

Digital Media and Activism:

An examination of the use of Facebook and Twitter in the Case of Gezi Park Occupation

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Abstract

The paper research the relationship of the internet and digital media, particularly social media usage in the case of Gezi Park Occupation Turkey. Using quantitative research methods, the research discusses the Internet and Digital media mobilization of participations of the social movement organizations on the one hand up-to-date online participation on the other, intending to compare and understand online versus offline (physical) engagement. There is a growing literature on the interplay between the modern communication technologies` tools and activism, and the research aims at examining this combination based on the Gezi Park Occupation. It aims to examine whether the internet and digital media has been highly accomplished in mediating and attracting more individuals to participate in social movements hypothesizing that although social media plays a crucial role for mediating and attracting more people to participate in a social movement organization, it is not only the reason of the massive participation in Gezi Park occupation Turkey.

The research demonstrates that digital media, particularly social media, boosted the awareness on the activist campaigns, it did not make certain more participation in the offline activities, and also, it was not only reason for the massive participation. The research suggests that the digital media has proved to have become a very useful for mediating and mobilizing for the discussed social movement organization, but the online activities does not fully comply with the real life activities in Turkey(Gevorgyan and Bagiyan, 2015). The paper concludes that the social media was accomplished in mediating and mobilizing more people to participate in the Gezi Park occupation, and it partially contributed to the positive resolution the Gezi Park Occupation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank to my supervisor, Pollyanna Ruiz for her comments and supports at the proposal stage. I also owed to thank to my friend Nermin Alkan for her invaluable helps.



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List of Abbreviations:

AKP	Adalet ve KalkinmaPartisi (Justice and Development`s Party)
CNN	CNN Turkey
Halk TV	Public TV,
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
SNSs	Social Network Sites
JDP	Justice and Development`s Party
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
Ulusal Kanal	National Channel

Introduction

Within the last two decades, digital information and communication technologies (ICTs) have quickly risen to prominence in public usage, and the dissemination of new information and communication technologies has never before been able to be achieved as quickly. As a result, new information and communication technologies have become ubiquitous in our daily lives. This rapid pace of technology change has also brought about significant changes to many spheres of life, politics in particular. In fact, more so in politics than in other realms or spheres, as social movement organizations and activists have become avid users of these new information and communication technologies (Van Laer, 2010).

After the advent of the internet and digital media, the new media has been started to be used as a social platform and act as a public sphere for discussing ideas, spreading information, organizing events and demonstrations, and engaging in other interactions. Moreover, the active use of new information technologies and digital media has started to be visible in protests, movements, riots, and other forms of civic activities throughout the world. Moreover, some important social movements and demonstrations were coordinated and mobilized directly through the active use of digital media, and have been readily visible in the world in recent years; for instance, the Egyptian revolution, the Indignados movement in Spain, Occupy Wall Street in the US in 2011, and particularly in the case of this research, the 2013 Gezi Park Occupation in Turkey. In these collective actions and demonstrations, hundreds of thousands, even millions of people took to the streets by acting on new information, communication technologies, and digital media (Gerbaudo, 2012). It can therefore be safely assumed that the use of digital media and social networking has had a considerable influence on the manner in which contemporary movements and activists organize and mobilize collective actions.

Because the internet and digital media has played a crucial role in spreading information, organizing people, and motivating people to actively participate in these social movements, the new information communication technologies and new media have become a part of the conventional means of mobilization. As a consequence, in recent years scholars have started to pay more attention to media and activism, focusing largely on the role of the internet and digital media, in particular their potential to achieve social and political change. Particularly, pundits have started to investigate the dynamics of mass mobilization and collective action. Hence, how the networks of mobile, social, and digital media affect individuals and motivate them to actively participate as a collective has become a popular subject of research (Yang 2013). At the same time, social movement scholars have begun to search for the impact of digital media, particularly these social networking sites' uses for extant social movements and their offline activism, as well as the junction between online communication and offline participation (Van Laer, 2010).

This paper investigates the possible connection between the internet and digital media with mobilized activists, in the case of the Gezi Park occupation in Turkey. It considers whether the internet and digital media has been a major factor in mobilization and communication during the Gezi Park occupation. In more detail, this research examines the interplay between the online and offline activism in Gezi Park occupation 2013 in Turkey; in addition, it, also investigates how activist perceive and use social networking sites, and how social networking sites serve to create an alternative public sphere. At the same time, since the case of the study is about a local movement, the research conducted in this paper sought to investigate other possible reasons of mass participation in the movement, in order to uncover the impact of the internet and digital media on mobilization. In this regard, some questions will be evaluated about the mobilization and mediation roles of the internet and digital media in social movements: for instance, what kind of role does the Internet and digital media play in mobilizing participants in domestic protests? How do activists use the internet and digital media within a social movement? Are those activists who found their motives for participation from the internet different from other participants? In short, this research aims to evaluate how digital media, especially social media, mobilizes people in regards to the research question; To what extent can digital media mobilize an activist?: an examination of the use of Facebook and Twitter in the case of the Gezi Park occupation.

In this sense, chapter two investigated existing literature on social media, activism, and mobilization, and brought together current discourse and discussion on the matter. Chapter three then introduces research design and methodology, and chapter 4 is an examination of cases and findings, followed by a discussion of the findings. Finally, the last chapter concludes the research by giving a summary and suggestions for future research.

Literature Review:

Jürgen Habermas's Concept of A Public Sphere

Although the public sphere, as a general concept, appears in a variety of ways within the writings of many scholars in the twentieth century, most people today associate the notion with Jürgen Habermas's specific version. The original text was written in German in the early 1960s, and it was only translated into English decades later. As a result, the influence of Habermas's Public Sphere has grown considerably in the Anglo- American world after this translation, and many critical events have occurred over the years. Also, while Habermas has not made any effort to provide a full-scale reformulation of the public sphere, it is possible to conclude that Habermas's ideas regarding the concept are evolving, much like the way his work in other areas continues to develop. Since I am not currently able to trace all of the contributions and debates about the Public Sphere, I will instead probe Habermas's concept more extensively in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989; German original published in 1962) and works from Habermas in 1964. Therefore, in the following, my aim is to expound upon Habermas's concept of the public sphere and its structural transformation in his early writings, and then will note how he takes up similar themes in his recent work within the context of a structural transformation of his own work. After setting up a variety of critiques which his analysis has elicited, including some of my own, I will try to illustrate the notion of the public sphere in the contemporary era. Hence, my study intends to point to the continuing importance of Habermas's concept, and its relevance for debates over democratic politics as well as social and cultural life in the present age. In order to do so, in this chapter I will seek to respond to the following three questions: How was the concept

of the public sphere defined by Habermas? What constitutes the normative specificity of the bourgeois public sphere? What are the main features underlying the structural transformation of the public sphere in the modern era?

In its original formulation, the Public sphere as described by Habermas is an area within social life in which public opinion can be formed, and access is free to all citizens. The engagement within the public sphere is not required to have any class positions or specific qualities. In the public sphere, the connections between activists are formed through a reciprocal will to take part in matters in which they share a general interest. In short, according to Habermas, the public sphere is something in which access is guaranteed to all citizens, and is “a product of democracy”. “A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. “ That is, the public sphere is a concept in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion, like a sphere which mediates between society and state. And, since that time, the public sphere which has provided mediation between state and society has made possible the democratic control of state activities (Habermas, Lennox, and Lennox, 1974).

After a substantial historical overview, Habermas arrives at the view that what he calls a public sphere began to emerge within the bourgeois classes of Western Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. What Habermas named the "bourgeois public sphere" consisted of social spaces where individuals gathered to discuss their common public affairs and to organize against arbitrary and oppressive forms of social and public power. For instance, coffee houses, salons, clubs, newspapers, books, and pamphlets, all of which in various (though incomplete) ways manifested Enlightenment ideals of human pursuit of knowledge and freedom (Dahlgren, 2001). According to Habermas, the institutional basis was not only the key here, but also the method in which communication took place within this burgeoning public sphere.

