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The Case of Street Collectors in Turkey

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The Role of Social Media in the Transition from a Sustainable Environment to Decent Work: The Case of Street Collectors in Turkey

Sürdürülebilir Çevreden İnsana Yakışır İşe Doğru Geçişte Sosyal Medyanın Rolü:
Türkiye’de Sokak Toplayıcılar Örneği

Safure CANTÜRK^{*} 

Abstract

Recycling practices, which are an indispensable part of the sustainable development model in developing countries within the scope of combating climate change, brought the issue of waste collection and street collection to the agenda. In developing countries like Turkey, where source separation is impossible, street collection has become a vital participant in the recycling market. This research examines the impacts of the economic worth of recyclable wastes on the social status of street collectors and their transfer to a decent work environment, as well as the function of the media in this transition. After reviewing the literature and legislation, this article applies content analysis on the relevant social media posts between the date of October 3, 2021, when the local governments in Istanbul made a police raid on street collectors, and October 30, 2021, when the street collectors issue was on the agenda. As a consequence of the increased social and environmental awareness caused by climate change on a global scale, the legislative arrangements made at the national level have enabled the waste to gain economic value. The organized street collectors’ defence of their rights and public announcement of their grievances through their representatives under the pressure of local governments had a societal impact on social media and entered into politicians’ and government’s agendas. Accordingly, in the past, perceptions of street collectors as “dirty”, “criminal”, and “poor” all of which were directly related with poverty in society, have been replaced by perceptions of “environmental protection”, “worker who earns their bread” and “zero waste stakeholder”. The analysis shows that 79% of Twitter user shares support street collectors and view the police raid negatively. On the other hand, only 2% of the users see the police raid as necessary for “maintaining public order”. As a result, sustainable environmental policies carried out within the scope of combating climate change have improved

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the economic situation of street collectors, positively affecting their organization and the improvement of decent work environments. These developments have affected street collectors to increase their visibility in the media and change their social perceptions positively.

Keywords: Recycling, Waste, Street Collectors, Decent Work, Social Media

Öz

İklim değişikliği ile mücadele kapsamında gelişmekte olan ülkelerde, sürdürülebilir kalkınma modelinin olmazsa olmazı olarak yürütülen geri dönüşüm uygulamaları, atık toplama ve sokak toplayıcılığı konusunu gündeme taşımıştır. Kaynağından ayrıştırmanın yapılamadığı Türkiye gibi gelişmekte olan ülkelerde, sokak toplayıcılığı geri dönüşüm sektörünün kilit aktörü haline gelmiştir. Bu araştırmada, geri dönüşebilen atıkların ekonomik değer kazanmasının, sokak toplayıcılarının, toplumsal statüsünü ve insana yakışır iş ortamına geçişlerini nasıl etkilediği ve aynı zamanda bu değişimde medyanın fonksiyonu sorgulanmaktadır. Makalede literatür ve mevzuat taramasından sonra İstanbul'da yerel yönetimlerin, sokak toplayıcılarına yönelik polis baskını yaptığı 3 Ekim 2021 tarihinden, konunun gündemde kaldığı 30 Ekim 2021 tarihleri arasındaki ilgili sosyal medya paylaşımlarına içerik analizi uygulanmıştır. Sonuçta, iklim değişikliğine bağlı küresel ölçekte toplumsal çevre farkındalığının artması ile birlikte ulusal düzeyde yapılan mevzuat düzenlemeleri, atıkların ekonomik değer kazanması sağlamıştır. Örgütlenen sokak toplayıcılarının, yerel yönetimlerin baskısında seçtikleri temsilcileri aracılığıyla haklarını savunmaları ve mağduriyetlerini kamuya duyurmaları, sosyal medyada toplumsal olarak ses getirmiş, ayrıca konu siyasilerin ve iktidarın da gündemine girmiştir. Buna bağlı olarak geçmişte, toplumda, yoksullukla doğrudan ilişkilendirilen sokak toplayıcılarına ilişkin 'kirli', 'suçlu', 'yoksul' algısının yerini 'çevreyi koruyan', 'ekmeğini kazanan emekçi' 'sıfır atık paydaşı' algısı almıştır. Analiz, sosyal medya mecrası olan Twitter kullanıcılarının, sokak toplayıcılarını destekleyen ve polis baskısını olumsuz gören paylaşımlarının oranının yüzde 79 olduğunu göstermektedir. Diğer taraftan, polis baskısını 'kamusal düzenin sağlanması' için gerekli gören kullanıcıların oranı ise sadece yüzde 2'dir. Sonuç olarak iklim değişikliği ile mücadele kapsamında yürütülen sürdürülebilir çevre politikaları, sokak toplayıcılarının ekonomik durumunu iyileştirerek, örgütlenmelerini ve insana yakışır iş ortamlarının iyileşmesini olumlu yönde etkilemiştir. Bu gelişmeler, sokak toplayıcılarının medyada görünürlükleri artırmasını ve toplumsal algılarını pozitif yönde değişmesini etkilemiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Geri Dönüşüm, Atık, Sokak Toplayıcıları, İnsana Yakışır İş, Sosyal Medya

