled with the political climate in Turkey which renders some entries speculative. The added aggression through antagonizing via Turkish sensibilities further makes SD susceptible to misinformation: users either do not know the validity of the claims they are reading or they build filter-bubbles by ignoring people who are blamed as trolls. This also shows that the term trolling works as an umbrella notion to criticize the opposite side of the debate, regardless of the side.

2. Exposing a Political Propaganda Account (aka SD-troll)

One of the major incidents on SD was the collective exposure of the person behind the *lord eddard stark* account. *lordeddardstark* is a suser who systematically post comments on Ataturk which are perceived as insults by some suser groups. This opposition is considered as trolling by many susers on SD. During the fieldwork, susers exposed this suser's identity with the help of his previous posts. The title, *lord eddard stark (500)*, consists of posts about how the suser with this handle is involved in trolling and/or political propaganda as far as the susers are concerned. The trolling they mention is a criticism against Ataturk that turns into defamation, which is prohibited by the Turkish law. On September 30, 2017 hundreds of entries were posted on the discussions on his defamation on Ataturk, and most susers pointed out that there are laws strictly prohibiting such defamation against Ataturk. One example from his titles/entries is *ataturk's alleged sexual behaviors with minors*.¹¹⁶ On September 30, the suser *@eksi peace* invites *@lordeddardstark* for a meeting in person, claiming that he would only try to talk to him about what he *really* thinks about his Ataturk posts and would talk *@lordeddardstark* into some sense. In a subsequent entry, *@eksi peace* states that he allegedly waited a very long time for *@lordeddardstark*, but he did not show up. In another entry, *@lordeddardstark* says that he also waited for *@eksi peace* for a very long time, and threatens to ask his police friends to check the nearby CCTV footage just to make sure whether *@eksi peace* really showed up.

After this discussion, the suser *@b1919* deciphers *@lordeddardstark*'s identity as Furkan Bolukbasi, with an entry linking his posts and searching for relevant reviews of

¹¹⁶ This title was created by *@lordeddardstark*, but as of February 11, 2019, his entries had been removed, but other susers' posts are still there on SD.

an online store, and matches them with other online comments of a computer parts discussion forum. Another suser lists all the posts that @lordeddardstark has posted about Ataturk, such as *Ataturk likes veiled women, it would be a free Turkey if it weren't for Ataturk, Ataturk's step-dad who is hidden from public, the fact that Ataturk is an average person, Ataturk's intimate relationship with a 15-year old girl*, etc. Suser @b1919 claims that he filed a legal action against @lordeddardstark as he knows his real identity, and explains how others can join him in this legal action. These discussions continue across several titles, raising concerns about @lordeddardstark's trolling.

On another front, there were a group of susers who called for a petition to declare that the situation is becoming extreme, as some susers are basically attacking @lordeddardstark. Most of the comments under the title-petition [*furkan bolukbasi is not alone (180)*] state that they don't necessarily agree with what he does, but they also cannot accept how some susers took the issue too far by involving his parents and personal life. On October 2nd, 2017, Marmara University, where Furkan Bolukbasi works as an academic, declared that he was under investigation because of the mentioned posts on SD. It should also be added that some of the susers claim that the supporter entries/titles for @lordeddardstark were allegedly posted on his other accounts on SD as he was trying to get himself out of this situation. The @lordeddardstark incident on SD shows that the lack of internal policies against hate speech, lack of explanations on the difference of hate speech and criticism, lack of policies against multiple accounts, and over-reliance on governance with the laws without specific policies on content moderation fuel an environment in which information cannot be managed by the SD users.

3. Ramifications of SD functioning as an Online Forum: Tracing Arguments through Conversation-Style Entries

On January 19, 2019, the founder and previous CEO @ssg was invited to SD for an ask-me-anything event. A suser asked him whether it was worth enforcing a format (referring to the early-years posting policies discussed in Chapter 2) for all those years only to relax it afterwards. @ssg responded:

It seems like it was worth it as the content is still compatible with the posting policies. It seems like you haven't seen a forum for a long time. Just go and take a stroll to Facebook, and forums, and observe the wild world without a format (i.e., posting policies).¹¹⁷

The above question-and-answer points to the tension on the posting policies on SD (the antagonism between susers and administration as I introduced in Chapter 2). Despite what @ssg argues, this chapter has shown instances where the lack of posting policies and governance structure further facilitates problematic information practices. Definition-format and other posting policies such as no-referring-to-previous-entries on SD were enforced up until 2012 with the help of volunteer moderations and snitching staff. After that, posting policies gradually turned into a habit and optional choice rather than policies on SD. The official removal of this policy, changes of administration such as approving many susers, and switching to a more professionalized moderation created a different environment on SD.

As stated previously in this chapter, the platforming developments triggered exoduses by veteran SD susers as they felt SD was changing into something that they did not want to support. I argue that the relaxation of posting policies and subsequent practices around conversation-style entries (such as personal anecdotes, video and news

¹¹⁷ <https://eksisozluk.com/ssgnin-soru-yanitlama-atraksiyonu--5912234?a=search&author=ssg>

commentary, general observations, and posts beginning to respond other entries), insults, and unpleasant jokes (as opposed to the inherent humor of the early-year practices) render the environment susceptible to ephemeral discussions revolving around daily-heated-arguments rather than topic (or cause-based) debates.

The biggest change on SD was the relaxation of the definition-format. Susers gradually started to embrace a forum-logic in *replying to earlier entries*, which was strictly forbidden and enforced before 2012 on SD.¹¹⁸ The title *germans' utility hole cover work (166)* illustrates this point on a lack of definition-format. Under this title, susers just comment on the news of a construction site in Germany, specifically about the meticulous work. One suser states that:

i was ashamed when i was watching this. it is fantastic labor just for a utility hole cover.
36 favs, 02.12.2017 22:02 choose and circle

Another title that shows conversation-style characteristics was *the fact that we get used to the cancellation of daylight savings (115)*, with the below entry:

really true. i wake up at 7 am, the prayer is 10 mins later. i can't wear my socks without switching on the lights. i go outside, and it is still dark, and no street lights. really appreciated.
449 favs, 11.12.2017 19:16 ristretto bianco

As can be seen, the above entries are comments that can be posted on any social media platform.

In post-2016 entries, one can also observe posts without a source or an understanding/perspective of an issue. For example, under the title *12 october 2017 syria*

¹¹⁸ In this sub-section, I provide examples to illustrate the points on the posting policy changes by bringing simpler titles than the ones introduced above. The lack of posting policies are also visible on the previously discussed titles for the post-2016 period. However, the structure(lessness) was muddled by the political content that was brought here.

operations (145), susers discuss the war maneuvers in the Syrian region by the Turkish military. Most of the susers don't agree with JDP politics, but when it comes to possible military attacks (especially within a Kurdish region), the same susers populate discourses of nationalism and render everybody else as "others."

the same idiots still talk about why we are there. it is just shit; the military just wanted to have fun there! they go there so that you peace butterflies don't be successful.

107 favs, 12.10.2017 23:32 ernesto sparrow

These kinds of entries are also opinionated rather than providing critical reflection which affects the unlearning process, as previously discussed. It also shows a trend of name-calling among the susers (such as the phrase *idiots* suggests). The title, *the fact that soldiers undress suspected civilians (199)*, further illustrates the name-calling. Susers discuss how soldiers are undressing civilians, with the suspicion of them being terrorists (labelled Kurdish-party supporters). Here are two example entries:

the soldiers can undress because terrorists can have some devices on them. you can't expect these soldiers to be like the ones in stockholm trying to control a crowd. but, terrorists are also human too, even if it is under security purposes, they shouldn't be photographed, and it should be banned to take a photograph.

170 favs, 06.10.2017 22:52 ~ 07.10.2017 15:42 sittirevalli

there are no naked civilians; there is just a precaution against terrorists who might have bombs on them. fuck your title and fuck your manipulation. edit: the son of the bitch susers who created the title have so many other terrorist-lover kurdish party supporter entries you will see. [...] you will pay for our own martyrs!

411 favs, 06.10.2017 22:53 ~ 23:03 yan komsunun wireless sifresi

Under the above title, most entries reterritorialize military discourses within hate speech and race relations, with a few exceptions stating that it is against the law. However, the conversations, including the ones that emphasize the importance of law, do not contain

any reference or contextualization to help people understand the issue, instead they are mainly commenting on the news through ad-hominem attacks and name-calling.

Within the post-2016 failed-coup political climate and following authenticity issues online, when susers exploit the way humor was embodied by the early-years geek practices, it turns into joke-posting that does not engage with the title or the other entries. For example, under the title *27 october 2017 catalonia declaration of independence (148)*, susers post about the news of Catalonia's declaration of independence. One suser sarcastically states:

A development that will make the cards redistributed in Europe.
60 favs, 27.10.2017 16:28 dede korkut paradoksu

The above entry seems closer to the early-years form of humor and wit. This is a language of Turkish news media's interpretation of the news on the Middle East with a phrase: “the beginning of a new era.”¹¹⁹ However, when repeated many times during the day under different titles, it turns into banality that does not register as wit. It is just another arbitrary entry that does not contribute to the discussion on Catalonia. Especially for the above title, most of the susers reference the turmoil news in the Middle East, refraining from posting about the actual topic in the title.

Another important mechanism that is repurposed is the *burns* turning into *insults*. As discussed in Chapter 3, during the burn moments, susers ideally come up with a logical and contextual explanation of a raised issue with the title as a rebuttal process, disproving the rival susers' arguments. However, gradually since the 2011-2013 interval, susers began to post insults, comment-style entries, and opinionated posts just for the

¹¹⁹ In Turkish, it is “kartlar yeniden dagitiliyor” referring to a card game; and because there is a new development or new player, or a new game, now the cards need to be redistributed again to say “the beginning of a new era”.

sake of posting and rendering them burns. For example, under the previously mentioned title above, *assuming a life change after reading a book (148)*, one suser disagrees with another suser, defending the title's premise and posts:

a stupid, clueless person's statement who might never hear of jules verne.
[...] this is all about instagram which makes people stupid, clueless dopes.
[...] when you read a book, your perspective will change; hence your life will change...your surroundings hypnotize you, just get out of here!
197 favs, 17.10.2017 09:00 zelyot

Under the title to illustrate the form of insults fed by the playful-burn practices, an *increase in student meal prices by 60% at bogazici university (111)*, a suser disagrees with others who claim that the increase is not really a significant one, posting:

an increase which is found insignificant by the shallow illiterate people who could only dream about entering bogazici by looking at the photos. dear ignorant person, your iq is not enough to accept that there was a time when people distributed sandwiches in front of the student center to protest and help people boycott the dining hall. but your one-cell brain cannot understand this [...] now just fuck off; you can't even enter there!
18.10.2017 16:46 fanci

As discussed in Chapter 3, the practice of burn used to function as a hostile-sounding humorous interaction that enabled users to bring their own expertise to a topic. One of the interview participants, @lipstickynote, explains the early-years burn as follows:

It was not just arrogance. It was not to crush someone. There are sometimes *burns* that you need to do, and you do it. It is a part of social education. You socialize together, educate each other. It was part of that. If someone talks about something ridiculous, a burn is needed, you need to say that, hey you wrote this without thinking about it too much, without investigating about it too much, you can just click here and there, and you can at least find something about it before you post here. It is like saying, please don't do this of stuff kids...I accept that it sounds arrogant, but that was a method I did not find wrong.