In addition, the bourgeois public sphere, which started appearing around 1700 according to Habermas, ‘‘was to mediate between the private concerns of individuals in their economic, familial, and social life contrasted to the demands and concerns of social and public life’’. The public sphere comprised organs of information and political discussion such as journals, newspapers, as well as institutions of political discussions such as like meeting halls, coffee houses, pubs, literary salons, political clubs, and other public spaces where socio-political discussion took place. Due to the bourgeois public sphere, individuals and groups could shape public opinion and make direct statements according to their demands and interests while influencing political practice. It then became possible to form a realm of public opinion which opposed state power and powerful interest; hence, Habermas’s notion of the public sphere illustrated a space of instructions and practices between the private interests of everyday life in civil society and the realm of state power. As a consequence, the public sphere mediates between the domains of the family, the workplace, and the state, which puts spontaneous forms of power and domination into place (Kellner 2000).

Furthermore, when people confer in an unrestricted area, as guaranteed by the freedom of assembly and association as well as the freedom to express and publish their opinions about matters of general interest, they behave as a public body. However, in contrast, the political public sphere in the literary sense is invoked by people when public discussion deals with objects connected to the activity of the state. In addition, the authority of the state is ‘‘so to speak the executor of the political public sphere’’, and as such is not seen by Habermas as a part of the body. Even though the state authority is a generally accepted ‘‘public authority’’, it derives its task of caring for the well-being of all citizens primarily from this aspect of the public sphere. However, Habermas states that this kind of communication requires a particular means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it in a large public body. In Habermas’ accounts, the public sphere has been growing with the spread of mass literacy and press. Therefore, television, radio, newspapers, and magazines are the media of the public sphere (Habermas, Lennox, and Lennox, 1974). (Habermas, Lennox, and Lennox, 1974).

Lastly, when Habermas continues with his historical account, he sees the public sphere growing, and in the first few decades of the nineteenth century depending heavily on the spread of mass literacy and the press, after which a certain amount of decay slowly began to set in. In contrast, the concept of commercialism increasingly started to shape the operations of the media, and the domain of rationality diminished. Habermas refers to this diminishing of rationality as follows: “the trivialization of politics, not only in electronic media, the industrialization of public opinion, the transformation of publics from discursive to consuming at the beginning of the twentieth century (Dahlgren, 2001). On the other hand, because the internet pluralizes and increases the public sphere in a number of ways and is the main piece of digital media (especially online communication via digital media), the public sphere now has a continuing place in research agendas and intellectual inquiry, and has also started to appear in mainstream communication studies. Also, because the destabilization of political communication systems is accepted as a context for understanding the role of the internet: “It enters into, as well as contributes to, this destabilization”. The focus then moves on to the dimension of interaction within the online public sphere with regards to contemporary movements and political communications (Dahlgren, 2005). In view of these ideas of Habermas, it is possible to conclude that the internet and digital media, especially social media, are the new public sphere of the world today. Due to the fact that the internet and digital media both pluralize and boost the public sphere in a number of ways, the subject of the digital media, especially social media, are quickly becoming key areas within research agendas and intellectual inquiry.

Offline and Online Activism:

To most people, an activist is someone who is out of the ordinary – someone who waves picket signs in front of the Pakistani Embassy, “marches on the Washington Mall demanding money for cancer research, or chains him- or herself to trees”. With this in mind, it is possible to imagine that these sorts of activists are ‘other’ people – kind-hearted, weird, or dauntingly benevolent (Baumgartner & Richards, 2000). On the other hand, online activism is a politically motivated movement that depends upon the internet. Activists now utilize benefits of technology and techniques provided by the Internet to achieve their traditional goals.

At first, the internet was only used to enhance conventional advocacy techniques; like a new communication channel, for instance, “by raising awareness beyond the scope possible before the internet, or by coordination movements or activists more effectively, but now, activist’s strategies are either internet based or internet enhanced. In the latter cases, the internet have been started to used only possible online, like a virtual public place or hacking target websites (Mercea, 2011). To better understand online activism and its effects, I will conduct a literature review on activism, both online and offline.

Internet and Social protest

Nowadays, one of the main issues in research on activism is the need to understand the role that information technology and digital media plays (Bennett 2004). According to Fisher and Boekkooi, the limitation of funding of social movements was removed by active use of the digital media. Now, the Internet and other digital media provides relatively inexpensive media through, “which the activists can distribute their messages to anyone with an e-mail address or access to the World Wide Web(Fisher and Boekkooi, 2010). In addition, for Leizerov, because information and communication technologies reduce the costs associated with accessing and publishing of movement information, ICTs have the power of altering the flow of political information. ICTs have been contributing an upsurge in participation level by reducing the cost of conventional forms of participation, and to create a new low- cost forms of participation (Leizerov 2000). Beyond the cost, the Internet can remove barriers to political participation. In addition, Bennet states that the Internet is being used “in the new global and local activism far beyond reducing the costs of communication, or transcending the geographical and temporal barriers found in communication media”. (Fisher and Boekkooi, 2010). The weak identity ties, the loosely structured networks, the issues, and demonstration campaigns are facilitated by the internet and other digital media. To put it another way, the “ways in which activists communicate, collaborate, and demonstrate’ has been being changed by the internet (Garrett, 2006).

Scholars have concluded that achieving political action with these changes is “easier, faster and more universal”. Although there have been many studies that observe the impact of the internet and digital media on activism, there have been a limited number of studies that look particularly at the internet in regards to social protests and activism (Fisher and Boekkooi, 2010). John Naughton particularly argues for the role the Internet plays in coordinating protests:

Given that the Internet offers campaigners a communication system which is cheap, reliable, ubiquitous, efficient and uncontrolled, it would be astonishing if they did not make extensive use of it. ...The real significance of the events surrounding the Seattle WTO meeting lay not so much in protestors' reliance on communications technology as in what the technology enabled them to do (Naughton, 2001, pp. 155–156).

In addition, Fisher et al. (2005) found similar results after studying five globalization protests in multiple countries. He found that more than 80 per cent of activists in his sample reported using “the internet to learn about issue organize accommodations or transportation, and/or coordinate with other people coming to the protest”. However, the role that the internet is having in collective action and how it might be changing social movements in the process has not yet been examined by social movement scholars, although there are a handful of broader studies from outside social movement research about how computer-mediated communication changes society and social interaction. What social movement scholars have found is that the way in which people interact has been changed by the internet, but it has not always resulted in a stable movement. In fact, scholars have observed that communication through the internet may result in some limitations in terms of social connections, and produces what Putnam defines “cyberbalkanization” (see Shapiro 1999; Wilhelm & Ebrary Inc. 2000). On the other hand, some research has found that the Internet makes connections in new and innovative ways; Ray addresses this concept: “Used to blend new and old forms of associations, the Internet offers additional choice and gradients to the quality of interaction, bringing people into new configurations of interaction”. To put it another way, the internet has been seen to supplement personal contacts rather than replacing it (Fisher and Boekkooi, 2010).

Another key advantage of the internet is that it allows for everyone's voice to be heard; alternative media scholars state that activists and social movements create their own media in order to resist the hegemonic messages, falsified news, and negative description of activism typical in the mainstream press. Mcleod&Hertog (1999) claim that, because the traditional media tends to cover social movements in a negative light, activists choose to use new media tools, such as the internet and other digital media. Simply put, the internet allows social movements and activists to bypass traditional gatekeepers. It also provides a chance to establish an alternate viewpoint, empowering activists by giving them a new media channel (Harlow and Harp, 2012). Moreover, for Postmes&Brunsting (2002), one of the greatest strengths of the internet is that it uses the power of mass communication to assist movements and activists. Another positive feature of the Internet and Digital media is its potential to mobilize and prompt collective action; after completing a questionnaire of Dutch environmental activists and non- activists, Postmes and Brunsting summarized that the Internet is “opening new avenues” and “reinforcing existing forms” in terms of collective action (Postmes and Brunsting,2002).

