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Social Media and Mainstream Media effects on Social Protests

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Abstract

What role do social media and the mass media play in social movements and political unrest? This article will explore the dynamics of social movements, protests and their coverage by mainstream media and social media. Since 2011, social revolutions, like Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt, or other revolutions including those in Turkey, Brazil, Iceland, Spain, and the global Occupy movement highlighted the importance of social media in mobilizing people. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have become an important component in social revolutions. It remains unclear whether social media has become the primary tool of mobilization, however, or whether the mass media still plays a crucial role. The May 2013 Gezi Park Protests in Turkey and the June 2013 Public Transportation Riots in Brazil serve as case studies to understand the effects of mainstream and social media.

Introduction

Does social media help or hold back social movements? Do technological developments and social platforms help protesters and activists to mobilize and achieve their goals? If these platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram have effects on social protests, are they really important to start the protests and make them successful or are they only one of the components of success along with coverage by the mainstream media?

The primary objective of this paper is to determine whether it is possible for people to mobilize in protest against their government without mainstream media coverage provided they have access to social media. Does social media enable people to organize? Since even some democratic governments use their leverage over traditional mass media in order to support their ideas and plans, it is important to know whether social media can create an independent platform that people can use to access information and have a free voice in this censored environment.

Other scholars have already explored the question of whether organization through social media can suffice to mobilize protest movements successfully. Scholars separate into two different groups: Traditionalists who believe that support of traditional mainstream media coverage is crucial, and New Media Scholars who claim social media platforms are replacing the mass media as a key pathway to mobilize social protests. New Media Scholars who emphasize the effects of social media believe that social media has revolutionary power for protests to start and become successful. They argue that social media platforms have significant impacts on social protests. During the Arab Spring, social media platforms were one of the major tools for communication between protesters, and these platforms facilitated the coordination of protests.

Traditionalist Scholars claim that social media does not have a significant effect on the social protests and it is not enough to be a tipping point for protests by itself. According to Traditionalists, the impact of social media is exaggerated by New Media Scholars, and they even claim that social media platforms can actually slow down social protests by reducing the level of popular participation in protests.

Even though some scholars take a more nuanced view, acknowledging both positive and negative impacts of social media on social protests, the discussion of social media effects mainly divides scholars into these two camps. The main question therefore remains: does the social media by itself suffice to organize protests, or is mobilization of both social media and mass media coverage necessary for successful protest organization?

In order to have a better understanding of the effects of the social media on social protests, comparison of two relatively similar cases—the Gezi Park Protests in Turkey and the Public Transportation Riots (the so-called Vinegar Protests) in Brazil—will shed light on the relative importance of social media and mass media pathways. There was considerable social media usage in both cases, but the mainstream media became involved only in the Public Transportation Riots. These cases will thus improve understanding of whether social media suffices by itself to mobilize people people or whether the mass media must still play a crucial role.

Literature Review

New Media Scholars who emphasize the effects of social media believe that technological developments which provide better and faster ways of communication can be

helpful for gathering people and increasing awareness of social problems. Dustin Kidd and Keith McIntosh (2016) argue that, since social media can reach many people, it may create awareness among people about social and political issues, and it can create a tipping point for people to speak up. "The scale of such problems varies greatly – including both global issues such as climate change as well as problems that are, proportionally, more modest, such as fostering engagement in the democratic process" (Kidd&Mclntosh, 2016).

Manuel Castells (2009, 2012) claims that in the information age people can communicate easily, and information flow depends on people who use the new communication technologies. For him, social media is one of the easiest and most logical ways of communication, but he also believes that there needs to be a real-world connection between online activism and street activism for successful social protests. He believes that usage of social media and its power to affect people can lead to successful street protests.

According to Castells, all those revolutions and uprisings that happened between 2008 and 2011 are related to each other such as Iceland's Kitchenware Revolution, the Spanish Indignados Movement, Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution, Egypt's Tahrir Square Protests, and protests as a part of Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street. Protests that happened earlier inspired the ones happened after and they all learned from one another's methods via online networks (Kidd&Mclntosh, 2016, p.786). Castells also claims that these protests are mostly happening spontaneously and they don't have leaders. Dustin Kidd quotes from Manual Castells' work: "these new network society social movements are leaderless, because of both the distrust that the movements have for power and because of the ways that network society has flattened organizational hierarchies" (Kidd&Mclntosh, 2016, p.786).

According to Gilad Lotan, Erhardt Graeff, Mike Ananny, Devin Gaffney, Ian Pearce, and Danah Boyd (2011), movements in Egypt and Tunisia are great examples for the leaderless movements and to see the effects of social media usage: "Social media, and in particular Twitter, is a new venue for studying how people communicate and how information flows. While many genres of social media encourage reciprocal sharing, both blogging and Twitter have been shown to enable rapid information flow." Their research examines the information flow on Twitter; and they show that the main source of information flow is tweets and retweets. "[In Egypt and Tunisia], journalists and activists serve primarily as key information sources, while bloggers and activists are more likely to retweet content and, thus, serve as key information routers" (Lotan et al. 2011, 1390).

They claim that individuals, journalists, and bloggers are the number one source of information and they are more reliable than mainstream media sources since they are more independent. Their conclusion is "social media really has transformed journalism into a conversation across different types of actors, and that activists and bloggers are significant producers of information, in addition to journalists" (Lotan et al. 2011).