It had its own tensions, as susers embodied a kind of knowledge-power by looking down on others. The practice of burn already contained an essence of discrimination; more importantly, an assumed authority over the way knowledge is produced and shared. The early-days practice of burn gradually evolved into a practice of hostility coupled with the platforming developments, especially on the professionalization of moderation and relaxation of the posting policies. The lack of clear moderation rules and policies about insults turned into a way to humiliate other people using parts of questionable facts within the entries. The next section explains the ways in which subjectivity, particularly activist subjectivity, are experienced in the post-2016 era.

C. Tracing Activist Subjectivity and the State of Critiquing on the “new” SD

In this section, I argue that there is an element of activist subjectivity that is still active on SD at the time of writing. Its practices hinge on 1) discourses of criticism about daily topics on scandal titles and consumer culture activism; 2) the status of political parties and Kurdish-Turkish relations; 3) crowdsourced visibility; 4) tensions between susers and administration; and 5) forces of inaction. I also address how post-2016 SD is still able to raise social awareness, especially through the Netflix example I discuss below. This discussion is not to undervalue the importance of what these susers do collectively, such as funding an old-couple who were kicked out of their building, and collectively making a title visible to raise awareness on lost girls and animal rights. However, occurring in an environment of quick information flows within problematic information practices, these actions are usually made possible thanks to the susers who are already interested in such causes, but they do not create sustainable collective action.

1. Scandal Titles

The ethos of opposition that I discussed in Chapter 3 shows itself in 2017 as ephemeral activism, such as consumer activism where users open *scandal titles* if the customer service of a product is not satisfactory. An example of a scandal title is *24 october 2017 samsung turkey scandal* (with the format: the date, company, and insertion of the trendy word *scandal*). The first entry is a long entry that details the issue (637 words): the user has a new Samsung waterproof phone, he swims with it, and it malfunctions. He calls customer service only to hear that they are not Apple and they can't help, since the user misused it in a vulgar manner. He continues his complaints (also posted on SD for visibility) and edits his first entry after a while because he receives a call from a regional manager who lets him know that his issue is resolved. There are three types of entries under the title: 1) Some users provide helpful guidance on what the first users can do legally to empower other users and readers to go after the companies; 2) Some others compare Apple/Samsung and aim to steer the conversation into a technology battle; 3) There are users who claim that this person is a *troll* aiming to promote the features of Samsung Note 8 and the Samsung services.

This last point suggests that users do not have that much confidence in whether an entry is an authentic entry/title anymore. Users claim that they receive a solution with such customer service complaints. However, the discussion ends when the issue is resolved. Users do not continue to talk about structural problems that lead the problems up to that point, as older generations used to do. For example, with the *dominos* example provided in Chapter 2, users immediately picked up the problematic complaint by the customer and turned the discussion into a discussion about labor issues. This Samsung

example is no different to a possible online forum entry that searches for an answer to a question asked, and the case is closed by the forum admins when the issue is resolved. The contemporary entry-posting mechanism does not contribute to the existing knowledge on SD, rather it mimics geek culture practices through the existing culture of resistance and operates it for different ends, in this case, a customer service solution for an isolated event.

2. Socio-Political Issues and Activist Subjectivity

In post-2016 SD, susers post criticisms on companies (Apple's pricing, Netflix's aggressive promotions, etc.), celebrities, mainstream media, the people who support the government, other susers, the SD administration, and the government. Although the sensibilities of critiquing are inherited from early-years geek culture practices for emancipatory purposes, it is mostly unorganized. The susers usually aim to address an issue that is raised by a title or another susers within the title, yet it is usually within the frame of a commentary, or a personal opinion rather than the articulation of the facts about the topic. As the dominant discourse is on criticizing the government, I highlight important aspects of it in the following paragraphs.

Under the title, *it is good when you are appointed for a position, then why do you judge when we want you to go* (224). Susers discuss President Erdogan's explanations on why they need to remove some people from the local offices (popular one Melih Gokcek). They talk about how he refers to the process as dealing with the "metal fatigue." One suser writes:

a statement which shows that melih gokcek is chosen with the help of erdogan; and ankara public clearly had no say with their votes. this statement also indicates that it was the last election in turkey and there will not be any further elections.

erdogan says leave, then you leave! erdogan says you are in; then you are in! if you do the opposite, then you are fetö, terrorist, etc.!

26 favs, 05.10.2017 11:32 yorumluyorum

The above title reveals that the users follow the definition-format, and interpret the situation of President Erdogan's actions, rather than responding to the title. The sensibilities on critiquing discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 present themselves as criticism against the government. However, the rest of the entries in the title also bring in speculation and unnecessary antagonizing on the deep state and party-politics. Another similar title is *either we will have a budget deficit, or we will raise the taxes* (162), where users criticize this exact government statement. One user states that:

a thought that shows us that their minds only work this much. as if there is no third possibility considering what logic science must say [...] this is a situation you find yourself in when you spend all the money claiming it is for the reputation of the country and concrete constructions and doesn't invest in research and development and technology

403 favs, 08.10.2017 10:42 ~ 12:07 mdmbvry

Some users are not surprised but still highlight how there are many other possible options. Others emphasize how inflation rates, growth numbers, and other statistics cannot be relied on as the numbers are allegedly manipulated. These two examples of criticizing the government suggest that along with the problematic information practices, there is a continuity in geek culture opposition. The difference is that the burden of filtering and finding these kinds of entries is on the users. Platforming developments, presenting popular titles as a default on the left frame and a lack of clear moderation policies for the speculations and antagonizing, render these opposition entries mostly invisible. In addition, they are also event-based, rather than cause-based discussions,

which makes them temporarily available on SD.¹²⁰ The title, *the fact that iphone x will be on sale for 6099 TL*, illustrates this latter stance. It is a title that criticizes the taxes in

Turkey which means an iPhone X is almost \$1600.¹²¹ Susers state that:

so you can't pay 6099 tl? then, you are going to buy a different phone! if you ask, why apple sells it so expensive: they know they will be sold. but, if you ask, why does the state apply so much tax, then it is actually changeable. [...]

182 favs, 14.10.2017 02:06 dortmund ist gut

considering our country's economic situation, it is understandable that there is a high tax, etc. and the high price is reasonable. if you have money, you can just buy it. but, a working-class man goes and buys it, is just sad. that is, unfortunately, our reality, [...]buying it for its perceived status.

14.10.2017 14:59 yaw he

Susers criticize minimum wage and race-related social class issues. They also criticize people who do not earn enough to buy an iPhone but still buy it for its perceived social status. However, when the title is not visible again the next day, all the discussion is lost, as it is not connected to discussions on iPhone, technology, social class, or consumer behavior. SD works like a forum website that allows topics to be posted, however it is not a place of articulation or a collaborative encyclopedia. This is not to say that it should be. However, it is to show the ramifications of how SD admins repurposed the tensions on empowering and debilitating practices to render the platform a mainstream one (that improves revenues) rather than an alternative media platform. SD turned into a commercial platform on which these topics are discussed and then forgotten.

¹²⁰ They are stored on SD archive, and they are always available. However, I question, what does such availability mean in the continuous flow of information, especially without clear title-making and moderation policies?

¹²¹ iPhone X is originally \$1000 as of the title's first entry date shown under the copied entry.

A big part of the early-years geek culture practices that connected susers was the inclusion of discussions on ethnicity. Following the platforming developments, especially the increased and vaguely managed algorithmic suser approvals, right-wingers and nationalists have also invaded SD. Under the title, *Kurdistan is in our hearts* (87), which is a statement made by an HDP (a mostly-Kurdish supported party) member of the Grand National Assembly, two susers post:

so what mister? you can just fuck off, what are you doing in turkey and the national assembly?

208 favs, 13.12.2017 15:26 mesinieskimiskeneftakunyasi

including my husband, kurds have no dream of kurdistan. whoever thinks about it can just go to iraq [...] these discourses lead people to racism.

[...]

edit: after several messages of hate speech: as you could see from my other entries i am a company owner who serves the turkish army and local turkish forces. i live in far southern east turkey. if you want to message me something supporting the kurdish people and terrorists, you can just add your id numbers as well if your ass is up for it. you cannot just go with big words behind your keyboards as we hear bombs every day, you can't divide this country!

119 favs, 13.12.2017 15:34 ~ 18:37 the she ronin

Compared to pre-2016 logic on SD, these titles gradually show nationalism, othering, hate speech, and a lack of tolerance toward minorities in Turkey. One can also see the continuation of previously discussed insults and name-calling. Under the title, *sezgin tanrikulu* (122), susers discuss Sezgin Tanrikulu, who is a deputy from CHP (the main opposition party), and the way he draws attention to the issue mentioned previously regarding the naked-detaining-of-suspects (*the fact that soldiers undress suspected civilians* (199)). One suser states that:

a chp person who wouldn't just shut up about how he loves terrorists. nothing to say when there is a turkish martyr [...] my ataturk's party is in these hands, oh...

50 favs, 07.10.2017 11:52 bryantjames

The entries are mostly against him within a discourse of racism and nationalism which generalizes that authentic-Turkish lives matter more than *other(ed)* lives. Most of the susers are against him on defending the rights of the detainees, and they build a discourse through Kurdish-Turkish relations. The few susers who support him are accused as being terrorists. Although one could still observe the availability of the critical discussion on the Kurdish-Turkish relations, they are mostly clouded by insults and name-calling.

3. Using Sour-Dictionary Visibility

The previously discussed feeling of connectedness rendered SD as a place to ask for help from the suser-crowd to raise awareness about a perceived problem. One of the participants, @bestmusic, states:

If you want to reach out to a politician or a celebrity or a company, SD is still the best place... A mayor that I don't want to name right now did not care about my complaints on animal rights issues in my neighborhood, and I posted very heavy stuff under his title on SD. In 24 hours, he followed me on Twitter, sent me his private cell phone number and invited me to attend the first animal rights meeting in the municipality.

According to the interviews, online connective actions help when the issue is about consumer culture or immediate local politics that are not related to gender, race, and class issues. It can be related to less controversial issues such as animal rights.