On the contrary, the idea that increasing communication capacity will heighten political engagement is criticized by some scholars. For instance, according to them the political participation among US citizens has not seen a significant change since the 1950s, despite the “increases in communication capacity resulting from the expansion of television and increases in formal education levels”. The results of surveys from 1996 to 1999 show little evidence of a relationship between receiving political information via the internet and any other form of political activity. In light of this, it is possible to conclude that having access to more information at lower costs will not significantly change participation levels. Furthermore, one problems with online activism is a lack of strength of commitment. For example, the rise of "e-activism" has brought out " users" rather than "members". The support and diffusion of protests, which is enabled via the internet, is not followed by a committed group of people. Because of the ease of use of the internet, it enables people to easily “opt in and opt out of different protests issues and causes following their individual preferences and current priorities. However, in the long term, internet, like a “weak-tie instrument par excellence”. The internet is also thought to be

insufficient at generating a permanent network of activists, endangering maintenance and coordination of future social movement organizations (Garrett, 2006).

Social Network Sites: Facebook, Twitter and Social Movement Activity

Progressive Internet technology has brought about numerous social network sites (SNSs), such as Twitter, Facebook, and MySpace. These social network websites have some differences from conventional websites. In more technical terms, SNSs are

web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.(boyd and Ellison, 2007, p: 211).

Social network sites have some important and unique features, such as identity profiles, friend lists, public commenting tools, and stream-based updates. These unique features of SNSs influence the propagation of information, how individuals interact with that information, and how users influence each other. Social networking websites are also distinct from other Internet website ties. For instance, the ties which belong to SNSs can be a blend of both strong and weak ties, and the ties provide the user the opportunity to access information in a much faster and easier manner. The structure of the websites also gives the opportunity to users to identify others with whom they have differences or similarities. In addition, researchers propose that the weak and latent ties should be converted to active ties, by using SNSs; this could lead to increased information, resources, and mobilization (Gervais, 2015).

Social network websites are unique, but not only for allowing individuals to meet strangers. Users can also articulate and make their social networks more visible; meeting new friends and making new networks via social media can result in connections between individuals which would not otherwise have been made. These meetings made possible by digital media are not generally the objective of the website, but rather to foster confidential ties between people who already share some offline connection. Besides the public exhibition of friends, activities

and your life routines are crucial components of social network websites. The friends list and activities which are shown in your profile contain links to each friend's profile, and they allow viewers to scrutinize the network graph by clicking through the friends lists and activities. The friends' lists, activities, and what you share are visible to anyone who is permitted to view that particular profile, or those who have any connections to your network (Haythornthwaite, 2005). To give an example, Facebook users can open or close their friends' lists, what they like, and share what they want with who they want. On Twitter, users can also choose who can follow and see what they share or broadcast on their pages. At the same time, the social networking websites provide a mechanism for users to send messages on their friends' profile. For example, you can write your comments or your thoughts about what your friends shared directly on her or his page. SNSs also generally contain a personal messaging feature similar to webmail (Ellison et al., 2007).

In addition, social networking websites, especially Facebook and Twitter, have started to be used by advocacy groups to facilitate civic engagement and collective action for at least two decades, because of the features of SNSs mentioned above. The properties of SNSs are imperative for encouraging interpersonal interaction, broadening social ties, and providing valuable information about how to become civilly and politically involved. These websites also are generally used to support existing offline social relations and activities. At this point, since contemporary activists generally use Facebook and Twitter for mediation and mobilization, it may be useful to briefly summarize Facebook and Twitter. Facebook, which has more than a million users worldwide, is the most popular of all social networking sites, approaching one billion global users in 2011. Facebook was developed by Mark Zuckerberg on 4 February 2004. In fact, when Mark Zuckerberg established the first version of Facebook at Harvard University, his aim was to cater to young university students seeking to either flirt or make friends. As it has grown, Facebook has become a tool generally used to mediate one's relationship and engagement with a local community of friends and acquaintances: "to articulate connections that have some basis offline". Facebook also allows people to meet and be friends with people whom they have met only once and have not yet had the opportunity to learn more about them. This social networking website currently allows people to create their page, state their status, and

share videos on their pages due the development of internet technology and the format of the website. Another example of such a an information and social networking website, Twitter, allows its user to post a 140-character message called a “tweet”. This website was created in March 2006 by Biz Stone, Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, and Noah Glass, and was launched by July 2006. Portability is one of the key features of Twitter: users connect their accounts to their mobile phones and can download a Twitter application to begin reading tweets on-the-go. In short, it is one of the easiest ways to stay current regarding the latest news related to subjects relevant to user interests. The services of Twitter quickly gained worldwide popularity, with more than 100 million users. Currently, Twitter is one of the ten most visited websites, and has more than 500 million users, of which more than 300 million are active(Twitter, 2012).In fact, although Facebook and Twitter are a still social networking websites and have been used by people as such, activists also use Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking websites in order to create a platform for political organization and mass mobilization. Consequently, Facebook and Twitter are the most popular, and used by activists in contemporary social movement due to the features of Facebook and Twitter, as mentioned above (Gerbaudo, 2012).

Digital Prefigurative Participation

Digital prefigurative participation is defined by Marcea as interaction with either individuals or content through computer mediated communication which precedes engagement in offline protest. This notion suggests a descriptor for a specific genre of online participation in activism. In addition, digital prefigurative participation in offline protest events would perhaps be distinguished as active participation “in the online build up – in terms of mobilization, identity building and organization- ahead of a physical protest event”. In addition, scholars have started pinning down online activism in terms of both its scope and the quality of participation therein. In the meantime, the emergent implications of internet use, particularly for social media, but also for extant SMOs and their offline activism have been observed by the social movement scholar. In light of this topic, an earlier distinction between low- and – high-risk protests has been made. The choice to dwell on this low/high -risk differential has been declared by scholarship, which has indicated that the risk entailed by participation in a protest event is “likely to influence who is mobilized and how” (Marcea, 2011).

In his seminal article, McAdam proposed that the hazard as well as the cost of participation would cause disparate paths of mobilization into activism. He designated risk to be a collection of “anticipated dangers ... of engaging in an activity. During socialization, individuals who was not integrated in an activist organization, would end up participating in protest events. The independent individuals were more likely to initially participate in instances of low- risk activism before they improved the mindset and the social links that would drive them into high- risk protests” (McAdam, 1986). Furthermore, subsequent research has shown that high risk protests are where participants are likely to be both ideologically and socially integrated into an activist network. Ideological affinities and interpersonal commitments which underpin high-risk mobilization were fostered by close socialization within activist networks (Mercea, 2011). It can therefore be assumed that the independent individual may become an activist via close socialization during high-risk protests.

Although earlier expectations for a ‘mobilization effect’ (Van Lear, 2010) had been unrealized, in order to grow social movement organization outreach through computer mediated communication, new participants were brought into offline protests by way of their internet use. One important and recent instance is that of the emerging constituency of isolated individuals who have no personal links to other participants in protest events (Fisher and Boekkooi, 2010). This indication was accepted as a reason to focus on the mobilization of independent individuals through computer-mediated communication. However, the individuals have less opportunities for mobilization than those closely affiliated to an activist organization (McAdam, 1986). Moreover, there has been direct skepticism or critical reservation about the “bearing the internet may have on mobilization into offline protest events”. According to Diani (2000), internet use would help increase the efficiency of extant movement networks, but could hardly be convenient for the social bounds underpinning participation made through face-to-face interaction, because face-to-face communication is germane to cultivating a high level of trust. Diani states that face-to-face interaction is related with high levels of trust, and computer-mediated communication, when completely apart from face-to-face interaction, is not expected to result in that high level of trust that underpins participation in protest events. For this reason, there is a discussion about prior integration into a movement network as the principal conduit to mobilization (Marcea, 2011).

Network without Centers:

The notion of a network is not at all a new concept; it has been envisioned by the French philosopher de Saint Simon as a system of canals uniting the whole of Europe. It has also been used to invoke an abstract form of modernization and social connection (Mattelart, 1996, in Gerbaudo, 2012). In addition, the network term has been used in relation to the dynamics of grouping of friends, colleagues, relatives, and comrades. However, the term was popularized by the Catalan Sociologist Manuel Castells among contemporary activists. He transferred the term from an analytic, almost technical, “category in to an overreaching spatial metaphor for describing the ‘morphology’ of postindustrial societies.” Later on, the network notion became a standard reference point for many authors studying the impact of new media on contemporary activism (Gerbaudo, 2012).