Introduction

Climate change, which has become the biggest problem of our time due to global warming, is witnessing unexpected natural events such as disasters, droughts, fires and floods, while deeply affecting people's daily lives socio-economically. The recycling system, also known as zero waste practices, has become one of the prerequisites of sustainable development, has brought a new dimension to the 'street collecting' sector in cities. In cities, "street collectors", who are "excluded" due to poverty, work in socially insecure and inhumane conditions, and are classified as the lowest socio-economic level of society, have started to deserve more share on the public agenda with the development of recycling practices. Recycling wastes such as plastic, paper, and glass collected by street collectors have acquired value as a result of the mandatory use of recycled materials in manufacturing, raising their income levels. In this process, the organized street collectors defended their rights in the media, became visible, and found a place in the relevant legislation with the

representatives they choose from among themselves. In the past, the wastes, which local governments did not consider worth collecting, caused a conflict between local governments and street collectors as they gained economic value.

On the night of 3 October 2021 in Istanbul, the governorship and local administrators raided the warehouse of street collectors and confiscated their rickshaws and the waste they collected (Esen & Korkmaz, 2021).. Thereupon, the main opposition party CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu paid a support visit to the street collectors who made their voices heard on media and brought their problems to the agenda of the Parliament (TRT, October 9, 2021). In the following process, the Minister of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change Murat Kurum, defined “street collectors” as “Waste Collector Laborers” and stated that they were the “Unsung Heroes” of the Zero Waste Movement (HaberTürk, October 9, 2021). Shortly afterwards, Murat Kurum, invited the President of the Street Waste Collectors Association Recep Karaman to the ministry, and announced that the ministry gave the separated wastes to the street collectors (İHA, October 26, 2021). Thereupon, First Lady Emine Erdoğan, who patronized the Zero Waste Project and supported environmental projects, defined the street collectors as “Natural Stakeholders of the Project” on her social media account, supported them, and called for the practices of the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization to set an example for other institutions (Hürriyet, October 27, 2021).

This research discusses how recycling practices, an indispensable part of the sustainable development model, affect the business environment and social status of street collectors in developing countries within the scope of combating climate change, and the role of social media in this change. It is questioned how the increasing economic value of recyclable wastes affects the development of the social status of paper collectors and their transition to a decent work environment, as well as the function of social media in this shift.

Within the scope of the research, a literature and an official document review about legislative changes was conducted regarding Street Collectors. In addition, to understand the role of social media in changing of social perception, social media scanning was carried out on the news between on October 3, 2021, the date of the police raid on the street collectors ordered by the Istanbul Governorship, to October 30, and the findings were obtained by examining the posts using the content analysis method. In this context, the study consists of three parts. In the first part, the conceptual framework including the literature review and legislative arrangements on sustainable development, recycling and street collectors is given. In the second part, the method of the research is explained, and in the last part, the findings and discussion are given.

Sustainability and Waste Management

The concept of environmental sustainability, which is defined as the transfer of natural resources to future generations and ensuring their continuity by using them on-site, was used for the first time in the Brundtland Report named “Our Common Future” in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (UN, 1987). In the 18th and 19th centuries, many today’s developed countries polluted natural resources such as soil, water, and air, leading to the depletion / pollution of

natural resources by human hands with the wild growth model, and accordingly, these circumstances started to take place with scientific data in international reports that caused problems such as global warming and climate change. (Turan & Güler, 2013). States that took the path of developing policies based on the concept of environmental sustainability have signed international protocols and agreements, but these goodwill statements contradicted the linear development models based on the “dispose of” culture. The RIO+20 Summit, which was also organized under the leadership of the UN in 2012, was named the “UN Conference on Sustainable Development”. Green economy and the institutional framework of sustainable development were discussed within the framework of sustainable development and poverty reduction at the Conference, which attracted a lot of attention about sustainable development goals. The 283-item final declaration entitled “The Future We Want” was accepted at the Summit. The concept has become the main discourse of the environment and development movements (UN, United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, 2012).