There are also online actions on SD where one can observe the collaborative spirit, such as in the title *urgent help for a missing person with autism (465)*. Susers aimed to help this missing person by posting entries such as *see: up* to keep the title at the top on the left frame and by trying to connect people who might be of help. This is an example title to illustrate the point of how susers post entries just to make the title stay in the popular titles on the left frame for further visibility. Under these titles, the first entry usually raises an issue and asks for help from the others, with a very long explanation and

continuous edits on the situation (for the above title, the first entry is about 1000-words long that provides details and updates on the issue, and has about 500 favs).

Through the affordances of the SD, susers invent ways to make their voices heard. They use the first entry as a hub of information, and the next entries to make their voices heard. SD, as one of the largest social media platforms in Turkey, is helpful for spreading the word about a missing person. On the other hand, the call for collaborations does not always turn into sustainable collective action. For example, under the title, *30 October 2017 wikipedia resistance (106)*, the first suser attempts to build momentum to raise concern about the fact that Wikipedia is banned in Turkey. The first entry contains the hashtag for Twitter, #wikipediacannotbebanned, a link to the original title that explains the ban (*29 april 2017 wikipedia ban*), a change.org link, as well as some selective contact information for TV Channels with an example text that explains the demand to lift the ban. Although this first entry is *faved* 370 times, it could only generate 106 total entries, and this action was not able to be turned into a collective voice on the stance on Wikipedia. The suser who opened the title updated the entry on September 15, 2018, stating that the attempt to raise concerns had failed.

4. Netflix and Activist Subjectivity

A very important dimension in terms of the activist subjectivity is the susers' gradually visible resistance against the policies of the administration. The title, *29 december 2017 netflix Turkey scandal (350)*, illustrates the point on the tensions between the susers and the administration. This title concerns the TV Show Black Mirror promotion account on SD created by Netflix and SD together. The account called @iamwaldo sent a message to susers telling "*we know what you did. You should watch*

and see what we are capable of” which triggered anxiety among the susers.¹²² Some of them argue that this is good PR and it shows that Netflix utilized a version of the TV Show in the promotion by blurring reality and the show. But most of the susers argue that this is a breach of privacy and not appropriate in a country with political instability.¹²³

One suser posted that:

it is told that people receive messages from @imwaldo saying “we know what you did. you should watch and see what we are capable of”. if this is correct, it is a very big scandal. who do you think you are to scare people in the middle of the night just to promote a half-ass tv show? what kind of promotion is this?

edit: the title is now banned on the left frame.

edit 2: the title is now back on, but so many susers are kicked off and downgraded to rookie status. i guess abusing power is just routine in this country.

135 favs, 29.12.2017 02:03 ~ 19:42 cathars

This is one of the less available examples of how susers can raise their voices about an issue they are facing. After this incident occurred on SD, susers immediately responded with many entries which caught the moderators off-guard. One of my interviews with a participant was coincidentally scheduled right after the Netflix incident, and he,

@redditguy, brought up the issue himself:

I think it is terrible. It happened to one of my friends... I would be so uncomfortable if it happened to me, I mean, god... Because, I mean, "we know what you did," so inappropriate, "see what we are capable of," I mean, no. Especially in Turkey... In 2011, the police came and took so many people, you know... Why? So, there were some alleged insults. This is not an appropriate marketing strategy in a country where these things happen...a country which is full of action...

¹²² This message was probably sent to susers who posted on Netflix or talked about the Black Mirror TV Show, but the actual mechanism is unknown to susers.

¹²³ Also, susers points out that Netflix US did the same thing a few days before the SD-Netflix promotion and posted supposedly ironic statistics about users' watching habits, and faced a backlash in the US.

The Netflix incident is also important because it is a criticism that is about SD on SD.

There are two important issues at stake here: 1) It shows that SD sided with a company for advertising and marketing revenue, and SD proceeded against its own users 2) It shows that SD is continuing to use platforming developments with marketing strategies that jeopardize user privacy. Although further investigation is needed to identify who received this message on SD clearly, the user entries under the title suggest that these are the users who watch Netflix and posted something about Black Mirror on SD. The second point shows that SD also started to organize user data in a meaningful way for advertiser's attention. Although users were able to raise their concerns about privacy and the political incorrectness of the marketing campaign, they weren't able to create meaningful actions against Netflix and SD, and the momentum remained in its reactive status.

5. On the Momentum of Resistance, Activist Subjectivity, and Inaction

The above cases show that there is a resistance momentum on SD which can be activated through a few entries that might solve some of the raised issues. However, it also demonstrates that these awareness titles function as a buffer zone in which users show their feelings of connectedness through affective bursts without the creation of productive compositions (and mostly without a trust-network) that can sustain diverse activisms.

Another incident that helps to address the contemporary sensibilities of users prefigured by the culture of resistance is the Sabire Meltem Banko case on SD. Banko is a lawyer in Turkey whose Periscope broadcast of a legal consultation went viral. She forgot to turn the live broadcast off and accidentally broadcast her sleep. The *sabire*

meltem banko title on SD turned into a place for fart-jokes the very next day. Every other month, she applies to court, and has all the entries deleted under court orders. Susers then immediately post similar entries again.

For SD susers, this is a short-term win in the war on freedom of speech.

Previously on SD, the entire title could have been blocked. However, a push in the community and admin efforts to keep the platform active granted them a say in how they handle the titles. This entry deletion after court orders, rather than a title or website ban, activates the culture of resistance on SD. The entries under this title are not necessarily definitions; they are statements of perceptions of freedom of speech or lulz.

The self-censorship on SD at the time of this writing is also another layer that subtracts the essence of opposition culture. There are two reasons for the ongoing self-censorship on SD in the post-2011-2013 era: 1) issues on Turkish law perceived by the susers and 2) a fear of getting kicked out. *gg policy*, discussed in Chapter 2, forced susers to edit entries constantly. One lawyer suser in the interviews even stated that he has no fear of the law - they can sue him for whatever they want as he knows what to do. However, he indicates that he is not courageous enough to post radical entries because he still wants to stay a suser. @biological states that "when there were fewer susers on SD, susers used to read all the rules, they were educated people, they understood the rules. Right now, nobody reads the rules, even if they read them, they don't understand. Even if they understand, increase in entry removals by moderation made them feel like they need to exercise self-control on their posts to keep their suser-ship". The administration's development of SD as a commercial social media platform around vague policies coupled with the lack of

clarity on how Turkish laws apply to online discussions, means that susers gradually distanced themselves from the practices of critiquing.

However, considering the automatic approval process in SD and the gradual demographic change with the new abundance of suser approvals during the time of the fieldwork, @metu states that he chooses to self-censor or limit what he posts. He explains how his life was threatened because he posted an anti-war sentiment about the Syrian war.

2011 IP issues and the Webrazzi incident discussed in Chapter 2 also show that SD admins have their own agenda for SD. Susers also reported that format-related entry warnings and removals turned into political warnings and law-referenced entry warnings and removals in 2017. Because the content is suser-generated, susers assume ownership on the platform which leads to contradictions on how it should be developed. On the 2011 IP issues, @downloadapp states that "we were like the neighborhood kids, we thought they would cover our back. Not only they did not cover our back; they just left us there". @talk states that "It used to feel like I changed something, we were involved in some discussions [Armenian Genocide], and we explained the situations little by little, and it felt like I affected some people, it felt like I affect this community, but not anymore." These sentiments of susers for the post-2011-2013 era suggest that there is a tension between how susers see and define SD, and what admins would like to do with SD. As discussed in Chapter 2, this tension stems from how SD-admins were unable to communicate with the susers about the changes in SD and how those changes would affect them. In a parallel vein, the culture of resistance also prevented susers from

registering SD as a commercial social media platform, rather than a non-profit free speech organization.

The geek culture on SD created an environment for the construction of knowledge-power to show how it is important to argue through "truthful" statements, being mindful of the encyclopedia that is created on SD. However, the inherent playfulness also supported a mechanism of *othering* that affected the possibilities of ethical actions. As discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, through the early-years playful geek culture, SD created a platform for activist subjectivity that showed its peak potential during the Gezi Protests. However, the following platform developments in the post-Gezi political climate, especially after the failed coup in 2016, facilitated an environment of inaction.

According to the susers, activism on SD is not worth it anymore in the post-Gezi period. @biological states that "entry removals following court orders made you think whether it is worth it or not to post a detailed entry on SD." He notes that they are "part of a community who thinks, makes noise, talks, and is advanced compared to the society and questions whether it is worth it to make yourself vulnerable in these time on SD." @bluepear states that "SD spirit is gone and you can see it in new susers' way of posting without a reference and argumentation, merely dictating their opinion is correct." She adds that the previous diversity on SD is mostly gone now "you used to see people who support Ataturk, or socialism or communism or anarchism or people who don't think alike patiently listen to one another and relay their points respectfully within a structure of argumentation, now you can't see it." The inherent tensions within the culture of resistance (in terms of reproduction and creation of norms) and the socio-political

context, coupled with vague content moderation, distanced the users who felt a connection to the idealized early-days spirit of SD. They started to follow their own buddies and filter the content manually as a way to challenge the current (fieldwork period 2017) invasion of unfiltered content. This rechanneling of energy created further filter bubbles on SD, which was another step in the alienation of resistance voices. The next section discusses the ramifications of the fluidity on SD guided by empowering and debilitating potential at the intersection of participatory culture, play, and subjectivity.

D. Concluding Remarks: On Tracking Ambivalence across Participatory Culture, Play, and Subjectivity

The culture of resistance, as discussed in Chapter 3, has turned into an environment that is susceptible to problematic information practices through platforming developments on SD. The practice of resisting is mimicked by affectively-loaded discriminatory criticisms that exacerbate the ramifications of information overload. There is an inherent tension on SD between practices that empower and debilitate, which is guided by the fluidity of the platform. SD began as if it was an alternative media with an amateur spirit that quickly attracted the attention of the geeks. Although the initial momentum presents a picture of empowering potential, as discussed in Chapter 3, the geek culture had its own tensions such as masculinity, tech-determinism, idealism, and excessive freedom of speech at the expense of inclusion of hate speech and insults. However, they were able to build a somewhat-working volunteer moderation that guided the user practices. This chapter developed those tensions of empowerment and debilitation by addressing the transformation of SD from a platform with an amateur spirit to a mainstream social media platform and what it entails. I argued that platforming

developments coupled with post-2016 sensibilities in Turkey and on SD paved the way for SD to be a buffer zone for the discussions, which facilitated a particular "offline" inaction through ambivalent practices. I presented three dimensions of this transformation by analyzing how participatory culture, play, and activist subjectivity is repurposed and how this repurposing contributes to ambivalent practices.