In essence, the thesis proposed by Castells (2000) asserts an historical shift from the pyramidal structures characteristic of bureaucratic organizations- the company, the party, the state- to networks. For Castells the “solid” and “rigid” economic, social and political institutions of mass society, well described by Max Weber, have given way to more flexible and adaptable structures. This is the first and foremost the consequences of technological innovation. The revolution in micro- electronics, beginning in the 1960s, created the necessary conditions for new forms of communication and cooperation which no longer required central coordination. Such societal shifts invest different social activities: from the economy to social movements, to drug trafficking, the whole of society is restructured after the model of networks (Gerbaudo, 2012, p22).

These developments of network technologies which were examined by Castells, also has a bearing on the working of Web 2.0. In particular, Social media are portrayed as focusing on user agenda content, and by a high degree of interactivity. Social media typify the nature of the participatory culture, and, now, users are the “producers” in the communicative interaction. Due to

the participatory and interactive communication of social media, people are no longer passive audiences and “positioned at the receiving end of the process of communication” (Gerbaudo, 2012). In addition, Manuel Castells has defined this media landscape as dominated by a paradigm of ‘selfmass- communication’, in which individuals and groups can broadcast their messages to large audiences. According to Castells, the advent of mass self-communication increases the scope of political and social engagements immensely, and carries the promise of autonomy from bureaucratic structures to the public (Castells, 2009).

Flash- Mobs and Swarms without Hives:

The concept of swarms had first been defined by a venerable Italian post – an operaismo thinker and Duke`s maverick professor. He defined swarms as a new social class: the multitude (Hardt and Negri, 2004). The multitude has been welcomed as revolutionary concept, and is for him what the “proletariat” was for Marx. However, the multitude has some differences with the “proletariat” (working class). For instance, the multitude is featured by an irreducible multiplicity; Herdt and Negri explain the multitude as featured by “nomadism” and ‘deterritorialising power’, “building on the Delezuan contrast between the State, with its territoriality and fixity, and the War Machine, with its smooth space continuously traversed by flows” (2004). Swarms are defined as a “body without organs”, where the crowd would move or behave as a whole without losing its sense of unity (Delezue and Guattari, 1987).

The communicative process is a vital part of the coordination of swarms. The swarms become a body due to complex technical linkages, and they maintain a specific form of general intellect. The “swarm intelligence” is without a central construction:

recent researches in artificial intelligence and computational methods use the term swarm intelligence to name collective and distributed techniques of problem solving without centralized control or provision of a global model... the intelligence of the swarm is based fundamentally on communication... the members of the multitude do not have to become the same or renounce their creativity in order to communicate and cooperate with each other. They remain different in terms of race, sex, sexuality and so forth. What we need to understand, then, is the collective intelligence than can emerge from the

communication and cooperation of such a varied multiplicity (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 91 – 92, cited in Gerbaudo, 2012, p 27).

Furthermore, there is an obvious resonance between the social phenomenon of “flash-mobs” and the notion of swarm. Flash-mobs began to emerge after a social experiment by Journalist Bill Wasik. In his social experiment, he “circulated an email inviting people to gather in front of a jewelry shop and then disperse, as a form of extravagant artistic performance.” The idea was quickly accepted around the USA, and events were promptly planned. It was later stated by the activist that it was a way to take advantage of the flexible coordination that the internet and mobile media allows. Flash-mobs capture the sense of a liquid sociality due to their rapid assembly and sudden dispersion; these groups are also referred to as “smart mobs” or “social gates” by Howar Rheingold, because they have devices which possess both communication and computing capabilities (Gerbaudo, 2012).

Research Design and Methodology

Aim of the Research

The aim of this research and research question is to observe how digital media, especially social media, mediates between people and mobilizes them. Thus, the research question has been formulated as follows: To what extent can digital media mobilize activists; an examination of the use of Facebook and Twitter in the case of the Gezi Park occupation?

Sampling and Data Collection

The primary data was collected through the quantitative research method of e-mail interviews conducted during the month of July 2015 with participants of the Gezi occupation. While online interview are limited by their relatively low response rates, I chose to conduct e-mail interviews because the internet is a logical and convenient medium to find subjects for this exploratory study. The interview questioned people who engaged in both online and offline activism by utilizing a two-way approach, relying on a snowball method with which to identify

and diversify respondents. Considering the size of the sample, interviews were planned to be sent to a minimum of 20 respondents.

First, in order to reach 20 activists who engaged in both online and offline activism during the Gezi occupation of 2013 in Turkey, I conducted research via my online and offline networks. I identified activists from different geographic regions of Turkey, since the Gezi occupation did only not occur in Istanbul. I then contacted these 20 subjects by e-mail and asked them to participate in my online interview. A few reminders were also sent to respondents to encourage them to participate the interview in the following days.

I chose to do these interviews via e-mail rather than doing face-to-face because of some advantages that e-mail interviews present. To begin with, since the occupation protests did not only occur in Istanbul, I had to choose my respondents from different cities in Turkey, such as Adana, Izmir, Ankara, etc.. Thus, this represented a problem in terms of conducting a face-to-face interview with them, especially since the subjects also tended to be apprehensive and diffident about the pressure of having an interview face-to-face. Therefore, it proved difficult to meet with them in person, thus forcing me to decide that it was more convenient to do these interviews via e-mail. Moreover, the e-mail interview was an ideal way to conduct an interview within a restricted time period; For instance, the traditional face-to-face interview can be very time-consuming, both in setting up and conducting the interview, and later transcribing the recording; on the other hand, the e-mail interview requires a considerably smaller investment of time. For instance, the interview does not have to be conducted in real time, and the interviewer needs only to send the questions. As a result, all respondents who participated in the interview sent their responds more quickly than at a traditional letters' pace, or even messages left via voicemail. At the same time, one of the great advantages is that it is "ready transcribed" - a significant time-saving factor when compared with the traditional interview. The completed interview that was received was much easier to compile because of these reasons. In fact, in comparison with face-to-face interviews and observational techniques, having the interview via email can also supply more useful and realistic outputs. Lastly, because the e-mail interview is not an official medium, the respondents generally feel that they can provide answers more freely and comfortably. In summary, the e-mail interview provides a good quality of data, as well as generally "colorful" necessities which can be quite specific, like the face-to-face interviews (Lowndes, 2003).

I began to collect my data on 1 July 2015 and continued for 8 weeks. Based on social movement literature and previous studies about social networking websites, I designed the online interview to measure peoples' experiences with and opinions about using SNSs for action purposes. Also, while I was making my interview questions, I especially tried to form my questions around the three main topics: first, what were the motives for the participants, their friends and family (networks), and others for participating the Gezi Occupation?; then, did digital media, especially social media, become a media channel and affect their mobilization and their networks mobilization?; lastly, were there any offline communication that occurred during the Gezi occupation, and did the offline networks and communication mobilize activists or not?

Furthermore, the interview also consisted of multiple-choice and closed-ended questions about activism via SNS, as well as questions pertaining to the extent to which respondents participated in online and offline activities. To provide an example, with participating in demonstrations, making comments via social media website, etc., I aimed to probe the respondents' sense of efficacy of online and offline activism and the suitability of the internet and digital media, especially social media, for activism. I also asked demographic questions related to gender, age, and education level.

Twenty people responded to the interview; eleven females and nine males. The mean age of respondents was 25- 30. The education level of participants were generally undergraduates and postgraduates, including some with PhDs. As mentioned above, the interview results do not show any differences with this case. To gauge the reasons for respondents' participation in the protests, the interview included questions pertaining to both online and offline activism, using internet and digital media, in terms of what encouraged them to become activists, etc.

Data Analysis

In the case of this research, I used the web- based interview tool "Google Drive" in order to collect and analyze the data, as it includes both design and analysis features. After I used this program for data collection, I also used its services to interpret my respondents' answers with three main themes in mind: their motivation for activism, social network sites for mobilization,

and offline communication and mass media for mediation and mobilization. Therefore, the use of traditional statistic software such as “SPSS” was not necessary, as all relevant statistical analysis tools were readily available on Google Drive; activities such as browsing responses individually, filtering responses with desired variables, and building tables were simple enough using tools already provided. (*Drive Help*, 2015)

Challenges and Limitations

Although the e-mail interview combines some of the positive aspects of a face-to-face interview by avoiding some of the drawbacks associated with traditional methods, the e-mail interview also has several limitations (Gillham, 2005). Therefore, while I was doing my interview, I nevertheless had some restrictions.