In another study which also examines how the social media and internet usage affected the Arab Spring, Zeynep Tufekci and Christopher Wilson ask, "did social media use shape how participants learned, planned, or documented the protests in Egypt's Tahrir Square protests?"(2012, 369). They find that social media played an important role in the process of decision making regarding whether to attend a protest or not, gathering locations and the probability of success. Tufekci and Wilson say, "about half had a Facebook profile (52%) and almost everyone who had one used it for communicating about the protests (51%). Twitter was used in general by 16% of the respondents, and for communicating about the protests by 13%"

(Tufekci and Wilson 2012, 369). Briefly, Tufekci and Wilson supply significant evidence to show that social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, played an essential role in the protests which caused the resignation of Egyptian President Mubarak.

Clay Shirky, another leading scholar on social media and communication technologies, approaches the problem both sociologically and psychologically and argues that technology has affected human behavior. He believes that technologies and social media platforms are transforming people's actions and prepare the ground for revolutions. As he claims, "revolution does not happen when society adopt new technology, it happens when society adopts new behavior" (Shirky, 2008). He also says the "key issue is not the technology itself but the change in human behavior that the technology enables" (Shirky, 2008).

According to Shirky, people avoid protests or revolutions because of the fear of being left alone during those events. However, improving technologies start to change people behaviors. Social protests involve a three-step ladder: "sharing, cooperation and collective action" (Shirky, 2008, 49). According to Shirky, the fear of action disappears when the risk, cost, and speed of that action is decreased by technology.

In *Pax Technica: How the Internet of things may set us free or lock us up*, Philip Howard (2015) also makes a point about social media and surveillance. He argues that even though these services can be used by governments or big companies as a surveillance tool, they can also be used by citizens to monitor corporate powers and governments. Thus, social media platforms can be helpful for providing peace and stability. Howard talks about three advantage of the usage of social media platforms during the protests. He claims that they can be used as a tool during the social protests and uprisings to contact friends and relatives, they can help protesters mobilize and collaborate, and they are a means of recording, sharing and documenting events (Howard,

2015). Since social media and the Internet provide easy and rapid communication, people can access information quickly. As Howard claims, platforms like Twitter are great for gathering and acting collectively because an individual can reach millions of people instantly. Eltantawy and Wiest (2011, 1207) also claim that "social media technologies have been used especially in organizing and implementing collective activities, promoting a sense of community and collective identity among marginalized group members, creating less-confined political spaces, establishing connections with other social movements, and publicizing causes to gain support from the global community."

Traditionalist Scholars, on the other hand, believe that the effects of social media are exaggerated. Even though some of them think that, in some cases, social media has changed power relationships, in general, they remain suspicious. They say although social media seems impressive and may appear to change the way of people mobilize and relate to one another, in the real world the influence of social media is overstated.

Malcolm Gladwell criticizes New Media Scholars and journalists as being unrealistic and unsophisticated, in his work *Small Change: Why the Revolution Will not Be Tweeted* (Gladwell 2010). He compares the protests based on social media the civil rights movements during the 1960's. He acknowledges that social media has effects on social protests: "the world, we are told, is in the midst of a revolution. The new tools of social media have reinvented social activism. With Facebook and Twitter and the like, the traditional relationship between political authority and popular will has been upended, making it easier for the powerless to collaborate, coordinate, and give voice to their concerns" (Gladwell 2010, 2). However, he believes that social media has changed the basis of the social protests by weakening the level of activism. "Personal ties

between participants are essential for "real" political activism and that social media can not replace this form of direct engagement between participants" (Guner 2016, 5).

Gladwell offers examples to show the strength of protests during 1960s civil rights movement. He argues that social protests require a high level of activism encouraged by strong friendship and relationships. Guner also says that "real political actions occur as the result of direct, face to face interactions that are combined with emotional, interpersonal investment" (Guner 2016, 6).

Gladwell claims that especially during the 1960s civil right movements, mostly students were mobilized and there were strong ties among them. He says that "the kind of activism associated with social media isn't like this at all. The platforms of social media are built around weak ties. Twitter is a way of following (or being followed by) people you may never have met. Facebook is a tool for efficiently managing your acquaintances, for keeping up with the people you would not otherwise be able to stay in touch with. That's why you can have a thousand "friends" on Facebook, as you never could in real life" (Gladwell 2010, 5). So, communication may be easier, but personal commitment is lessened precisely because it's so easy. As an answer to scholars who argue that social media increase the level of participation in protests, Gladwell answers that "social networks are effective at increasing participation—by lessening the level of motivation that participation requires" (Gladwell 2010, 6).

Another concern about the usage of social media relates to control of the social media. Evgeny Morozov (2011) says that benefit of technology and social media usage is exaggerated. Morozov accepts that social media and the Internet can be powerful tools, but he is concerned about who creates, has access to, and controls these mechanisms. Morozov claims that social media and the Internet can also be a powerful weapon for authoritarian governments and

corporations for surveillance and tracking people and opposition groups. "Technologies that were supposed to empower the individual strengthened the dominance of giant corporations, while technologies that were supposed to boost democratic participation produced a population of couch potatoes" (Morozov, 2011, 276).

A Comparison of the Gezi Park and Vinegar Protests

The Vinegar Protests in Brazil offer an instructive contrast with the Gezi Park Protests in Turkey. The May 2013 Gezi Park Protests in Turkey and the June 2013 Public Transportation Riots (Vinegar Protests) in Brazil were both mass protests against government policies. In both cases, protesters were relatively successful, and protests in the Gezi Park case had similar outcomes as in the Vinegar Protests, causing the government to retreat from an announced policy change. In both cases, people started to demonstrate, the government and police forces reacted against the protesters, and social media platforms played similar roles. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram were all involved in these protests. Since both happened almost at the same time, protesters often supported the protesters from the other country by mentioning each other on social media. On the other hand, these protests differed in one crucial way. In Brazil, both mainstream media and social media actively covered the demonstrations. While there was excessive use of social media among protesters in Turkey as well, however, there was almost no mainstream media coverage of the protests, especially during the first week of the demonstrations.