It should also be emphasized that, through my fieldwork and the interviews, most users do not trust the reliability of the information and they are unwilling to post critical entries. Moreover, as discussed above, the practice of title/entry system has changed. For example, before the 2011-2013 period, user would go to the Samsung title to post the entries to bring another layer of discussion point to the ongoing entry-debates. However, during the time of the fieldwork, users tended to open new titles which are not connected to a broader topic by any *see: x*. This makes SD become populated with titles and entries people can't reach unless they know the issue.

Participatory culture practices in post-2016 era are represented through the conversations around arbitrary assumptions and judgements on social issues, polarization through party-politics, the creation of reactionary argument-bubbles through engagement with celebrity statements, transferring habits from other platforms such as live-entry posting for the sports events as on Twitter, and posting isolated entries on technology that do not engage with the topic but just the title. The most important elements of platforming development were the algorithmic user approval that is used to increase the population on SD and the lack of clear content moderation, intentionally or unintentionally. The large amount of entries to consume made it gradually difficult for SD to function as a "sacred source of knowledge." Although the elitism of the culture of

resistance is broken by the acceptance of new users (as could happen in any online community), the new user approval mechanism and the following moderation changes on SD were not designed to facilitate the sensibilities on critiquing.

Early-years practices of play are repurposed around the lack of clear governance and unclear policies on hate speech and insults. The playfulness gradually introduced a playful-yet-hostile environment, with speculations and unnecessary antagonizing. In addition, users embraced their own definitions of trolling as behaving in opposition to someone's ideas. When users started to accuse each other of being trolls, it contributed to the problem of authenticity on the platform: how do we know if it is really that person who is posting the entry? How do we know if the entry is discussing something that is accurate? The lack of trust in the post-2016 failed-coup environment in Turkey permeated and evolved on SD, adding another layer for the production of problematic information practices. The abandoning of key posting policies such as the definition-format and the no-referring-to-the-previous-entries introduced conversation-style discussions that are no different from practices on any other online forum. Users just post their conversations on SD because it is the most popular one at the time of writing.

It would not be accurate to say that there is nothing left from the early-years geek culture of activist subjectivity. At the time of writing, SD is centered around posting *see: up* entries to provide support for an issue to be more visible, as explained in the missing person title above. However, users are also not passive people; they are mostly aware of the problems of the platform. The Netflix example previously discussed shows how the activist subjectivity was turned against the SD administration to criticize its politics and policies on marketing. However, the activist potential is clouded by the name-calling,

insults, and hate speech practices as demonstrated by the post-2016 engagements with the Kurdish – Turkish relations. In line with platforming developments, the activist subjectivity gradually turns into an episodic save-the-day momentum, rather than creating an environment in which to discuss a sustainable change.

To summarize: there are four important elements of the toxic techno-culture: speculations, antagonizing, insults, and trolling. 1) An important aspect of the toxic culture is how a topic on anything (sports, technology) can turn into a discussion on speculations about party-politics, especially around who supports *feto*, who supports President Erdogan, and who supports others. After a certain number of entries, any topic is clouded by the conversations around post-2016 discourses of *feto* organization and the deep State. This situation further facilitates practices of misinformation, as users still post replies to the entries that raise speculative claims as if they are true. 2) Antagonizing practices produce entries that intentionally irritate the people who do not conform with the pro-government discourses on political Islam, as discussed above. 3) Insults and name-calling permeate everyday conversations on SD. It shakes the practices of argumentation and turns them into ad-hominem attacks. 4) The important difference between contemporary trolling and deception with a social purpose, as discussed in Chapter 3, is that the latter has subversive potential and targets everyone. Although early-years trolling had its own tensions, those trolls who followed the strategy of deception with social purpose did not use it to target a specific group in society, instead, they practiced trolling by exploiting the social-political context in Turkey to make a point (for example, to raise awareness about the nationalistic sensibilities). The contemporary trolling targets left-leaning libertarian impulses for the sake of raising a pro-government

argument. Trolling sometimes refers to pro-government entries, sometimes to any kind of opposition against the entry author, and sometimes to pro-opposition party entries.

Regardless of being an actual SD-troll or not, the blaming mechanism makes the entries questionable. In addition, the production of political propaganda through SD-trolling on topics about *feto*, Kurdish-Turkish relations, Atatürk, and even in regular daily topics, creates a further distraction in the attempts to explicate content from the political drama, truth from falsehoods, irony from authentic content, and fact from personal opinion.

Previously discussed SD early-years geek culture practices and cleverness helped to cultivate interests across technology, science, popular culture, and social issues on gender, race, and class. However, within the environment of problematic information practices, toxic techno-culture, and information overload, it is gradually becoming a challenge to sort out white-male centrality, and this is further blurred by right-wing politics. Following Phillip's (2012) argument that "trolling need not to be inherently regressive, it is about who uses the tools," Milner & Charleston (2013) argue that agonistic conflict can be empowering within participatory cultures (p. 4). However, through the platforming developments introduced in Chapter 2 and further articulated in this chapter (design, governance, moderation, format changes), coupled with the 2016 post failed-coup sensibilities (such as suspicion), one could argue that the tools that were used to empower communities were repurposed and further complicate information flows.

Chapter 6

Concluding Remarks: On Construction of Culture of Resistance, and Platform Politics

In this dissertation, I argued that the empowering potentials of SD were neutralized by the contradictory flow of affects that rendered the platform as alternative and mainstream at the same time: alternative because of the feeling of connectedness and culture of resistance that originally formed around challenging normalized practices; mainstream because of the eventual interplay between ad-based revenue streams, imposed design and altered posting protocols to make it compatible with globally popular digital platforms, along with Turkish politics and its laws regarding the Internet. This dissertation addressed the discrepancies between user expectations of SD as a community (including perceptions as if it is a non-profit collective) and top-down administrator decision-making processes. I argued that SD has a unique type of platform politics that revolves around tensions between empowering and debilitating practices. The early-years geek culture was able to build a kind of subjectivity that was ready to resist perceived injustices. However, that geek culture already had its own internal tensions that prevented it from producing collective action. Users showed their peak potential during the Gezi Protests, yet their production of resistance mostly stayed online as an affectivity toward what was going on in Turkey during the Gezi Protests. The geek culture's way of interaction, coupled with platforming developments, the post-2016 failed-coup climate, and the global rise of toxic techno-cultures facilitated an environment that is susceptible to problematic information practices. This is not to say that the SD environment was once emancipatory and then it suddenly changed to a

different place. I argued that SD always contained elements of the tension between empowerment and debilitating practices. However, the developments that are introduced by the platform coupled with the Turkish socio-politics presented challenges both for susers, admins, and the government on how to make sense of their conditions of existence on this platform.

In order to explicate the tensions of empowerment/debilitating practices, Chapter 1 introduced the concept of unlearning within a three-layer conceptual framework: participatory culture, play, and subjectivity. As it is a form of producing unexpected compositions, I also stated that the other side of the coin is the crises of unlearning because of the ambivalent reflections of each of these three layers on SD. Chapter 2 introduced the dynamics between susers and the administration through the affordances of the SD platform by discussing its content moderation, and digital tools such as design, interface, titles, entries, the see: x button, user agreement, and legal issues. It also introduced specific practices that were afforded by the affordances of the platform and of the culture of SD, such as trolling.

Chapter 3 discussed the formation of the culture of resistance, which is the core aspect of the concept of unlearning/crises of unlearning processes. It involves practices of posting subjective experiences, feeling of connectedness, sharing, knowledge-power, play, and geek culture. I argued that despite having the connotations of social change and raising one's voice against perceived injustices, the SD culture of resistance is fundamentally technologically deterministic, masculine, heteronormative, and depends on hierarchic channels of communication within inner circles rather than being inclusive as intended. Chapter 4 addressed the production of activist subjectivity through the practices

of the culture of resistance via a feeling of connectedness, sensibilities on critiquing, and ethos of opposition during the Gezi Protests. The chapter argued that although SD turned into a collective sharing platform with the production of activist subjectivity, the momentum did not facilitate any further sustainable collective actions with any policy-changing goals about the perceived injustices of the government.

As I argued in Chapter 5, problematic information practices produce an abundance of true discourses that render unlearning rather debilitating, especially with respect to the socio-political developments in Turkey. Chapter 5 demonstrated that the embedded logic of culture of resistance along with platforming developments created problematic information practices on SD with respect to the post-2016 political climate. I argued that the contradictory flow of affects within practices of problematic information produce empowering and disempowering sensibilities, and the tensions formed around this contradiction on SD limit actions upon actions. One could argue that SD acts through a technocratic approach; it is an actor itself rather than being a neutral entity. SD makes money through users' indirect agreement to a contract, which is exploited by content creation. SD's techno-fundamentalism is embedded in its design, content moderation and algorithms (such as user approval). SD encourages re-solidification of popular content through its fav and agenda buttons.

In the subsequent sections, I emphasized the way that the ongoing tension between the process of unlearning vs. crises of unlearning was expressed through the key operations summarized above and discussed in the previous chapters (the culture of resistance, activist subjectivity, platforming developments, and problematic information practices). I also argued that SD presents itself as if it is a neutral service provider when it

comes to tensions within its user base or tensions with the government. Sour Dictionary administration was able to repurpose the restlessness of their user base for further visibility, as they aimed to gradually transform from perceived alternative media status to a mainstream social media platform.

A. Platforming Developments

In Chapter 2, I discussed the user-administration dynamics through the platforming developments referring to changes in the way SD is shaped in terms of its design and governance. The platform changes included repurposing user data for various presentations such as the agenda button where only popular entries are shown. In this section, I highlight six important aspects of platform developments and their contribution to the tensions previously discussed: design change, user agreement, professional content moderation, entry-posting policies, the introduction of Sour Things, and exoduses.¹²⁴ The 2014 design change introduced a different interface that is compatible across many devices. It is also faster because of the more modern coding schema. As discussed earlier, in addition to modernizing inclinations, there were also external pressures to change the design. Google Search algorithms were punishing SD and retrieving lower ranking results because of its previous overly complex design. As SD transformed to be more compatible with Google, there were also new elements added: 1) repurposing the presentation of left-frame titles in terms of their popularity, which converged discourses around limited titles and isolated any other issues aimed to be developed; 2) new digital tools that reshapes navigation such as the (...) button added with the 2016 design change for longer entries

¹²⁴ As I argued in Chapter 5, this is not to state that only these changes introduced new practices. It is to state that these changes, along with the socio-cultural tensions inside and outside SD, paved the way for problematic information practices.

that makes reading the long entries an option, while encouraging shorter entries; and 3) Buttons under the entries that make them easily sharable on Facebook and Twitter. Especially the last point welcomed susers to use SD in relation to their regular engagements with the big social media platforms.