To begin with, one of the main issues in the data collection process was finding appropriate participants for the study. Firstly, the occupation happened in 2013, and so a major problem was to find respondents who remembered the occupation clearly. Secondly, according to one questionnaire, 63.2 percent of Gezi Park activists were under 25 years of age, and 81 percent of the protesters were under 30 years old. Likewise, 82.2 percent of the activists who participated in the Gezi occupation have now perhaps graduated from a university and/or have since left for another city (Safarati, 2015). Therefore, it was hard to find different age groups of people, and to contact them. In addition, even though I found a few older activists who participated in the occupation actively, they were not willing to participate in this research. On the other hand, the invitations which were sent to respondents for this study were sometimes mislabeled as “spam” by their e-mail services. There were also some concerns among the participants regarding privacy, because of widespread anxiety of online fraud and hackers, something that was not aided by a lack of personal relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. Hence, the unwillingness of participants and the concerns of privacy represented some significant barriers to this study.

It may also be worth noting that people generally express themselves better orally than they do in writing, as diffident or less articulate individuals may not welcome the opportunity to re-read and edit their responses. So, sometimes the tidy nature of the e-mailed responses does not

stand in comparison with the engaging candour of remarks made spontaneously within the context of a successful face-to-face interview. Another difficulty of doing an e-mail interview for me was that subjects responded with common everyday language in their writing. Because respondents fulfilled the interview in a manner that is similar to speech, and some phrases such as “etc,” or “et al” do not appear in an academic face-to-face interview, it occasionally proved difficult to transcribe them (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

In conclusion, According to Bryman and Bell the primary disadvantages of the structured interviews are the fact that the interviewees do not receive any help or explanations in questions, which can be frustrating for them to figure out. Therefore, because the respondents may tire easily from questions which are difficult for them to understand, I was compelled to keep my questions brief and concise. Thus, this interview was limited to collecting only essential data. Moreover, the ability to analyze the data in more thorough and statistical way was restricted by the limitations of the web- based interview (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDY AND FINDINGS

Background Information about Gezi Park Occupation and use of Digital Media

One of the most important uprisings in Turkish memory broke out by the end of spring 2013. The summer in 2013 had turned out to be a historic period for political activism in Turkey. What started as a comparatively little and peace- loving protest at Gezi Park in the Taksim district of central Istanbul quickly turned into the biggest anti- government protests which Turkey has ever seen. Whereas the first protests called for the halt of a plan to transform the Gezi Park into a shopping mall at the beginning, a public outrage emerged and grew because of the disproportionate police response in which water cannons and tear gas were used in an excessive display of force. Meanwhile, the biggest cities which are Ankara, Izmir, Adana, and other cities across the country became a place for the protests in short time because of the outrage and the police brutality.

Therefore, internet, and other digital media, especially social media started to be used in order to spread information and mobilize people from beginning to the end of the Gezi Park resistance. Facebook, Twitter and were YouTube the most important websites. Furthermore, the initial demonstrations in Istanbul were opposed to the urban development plan, which would end with the replacement of Taksim Gezi Park with a shopping mall and possible residence triggered a gross movement covering all of Turkey. In short, it was not only a resistance which was against cutting down some trees for today but also it was a serious challenge towards AKP government. Subsequently, the protests spread through Turkey and transformed into anti-government protests. However, the political transform of the movement directed against AKP was much more than expected(Sen, 2014).

In this regard, it is significant to evaluate the political results of the uprising and to discuss the issue much more comprehensively. Therefore it shall be analyzed that the development in terms of social, cultural, and political meanings of this sudden collective movement, which started at the end of the May 2013 in Turkey and continued until the 2014 local elections. To start with, in the first part of the article, I will explain why and how people started to gather at the Gezi Park. Then, how the protest transformed a collective movement against the incumbent AKP government and how Internet, and digital media, especially social media were used effectively during the Gezi Park occupation. How do Gezi Park protests help us conceptualize transformations in the forms of collective action in Turkey? What were the mechanisms of political mobilization used by the protesters? What was the government's response to dissipate and discredit the protests? Finally, while I explain how it finished in order not to damage the 30 May 2014 local election, I will illustrate example of public spheres and mediation channels during the occupation.

The Occupation Begins

After AKP came into power, the AKP government started a stabilization and reform program. It, also, showed a significant commitment in monetary discipline and economic reforms. They showed great ability to build upon the program and with the program and the determination of AKP, Turkey obtained a high rate of financial growth of 7.5 percent annually during the 2002-

2006 period (Cizre, 2007). The combination of high economic growth and low inflation initiated a neo-liberal economic condition in Turkey. However, the neo-liberal economic condition brought some negative effects as well. For example, transforming the historical city Istanbul into a global megacity with huge tracts of open space used for the purposes of real-estate development was one of them. They used almost all green spaces in central Istanbul to maintain their economic and social conditions (Abbas and Yigit, 2014). The Gezi Park became the next target area for the capital because it is located in one of the most popular, and expensive districts, which is named Beyoglu, next to the Taksim Square. However, when the Gezi Park was being threatened, it encouraged a number of activists to prevent the green space from being destroyed.

The demolition of Gezi Park was started in order to build another shopping mall in Istanbul on Monday 27, 2013. Bulldozers entered Gezi Park, without any legal admonition, and they ran out to take down the trees which are located in the Gezi Park without any legal permission. In response, The Gezi Park movement which drew Istanbul into a fire of protest and uprising, was started by a modest 'occupy style' peaceful resistance in order to prevent the Gezi Park and the trees which with history dating back to the 1940s at the beginning (Aksoy, 2012). Because of the illegal demolition, activists expeditiously organized and called more people using Twitter and Face book to the park for stopping the bulldozers from uprooting the trees and they were very successful because hundreds thousands of people gathered in the park in less than an hour. During the following three days, preventing the Gezi Park from the destruction of an urban commons for the benefit of capitalists was the primary aim. To put it another way, at the beginning, the resistance was organized against a gentrification (Abbas and Yigit, 2014).

The Transformation of the Occupation: Mainstream Media Censorship and Digital Media Use

While the people were continuing their occupation, on May 29, celebrating the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans in 1453, Prime Minister Erdogan gave a speech in the tremendous inauguration ceremony of the Istanbul's third bridge. He stated that "Do whatever you want in Gezi Park, we have already made our decision." (Gürcan and Peker, 2014, pp. 70–89). After just

a few hours passed from the Prime Minister Erdogan`s speech, the environmentalists, activists and people who were living in the local area, were woken up at five am on 30th May by police at the Gezi Park. It was the third day of the peaceful defense of Gezi Park, and the aim was still only preventing the trees and park from being destroyed before the police`s “operation dawn”. During the “operation dawn”, the police raided the park with tear gas bombs and water cannons, burning protestors' tents and other personal property on the way. However, while the environmentalists, activists were under the uncontrolled police brutality, the local and mainstream media did not cover the events and neglect the intervention of the police brutality on the night of May 3, 2013. To give an example, while CNN Turkey was broadcasting penguin documentaries, the Cable News Network (CNN) had a live feed on the clashes between the police and the protesters. Although the blunted mainstream media ignored to broadcast the protests, there was some TV channels such as Halk TV (Public TV), UlusalKanal, (National Channel), which was broadcasting Gezi Protests as live (Sen, 2014). As it was the case in Egypt`s Tahrir Square, and Tunisia because much of the early news of the protests were not spread to outside by mainstream media (Varnali and Gorgulu, 2015).