Recommendations in the Declaration for limiting the production modes that pollute the nature, such as the emission volumes of developed countries and developing countries, have made it necessary to develop sustainable environment and sustainable development models for countries on a global scale. In the sustainable development model, using environmentally friendly renewable energies such as sun, water and wind has been used without harming the nature. Instead of the “dispose of” economic model, the “circular economy” model, which includes the understanding of “use, reuse, recycle, and discard”, has been adopted. The approach of the concept of sustainable development to the use of natural resources also includes issues such as efficient use of energy, giving more share to renewable energy sources and recycling. One of the main aspects of a sustainable development approach is waste management. For this purpose, recycling of recyclable solid wastes by subjecting them to some physical, chemical or biological processes contributes greatly to savings in resource use (Han & Kaya, 2008). In order for the recycling model to become widespread, international agreements and legislation containing trade sanctions have come to the agenda of countries. Recycling is being attempted in developed countries such as the European Union, Japan, and South Korea to prevent waste from being released into the environment, using models such as waste separation at the source, holding producers responsible for waste, and deposit applications, as well as legal regulations for both producers and consumers. According to the 2017 report of environmental consultancy Eunomia, compiled from data from the UN and the European Environment Bureau, countries with high recycling rates all have common government policies that encourage their citizens to recycle their household waste. They provide financial incentives in this direction. Local governments are also given explicit performance and policy objectives. In 1990, Germany, for example, made the decision that manufacturers were liable for their packaging waste. It boosted the recycling rate from 3% to 66.1 percent in 30 years after adopting the duty to collect garbage from homes and businesses in 1991. It passed the Packaging Law in January 2019, urging retailers to decrease packaging waste and use environmentally friendly items to help the environment. Germany, as a member of the European Union, has adopted the Circular Economy Action Plan, which aims to make sustainable products the standard while reducing single-use items and prohibiting the destruction of unsold durable goods inside the trading bloc (Eunomia, 2017).

Sweden has achieved success in its waste management system by raising the awareness of its citizens about separating waste from its source. Wastes are collected by local governments by separating them in collared bags according to their type. In addition, the long-standing glass deposit practice, which started in 1984, continues, including plastics and tins. The sale of glass, plastic and tin cans that are not suitable for deposit is prohibited. It provides energy to 250 thousand houses by sending the non-separable wastes of Sweden to incineration plants. However, this practice has been criticized for increasing carbon emissions (Eunomia, 2017).

Japan is one of the countries that takes recycling most seriously. Apart from its environmental commitment, here it decomposes large volumes of waste generated by millions of people in its major cities. Thanks to the waste collection system established by the state, citizens separate their waste perfectly as desired. One of the successful examples of the Japanese model is the town of Kamikatsu, which is difficult to access to the system in big cities and cannot dispose of its waste. Citizens in this town sort their trash into 34 categories and transport it to a recycling centre. This town separates 90 percent of town waste and aims to separate 100 percent in the near future. Furthermore, the state promotes water separation and reuse. However, although many industrialized and developed countries have adopted the separation model from the home, that is, from the source, as a recycling model, the rest of the waste is sold to incinerators or to underdeveloped countries for money (Eunomia, 2017).

Recycling and Waste Collection in Turkey

The expansion of recycling regulations in developed countries to cover international commerce has had an impact on developing countries like Turkey. For example, in the recycling practice of the European Union's Environmental Acquis, manufacturers have been obliged to use recycled materials at the determined rates in the all products produced. This necessity brought to the production sector has made the wastes valuable, and international waste exports and imports have come to the fore. In addition, waste collection, decomposing, recycling facilities have created new sectors such as waste import and waste collection. Developing countries, on the other hand, have started new projects for the recycling of waste in their own countries instead of importing the garbage/waste of developed countries due to public pressure on the one hand and increasing import costs on the other. The aim of recycling is to prevent unnecessary use of resources and to reduce the amount of waste/garbage left to nature by separating the wastes at the source. Waste is defined as the out-of-use of all kinds of substances such as iron, steel, copper, lead, paper, plastic, textile, rubber, glass, and electronics. Recycling or reusing waste materials will prevent the depletion of all natural resources. This approach will not only protect natural resources to meet the needs of countries, but also save a great deal of energy spent for their production. For example, the reuse of used paper in paper manufacturing reduces air pollution by 74-94%, water pollution by 35%, and water use by 45%, and by adding one ton of waste paper to pulp, 8 trees can be prevented from being cut down (Karabıçak, & Özdemir, 2015, pp. 45-49). Considering the importance of wastepaper for a country's economy, recycling of wastepaper saves trillions of Turkish Lira as well as protecting nearly 100 thousand hectares of forest area.

In developed countries, the waste collection sector on the streets has not been formed, as the model of separating the waste at the source has developed at home. The street collecting sector has emerged due to the fact that zero waste practices in developing countries are not socially developed and local administrations cannot establish a system for households in terms of separation of wastes. The process from collecting solid waste to recycling in developing countries has helped the emergence of street collectors, who are indispensable for the system, but with low professional prestige (Özgen, 2008, p.91).