The 2013 protests in Brazil were the biggest uprising against the government since the period of 1983 to 1992 military dictatorship. More than 2 million people mobilized all around

Brazil during these protests, which are also known as the Vinegar Protests. "In June 2013, Brazil saw a resurgence of its nationwide social movement, the size of which had not been seen for little over 20 years, since the fall of its military dictatorship" (Borelli, 2015, p.2).

Demonstrations led by the activist group MPL (Movimento Passe Livre) started on June 6th against the rise of public transportation fare. There was mainstream media coverage of the protests, but it neither provided accurate information about why people were mobilizing, nor did it show how police forces used extensive power to eliminate the protesters. Most of the nationwide TV channels and newspapers broadcasted information about traffic jams caused by activists or showed the damaged caused by vandals in order to delegitimize the protesters. "The press coverage of this stage was dooming, complaining about the traffic issues it was causing and the movement's unrealistic demands, but barely covering the police attacks on the demonstration" (Ferreira, 2013, p.14). "The manifestation itself is already enough reason to attract the media's attention, since it has been the largest since pro-democracy demonstrations in the 1980s" ((Portwood, p.3, 2013).

The announcement of the municipal government and the government of the State of São Paulo of the fare increase on public transportation services in 2013 caused the tension at a moment when people were already complaining about the government's policies and issues like corruption. The demonstrations began with the demand for a R$0.20 reduction in the public transportation fare by the activist group "Movimento Passe Livre" (MPL - Free Pass Movement) in San Paulo. Soon after that, normal citizens who were not members of activist groups began to join demonstrations not only against the public transportation fare increase but also against massive government corruption, police brutality, inequality, poor social services in Brazil, unnecessary government expenses, and so on. "Protesters are angry about corruption and

inequality. They're also frustrated about the cost of hosting the upcoming World Cup and Olympic Games in light of economic disparity and lack of high quality basic services" (Hernández and Spiro, 2014). "Public demonstrations did not only consist of MPL activists, but ordinary citizens voicing their concerns over better provision of public policy and against massive government corruption. These demonstrations received mass support and attendance as they spread across all of Brazil's 26 states"(Borelli 2015, 6).

The Vinegar Protests were not the only mass mobilization against the government in the history of Brazil. The country has long history of protests, street fights and social movements. "Brazil mobilized twice, once in the 1960s and again in 1992, demanding freedom of speech and end of corruption, respectively. But it was in 2013 that Brazil awoke to its biggest protest yet, this time demanding strong structural changes and expressing numerous different concerns" (Ferreira 2013, 2).

The mainstream media was actively involved in all three of these cases, in the 1960s, 1992 and 2013. The mainstream media was the only way of communication and provided information flow during the 1960s and 1992 movements since there were no Internet or social media platforms. However, that was not the case for the 2013 Vinegar Protests. Social media platforms such as Twitter, played important roles during the protests, together with mainstream media organs including newspapers and TV channels. "In 2001, the Internet had already spread to twenty percent of Brazilians, according to the Brazilian statistics IBOPE. By 2013, during the 2013 protests, the social media played a big role in reporting the events" (Ferreira 2013, 2).

One of the crucial elements of social mobilization is communication, which includes reporting and information flow. When protesters have better ways of communication, they can reach out to more people and increase participation in their protests. Social media platforms are

one of the ways of communicating during protests and, in some cases, played a significant role in cases such as the Arab Spring. Both democratic and undemocratic governments have a tendency to try to control mainstream media organs by using their power and leverage over them. Therefore, activist groups and protesters cannot fully utilize these organs to make themselves heard by the people. The pressure on the mainstream media and extensive censorship policies makes the Internet and social media platforms the preferred communication channel for protesters, providing them a fully accessible and largely unregulated environment.

Social media during the 2013 protests in Brazil was highly active even though there was also mainstream media coverage. The Brazil case permits a comparison of the effects of both social media and traditional mainstream media. The important question here is whether social media usage makes any difference for the mobilization process and the success of the protests?

Communication is one of the most important components of social mobilization. The mainstream media is one of the tools that activist groups and protesters can utilize for mobilizing and expressing themselves. However, due to the governmental control over mainstream media organs, the New Media scholars argue that social media provides better and more rapid form of communication that can be helpful for mobilization and increasing awareness of social problems. In the Brazil case, social media platforms indeed provided a better way of communication than the mainstream media since the nature of these platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, allowed them to provide instant information flow.

Mainstream media tools like TV channels and newspapers are also important tools for people to learn what is going on around them. In most countries including Brazil, however, governments have a massive influence on mainstream media. TV stations and newspapers are highly dependent on political powers. "The fact of the matter is that media organizations in

Brazil still cultivate close ties to particular political parties" (Matos, 2014, 7). Matos interviewed Gabriel Priolli, who is the TV Cultura's vice director of journalism (TV Cutura is a popular free Brazilian TV network). According to Priolli, the "entire idea of public TV was wrong as the government only wanted a place to defend itself from the attacks that were being done on the government in 2005" (Ferreira 2013, 7).

Another problem is that the TV industry in Brazil mostly focuses on the entertainment sector rather than political problems. Matos says that "the mainstream commercial media in Brazil are still highly vulnerable to both internal and external political as well as economic pressure" (Matos 2014, 223). When they broadcast or publish anything about politics, most of the time they support the government's policies and actions. "Since the impeachment of President Collor in 1992, the media has abstained itself from politics and governance and some broadcasters and newspapers have actually been supporting the government, as it is seen by the lack of coverage in their front page on political issues" (Ferreira 2013, 9). Mainly because of government control of TV channels and newspapers in Brazil, the mainstream media initially tried to humiliate protesters and marginalize them. "Interestingly, the media and its portrayal has also been seen to effect the political environment in favour or against social movement depending on its issue framing" (Borelli 2015, 18).