The censorship which was shown by the mainstream media, was not an unexpected behavior because Turkish government accepted the media as a tool for constructing and maintaining hegemony. Even though the process had already begun before AKP, under the AKP rule it has taken a more decisive turn with a few newly emerging businessmen who close to the AKP government, acquired media outlets. For the blunted mainstream media, what happened in Gezi protests was only vandalism. In the view of this, it is possible to assume that the liberal profession symbols like objectivity and ethic have been destroyed because the media have become a capital filed (Sen, 2014). Therefore, the activist and environmentalist started to use Internet and digital media, especially social media, in order to reach out to wider audiences as well as keeping a record of their meetings and police brutality. Also, they used the Internet news media and social media because these media do not work profit based, and do not affected from relationship between political power and capital groups. Later on, Twitter, Facebook, blogs, websites and fanzines, all managed by activist, environmentalist and civil initiative on a voluntary basis, and become the main media channels and sites of information these ongoing demonstrations. The active using of Facebook, Twitter, text and video messages kept all of

Turkey informed and mobilized while the demonstrations and mobilization was censored by the mainstream media (Inceoglu, 2013).

Moreover, according to Safarati (2015), the digital media, especially the social media provided three major functions during the protests. First, the digital media, especially social media, became the credible source to disseminate information on the uprising to protestors, bystanders and other individuals who follow the protests. Most of the activists transformed from passive receptors of news creators of information, and become implementers of “citizen journalism” by recording incidents in the street with their smart phones, posting them online, and sharing them with larger networks. Secondly, social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, became impactful tools to create communication between protestors, supply logistics, organize activities, spreads collective action frames to mass and attract international public opinion. To illustrate, during the first day of the uprising, the hashtag “diren Gezi Park” (resist Gezi Park) was used “in 950,000 tweets, and 1.8 million times in the uprising’s first three days, and more than 4 million times in the first eleven days”. Also it is notable to mention that the ninety the Gezi park tweets were tweeted by ninety percent of tweeter user in Turkey. Lastly, social media played an extensive role for logistics. For example, after protesters circulated their needs lists on Twitter and Facebook, foods, medicine, cleaning products, other needs were supplied by other activists and bystanders (Safarati, 2015). Because activists and environmentalist used twitter for mediation, a big change happened the total number of tweets sent in Turkey. The amount increased from 9-11 million to about 15.2 million during the protests (Varnali and Gorgulu, 2015).

Furthermore, because the pro-government mainstream media did not show anything about the police violence, and what happened during the demonstrations was vandalism for them, a group of activist did not remained silent, and created their alternative media networks such as “whatshappeninginistanbul.com,” “everywheretaksim.net.tr,” and “delilimvar.tumblr.com”. They aimed to provide reliable information to the international audience and facilitate the information flow during resistance process was founded by the activists. In view of these points it is clear to conclude that social networking sites and internet have significantly contributed to increasing participation in and swifter organization of the demonstration in Gezi Park as well in the Arab spring uprising in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, et al. in

2010, to Los Indignados in Spain, Occupy in London and New York (2011) (Sen, 2014). Also, it is worth to refer that educated, urban middle class youth “constituted one of the main societal pillars of the Gezi Occupation. According the one questionnaire, 63.2 percent of the Gezi park activists were under 25 years of age, and 81 percent of the protesters were under 30 years old. Likewise, 82.2 percent of the activists who participated Gezi Occupation were either graduated from a university or a university student (Safarati, 2015).

Meanwhile, while the spontaneous demonstration was becoming bigger and bigger in hours, the AKP government and its riot police continued to use different violent methods, ranging from beating defenseless people to close range shots of tear gas containers on individuals` heads in order to scatter the protestors from Taksim Square. However, although these excessive brutality of police, several tens of thousands people joined the first group in the span of a few hours, according to some agencies. The joining of thousands people in a few hours was an unplanned and exceptional act of collective mobilization. This urban mobilization was barely only organized through social media, while the mainstream media was collaborating fully with the AKP government and imposing a media blackout of the event. (Kuymulu, 2013).

In addition, while protestors showed peaceful and calm demonstrations, the government police often continue to use its violent manner without any legal monitions. So, people have never hesitated to take to streets and block avenues and their cities' important public spaces. What started like a regional area environmentalist action project, with the backdrop of a general concern around neo-liberalism and urbanization, rapidly changed into a national outcry against the policies of the AKP as a whole. Afterwards, protest movements have spread across Turkey`s largest cities, and appear to become widespread urban uprising. Small but strong willed groups of people which armed with their pots and pans, started to parade throughout the streets by chanting antigovernment slogans almost in all cities in Turkey. (Abbas and Yigit, 2014). For standing against the absolutism of AKP government, the protestors used “excessive wit” against the authorities who used excessive uncontrolled physical force against them. Therefore, the protestors used the political humor in order to ridicule the government`s restrictive policies, police brutality, and the mainstream media`s silence with creative humors and jokes. To give an example, the penguin which as one of the uprising`s symbols, was adopted by protestors for

mocking the silence of the mainstream media. In the same manner, Erdogan who was the prime minister of Turkey, called them looters (çapulcu), the protesters quickly took over the world and named themselves “Capulcular” for creating an alternative discourse and fellowship among themselves. A graffiti that read “You prohibited alcohol, and the people got sober!” made fun of the prime minister Erdogan’s alcohol law. Another that read “Are you sure you would like to have three children like us?” teased the prime minister’s lasting advice to women to bear at least three children. In addition to utilizing humor, new strategies of civil disobedience were invited for attracting people attention and capturing the moral high ground in their struggle against the government by protestors. For instance, the “standing man” which initiated by a young performance artist, was one of the most successful acts of civil disobedience. In the following days, the silently standing protests started to be seen in different parts of Turkey in solitude or in groups demonstrating their dissatisfaction with the government’s policy of evacuating Gezi Park, neglecting their democratic demands, and demonizing their cause. Although the authorities detained and then released the “standing men and women” in the initial group, they soon understood the nonsense of detaining individuals for “standing”, and could not know appropriately how to deal with this new form of protest. (Safarati, 2015).

On the other hand, Kuyumlu argued (2013) the police brutality was not only the reason of this turn. The Prime Minister Erdogan himself and his government were other reasons of this turn. From the beginning of the resistance to the last time, Erdogan confidently took a confrontational path. Also, Prime Minister Erdogan used discursive strategies to discredit and vilify the protestors. First, the activists have been represented as a security threat and enemies of religion. Second, the protestors were deliberately depicted as enemies of religion by government. For example, two events have been circulated widely by Erdoğan and pro-government media for depicting activists. The first event happened on June 3, roughly a hundred activists who were injured in protests made refuge in a mosque in Istanbul which was changed to a clinic. After the injured activists stayed the night there, the story started to circulate stories about alcohol consumption. The second story surfaced, when a woman who wears veil, claimed that “she was attacked and assaulted with her 3-month old baby by activists. Then, Erdogan continuously repeated these events, and he states that the protestors were enemies of religion (Safarati, 2015). Later on, while Prime Minister Erdogan was continuing to use police for further

intervention, he invited a million supporters to Taksim Square in order to confront with the demonstrators. In one of his speech,

He asked 'his nation'—Prime Minister Erdogan always talks in the first person— not to join the chapulling 'looters' and told them to go back home."Such a recalcitrant and authoritarian language telling people what to do and what to think is nothing new for the people of Turkey. It is difficult to recount every event that turned people from docile individuals into a new militant collectivity. In the span of a year, people in Turkey, especially women, were repeatedly told to have at least three children, not to use contraception, to avoid cesareans, that every abortion was a murder and that everybody who drinks alcohol was an alcoholic. People heard Erdogan declare that he did not want a youth wandering around drunk, and that instead, he wanted a religious youth. He also scolded young couples for kissing in the subway(Kuymulu 2013,p 226).

As a result of these negative behaviors, people started to be concerned about authoritarianism, neoliberalism and the brutality of police. These particular concerns brought together a whole body from different interest groups. For instance, in the following days, there were not only environmentalists, activists and people living and working in the local area in the Gezi Park, but also there were different groups who were camped in the park, from rightists to leftists, from the Islamists to secularist, from the young urbane sophisticates to older 'mothers of the protesters' and all encountered the full wrath of the state authority. The, people who from any groups or any social stratum, fasting, non-fasting sat together in order to break their fast at sunset in public spaces at the 'earth tables'. Also, Aspects of Turkey`s LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) arranged protests against the AKP government and its police (Aciksoz and Korkman 2013). Religious Muslims, also, participated in the protest because they were concerned about police brutality, authoritarianism and neoliberalism. Even the most three most famous football teams` (Galatasaray, Besiktas, ansFenerbahce) fans showed a great example of solidarity as they named themselves ' Istanbul United' (Inceoglu, 2014). These trends would indicate that majorities and minorities, women and men, commonly young but also older people, rightists and leftists, religionists and atheists, simultaneously gained a national outrage and

outrage against the domineering and insulting statements of Prime Minister Erdogan and the uncontrolled responses of police to the protestors. At the same time, food and refreshments were left by people for the protestors, which was then served by volunteers. Some diverse social activities like Pilates and yoga sessions, small bands' concerts, reading and gathering forums. In short, there was almost a carnival like atmosphere were created by people and the atmosphere brought people together rarely detected in Turkish society. (Abbas and Yigit, 2014).