Street collectors earn their lives by digging garbage on the streets, collecting recyclable material, and selling it to appropriate recycling facilities. Although street collectors are known as garbage collectors, they are the most important stakeholders of the recycling system in developing countries. In the world, as the recycling system develops, street collectors are frequently organized to stay in the chain individually, while a similar situation has been experienced in Turkey in recent years. Although they are defined as 'solid waste collectors' in the literature, they are called 'paper collectors', 'cart drivers', 'rickshaws' or 'street collectors' in Turkey. They will be referred to as 'street collectors' in this study. Street collecting, especially in cities, is an economic activity that is carried out with almost 'zero capital' in order to hold on to life due to reasons such as migration, poverty and unemployment, on the other hand, with intense labour power, in unhealthy conditions and without social security (Acar & Acar Baykara, 2008; Medina, 1997; Medina, 2007; Theron, 2010). Although street collectors, who separate the waste in the garbage and makes it an economic value by selling it, seem to be independent workers, their work is directly related to having access to the waste and solid waste buyer (Schneck, Blaauw, & Viljoen, 2012). Street collecting has been problematized for many years as 'dirty, humiliating' and 'the least likely source of livelihood' in the literature (Scheinberg, 2012). Due to their working environment, street collectors are objectified as 'victims', problematized around the 'nature of work', 'reputation', 'safety', 'decent work', 'social benefits' and 'decent salary' (Gunn & Ostos, 1992; ILO, 2004). It is seen that poverty, unemployment and migration are common points among the causes of street collecting. Dinler (2014, p. 144) lists the reasons for street collecting as "forced migration, criminal record, unemployment and privatization for others, and inability to handle the harsh conditions in the factory environment for some".

The working conditions of street collectors have brought along decent work discussions in the literature. Decent work, which was first brought to the agenda by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1999, is defined as productive work that protects the fundamental rights of individuals in working life and provides adequate income and social protection. This Concept is constructed on four main objectives which are employment, social protection, fundamental rights to work and social dialogue (ILO, 1999). The ILO uses the concept as "decent work", the employer side "fair work", the government side "respectable work" and the worker side "decent work" (Çetinkaya & Yıldırım, 2012; Erdut, 2003; Işıkcok, 2009; TİSK, 2003). The main purpose of decent work is to create employment opportunities in accordance with human dignity under the terms of freedom, equality, security and dignity for all individuals in language, religion, race and other matters.

Street collectors are among the business lines that experience social exclusion the most due to low income, unhealthy and insecure conditions, and the social association of dealing with garbage

with the pejorative term “garbage”. In addition, the media plays a key role in the formation of social exclusion or the formation of social perception towards professions (McKendrick, J., Sinclair, S., Hugh, A.I., Scott & G., Dobbie, L. 2008, pp. 5-6). Similarly; Clawson and Trice (2000, p.54) also argue that the visual representation of a political issue is an important part of defining the issue, and therefore they point out the importance of working on visual images of exclusion through deprivation. In his research on the representation of poverty/deprivation in the Turkish media, Aksoy (2010, p. 3229) concluded that “poverty is ignored, but in contrast, poverty is made a spectacle by using photographs of the poor and/or deprived, and it is often associated with the criminal or the victim”. Street collectors, who are associated with concepts such as poverty, deprivation, exclusion, crime, and migration, state that they do this out of necessity because “there is no better job to be done” (Özsoy, 2007, p. 110). In the literature until the 2000s, the social perception of street collectors is evaluated as a group that is undesirable to be encountered in city centers, excluded, found worthless, marginalized as criminal, foreigner, dirty, and a group which exposed to ill-treatment.

Recycling activities, which have an important place among sustainable environmental policies within the scope of measures to combat climate change, have been accelerated and this has enabled waste to gain value. Street collecting in developing countries makes significant contributions to the environment and economy. Street collectors have achieved significant gains in terms of organization, legal recognition and improvement of living conditions in countries such as India, Colombia, Argentina, Egypt and Mexico, especially in Brazil (Dias, G. F. L. S. de Mendonca, E. M. P. Teodisto, S. S. A. & Santos, L. C. 2012).