SD's earlier motto "*sacred source of knowledge*" contradicts with its earlier disclaimer "*nothing is written on this website is correct.*" However, both were written using humorous language, by which they aimed to protect themselves from possible legal issues. That is why updating the previous user agreement, as discussed in Chapter 2, was an important step. This solidified SD's presence as a mainstream social media platform and not alternative media. It introduced the language of law, copyright, and rights of users. However, it also laid out how SD is not responsible for any of the content that is posted on the platform. The user agreement has been updated several times in an ongoing process, and all susers are assumed to read the details as well as the unannounced updates. For example, when Sour Things was introduced, the admins had to update the copyright portions of the agreement as they were editorializing the entries to present them as an online magazine format. This situation shows that susers have no control over the conditions of their existence on the platform. In addition, in legal terms, SD admins can impose policies to protect the existence of the platform as opposed to protecting suser presence.

Content moderation was originally a volunteer-based system. It had its own tensions because of the power the 12 volunteer moderators had over the susers (such as imposing moderator's perceptions of the vague SD policies on susers). However, the suser mass exodus, and the subsequent professionalization of moderation introduced

several other problems of platform governance. The unclear policies on moderation, hate speech, and insults paved the way for the problematic information practices. In addition, they introduced algorithmic user approval. In that mechanism, an automated system scans the initial entries of the rookies (minimum 10 entries) and compare them to the previously approached user entries to make an automated judgment whether to approve the rookie as a user. The initial anarchist spirit with the “offline” networks of the geek culture was able to be balanced by the increase in user approval rate with the automated system. The current professional moderation is not sufficient to monitor the flow of information on SD. On the top of that issue, as discussed previously, the administrators aim to further automatize the content moderation system (at least as envisioned by @ssg) which might bring further issues in terms of detecting hate speech and insults.

The most important change was on entry-posting policies: relaxation of the signature-definition format and the no-referring-to-the-previous-entries rule. This development, along with the unprecedented increase in the user approval rates, introduced a more casual regular-forum-like language on SD. Users started just to post comment-style entries, judgments, speculations that do not necessarily start or continue any debate about the title. Along with the unclear governance, SD also facilitated an environment that is susceptible to insults, hate speech, and name-calling.

The introduction of Sour Things was an important step that signaled the subtle acceptance of the SD-admins of the complexity and confusion inside SD because of the uncontrolled expansion of the platform. With Sour Things, they were able to repurpose the entries that were mostly liked and present them in an online magazine format through an editorializing process. During the process, they edited the entries as they thought

might fit their presentation purposes (an online magazine format with pictures and blog post-like clear entry placements).

There have been several developments on SD that triggered suser reactions (e.g., the mass exoduses) against the administration. As discussed previously, the most important ones were the 2011 IP address issues, the establishment of Sour Things in 2015, and ongoing design changes. Through these exoduses, a core group of susers (especially then influencers) quit SD, which had impacts on interactions. The exoduses also signal a certain antagonism between the susers and the administration. For example, about the IP address issues, susers' concerns were about the administration's possible abuse of power, while administrator's concerns were legal. The antagonism was around who should have more say on the platform: government, administrators or the users. The bottom line of the antagonism stems from the culture of resistance built on SD since 1999. Interviews and my fieldwork show that users saw SD as an alternative media in the pre-2011–2013 period, which they used to empower others. The culture of resistance cultivated a certain sensibility, under the assumption that the SD administration would protect them, while at the same time SD admins aimed to gradually position the platform as if it were a neutral zone between the government and the users.¹²⁵

B. Culture of Resistance and its Tensions

In Chapter 3, I discussed the culture of resistance as a concept that referred to the geek culture sensibilities on SD. I argued that it produces affectivity, which facilitates the process of unlearning while simultaneously hindering its potentials (crises of unlearning).

¹²⁵ In a parallel vein, in Chapter 5, I also showed that, problematic information practices, coupled with the socio-politics of Turkey especially of the post-2016 failed-coup era, facilitated following self-censorship practices among the susers.

There is a tension between the empowering and debilitating forces within the culture of the resistance stemming from geek culture practices coupled with the playful participations of the susers. The culture of resistance was constructed around play, affective bonds, and social networks. As previously discussed, the geek cultural practices helped susers to form debating circles around sensitive topics such as Turkish–Kurdish relations and the Armenian Genocide. However, the geek culture was dominantly male, idealist, mostly upper-middle class, and technologically determinist, which also facilitated debilitating practices. Geekiness towards topics, established lingo that was humorous, snobby, and witty lured people into the platform.

The most important aspect of the culture of resistance is play, especially playing with the definition-format and deception with a social purpose. Susers were drawn to SD because of the geek culture *goygoy* (impromptu humorous and/or meaningless conversations) and played with the boundaries of the definition format to relay their points. Their parrhesiastic utterances during their argumentation are crucial here: they point to the way they enunciate their version of the truth, rather than the importance of the truth in their entries. On the one hand, they initiated conversations claiming expertise on the subjects they talk about (technology, games, politics, ethnicity, gender) and emphasized the coupling of experience and knowledge (such as a Kurdish person explaining Kurdish–Turkish relations through unpacking discourses of nationalism in Turkey). On the other hand, they were also posting humorous entries following the pre-2011 disclaimer that *nothing on this website is correct*.

Coupled with the practices of deception with a social purpose (a.k.a. pre-Gezi Protests trolling), it raised concerns on the authenticity of the entries. This last stance was

traced through the tension between unlearning and crises of unlearning. As discussed in the Introduction chapter, the process of unlearning brings unspecified risk to the enunciation of the subjects, as it is action through courage. However, when the process of unlearning is experienced in an environment that is inherently fluid, it also produces practices that target the very practice of unlearning: what if it is a deceptive play? What if it is just part of a *goygoy* that will only stay online?

Another important pillar of the culture of resistance is the production of affective bonds through the way it enunciates its version of truth. The sharing practices, internal checks and balances formed around the norms of the culture of resistance plus the posting of highly subjective experiences built a network of trust through a *feeling of connectedness, sensibilities on critiquing, and ethos of opposition*. I argued that the rigorous debate and continuous informal peer-review process cultivated an empowering energy among the users. However, the way that they wove drama with facts made the entries susceptible to misinterpretation, facilitating further reliability issues. On the one hand, the specific expertise experienced through moments of *burn* prevented misinformation on SD in the pre-2011–2013 period. On the other hand, it was a form of bullying that formed segregations across user-groups: those who were closer to the earlier geek culture groups, and those who were new additions.

In addition, although the culture of resistance had empowering potentials, it had its own problems: 1) the geek culture followed a masculinist discourse despite the aggregation for gender issues, 2) they were idealistic people who thought that continuous debate and limitless freedom of speech (presenting itself as an exaggerated libertarian impulse) would solve every issue, and 3) they were mostly educated, upper-class people

or college students who welcomed such debate environments before the gradual increase in the number of users in the post-Gezi period. The discussion of the construction of the culture of resistance suggests that SD has never been egalitarian, or at least it was not egalitarian as claimed by the users and the administrators.

C. Activist Subjectivity

In Chapter 4, I discussed how the culture of resistance had reached its peak potential during the Gezi Protests at the nexus of SD as a social media platform and socio-political developments in Turkey. At this point, a word of precaution should be made. SD did not cause the Gezi Protests. I argued that the culture of resistance formed in SD (especially in the pre-2011–2013 era) prefigured the way users acted during the Gezi Protests. Users mostly embraced the Gezi Protests and fueled enthusiasms with their entries, contributing to the affective storytelling about the experiences they had during the protests.

The trustworthiness built by the early-years geek culture around the feeling of connectedness, sensibilities on critiquing, and ethos of opposition cultivated the resistance motivations of the activist subjectivity. The tensions between empowering and debilitating practices also present itself within the potentials of activist subjectivity: it represents an affectivity on *changing the world, sustaining democracy, ending capitalism*. However, it cannot always turn into sustainable collective actions. On the one hand, the empowering practices prefigured by the culture of resistance helped users raise awareness on the GP to promote its visibility. Users also aimed to post definitions of GP on their own terms in opposition with the mainstream media discourses. On the other

hand, during the time, SD was infiltrated by the ak-trolls exploiting the affordances of the platform and the geek culture playfulness with trolling (pro-government propaganda). The Gezi Protests in 2013 was an important turning point to understand the interactions of SD with respect to Turkish politics. It represents a laboratory for the culture of resistance, as an arena to apply the toolkits they had built over the years through an important practice of the geek culture: *parrhesia* (informal peer reviews, opposition, criticizing everything, debating culture). On the other hand, in terms of what happened next as in toxic techno-culture practices, it also represents what it means to search for practices of truth within an abundance of discourses through the rise of propaganda accounts with pro-government discourses. Thus, Gezi is a significant point in SD history to illustrate the empowering and debilitating tensions of SD as a social media platform: 1) it affords diverse populations to come together as a space of mutual recognition, especially because of the way SD integrated itself to Gezi activism from the beginning, 2) pro-government right-wing support is also a form of activism that benefited from the visibility on SD, and 3) it helps to unpack the sensibilities of users to differentiate between their “offline” actions and “online” potentials.

The tensions that were discussed about the culture of resistance caused user actions to mostly stay online. This is not to downgrade what some of the users did during the Gezi Protests: they integrated into the protests, carried people from point A to point B with their vehicles, and occupied the Gezi Park. However, these instances only used as points of nostalgia (and affective telepresence) rather than organizing sustainable actions in the future. In addition, the nostalgia around the Gezi Protests is processed as an anchor for user identity. In a parallel vein to the culture of resistance sensibilities, that

part of identity is used as a litmus test to detect the level of activism for other users to construct an "us" vs. "them" dichotomy on another level. Rather than use memories of Gezi to create more conditions for acting in the world, users used them to mull over and anchor their own identities.

D. Problematic Information Practices

In Chapter 5, I argued that the inherent playfulness of the geek culture produced antagonisms across diverse user population and spawned subsequent problematic information practices: information overload, insults, name-calling, blaming each other as trolls, pro-government propaganda, deliberate antagonizing, and speculations that shadow the effective conversations. The conflict between the two sides of the inherent playfulness (geek culture sensibilities vs. emergent toxic techno-culture) produced an ambivalence on SD that cultivates the already existing tensions around constitutive/destructive practices. I also argued that the problematic information practices should be interpreted at the nexus of platforming developments and the post-2016 failed-coup political climate in Turkey. One could observe sexist and racist discourses, entries that seemed to be structured but showed a lack of supporting evidence, and rumors that were centered around the conflicts between *feto* and the government. These practices clouded entries and introduced an environment of distrust. Users cannot proceed with meaningful discussions when there is a doubt on the reliability of shared information, or when users accuse others of being trolls or *feto* when opposed.