How Occupation Finished

These peaceful demonstrations and sometimes the harmful insurrections continued to happen by the end of autumn 2013. Then the protests became less silent and emotionless demonstrations. The coming winter and the inconvenience of cold of public spaces for long hours of meetings affected demonstrations badly and many of the park forums were dispersed. That was the apparent part of the iceberg, but the main reason of the dissolving of protest was political concern. There was an upcoming local election, and the upcoming local election made the political parties shift their focus to the local election. The shift gained a destructive role for the post Gezi Park protests. Initially, the Gezi park activists attempted to seek alternative ways of doing politics for being more inclusive, direct, and local and tried to be a political actor in the upcoming local election in March 2014. However, the election process influenced badly and hijacked the spirit of Gezi uprising. Activists started to focus on following party lines. Democratic and peaceful negotiations were put on hold. In other words, the horizontal approach of the new politics was abolished by the traditional centralised and organised, top- down, way of doing politics before it could ripen to offer alternatives (Inceoglu, 2014). Also, although the Gezi park spirit was so strong and spread to whole Turkey in a few days, the period of creating alternatives to the existing and entrenched system is a long term effort than anything that can be achieved in a single election. Therefore, most of the Gezi activists left the sphere of politics to the three powerful parties of the status quo even though they were not convinced completely.

The political indecision of Gezi activist was used by Prime Minister Erdogan and its party's spokespeople. They made an agenda which emphasized the ballot box as the place where the tensions should be resolved and also they asserted, in a rather daunting way, that 'the will of

nation' would only be seen via election results. It is clear from this that overemphasis on the elections could easily be read as a pressure of the majority, but in Turkey, elections seem as a mean of democracy. Therefore most of the people who joined the Gezi Protests agreed the idea to solve the problem via elections, and because they believed that continuing the street protests would harm the local elections, they consented to stay off the streets until the end of the March. On the contrary, some tragic circumstances which started the death of Berkin Elvan, a fifteen year old boy and one of the most significant figures of the Gezi resistance, abruptly reawakened the Gezi spirit of the activists again. The young boy who fought for survival in a hospital for 265 days, had been regarded as a symbol of ongoing resistance (Inceoglu, 2014). Therefore, when Berkin died thousands of people gathered in front of the hospital and they showed a great emotional response. Hundreds of thousands of people participated the funeral of Berkin Elvan on 12 March 2014 in Istanbul and meanwhile, thousands of people took to the streets and avenues in other cities in Turkey as well. The huge numbers of people attending the funeral was interpreted as the reawakening of the Gezi spirit. But the police emerged again and attacked people without any warning while the people were only doing the funeral march peacefully. In addition, While people and activists tried to stay calm, a more tragic event happened on the night of the funeral a 22 year-old man, Burak Can Karamanoglu, was killed in the neighborhood where the Elvan family lived, and then matters became even worse. While Berkin Elvan had been close to radical left groups, Burak Can Karamanoglu was identified with ultranationalists groups. Hence, the situation made a threat about armed street fight between these groups because that kind of fight happened in Turkish history before (Safarati, 2015). However, the general public and activists remained calm and no further clashes occurred despite some provocations. Furthermore, despite the tragic events and provocations, the majority of people who joined the Gezi protest remained calm because they preferred to solve the problems via the local elections. They preferred to stay off the streets until the end of the March. They created a new slogan " vote and beyond" ("Oy ve Ötesi") a few months prior to the elections. One response to this line of thinking was a civil initiative called *Oy ve Ötesi* (Vote and Beyond), established by volunteers a few months prior to the elections. To sum up, the electoral politics hijacked and subdued the street mobilizations and the Gezi spirit, and any protests did not happen with the Gezi spirit after the 30 March 2014 local elections (Inceoglu, 2014).

All in all, In the Gezi Park uprising, the mostly young, urban and educated activists who were organized horizontally, vocalized their grievances against the social injustice, and the governing JDP's increasing authoritarianism in Turkey. By using digital media, especially Twitter and Facebook, they gathered in the Gezi Park, streets and public and made a unity and solidarity. At the beginning, three main frames created by the activists for addressing local popular grievances steaming from neo-liberal urban development projects, diminishing resident's` voices in their cities living places and the Justice and Development's Party`s increasing authoritarianism.

In addition, although the movement was very spontaneous, and the political commitments of the protesters were very diverse, the Gezi movement can be seen as the revival of civil resistance in Turkey because the spontaneous demonstrations and mobilization of the movement showed that the streets are a significant place once again as the legitimate areas of social communication and the political interaction in Turkish political culture. The Gezi uprising, also, illustrated that the communicative potential of street originating from itself in such a spontaneous way for the first time in Turkey political history. To sum up, the uprising became a powerful symbolic opportunity to act together, resisting political and capital powers who were disregarding the requests of citizens. In other words, the Gezi resistance has changed the political language of the nation, brought a new form of consciousness into the politics of everyday life, and opened people's eyes to the possibilities of resistance.

Interviews and Evaluation of Findings

Motivation for Activism

An overwhelming majority (almost 90 percent) of respondents stated that their motivation for participating in the Gezi occupation was the wrath of the AKP government and its anti-democratic decisions and governance style. The other 10 percent said the statements which had been spread by activists via social media against the AKP government and the uncontrolled police brutality seen during the occupation is what mobilized them. When I asked about any motivation of their family, friends and others, almost 80 percent of respondents said that they shared similar sentiments. Others participants said that they participated because they wanted to

protect their democratic rights. Lastly, when I asked about symbols such as the Red-Dressed Women, or other symbols which may mobilize people, the majority (like 80 percent) said that they are not sure whether the symbols effected people and their mediation; only a small majority (around 5 percent) affirmed that the symbols motivated people and affected communication. Others said that the symbol did not affect activists.

Social Network Sites for Mobilization

In response to SNS for mobilization, which asked whether activists had a social media membership or not, and if they used it actively or not for mediation and mobilization during the Gezi occupation, the interview results showed that all respondents had a SNS membership, particularly Facebook (100 percent), Twitter (57 percent), and Instagram (76 percent) at the same time. In addition, the results showed that the internet and digital media, especially social media, was used actively for spreading information and propagating information sent by activists or others during the Gezi occupation. Finally, the results of the questions regarding digital media, especially social media used to inform and encourage others to participate, showed that a high percentage of the respondents (60 percent) stated that it affected activists and themselves in particular. At the same time, 30 percent of them said that the use of SNS did not affect people as much as it had seemed, but had instead stated other reasons.

Offline Communication and Mass Media for Mediation and Mobilization

In answers to the offline communication question, which asked if you informed your friends about protests via face to face communication or not, almost half of the participants (40 percent) said that they informed their family and friends about protests via face-to-face communication. In addition, results showed that respondents firmly believed that face-to-face communication was more effective than online communication; for example, one of the respondents said that because the media did not show all things, it was more reliable to learn via offline communication instead. Also, another said that “everybody were talking about this occupation on buses, on roads, in their houses you could hear these conversations everywhere”. On the other hand, other respondents (27 percent) said they did not participate in any offline communication. When

respondents were asked what the role was of the mass media in terms of the mobilization or mediation of the activists, most respondents said that the mass media did not broadcast the protests, stating that “ the mass media stayed silent all protests and never showed the truth.”

In summary, interviewed activists tended to positively accept the current role of the internet and digital media, particularly social media, in activism. However, respondents agreed that online activism is not only the main reason for mobilization, and offline activism is just as important. In short, activists` responses to the questions revealed that activists believed that while online activism was essential during the Gezi occupation, it still had to be accompanied by some kind of offline action.