In Turkey, it is seen that the changes in public policies have gained momentum with the increase in social awareness against environmental problems, which came to the public agenda more and more after the 2000s. Many rules, regulations, and communiqués created by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate to govern the market, such as waste, waste collection, storage, processing, conversion into raw materials, imports, and exports, came into force after 2010. In particular, circular economy-based practices that directly affect commercial and daily life draw attention in the regulations made after 2018. The recycling contribution charge, for which all producers are accountable for their trash, the charging of citizens for the use of plastic bags, the separation of waste from the source with zero waste, and the recycling of wastes in accordance with the European Union have all been implemented. By accepting the waste as raw material, freedom was brought to institutions and organizations and the sale of wastes to licensed companies was created, and a waste economy was created. Social awareness was established at the national level through the media, in addition to practical recycling instruction in schools. The Environment Agency, which was founded in 2020, has devised a management system that includes the sale and return of plastic, glass, and tin canned drinks, as well as a deposit for waste monitoring and recycling. In all these arrangements, street collectors are generally accepted as official stakeholders, while local governments are encouraged to collect waste from its source/house (Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate, Waste Management, 2022). As seen in the literature review, street collectors, which overlapped with the perception of dirty/exclusion/criminal/poverty in the past, have become indispensable for the recycling system. While this process accelerated the organization of street collectors, it also ensured

that they were legally recognized by the state. Although the legal aspects and how recyclable waste should be collected are specified in the relevant laws and regulations, the inability of especially TATs (Collection Separation Facility) and local administrations to employ enough people in this regard brings street collectors to the forefront as the key actor of the system.

According to the “Street Collectors Field Survey Final Report” (2020, June) conducted jointly by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change and the Ministry of Interior, the number of street collectors in Turkey is approximately 40 thousand and they collect 100-150 kilograms of waste per person per day. Street collectors work 12-13 hours a day in harsh conditions, while their individual incomes vary between 750-2000 TL. The total monthly household income varies between 1500-5000 TL. 2 million tons, which corresponds to approximately 25% of the recyclable wastes collected annually in Turkey, are collected by street collectors. In the report, it is stated that street collectors are open to all kinds of disease risks because they are constantly in direct contact with garbage due to the nature of the work and not using protective clothing such as gloves. They encounter respiratory diseases due to bad odor, glass cuts, medical waste. These people also work without social security, and although they have general health insurance, they often do not go to the hospital due to the fear of exclusion.

According to the “Public Perception Survey on Paper and Solid Waste Collectors in Istanbul” report conducted by Istanbul University in 2021, there is no negative, anxious, unhealthy, exclusionary, marginalizing point of view regarding paper and solid waste collectors. The report states that street collectors are not seen as a health or safety threat. They are seen as compulsory work due to poverty, and they are also considered to prevent the waste on the street, considered to be national wealth, from going to waste. In the same study, it is stated that street collectors should have a legal ground. (Public Perception of Paper and Solid Waste Collectors Istanbul Survey, 2021).

In this process, with the Zero Waste Directive developed by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, legal obstacles in front of waste collection by waste collectors were removed (Official Gazette, 09.10.2021). In addition to the implementation of sustainable environmental policies, the increase in social environmental awareness and the awareness of the private sector as well as public policies that at least a part of the garbage can be reused play a role in the legislative transformation. From this point on, garbage has become an economical product (Acar & Acar Baykara, 2008) and as a result, the number of licensed waste storage companies in Turkey has increased significantly by 2800 percent between 2003 and 2012. Legislative arrangements for recycling within the framework of EU harmonization laws have made waste treatment an attractive business line. In the early 2000s, when the functionality and investment opportunities in the recycling sector became increasingly visible, the entry of more facilities into this business led to an increase in the competitive environment. For the first time in 2016, Street Waste Collectors Association was established by street collectors in Ankara, and in the following process, paper collectors were organized in Istanbul under the name of Recycling Workers Association. In Adana, they were united under the umbrella of the Waste Collectors Assistance and Solidarity Association. It is seen that the theory of rotational poverty manifests itself in street collecting, whose economic income is increasing. Street collectors, who are Turkish citizens, started to use motorized vehicles with the

improvement of their economic situation, and instead of collecting from the streets, they started to take an entrepreneurial position within the system by establishing intermediate collection stations. On the other hand, it is seen that illegal immigrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria, who do not have social security, started to work in the street waste collection business with rickshaws (Street Collectors Field Survey Final Report, 2020). Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey generally work informally. Organizations such as the EU and UNHCR provide assistance to Syrian refugees, but in the long term, this makes integration difficult and creates a life dependent on social assistance (Erdoğan, 2021, p. 201). Therefore, the system to be developed for street collectors will facilitate their integration by ensuring their legal participation in the labour market. Although Syrians have the right to work, they typically labour informally in order to continue receiving benefits. As a result, they are excluded from the social security system, and future health services are expected to be problematic (Erdoğan, 2021, p. 201).