Because of the pro-government bias of mainstream media organs, activist groups couldn't utilize these resources directly. Yet sometimes all protest groups need is for the public to be aware that protests are happening. Even though mainstream media coverage was under the influence of the government, it still creates public awareness by letting the public know that protests are occurring. Nevertheless, in order to increase participation and provide information about what was really happening, social media platforms became one of the popular ways of

communication among people during the protests. Increasing access to the Internet allowed protesters to reach out to more people, and they use social media platforms to encourage people to go to the streets and mobilize. According to IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistic) data in 2013, more than 85 million people had access to the Internet. Reis (2003) claims that most of these people used the Internet to search for news and information.

Shirky (2017) and Filho (2013) both give examples of events in which social media is actively used, and they claim that social media is an effective tool though not a guarantee of success. According to them, social media outlets contribute to communication among protesters and facilitate the process of mobilizing. Social media helps to speed up the mobilization process during protests.

In Brazil, activists used social media platform as a tool for communication and gathering information. Twitter was one of the most commonly used social media platforms, along with Facebook. "In common with recent movements elsewhere, the Brazilian demonstrations were largely organized through social media... Frequently, groups of people organized themselves on Facebook and Twitter, met somewhere, and then marched in directions that were frequently unclear, depending on decisions made by unknown persons more or less on the spot" (Filho 2013).

During the Vinegar Protests, then, both social media and mainstream media were actively involved. There was a lot of TV coverage, newspaper articles and a large number of tweets and Facebook posts. In order to compare the effects of social media and mainstream media on the protests, the data from Twitter about how many tweets and retweets were posted and the level of mainstream media coverage during the protests were investigated. While examining the mainstream media, the focus was on the language about the demonstrations that was used by

newspapers and TV channels,. The framing of protests in the news, rather than the quantity of the publications or broadcasts, was more important.

According to the G1 Globo communication data on June 7, 2013, 5000 people joined the protests; on June 11, 10,000 people joined the protests. From the very first day, social media platforms were actively used for reporting and inviting people to demonstrations. "Hashtags such as #vemprarua (come to the streets) and #ogiganteacordou (the giant has awakened) became trending topics on social media throughout the country, hence raising awareness and at the same time inviting people to join the revolution" (Portwood 2013, 3).

Even though the protests were started and organized by peaceful groups, marginal groups who acted violently also joined as the protests grew, attracted the mainstream media attention. Small anarchist groups and individuals who wore black clothes, masks and sunglasses started to smash store windows, ATM machines and bus windows, and this attracted the mainstream media's attention. "Fantastico a Brazilian TV news program aired by Rede Globo, portrayed the segment covering the manifestations in the following way: 'During a week marked by violent protests in São Paulo and in Rio de Janeiro, our reporters were able to draw a profile of Black Blocs'" (Portwood 2013, 4). " Black Bloc is not an organization, it is rather comprised of individuals who support anarchism—a stateless and self-governed society" (Portwood, 2013, 4). Another Traditionalist concern about social media and Internet usage is that these platforms can be a powerful weapon for governments and big corporations for surveillance depending on who has control of these platforms. Compared with mainstream media organs, however, social media platforms are typically more free of direct governmental control. In the Brazil case, protesters were free to access to those platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, and social media definitely provided more accurate information flow.
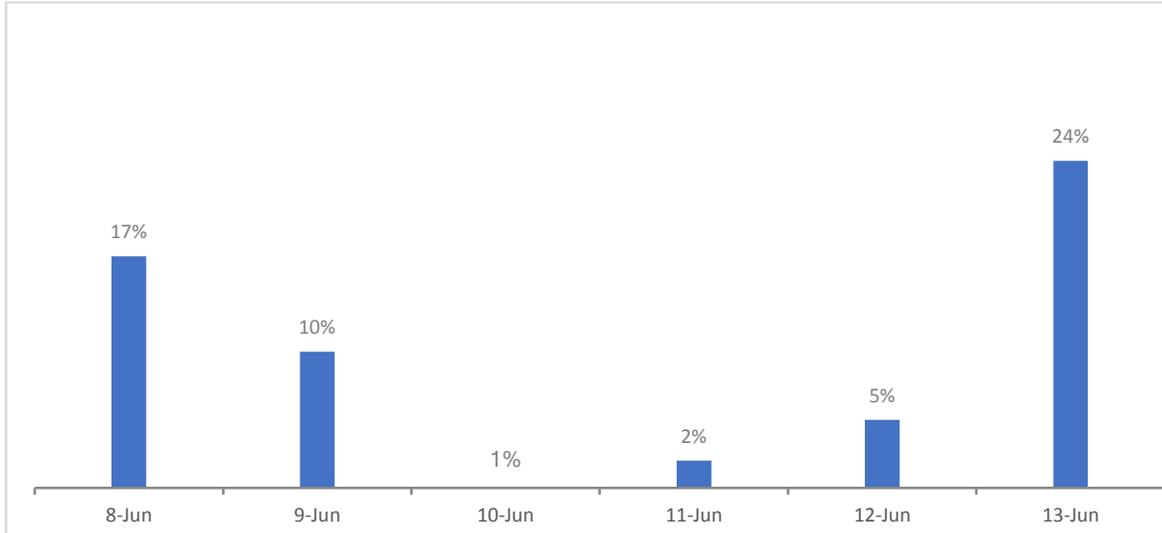
Graph 1: Newspaper Front-page Coverage of the Vinegar Protests