Discussion

Protest has been considered a prominent outlet for the popular articulation of political concerns. As a result of that, protests, movements, riots, and other forms of civic activity have continued to occur throughout the world, such as in the Egyptian revolution, the Indignados movement in Spain, Occupy Wall Street in the US in 2011, and lastly the case of this research, Turkey's Gezi Park Occupation 2013. Since the internet and digital media, especially social media, were used and played a crucial role in these three protests in terms of spreading information, organizing protests, making campaigns, and creating networks, the internet and digital media have been widely viewed as fundamental to these protests (Mercea, 2011). Therefore, in this research, I investigated the role of internet and digital media, particularly social media, for mobilizing activists in the Gezi Park protests in 2013.

To begin with, responses to interviews of activists showed that the internet and digital media tools were seen as an important part of their activism during the Gezi occupation. All respondents agreed that the internet and social media were crucial for organizing, creating networks, informing people, promoting debate, and mobilizing them into active participation. They also stated that they used at least two social media channels in order to get information, make comments, and share their thoughts. For example, the majority of respondents said that they especially used Facebook and Twitter during the occupation to get information about the attacks of the riot police and the address of the local hospital, and also for sharing news about the

protests. In addition, as mentioned above, this indicates that, because the internet and other digital media provides a relatively inexpensive form of media, the limitation of funding of social movements has been removed. So, a digital prefigurative participation, written above, occurred during the Gezi Occupation.

In addition, although earlier expectations for a ‘mobilization effect’ (Van Lear, 2007) had been unrealized, as social movement organization outreach grew through computer mediated communication, new participants were brought into offline protests by way of their internet use. According to the results of the interview, since the local and mainstream media did not cover the events and neglected to mention incidents of police brutality during the occupation, and for the blunt nature of the mainstream media in describing the protests as nothing more than vandalism, the activists and environmentalists created their own media via social media. At that point, digital media, especially social media, became the credible source on the dissemination of information on the uprising to protestors, bystanders, and other individuals who followed the protests. Most of the activists transformed from passive receptors of news into creators of information, and become implementers of “citizen journalism” by recording incidents in the street with their smart phones, posting them online, and sharing them with larger networks. This strongly indicates that by using the advantages of the internet and digital media, activists created their own alternative media in order to resist the hegemonic messages, falsified news stories, and negative descriptions of activism that were typical in the mainstream press.

As mentioned above, the formal and informal networks play a key role in pulling individuals into collective action. Many scientists have stated that the internet and digital media, particularly social media, play an important role in producing and sustaining social relations and networks in terms of participation. The two are important in taking part in demonstrations and collective action in at least two ways: first, the strengthening of existing networks in which activists are embedded, simplifying communication and interaction capacities across different networks and engagements; second, by amplifying new networks, and increasing the possibility of taking part in collective action (Van Laer, 2010). In addition, the “network” term has been used in the past in relation to the dynamics of grouping of friends, colleagues, relatives, and comrades, however the term was popularized in its' current usage by the Catalan Sociologist

Manual Castel. He transferred the term from an analytic, almost technical “category in to an overreaching spatial metaphor for describing the ‘morphology’ of postindustrial societies.” Later on, the term became a standard reference point for many authors studying the impact of new media on contemporary activism (Gerbaudo, 2012).

When considering the applicability of the internet and digital media for building networks, they must be trustworthy enough to convince people to participate in a collective action. Results from interviews conducted for this paper demonstrate that activists who participated in Gezi Park mostly used the internet and digital media, especially social media, for mediation. Almost all respondents (99 percent) said that they generally used the internet and digital media for acquiring and spreading information, though they did not specifically mention how they discovered an online group or small group via social media. However, one respondent clearly stated that he belonged to a political party that organized big and small groups in different parts of the country. In short, he attributed his involvement to the network which he belonged to, for its impact on his activism offline. At the same time, another respondent said that “I followed some groups and organizations”, but she did not clearly explain whether she followed the groups and organizations via online or offline activism. On the other hand, literature has provided evidence in support of the fact that although activists did not mention anything about their networks, they had already created networks via social media, and strengthened their network by using social media when they started to use it actively. In more technical terms, because of the social network websites` unique features, such as creating a friend list or a group, when a person creates a profile on a social networking website such as Facebook, the user makes their networks visible as a friend list or group which they create. Also, since users can see their friend’s networks, they can talk to others who they had not been acquainted with, and enhance their online network due to communication with others. It must therefore be assumed that during the Gezi Park occupation, the internet and digital media were generally used for mediation and mobilization, but also for building networks through both online and offline activists (Haythornthwaite, 2005).

On the other hand, although the internet and digital media played a crucial role in spreading information as well as mobilizing and motivating people to actively participate in the case of the Gezi Park occupation, especially social network websites, there were also important

and diverse offline activism groups that accomplished the same. At the beginning of the protest, the demonstrations in Istanbul that were against the urban development plan began via offline communication; these initial protests were initiated by an activist group which did not use any online communication technologies. Also worth noting is that all respondents of the interview said that at the beginning, the reasons which to motivate them to actively participate in the protests were the long lasting antidemocratic attitude of the government, the prime minister Erdogan`s discursive strategies to discredit and vilify the protestors, and the police brutality. As mentioned above, it was because of these negative behaviors that people started to become concerned about authoritarianism, neoliberalism, and the brutality of the police. These particular concerns brought together a unified body of people from many different interest groups. To give an example, in the following days there were not only environmentalists, activists, and others living and working in the local area around Gezi Park, but there were also different groups who were camping in the park, from rightists to leftists, Islamists to secularists, from the young urbane sophisticates to older 'mothers of the protesters', and all encountered the full wrath of the state authority. At that point, the group started to unify to address the problems and decide what they will do. They also participated in various offline activities as well, such as dinner parties, yoga, reading activities, etc. (Aciksoz and Korkman 2013). Moreover, it can be seen that the diverse groups` unity was much like Habermas`s public sphere, because according to Hermes, a public sphere is a collection of private individuals who come together to discuss matters of common concern, and access is guaranteed to all citizens. In Gezi Park during these protests, there were not only activists, but also many individuals from different social strata of Turkey, and they came together to discuss the demolition of Gezi Park; it was through this discussion that they influenced political action in Turkey(Habermas, Lennox and Lennox, 1974, pp. 49–55).In short, although the internet and digital media were vital for the mediation and mobilization of the activists, these offline communications were also effective in their mobilization and mediation during the Gezi Park occupation.

Conclusion

This research suggests that digital media, in particular social networking sites, have the ability to mediate and mobilize activists in protests, riots, and movements. The research has also shown that the active use of digital media, especially SNS, can turn online activism into offline

activism. Furthermore, despite the digital divide, these activists who participated in the Gezi Park occupation view digital media and social networking sites positively, and count SNS among the essential tools for their offline activism. It can be seen from this that digital media and SNSs are becoming more prominent, rather than completely changing traditional offline activism and the tactics thereof (Harlow and Harp, 2012). As such, this study indicates that in order to achieve any sort of real social change, online and offline actions must be combined. The theoretical suggestion of such findings is that digital media, particularly social networking sites, serve to reinforce collective identities, which could potentially lead to forms of activism that might not have happened without the active use of digital media and its tools as illustrated in the Gezi Park Occupation case.

This study is limited because the e-mail interview sample is not representative, and the results are not easy to draw general conclusions from. In addition, due to time restrictions, the respondent's amounts were restricted as well. However, in this digital era, use of new features and new information provided by communication technology, such as reaching about subjects via email and posting your needs to websites, should be used as a guiding framework for future research (Harlow and Harp, 2012). Although there exists a certain lack of information in terms of statistical representative data, the findings of this exploratory study are nevertheless comprehensive and meaningful, as the qualitative and quantitative results used have provided much information about how activists involved in this movement utilized contemporary technology. This research also offers evidence for the importance of considering the particularities of a region when considering how digital media tools might be used in different communities. In spite of some research conducted on this topic, the rapidly changing nature of new information and communication technologies requires much attention to be paid to this mobilization effect that can be achieved with these technologies.

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