During this whole process, both the amount of waste collected in Turkey and the recovery from waste have increased. According to the data of the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, with the Zero Waste Movement initiated in 2017, the waste collection rate has reached 22.4 % from 13 %. (26.09.2021 Hürriyet). The fact that garbage has become an economic product has led to the organization of street collectors, changed their social images and the form and content of visibility in the media. In the field surveys carried out recently on street collectors, it has been stated that “there is a positive public perception of street collectors, and any restriction or intervention against them will bring new social problems” (İstanbul University, 2021; Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate-Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2020).

Method

In this research, the social status of and perceptions about the street collectors, who collect recyclable wastes such as paper, plastic, glass and metal from the trash cans on the streets and are considered at the lowest level of social status, are discussed according to the social media posts on them. On the other hand, within the scope of combating climate change, how recycling practices affect the social status of street collectors and the role of social media in the change of social perception are examined. Within the scope of the research, the increasing value of recyclable wastes is discussed. How this affects the social status of paper collectors and their transition to a decent work environment, and the role of the media in this change are questioned. In the research, literature review for street collectors and official document reviews on legislative changes were made. In addition, within the scope of the study, the posts about street collectors in the social media platforms were discussed. 962 posts which were shared between October 3, 2021 and October 30, 2021 on Facebook and Twitter social media platforms were detected. This time period is important in terms of the raid on street collectors and the activities of politicians towards street collectors. In this direction, a search activity was carried out for some keywords and phrases and the posts on the mentioned social media platforms, and a list of posts was created. The words waste, paper, street, collector, rickshaw, bread, zero waste, raid were listed. The list is shared in Figure 1.

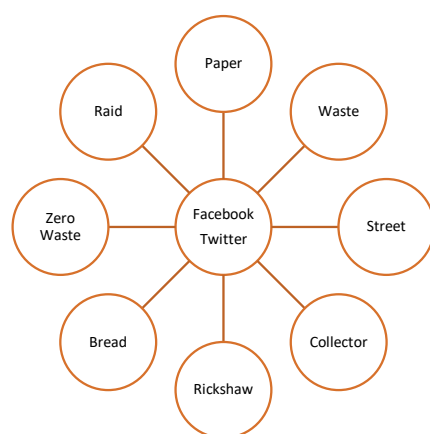


Figure 1: Keywords Used in Search for the Posts on Street Collectors

Within the scope of this study, in which the qualitative research method was adopted, the posts about paper collectors from Twitter and Facebook social media platforms were discussed. These posts were read by the researcher and content analysis was performed. Content analysis was deemed appropriate in terms of conceptualizing the data, organizing it logically, and identifying the themes that explain the data (Özmen, Karaman & Alkış, 2021). In the content analysis process, a logical structure was developed in line with the objectives and coding categories prepared. After reviewing all of the posts and preparing a specific code list, code categories were created. While coding, Strauss and Corbin's (1990) "coding type according to the concepts extracted from the data" was adopted. On the other hand, Neumann (2020, p. 471) points out that in case of high data density, reliability between encoders should be considered. However, it was deemed appropriate to have one encoder within the scope of the study so that the data density is not high, the consistency of the interpretation, and the meaning shift do not occur. The coded data was discussed with a qualitative data expert outside the field and a consensus was reached. Within the scope of the determined coding categories, the distributions were determined by making inferences from the posts and the digitization phase was carried out. The most viewed and interacted posts were selected and further analyzed. Finally, interpretations were made by the researcher by taking expert opinion (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2014). Within the scope of the study, criteria such as compatibility between data collection and analysis techniques regarding validity and reliability, clarity of expression, competence and adaptability in interpretation were taken into account (Arastaman, Fidan, & Fidan, 2018). These criteria also provided descriptive, interpretive and theoretical validity (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001).

In the scope of the study, the researcher who defined the problem designed the data collection process, determined the data collection tools and collected the data. The researcher who performed the analyses in accordance with the collected data finally commented on the results by reporting.

This research was carried out by adhering to scientific research methods, and no person/user-post matching was made regarding the social media posts collected.

Analysis and Findings

Posts on street collectors on Facebook and Twitter social media platforms between 03-30 October 2021 were discussed and various findings were obtained using the content analysis method related to these posts. The themes in which the posts are classified and the number of posts are shared in Table 1.

With the complaint of the local administrations, the police raided the street collectors on the unlicensed waste collection depots in Istanbul at midnight between October 3rd and October 4th. Street collectors shared footage of the police confiscating their rickshaws and the waste they collected on social media on 4 October. With the sharing of these videos by highly influential accounts with a high number of followers, the hashtag #ÇekçegimeDokunma (Don't touch my rickshaw) has risen to the top of the trend topic list in Turkey in a short time. Thereupon, footage shot from the scene by mainstream news agents and news channels was shared on social media accounts, and the intensity of the spread increased. It can be seen that the accounts that shared on October 4-5 were the social media accounts of "opposition", "left", "socialist" news sites and the social media accounts of political parties such as "Workers Party of Turkey" and "Republican People's Party".