Graph 1 shows the percentage of front page coverage of the protests between June 7 and June 12 by six newspapers: *Folha de São Paulo*, *Estado de São Paulo*, *O Globo*, *Jornal Estado de Minas*, *O Liberal*, and *O Correio Brazilense*. The data is obtained from PageOneX which is a platform that investigates language and pictures from the front pages of major newspapers. The percentages shown on the graph are the combination of data from six newspapers that covered the protests as "Violence in Brazil." When they mentioned protests during this period, they focused exclusively on the problem of violence. Even though there were more than 30 thousand peaceful protesters during the first week of demonstrations, almost all of the mainstream media coverage portrayed the protesters as vandals and violent protesters. "They framed the protests as violent, when in fact they were largely peaceful with only some incidents of vandalism" (Portwood 2013, 3).
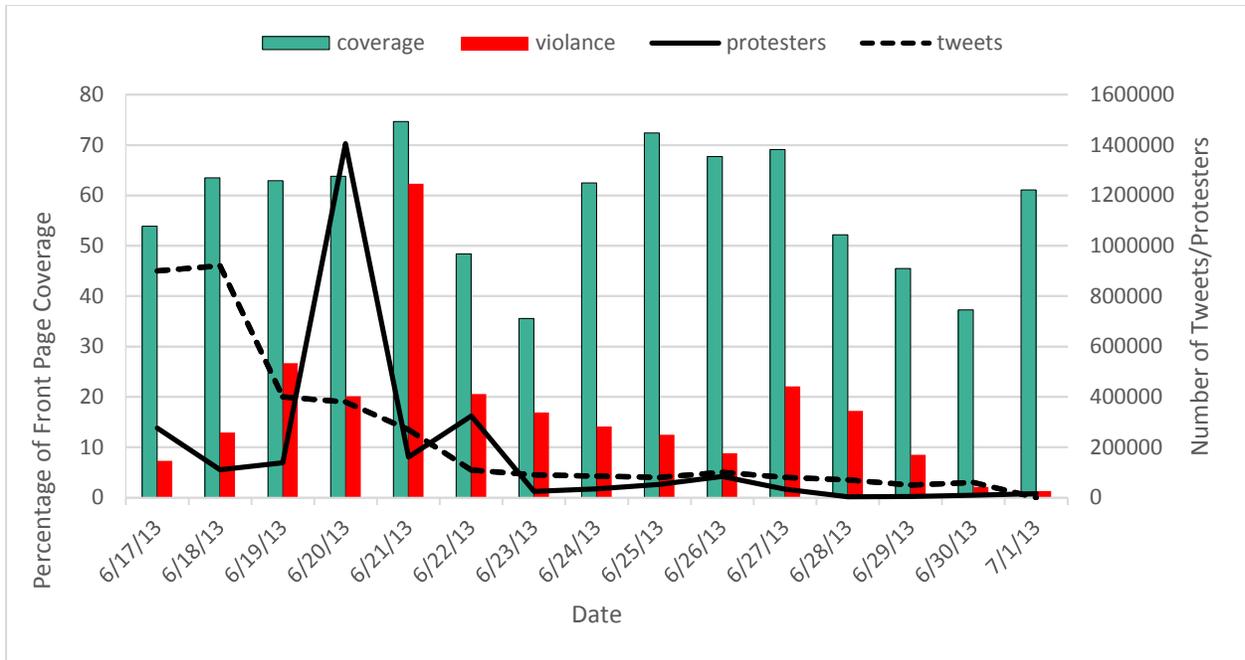
Graph 2 - Front Page Coverage, Tweets, and Protesters

Graph 2 presents data from the Twitter database, G1 Globo, and PageOneX showing the number of the tweets, the percentage of newspaper front pages dedicated to news about the protests, the percentage of coverage devoted to violence, and the number of people who participated to the protests between June 17th and July 1st. Both local and national newspapers such as *Folha de Sao Paulo*, *O Globo*, and *Jonaral Estate de Minas*, which are papers with high circulation, had front-page coverage of the protests every day between June 17 and July 1. Often, they covered the demonstrations as violence even though the protests were overwhelmingly peaceful. Nevertheless, mainstream media organs such as TV and newspapers apparently tried to shape public opinion by using the language of violence in order to delegitimize protesters.

Activist groups tried to utilize social media platforms to tell people that the violent marginal groups did not represent the protesters. "The MPL had previously issued instructions through social media (its main instrument of mobilization), for those attending to record

whatever acts of vandalism one may witness in an attempt to separate MPL supporters and the small number of unaffiliated violent agents. This occurred as a response to the overweeningly negative media portrayal following the manifestations of the 7th" (Borelli 2015, 33).

Over the 15 days between June 11th and July 1st, there was mainstream media coverage every day. At least 35 percent of the front page coverage was related to the Vinegar Protests. So, the traditional mainstream media might have been effective at shaping public opinion about the demonstrations. On the other hand, as can be seen from Graph 2, there were also many Tweets about the protests, and when the number of Tweets increased, the number of protesters also increased. Graph 2 shows that there were Tweets about the protest from the beginning of the protests until the end, but especially between June 17 and June 23 "By this date (17th of June), an estimated 79 million people had been exposed to information regarding the mobilizations through social media channels, such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and others" (Borelli 2015, 41). When we look at participation in the protests, it shows a pattern similar to the number of Tweets. Between June 17 and June 23, the number of the protesters also reached the highest amount. According to data, there is an apparent relationship between the number of Tweets and the participation level.