The fast-paced interaction coupled with thousands of daily entries facilitated an environment of conversation-style commentaries, rather than debates in the post-2016 period. These discussions are mostly title-based reactions (as in online forums) rather

than topic-based contextualization of the issues (as in early geek-culture practices on SD). This is not to idealize the early-years-era discussion environments; as discussed previously, they had their own disadvantages. This is to point out a rupture in SD's solidity as a social media platform. The gradual transformation from a perceived alternative media status to a mainstream social media platform further prevented possible sustainable collective actions. I also argued that coupled with platforming developments, problematic information practices made SD work as a buffer zone for conflictual discussions (political, social, economic) that further passivized the resistance potentials across susers. It was not the direct outcome of inundation of entries and many susers; it was the active opening of the platform to diverse populations. However, the diversity does not correspond to the introduction of different viewpoints; it corresponds to an appeal to libertarian impulses which welcomes right-wing pro-government discourses, sexism, racism, and insults.

E. What does it mean to be a mainstream social media platform?

This dissertation addresses the connections between content, form, users, and institutions. Suser practices show us how they rearrange their actions through (and sometimes in spite of) the changes in the interface, company, and the perceptions of cultural values. As Gillespie (2018) argues, architectural regulations through codes, interface, moderation, and internal policies are hard to call into question, as they are invisible to the users. However, when identified through what users can or cannot do on the platforms, they are registered as obstacles. The start-up sensibility in the platforms presents naïve understandings and optimistic takes about technology and social change, especially within an entrepreneurial perspective. The choices made by the platform

administrators are deliberate: they want certain things on the platforms to change, and they nudge it, altering the way communication is shaped. They gradually afford new network formations when coupled with the specific socio-political developments in the countries where the platforms exist as well as the effects of global developments.

As discussed earlier, the amateur spirit of connecting people in relation to user-generated content turns into the constitution of the content through the introduction of algorithms that repurpose its presentation (tags, see: x, like, agenda buttons). Entries, favs, buddy lists, and see: x help users reconfigure their connectedness as networked publics. The asynchronous mechanism of SD was transformed into a live-event generator during the Gezi Protests. People relied on SD and were further energized by the instantaneity of disseminating the news through SD for solidarity, as it was already a premediated milieu that mixed opinion and fact, subjectivity and objectivity. In the platform climate, SD administrators were able to transform the culture of resistance into “cognitive-affective capital” (Sinnreich, 2010) through platforming developments. The product, the platform itself, cultivates the culture it is embedded in and is cultivated by it. The platform produced blurred boundaries of work/play and shaped how it is made to be enjoyed and to be exploited at the same time.

There is an interplay between politics of the act (within the early culture of resistance and process of unlearning) and politics of the demand (within the reactionary style embodied later on SD). Platform developments (within the context of the Turkish socio-political environment) blurred the boundaries between alternative and mainstream. They created ambivalence that rendered the platform alternative, with the possibilities of episodes of connective action, yet maintain a mainstream status by being regulated in

accord with Turkish law and top-down administration. By further utilizing the concept of the platform as a neutral space, administrators created a safe distance between the users and the government. Controversial discussions are removed or banned from the left frame. In addition, even if they are not deleted, they are usually lost in the information flux. It is not clear whether any entry is authentically advocating for a cause, given the abundance of problematic information practices. The culture of resistance cultivated on SD produces virtual events, parallel discussions of politics, of social, of popular culture that break the mechanism of critical reflection before it is produced.

An important claim of this dissertation is that, on the one hand, “transformative play” (Salen, 2004) fuels the construction of the culture of resistance; on the other hand, inherent playful-pretending actions cater to problematic information practices. The culture of resistance manifests a practice of telling the truth. This practice qualifies the other (human as users/non-human as digital tools) as a constitutive element of the truth-telling subjectivity. It aims to show the present that the subjects fail to experience, such as the discourse around nationalism and discrimination against Kurdish and Armenian communities. The administration exploited the feedback loops among the platform and the users through the user’s production of affectively charged realities (within the culture of resistance and also problematic information practices).

Playful contribution through humor within the parameters of the definition format helped users transform themselves as political agents. The culture of resistance might not always be empowering. They challenged the norms but the tensions within the culture also facilitated a reproduction of the norms. In addition, especially in the post-2016 era, platforming developments reshaped participatory culture, and participatory culture and

play reproduced norms with respect to socio-political developments. Also important is how the notion of play enables subversion of rules while simultaneously distancing people who do not belong in the circle. Although the subversion helps to critique the issue at hand with the help of many users, in-group formations alienate others. The ongoing experimentation constructs a particular subjectivity with the lingo, politics, and technical tools. The production of subjectivity entails acceptance of non-written assumptions: SD practices require being apprentices who might not turn into experts. Although the activist subjectivity assumes the creation of non-hegemonic practices, the culture of resistance breaks it through the reproduction of norms. Analyzing play on SD provides us with the necessary tools to address humor, or what is called humor, as a by-product of discussing the Turkish socio-political environment.

The process of becoming-other on SD is not a formation of new identities: it is a process of creating affinities that are susceptible to unpredictable compositions such as *trolling*. One could argue that platforming developments on SD disrupt enunciations of truth-telling practices that facilitate crises of unlearning. This is not to say that SD administrators do not want people to critique events. This is to say that gradual introduction of new tools on SD (in terms of design and politics) rearranged the way people communicate. This repurposing facilitates toxic techno-cultures; as a form, it is similar to empowering practices (such as raising one's voice against perceived injustices, detailing problematic notions, providing contextualization, offering productive solutions, etc.) yet as the content, it is either false, fake or cannot be evaluated as to whether it is accurate. Moreover, beyond the true/false discussion, the speed of the flow of information disrupts effective engagements to build a collective. Within the climate of

problematic information practices, the activist subjectivity that sought to operate through practices of truth also enables toxic techno-cultures.

Affect energizes the shared information and transforms speculation into practice. As affect works as a hinge between information and action, it produces unspecified risks; it can lead to empowering or debilitating capacities depending on the milieu. The milieu created through SD produced initial conditions of empowerment such as the potentials I discussed through the lens of the Gezi Protests. However, the inherent tensions within the culture of resistance, coupled with the post-2016 failed-coup political climate in Turkey and the affectivity, created parallel problematic information practices that led to a toxic techno-culture that continues to disrupt the SD's early potential.

What defines SD as a space of knowledge is not only users. The sociotechnical arrangement with administrative decisions, the introduction of digital tools, and content moderation maintain the production of information. Although it was able to open up a new space of discussion for taboo topics in Turkey, it created its own set of norms, hierarchies, and discriminatory practices. Another critical aspect is mis/disinformation practices and trolling. On the one hand, problematic information practices make users question the authenticity of information and render many conversations distant from the public domain. On the other hand, it raises the questions about disinformation and trolling: considering that trolling practices are not new, why is this a time that discussions of trolling have become significant? What does the emphasis on trolling tell us about the socio-political climate? What kind of channels legitimate the production of disinformation and trolling and for what purposes?

As of the completion of this dissertation, SD continues to change with the introduction of new digital tools. They invite celebrities for ask-me-anything sessions almost weekly. They have initiated a new YouTube channel under the name of *pena*, and upload the ask-me-anything sessions there. In addition, they started a new project where they hired actors to reenact “famous” entries. For this project, they chose longer entries that depicted an event in detail which allowed space for two to three minute videos, sponsored by brands.

In 2015, Sour Things introduced pictures to an all-text definition-style platform. In 2018, the *pena* project introduced videos. These two new digital tools are just another version of how a host of a networked-connection is turned into a commercial social media platform by arranging the way users access information, and renders some materials more important or at least more visible than others. Following the discussions on new digital tools, in connection with platforming developments, I argue that social media platforms have control of the conditions of meanings. They govern how things are discussed, when they are discussed, and what is discussed.

I argue that social media platforms do more than just host their site for customers. They arrange digital tools, advertising, and rank topics (such as the agenda button) to facilitate more interaction. The platforms thus are the controllers of channels of communication through their code. The platform developments are processed within the context of the technical, cultural, political, economic, and the legal. This comes with a price for the users. For Turkish Internet users, Sour Dictionary created a unique space between 1999 and 2013 to help people meet online and offline in order to articulate the

conditions of their existence in Turkey's political turmoil with gender, race and social class issues.

As a first layer, it allowed people to distribute facts about certain issues, such as Kurdish–Turkish relations, growing up as a woman in Turkey, being an LGBTQ+ member in Turkey, or just embodying a way to talk about daily politics in reference to various theories and histories. However, as a second layer, this participatory culture created its own norms: they alienated those who were not educated or “cool” enough to join certain inner circles, produced cultural norms on hegemonic masculinity and imposed the assumptions of an upper-middle class lifestyle. As a third layer, this unique, playful participation on SD created its own paradoxes through its own version of trolling. A few users embraced alternative identities (per the SD motto on nothing is correct on SD) to teach life-lessons through troll entries. On the one hand, they created new avenues with their politically controversial titles to show what it means to be *othered* for everyone. On the other hand, they started a process on SD where the reliability of information began to be questioned. These first three layers cultivated their resistant tendencies towards controversial issues, which plummeted during the Gezi Protests in Turkey. SD was turned into a collaborative sharing space of susers’ embodied activist practices with increased visibility, especially after 2011 legal issues with the government and users. As a fourth layer, SD accelerated platform developments: they updated the user agreement with legal vocabulary, they redesigned the website and eliminated all the bugs, old tools, and started a flexible content moderation that allowed more users into the platform. As explained previously, some of those developments were implemented to comply with major media companies such as Google.

My argument in this dissertation is that platform developments more powerfully managed the culture of resistance compared to governmental action. The platforms govern what should be meaningful, relevant, and visible (Langlois, 2013). The crises of unlearning facilitated through problematic information practices turned into a convenient administrative feature for SD and the government for three reasons. First, it buffered resistant voices, as users are mostly allowed to post whatever they want to post. Second, it showed the government that SD is loyal to Turkish law. The information flux in the post-2016 era turned SD into a wild forest of information that disguised those resistant voices. On one level, it worked well, as any action that would be rendered problematic for the government is well-hidden within the information chaos. On another level, it rendered the culture of resistance to stay in its connective (but not collective) form. Third, the creation of a manageable balance between the users (allowing them to post “freely”) and the government (complying with the laws) rendered SD more profitable.