Table 1: Classification of Social Media Posts and Determined Themes

Social Media Platform	Positive	Neutral	Negative	TOTAL
Twitter	17	183	751	951
Facebook	3	3	5	11
TOTAL	20	186	756	962

When Table 1 was examined, a total of 962 Facebook and Twitter posts were reached and three themes were determined as a result of content analysis: positive, negative and neutral. It is understood that 951 of the posts about paper collectors were made on Twitter and 11 on Facebook. In the analysis, the number of social media posts that view the police raid on street collectors negatively and support street collectors is 756. On the other hand, the number of posts that consider and support the police raid as necessary for "maintaining public order" is 20. In the posts, the number of posts that only report the, do not make "positive-negative" comments and coded as "neutral" is 186. Those who supported the street collectors and reacted to the police raid were evaluated in the "negative" category, and those who evaluated the police raid as "providing public safety" were evaluated in the "positive" category.

The distribution of the posts for the determined themes is presented in

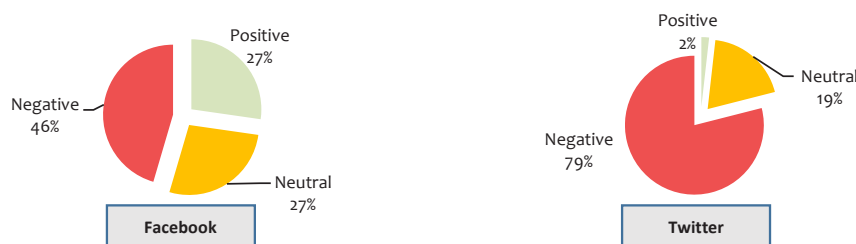


Figure 2. Distribution of Social Media Posts on the Determined Themes

When Figure 2 is examined, 46% of Facebook posts are classified as negative, while the share of neutral and negative posts are both 27%. However, the posts made on Facebook are not numerically significant when compared to Twitter, which is the other social media channel. This is due to the fact that the target audience of the social media channel in question does not raise the issue of street collectors. On the other hand, the rate of those who supported the street collectors and reacted to the police raid in their Twitter posts was evaluated as 79 percent, while the rate of those who saw the police raid as “positive” remained at 2 percent. The daily display of the posts made on the aforementioned themes between 3 October and 30 October, 2021 is shared in Figure 3.

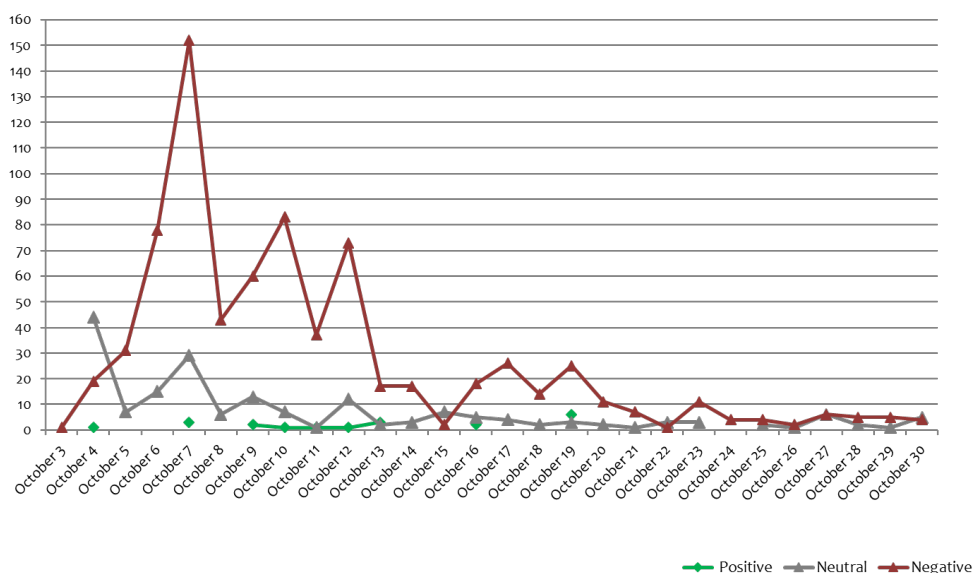


Figure3. Number of Posts Between 03-30 October 2021

The second-level high posts seen in Figure 3 on October 9 are the social media posts made after CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu visited the street collectors. In these posts, street collectors were used together with the words “our working brothers”, “raid” and “bread”, and the reactions drew

attention with the content that the street collectors were victimized and the oppression was unfair. The third-level high posts seen on October 12 are again the social media posts made after Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu voiced the raid on street collectors at the Parliamentary Party Group meeting. While the posts lost their effect in the following period, it was seen that the number of posts increased partially on October 17 and there were posts on the videos about the unjust treatment of street collectors. The number of posts rose relatively on October 26 and 27, and they were about the posts of Murat Kurum and the Emine Erdoğan supporting the street collectors.