Of course, even though participation in protests increased along with the number of the Tweets, this does not prove that the Tweets caused the increased participation. After all, there was also TV and newspaper coverage about the protesters even though this coverage was mostly critical. "Veja magazine, Globo news and G1, albeit prominent sources of data, often showed visibly biased (pro-government, anti-mobilization) re-accounts of the events" (Borelli 2015, 29). "Bastos et al. say that "Facebook and Twitter reportedly played an important role in the organization of public outcries, facilitating communication between protestors and live streaming

the demonstrations" (Bastos et al. 2014, 1). "They go on to claim that the protestors relied on the geographical tags in Twitter messages to join the mobilizations" (Ferreira 2013, 33).

Even though there is a similar pattern between Tweets and number of protesters, there is no evidence that the tweets themselves were the key to bringing out protesters because there was also mainstream media coverage. The participation level might have been affected both by the Tweets and mainstream media coverage. The case of the Gezi Park Protest in 2013 may shed more light on this relationship because, in Turkey, the mainstream media failed to report what was going on during the first several days of the demonstrations in Gezi Park.

The similarities and differences between the Gezi Park case and the Vinegar Protests help to control for other variables. During the Gezi Park protests, the usage of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have resembled that in the Brazil case. Unlike the Vinegar protests, however, there was very little mainstream media attention given to the Gezi Park protest. This case helps us to assess, therefore, whether social media alone can suffice to mobilize protesters. Investigation of why the mainstream media organs failed to report the events, and how they framed the demonstrations, are also crucial factors to understand the impact of social media on demonstrations in Turkey.

Gezi Park is a small park in Taksim Square, Istanbul. The initial reason for the protests was the decision of Prime Minister Erdogan's government to remove the park in order to build a shopping mall modeled on an Ottoman-style military barracks. "The planned project, approved by the local municipality in 2011, would deploy a replica of the barracks to house a mixed-use real estate development that was to have consisted primarily of a shopping mall" (Monchaux 2013, 1). A small group of people gathered in Gezi Park to protest the removal of trees and started protesting by reading in the park and preventing the construction from starting. They

decided to live in the park, and soon put up tents. The protesters were a small group of people, approximately 50 activists, but the excessive use of tear gas and water cannons by police to suppress the protesters and to burn the tents created public attention on social media even though there was no mainstream media coverage. "The municipal police burnt down the tents of the camping protesters in Gezi Park and used excessive force against them in the early morning hours of May 31, 2013" (Sarfati 2015, 25).

Brutal police force against protesters and Prime Minister Erdogan's humiliating approach and statements by using language such as "looters" or "vandals" about the people who demonstrated in Taksim Square, created the conditions for the protests. On May 28, 2013, 50 environmentalists started to protest in Gezi Park. Demonstrations transformed into a major confrontation soon after they started. "Within days, tens of thousands of protestors had taken to the streets across the main cities of Turkey. By the middle of June hundreds of thousands had taken part in "Gezi Park protests" that spanned almost every one of Turkey's 81 provinces" (Guner 2016, 9). During the Gezi Park protests, 22 protesters died and more than 8000 protesters were injured by police. Also at least 5000 protesters were arrested. "Police moved in and attacked the peaceful sit-in protesters. During police intervention an image of police spraying tear gas at a woman in a red dress was captured and spread around the world. The 'woman in red' would later become the symbol of the Gezi opposition, picturing the excessive use of police force" (Guner 2016, 9).

Since communication is one of the key elements of any protests, being able to communicate among protesters and people, providing and framing the news are crucial. In modern society, both mainstream media organs such as TV, newspapers and radio, as well as

social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, are the main forms of communicating information.

According to scholars like Castells, Lotan, and Graeff, social media is now one of the critical components of social mobilization. On the other hand, Traditional Media Scholars believe that the effects of social media are exaggerated and improvised. Even though there are two different approaches to the usage of social media platforms, it is accepted by everyone that "a free press is an important actor in any democracy. It provides accountability and encourages healthy public debate" (Oz 2016, 177). Nevertheless, even in democratic states, the media is under the influence of the government. Freedom House reports shows that the mainstream media in Turkey is not fully free. According to Freedom House, Turkey's government exerts control over the mainstream media in Turkey. "Erdogan has used his leverage over the media to push issues of public morality and religion and to squelch public debate of the accountability of his government" (Corke 2013, 2). Government leverage over the mainstream media organs influenced how pro-government TV channels and newspapers reported the demonstrations.

Because the government controlled mainstream media, social media became one of the primary ways of communication between people. Since people can instantly post what they see and it is easy to access those posts, Twitter became a highly used platform during the protests. "Millions of Turkish people turned to Twitter for information during the Gezi Park demonstration. The mainstream news media, on the other hand, had a hard time showing what was happening in Taksim Square and failed to shape public opinion by framing this event properly" (Oz 2016, 177).

There was no mainstream media coverage during the first three days of the demonstrations in Taksim Square except for some anti-government channels which were small

and not capable of reaching large numbers of people. While there was coverage of the events in international mainstream media, there was almost no coverage in Turkey. For example, while CNN International was live broadcasting from Taksim Square, CNN Turkey ignored the protests. "Failure to cover the protests does not come as a surprise. As police brutality in Istanbul spiraled out of control on Sunday night, CNN Turk instead chose to air a documentary on penguins, leading to much creative ridicule directed at the station—including the cover of a comic magazine showing penguins with gas masks and goggles—and an online petition urging CNN International to pull its name from the Turkish franchise" (Oktem 2013).