It could also be suggested that experimental platforms that start with amateur spirit are bound to submit to external pressures from major new media channels. When they comply, they find space to grow, but at the expense of losing their spirit and rendering the voices of users unheard. This is especially important for social media platforms in developing countries such as in Turkey. The business practices of media companies such as Google, Facebook, and Twitter, as well as their implementation of content moderation, influence the way the speech is shaped in Turkey as well as in other developing countries, through arrangements of digital tools. As experimental platforms such as SD try to find a place to exist online, they take cases from Facebook and Twitter as examples. The previously discussed platforming developments suggest similarities as

to how Facebook and Twitter negotiate their online existence with the governments and users as service providers. The metaphor “platform” provides them with a subtle immunity from any public or governmental attack: they navigate smoothly because they claim “neutrality” by helping us imagine that they are just a *platform*, and nothing more. Platforming developments also show that they care for plurality but not diversity; they care for visibility, but not recognition. They navigate liberal impulses to make a space for problematic information practices to be exercised. Further research should look into the ethical dimension of user data collection, platform governance, and content moderation across social media platforms, as well as investigate the ways people's conditions of existence are challenged.

This dissertation combined studies of collective action, social media platforms, and trolling to address how relations of power around technology and society are shaped. It showed how culture and politics configure and are configured by the platformization process. A few layers must be analyzed to fully understand how digital platforms operate: technical arrangements, user dynamism (such as activisms and user-administration tensions), and cultural sensibilities in relation to the socio-political context. Platforms exploit the production of knowledge to monetize content by determining narrative possibilities. I showed how exchange value is much more important for them than meaningful engagement. This is not about intention of the owners; rather, it is about how the technology (interface, code, design) is structured in relation to local and global politics and moderation policies.

This dissertation showed how a social network site turned into a social media platform by rearranging cultural participation with the help of content moderation

policies, design, and algorithms. It also showed how platforms govern cultural production through technical arrangements and policy changes (through their design and user agreement). It is important to emphasize the platform metaphor here as it speaks to everyone involved in digital platforms: for users, it means a community; for developers, it is a field to exercise coding; for advertisers, it is an exhibition venue; for owners, it is about profit maximization. The platform affordances helped to configure relations of power, whether between users and administrators (owners), users and moderators, moderators and administrators (owners), owners and government, or owners and advertisers. The Sour Dictionary (SD) case is significant as it helps us to understand how a counter-cultural ethos within a community (based on decentralization of relations of power) can be centralized around platformization by data collection practices, implementation of top-down policies through a user agreement, and technical arrangements to generate interaction for exchange value.

The platform practices repurpose cultural sensibilities and technological arrangements to build content and monetize it. They also help social media companies to protect themselves by appearing neutral. The platform regulations are especially visible in non-US contexts where the content may not always be protected by laws such as freedom of speech. The process of content moderation and platform regulation help us to ask whether a platform is a publisher, whether digital platforms are similar to traditional media companies, and how competitive markets affect the relations of power across companies and between owners and users.

As existing global media policies are built considering traditional media outlets and infrastructures (Picard & Pickard, 2017), analyzing the platformization process also

helps us to address the complexities of people's online existence. The platform metaphor also creates an environment where social media sites are considered neutral places of engagement. However, they shape user interactions and participation as they aim to balance a variety of demands coming from conflicting sources such as activists, governments, and advertisers. Analyzing platforms is important because they govern our everyday life, regulating the ways we communicate with each other.

Affordances of the platforms that enhance creativity and participation can also constrain interaction through the platformization process. That is why participation should be studied in relation to governance to address how interfaces, algorithms, and content moderation in relation to counter-cultural ethos (and activist subjectivities) are used to manage online cultures. The digital platforms benefit from the visionary rhetoric in their start-up process, which is fueled by the determinist ideals of social change through technology. For the SD case, humor was the common denominator for various groups to connect with each other; however, I also showed how it turned into different forms of trolling that empower one group and marginalize others. As platforms establish broader connections with their developing capacities, they facilitate interaction rather than participation.

In addition, the SD case showed that the platformization process also blurred the boundaries between true and false, as platforms are only interested in the production of information rather than meaningful conversation. The performativity of the users to produce political discourses (whether it is a process of unlearning or a trolling activity) further repurposes social arrangements for platforms to produce data practices that users may not know. Platformization makes all the information open to reevaluation, because

platform governance is about content creation and pricing by reworking and repackaging cultural commodities. In addition, I showed how SD also aimed to align with leading platforms (such as Twitter and Facebook) by incorporating similar business models, circulation philosophies, and policy-making decisions (such as governance through a user agreement). This alignment of developing social media platforms with the major social media company policies shows that there is a gradual globalization of US cultural and political standards. That is why it is important to study international digital media platforms to understand the transition from an online place for the participatory culture to a company that monetizes content; how the US-based platforms affect cultural production across countries through policies; and how market, governance, and design mutually affect each other. International research will also help to show how content moderation and user agreements are used to create norms through the existing counter-cultural ethos of the internet communication. For example, this dissertation showed how karma points (along with favs), algorithms that create and index trending topics, and trolling on specific socio-political topics help to produce similar content that aligns well with cultural sensibilities.

As suggested by the previous research, there are emancipatory possibilities within social media, but they are also venues that permeate data for the highest bidder—and to the governments. I showed that the emancipatory potentials should be interpreted with caution—but they are there. Social media helps people to build connective actions. As I also showed, there are ways in which users benefit from the affordances of the website to channel help for the ones who need it, such as practicing unlearning to challenge the internalized tropes about the culture, the production of affective belonging during Gezi

Protests or even finding a missing person as discussed in the previous chapter. The participants, the users I interacted with on SD, and the administrative staff I interviewed, all share optimistic views on how they can be helpful for each other. The coders and the administration who demanded the design changes argue that this is what the modern era needs. The design upgrades were needed, indeed. It is also correct that social media platforms are businesses and they need to generate revenue for their expenses. However, the research does not stop there. I showed how the controls on the conditions of existence online (either governmental controls or administrative controls) shape the way the information is processed. No matter how empowering or debilitating the information practice is, the platforming developments coupled with the socio-political context suggest that it is the social media platforms who profit from the visibility. It is done at the expense of user experience, such as in the case of Netflix as previously discussed. Rather than merely focusing on optimistic/pessimistic understandings of social media, we should also examine how this tension is articulated by the companies. Rather than treating the online sphere as something specific to Western media, social media research should also focus on the challenges of the other social media platforms in the rest of the world in relation to local and global developments.

Appendix I: Sour Dictionary¹²⁶

ekşisözlük başlık, #entry ya da @yazar

bugün **gündem** sorunsallar takip son kenar çaylaklar #spor #ilişkiler #siyaset #seyahat ... pena ekşi şeyler

gündem

24 nisan 2019 hdp'nin 24 nisan 1915 paylaşımı	154
mahalle arasında oral seks yapmak	301
metrobüs tacizcisinin chp'li çıkması	288
24 nisan 2019 ibb bm toplantısı	267
24 nisan 2019 ibb uyuşturucu komisyonu reddi	33
metrobüs sapığının imamoğlu ile fotoğrafı	36
elimi salladım kılıçdaroğlu'na deşmiş	59
hatay'ın hakkettiği değeri görmediği gerçeği	28

ne yani evlenince kirada mı oturacağız

+ ne yani evlenince kirada mı oturacağız
 - e evet? ne oldu ki?
 + ben hiç böyle düşünmemiştim yakup? böyle olmayacak :(
 - ama niye? neden?
 + hoşçakal, kendine iyi bak...
 - ne yani caddebostan'da dublekte kiradayım diye mi ayrılıyoruz?
 + aşkımmm :) şaka yaptımmmmmmm

f t ^ v 200 15.11.2013 17:43 gilbertus albans ...

o ses türkiye

bence gökhan'ın şovundan sonra **murat boz** ve **hadise** kulise kaçıp bir süre orda ağlamalı. çünkü gerçekten onlarınki bunun yanında **3a sınıftan arkadaşımız hadise** tadındaydı.

f t ^ v 21 13.01.2014 20:58 sehege ...

SIYASET 17,8b
 Türkiye Sağ Siyasetinin Yakın Tarihteki Seçim Galibiyetleri

SUÇ 55,9b
 1938'de Adana'da İdam Edilen Kadın: Karsantlı Ayşe

SEYAHAT 15,5b
 Green Card Aldıktan Sonra ABD'de Hangi Şehre Yerleşmek Gerekir?

¹²⁶ I took the screenshot on April 24, 2019.

Appendix II: Sour Dictionary Timeline

February 15, 1999	Sour Dictionary (SD) launched.
2001	Amazon ads introduced to the platform
November 24, 2002	Fourth Generation Susers Approved. This is an important development as it started to change the dynamics within geek culture by incorporating more people from the founder's and his friends' inner circles.
2002	@ssg had some entries removed under the Microsoft title because he joined a televised talk as a Microsoft employee
2003	First big advertisement: Ford
2004	Introduction of banners to the platform to rent space for advertisers
2004	Ece Erken filed a legal suit against SD
2004	Eksi Technology and Informatics Limited Corporation Founded
2004	Besides @ssg's inner circles, @armonipolisi volunteered as a moderator
2005	<i>Complain</i> Button added after the Ece Erken incident
2005	Working with an advertising agency until 2010
2005	@ssg meets @kanzuk (the former lawyer and current CEO of SD)
June 20, 2011	IP Address Release – SD administration released IP addresses of 112 susers to the prosecution.
June 26, 2011	SD launched its own agency, Social IQ, for advertising purposes
August 8, 2012	Webrazzi Incident

September 1, 2012	Volunteer moderators resigned.
March 1, 2013	Introduction of the new SD beta (new design beta mode, optional usage)
May 28, 2013	Gezi Protests title opened
December 4, 2013	Eksi Technology (Eksi Inc) Palo Alto branch opened
July 13, 2014	Launch of the new design, access to old-design closed
May 6, 2014	Statistics button about SD no longer available to the public
May 5, 2015	According to the public records, @ssg resigned. @kanzuk is the new CEO.
May 27, 2015	Public announcement of @ssg resignation and beginning of @kanzuk's term
2015	Big data and algorithm research of SD admins begin (this leads to automatic suser approvals in 2017)
February 28, 2016	SD Second Design Change
March 4, 2016	Sour Things launched
March 7, 2016	Opt-out button added to Sour Things after the push from the SD community against ST editors
November 11, 2016	Block titles option added
March 29, 2017	Suser info pages updated. If somebody searches for a suser's entries, SD will show them in reverse chronological order, rather than providing a search option.
March 6, 2018	Rookies can send messages to everyone.

Appendix III: Sour Dictionary Screenshots

Image 1

The screenshot shows the Sour Dictionary website with a search for "iphone 5s". The page layout includes a top navigation bar with tabs like "rastgele", "bir gün", "as?", "istatistikler", "kullanıcı girişi", "yeni", and "iletişim". Below the navigation bar, there are search filters and a search bar. The main content area displays three entries related to the iPhone 5s, including its price, features, and availability. The sidebar on the left contains a list of categories, and the right sidebar shows a search bar and a list of related videos.