The characterization of street collectors as ‘workers’, ‘brothers’, ‘heroes’, and ‘stakeholders’ in the posts of politicians represents an indication that they positively affect their social status.

Negative words against the raid are gathered around the words labor, bread, poor, garbage, recycling, zero waste, cruelty, poor, poverty, hunger, unfair earnings, police, detained, and environment. Positive words in the posts supporting the raid were collected around the words public harm, fugitive, migrant, crime, illegal depot, inappropriate conditions. Neutral words in the posts were generally seen in those who shared the news about the raid without comment. This group is mostly formed around the words waste, paper workers, raid.

According to the content of the posts, police raids on street collectors are perceived as taking their jobs from the workers who are at the lowest economic level of the society and transferring this job to big companies. Street collectors are portrayed in the posts as people who do useful work for the environment by collecting waste and try to earn a living without committing crimes.

The literature and document review includes the reflections of the recognition of the status of street collectors. Periodic changes about street collectors draw attention in the literature. Especially until the 2000s, the topics of ‘poverty’, ‘immigration’, ‘unemployment’, ‘hunger’, ‘exclusion’ came to the fore with street collectors, but in the following years, it is seen that they were discussed under the topics of the environment, recycling and zero waste. Document scanning has showed that the requirement of using recycled materials in production, particularly in EU and other international legislation, makes recycling an important economic sector. The legislative arrangements of the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change regarding waste, waste import, collection depot and the right of street collectors to collect waste from the street have made wastes valuable and street collectors and local administrations become important stakeholders of the sector.

Conclusion

In this research, the social status of street collectors, who earn their living by collecting and selling recyclable wastes such as paper, plastic, glass and metal, from trash cans on the streets, which are considered at the lowest level of social status, and the perception of them in the social media posts are discussed. In the research, official document scans, which are the subject of literature review and legislative changes, were made for street collectors. In addition, within the scope of the study, the posts about street collectors in the social media environment were discussed with the method of content analysis.

National environmental policies carried out in accordance with the international agreements within the scope of combating global warming and climate change have increased recycling practices in Turkey. Waste, which was called 'worthless' and 'garbage' in the past, has started to gain economic value with recycling practices. In the past, wastes referred to as 'worthless' and 'garbage' have gained economic value through recycling processes. Recycling practices have led to the formation of new sectors such as waste collection, storage, separation, recycling factories, waste imports and waste collectors. Street collectors, recycling practices that develop together with sustainable environmental policies have turned the wastes, which are called 'garbage' in Turkey, into economic commodities as in the whole world. Increasing value of the wastes have changed the perceptions of street collectors as 'dirty', odd, 'marginalized', 'criminal', and transformed them into 'environmental protectors' and 'right holders, laborer'. Increasing value of the waste has enabled street collecting to become a profession and have led to their organization. Their organization has helped street collectors to have their representatives visible in the media and to voice their rights. Visibility in the media, on the other hand, played an effective role in the change of social perception, but the situation in social media showed itself as an instant reaction to the mentioned initiatives.

In the analysis made within the scope of the study, it was determined that a total of 962 posts, 11 of which were on Facebook and 951 on Twitter, were made on social media about street collectors between 3-30 October 2021.

Compared to Twitter, it is seen that Facebook users are not interested in the issue of street collectors. While 756 of the Twitter posts that were meaningful for the analysis were negative about the police raid and supporting the street collectors, only 20 of the Twitter posts were supported with "positive" posts in the direction of "maintaining public order". When the posts are calculated proportionally, 79 percent evaluated the police raid as "negative", while 2 percent received "positive" support. This situation shows that the social perceptions of street collectors on social media are positive and they can be visible. It demonstrates that a rise in economic income with an increase in the value of garbage, organization, legal recognition, defending their rights, and being visible in the media are all effective in the positive change in social perception towards street collectors respectively.

Although it is said in the media that street collectors do good work for the environment, it is noteworthy that they are still associated with poverty. As a result, environmental policies carried out within the scope of combating climate change relatively increase the income of street collectors, increase their organization, visibility in the eyes of politicians and in the media, and although it positively affects their social perceptions, this situation has not yet provided them with a decent work environment. In addition to all these, with the increasing responsibilities of local governments regarding the separation, collection and recycling of wastes, it is foreseen in the near future that the process will be carried out by professional companies, as in developed countries, and this process is expected to move away from the current form of street collecting and to bring the process of transformation into a decent work environment with social security.

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