This refusal to cover the protests created distrust of the Turkish mainstream media, which people began to criticize on social platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. "The mainstream media did not adequately report on these protests until some protesters mocked the mainstream media on Twitter" (Baykurt 2014). Social media platforms such as Twitter, on the other hand, are more independent than the mainstream media organs and can be effective tools of mobilization. "Twitter is free and open to all, and because of its interactive structure, people are able to interact with other protesters and support them" (Oz 2016, 179).
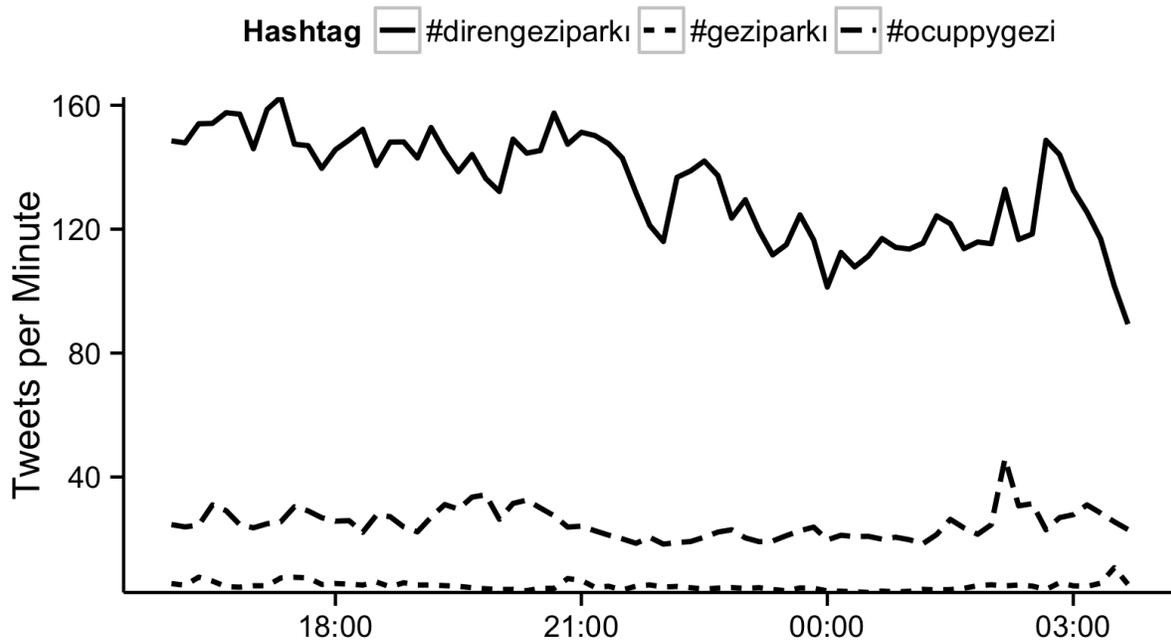
Graph 3: Tweets during Gezi Park Protests

Source: NYU's Social Media and Political Participation (SMaPP) laboratory, Report Turkey-Gezi

Twitter played an extensive role during the mobilization process for the Gezi Park Protests. "According to the report from NYU's Social Media and Political Participation (SMaPP) laboratory, what is unique about this particular case was how Twitter was being used to spread information about the demonstrations from the ground. This way, Twitter played the role of an alternative media while mainstream media did not broadcast the events" (Guner, 2016, 12). This supports Shirky's (2011, 2 observation that the "social media have become coordinating tools for nearly all of the world's political movements." In the Gezi Park case, social media platforms, especially Twitter, were one of the major components of mobilization process for demonstrations. "Because Twitter provided the ability to instantaneously spread messages to the

people, the Gezi protests quickly gained momentum on Twitter. Hundreds of thousands of people posted tweets about the protests" (Oz 2016, 179). "According to research conducted on the 24 hours preceding 1 June 2013 by NYU's Social Media and Political Participation (SMaPP) laboratory, the role of social media in the protests was phenomenal. On 31 May 2013, after 4 pm local time, at least 2 million tweets were sent mentioning hashtags related to the protest, such as #direngeziparkı (950,000 tweets), #occupygezi (170,000 tweets) or #geziparki (50,000 tweets). The activity on Twitter was extensive on Friday, May 31. Even after midnight local time, more than 3,000 tweets about the protest were published every minute" (Guner 2016, 11).