Image 2¹²⁷

The screenshot shows the Sour Dictionary website with a search for "alex de souza". The page layout includes a top navigation bar with tabs like "bugün", "gündem", "badi", "son", and "kenar". Below the navigation bar, there are search filters and a search bar. The main content area displays a single entry for "alex de souza" with a detailed description of his career and achievements. The sidebar on the left contains a list of categories, and the right sidebar shows a search bar and a list of related videos.

¹²⁷ The screenshot was taken by @jose raul capablanca and it is available to the public on SD.

Image 3

The screenshot shows the ekşisözlük website interface. At the top, there's a search bar and navigation links. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column lists various entries with their titles and view counts. The right column features a featured article titled "e-devlet alt-üst soy bilgisi sorgulama" (e-devlet alt-üst soy bilgisi sorgulama) with a sub-header "gökela: tümü | bugün başlıkta ara - tapı takip et". The article text discusses the new service for checking ancestry information. Below the article, there's a section for "günün videosu" (today's video) featuring a video of a man speaking. At the bottom, there's a section for "başlığın kanalları" (channels of the title) with a list of related channels.

Image 4

The screenshot shows the ssg website interface. The main content area displays a tweet from @esesci, which is a retweet of a tweet from HumanProgress.org. The tweet text reads: "The amount of labor that once bought 54 minutes of light now buys 52 years of light." Below the tweet, there's a video player showing a close-up of a lit candle. The website layout includes a header with the ssg logo and navigation links, and a sidebar with various links and a search bar.

Image 5¹²⁸

mercedes'in kilosunun fındıktan ucuz olması

az önce farkına vardığım gerçek.

mercedes a180'in baz fiyatı 84800 tl ve ağırlığı 1370 kg.
yani kilosu 84800/1370 = 61.89 tl

fındığın kilosu = 70 tl

insan gerçekten hayret ediyor.

f t v 939 #50925256 29.04.2015 22:24 no one knows who i am ... ▾

Image 6

kürtçe eğitim hakkı

şükela: tümü | bugün başlıkta ara ▾ taşı takip et

1 / 5 »

15 entry daha

artık olması gerekendir.

not:pkk karşıtıyım.

edit: demokrat, enternasyonal ve sosyalist bir insan olarak anadilde eğitimin hak olduğunu ancak ulus devlet kurmak için silahlı ayaklanmanın yanlış olduğunu düşünüyorum. ulus devletler yerine enternasyonal birliktelik için mücadele edilmeli. yine de silahla değil yaratıcı başka yöntemlerle olmalı bu da. kısacası ulusal sorunu sendikal mücadele benzeri bir başka çerçeveye içerisinde değerlendiriyorum.

edit2: söyleme bakınız, "teröristin dili"... bu mantıkla öcalan da türkçe konuşuyor zaten türkçe'yi de yasaklayalım, ne dersin ? ben örgütün değil halkın haklı talebini göz önünde bulundururum. dahası halkın haklı talebini göz ardı ederseniz o zaman terör amacına ulaşır işte ve ulaşıyor da

her kuşu siktik bir leylek kaldı.

f t v 218 11.02.2018 13:18 ganx ...

olmayan haktır.

yıllardır bu ülkenin başına bela olmuş, olmaya devam eden bir örgütün dilini mi meşrulaştıracaksınız bir de?

edit: aşağıda ağır hakaret eden şahıs anadilde eğitim diye zırvalamış. bu ülkenin ana dili türkçe'dir.

son edit: hakaretlere bak. "tece düşüncemize saygı duymuyurrr" diye ağlayan adamlar gelmiş burada farklı düşünen kişilere sayıp sövüyor gdfgdgd.

neden örgüt dili dedim? pkkyı oluşturan, destekleyen kişi ve kuruluşlar bu dili konuşuyor. onun dışında bu dili konuşup pkk sempatisanı olmayanlar zaten kendi aralarında özgürce bu dili konuşuyor ve bu dilde eğitim talebinde bulunmuyor.

bu dilde eğitim verilmesi, pkknın işini kolaylaştırmaktan başka hiçbir işe yaramaz. çok rahat bir şekilde içimizde örgütlenip haberleşebilirler bu sayede. zaten o yüzden bu kadar çok istiyorlar.

f t v 271 11.02.2018 13:26 ~ 15:02 agnes8 ...

¹²⁸ <https://onedio.com/haber/2015-yilinin-en-cok-begenilen-20-eksi-sozluk-entry-si-651108>

Image 7¹²⁹

gündem

11 şubat 2018 medipol başakşehir fenerbahçe maçı	116
futbolu gol dışında zevkli kılan şeyler	31
11 şubat 2018 abd'nin ypg'yi yanlışlıkla vurması	22
saygısız bir sınıfta öğretmenin yapması gerekenler	203
ölürken yüz üstü düşen asker kafirdir	132
kürtçe eğitim hakkı	114
ferhan şensoy zirvesi	30
helikopter için pilot kurtarma fikirleri	33
ahi evran lisesi videosundaki kişinin ifşa olması	66
meslek lisesinde öğretmene büyük saygısızlık	321

saygısız bir sınıfta öğretmenin yapması gerekenler

şükela: tümü | bugün başlıkta ara taşı takip et

1 / 9

meslek lisesinde öğretmene büyük saygısızlık hadisesinin - bana kalırsa - akıllara getirmiş olduğu sorunsal. belki bir kısım, şaşkınlık verici de olsa, böyle azgın, kuduruk sınıflar olduğuna şaşırabilir ama tavanda ayak izleri bulunan sınıflar filan var bu ülkede ve daha neler neler.

bir şey yapmalı! fakat ne yapmalı?! mesela eski öğretmenlerden bi' tanıdığım şöyle derdi: ben sınıfa girdiğimde gözüme kestirdiğim ilk şımarık öğrenciyi tahtaya çıkarıp temiz bi' döverdim.

ama gel gör ki, dayak çözüm değil diyenler var. belirli davranış kalıpları sunulur bazen. ama bu davranış kalıplarında öğrencideki temel sorunu göremiyor olabilir. çünkü meslek lisesi gibi bazı liselerdeki öğrencilerin okul ile veya okumak ile herhangi bir bağı yok.

ben her zaman, çocukluğumda gavurun bully dedediği, zorba tiplere de nasıl davranacağımı bilemediğimden, bu tarz çıkanları merak ederim. tamam da doğru davranış biçimi ne?!

11.02.2018 10:27 harrytuttle

sadece eğitimcilerin fikir beyan etmesi gereken başlık.

edit: mesaj kutum "eğitimci olmayanların fikir beyan etmeye hakkı yok mu?" diyenlerle doldu taşı. hepsine aynı cevabı yazdım buraya da bırakıyorum:

--- spoiler ---

Image 8

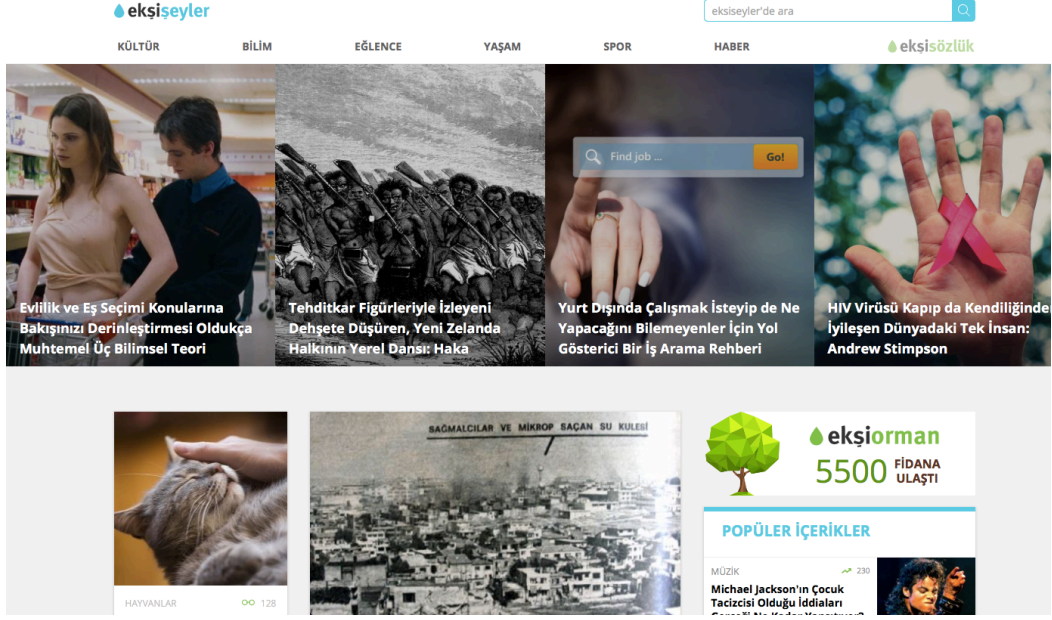
asitli, siyahımsı hatta soğutulmuş ve seyreltilmiş pekmezimsi bişi olmasını bilmeme rağmen hergün içmek zorunda hissettiğim, özellikle cam şişedeki haliyle tapılası içecek...

(bkz: **lipton ice tea limon**)

10.07.2001 16:45 ~ 16:49 hmmm

¹²⁹ Screenshot taken on February 11, 2018 at 11.30am.

Image 9



Appendix IV: Word Frequency under the Gezi Title on SD

resistance	5384	crowd	539	struggle	256
police	3920	freedom	489	protest	248
taksim	2189	ankara	457	chp	247
gas	1899	besiktas	433	right	245
activism	1865	facebook	420	voice	244
government	1424	Prime Minister	412	left	244
events	1133	trees	380	war	231
AKP	1039	civillian	368	nation	226
public	942	Being attacked	367	mall	225
political	910	YouTube	353	marginal	214
https	807	Live	352	TV	202
media	741	please	339	capulcu	198
state	738	thousands	331	election	197
tayyip	682	reaction	319	resignation	196
occupy	637	revolution	306	hate	194
istanbul	614	violence	304	apolitical	178
democracy	609	wrong	302	kurdish	178
Twitter	604	circle	290	coup	165
streets	574	hope	282	opposition	162
women	571	together	279	terrorist	159
friends	571	erdogan	266	opinion	157
news	556	insurrection	264		

Appendix V: Comparison of Discussions During the Gezi and post-Gezi periods

	Occupation in the Gezi Park	Post-Gezi
affective belonging	103	160
affective storytelling	26	23
critical reflections on GP	47	32
authoritarian pressures	67	47
call to Gezi Park	22	2
sensibilities on critiquing	18	13
diverse groups in Gezi	19	5
fueling enthusiasm	70	27
hope	44	47
sharing livestream links from the occupation	23	1
police brutality	73	22
#resist	43	32
sharing links to images	34	22
sharing news links	39	9
the subjective experience of the events	20	0
tactics sharing	17	1

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