Traditionalist scholars claim that the usage of social media decreases the participation level during protests by weakening the level of activism. They argue that people are not actually attending the protests even though they support the idea by posting and sharing on social media. Therefore, according to Traditionalists, the number Tweets or posts on Facebook do not show the number of people who actually participate in the protests. Yet Twitter data on the Gezi Park case contradicts this argument.
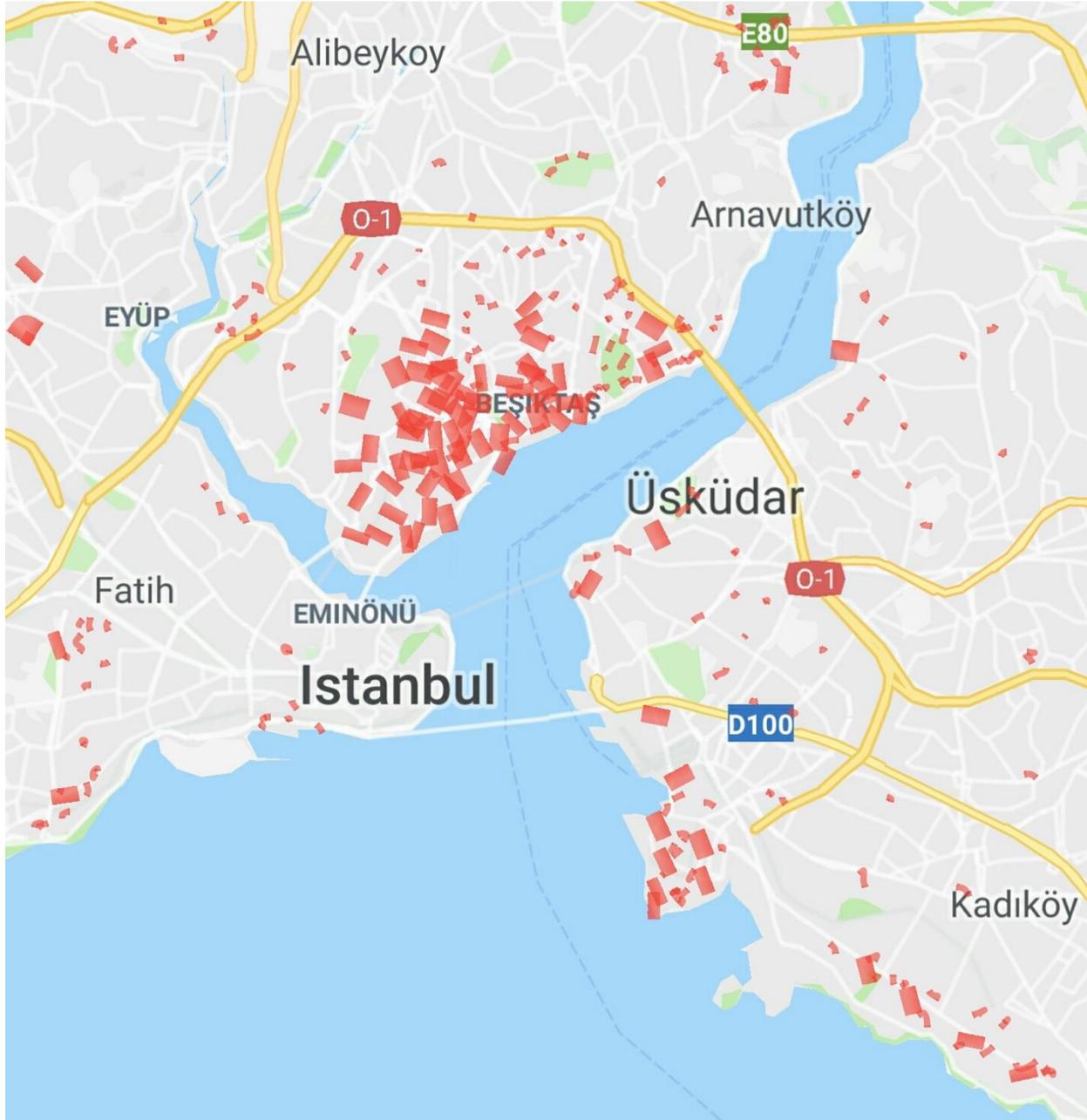
Map 1: Tweets about Gezi Park Protests in Istanbul, June 1-2, 2013

Map 1 was re-created from the Benedikt Koehler's (2013) map by applying Twitter data on June 1 and 2, 2013, to an Istanbul city map. Koehler used the R code -- R is an integrated suite of software facilities for data manipulation, calculation and graphical display.--

to create the maps (Koehler, 2013).

The darker areas indicate where most of the tweets come from, and Gezi Park is right next to the area labeled "BESIKTAS" on the map. Even though there were tweets from all around the Istanbul, the majority of the tweets came from the location of the protests. Map 1 therefore suggests that people were not only tweeting about the protests but also participating in them in the Gezi Park case. "Starbird and Palen (2012) report that 30% of the 1000 mostly highly retweeted Twitterers who were using popular hashtags related to the protests were 'on the ground' in street protests. Tweets from these users contained information such as meeting times, injuries and supplies needed "(Guner 2016, 6). Additionally, in comparison to Tweets from around the world, "the report from NYU's Social Media and Political Participation (SMaPP) laboratory also states that unlike some other recent uprisings, around 90% of all geolocated tweets were coming from within Turkey, and 50% from within Istanbul "(Guner 2016, 12).

This research indicates that the timing of tweets and the mobilization of the protesters were related. Twitter was actively and extensively used during the Gezi Park demonstrations. "During the events the hashtag #direngezipark was the most popular and was used in more than 1.8 million tweets. In comparison, the hashtag #jan25 was used in less than one million tweets during the entire Egyptian revolution" (Guner 2016, 11).

Conclusion

In both the Vinegar Protests and the Gezi Park Protests, protesters were fairly successful. In Brazil, demonstrations began with a demand for a R$0.20 reduction in public transportation fares, and protestors achieved their goals. In Turkey, people mobilized against the new construction plans in Gezi Park, and these plans were put on hold after the demonstrations.

By focusing on these two cases, the influence of social media in social protests is highlighted. Government control over the traditional mainstream media was also explored through an examination of the language that media outlets employed to shape public opinion during the protests. These cases also permit a comparison of the Traditionalist and New Media approaches to the effects of social media on social protest. In both the Brazilian and Turkish cases, social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook were utilized by the protesters, and this organizing strategy was effective even in the absence of mainstream media coverage in Turkey.

Even though the traditional mainstream media did cover the demonstrations in Brazil from the beginning of the protests, moreover, "Twitter during the Vinegar Protests, played the role of motivating and facilitating the organization by explaining the action plan, the gathering points, and giving voice to those that were being part of it" (Ferreira 2013, 33). In Turkey, the other hand, the lack of mainstream media coverage may have intensified the use of social media during the protests.

On balance, the argument of the New Media Scholars more accurately reflects the role of the social media in these cases. The social media played a crucial role during both protests. It had a significant influence on the mobilization process, organizing for the protests and provided accurate information flow which is essential for any social protest. It is clear that the social media played a crucial role in the protests in Brazil and Turkey. This does not mean, however, that traditional mainstream media is useless.

More research is required in order to understand more accurately the role that social media played during these protests, and it would be enlightening to investigate another case in which there was mainstream media coverage without social media coverage in order to assess the contemporary effectiveness of traditional mainstream media alone.

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