

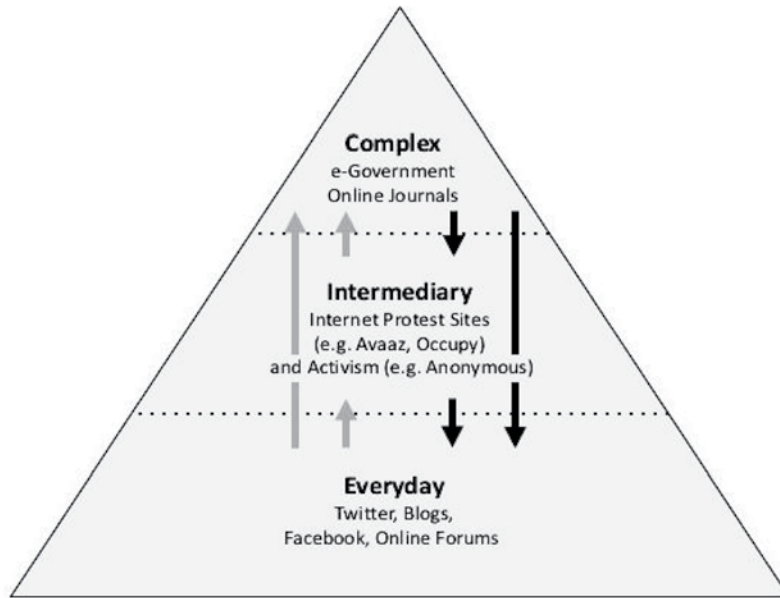
reasons for this lies in the possibility of documenting performances in other media such as photographs, videos and documentary films and thereby transforming them into more lasting productions. A further reason is the possibility to popularize them by their fast distribution via mobile phone and social media. Digital media have changed the way in which the culture of social movements can be displayed and it has changed the way in which movements are constituted and formed.

4. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Digital media and the development of the internet have revitalized the debate on the character of the public sphere. Broadly speaking, a rift can be observed between those scholars that optimistically hail the internet for its power to create a more democratic and participatory public sphere and those others that pessimistically see dissolution of the public sphere. The new intermingling of the public and the private, the fragmentation of the digital publics have given rise to a concern about the viability of a public sphere as it was formerly dominantly conceptualized: One realm, separated carefully from the private lives of people, in which political debates unfolded and led to democratic decisions. In a way the advent of the digital media proved many of the points feminist theory and alternative social movement theory always insisted on (Klaus/Drüeke 2014). The need to accept that the private is political, the necessity to extend the definition of the political to everyday processes of self-reflection and the insight that the public sphere does not consist of *one* public, but is comprised of many publics. Exactly these doubts raised against traditional public sphere theory lay at the foundation of the three-level-model of the public sphere as I had formulated it in pre-internet times.

Figure 3: Digital Media and The Three-Level Model of The Public Sphere

Source: Drüeke/Klaus 2014: 61



Nevertheless, there are many changes and modifications to be considered as digital media have provided citizens with new media to communicate their interests and allow for a much greater communicative fluidity. Reflecting on the substantial changes in our interactions and communications Ricarda Drüeke (2013) and other researchers have theoretically and empirically probed the viability of the three-level-model (see Klaus/Drüeke 2016). Their answer is that the model holds potential also for the digital age. However, the penetrability between the different levels have changed fundamentally as new political spaces have emerged. The former letters to the editor cannot be compared with the postings in online forums provided by mass media, where the reaction to an article often by far extends its original lengths. We have suggested a

modification of the three-level model that highlights the much greater potential and dynamics of digital communication among publics operating at the different levels of the public sphere (see figure 3).

Digital media provide social movements with new resources. Alternative media, in which the interests of the group can be spelled out and discussed, can be produced at much lower costs and can be circulated much easier and to a wider public. Also, the important visualization of the agenda of counter-publics is facilitated by You Tube and other media. The so-called “Gezi spirit” was captured on many videos, photographs and documentaries which are still easily accessible through Google Images, You Tube and other sites.

Furthermore, in the communication across levels, the access to the elites and their publics is facilitated and this probably is one of the reasons why the Gezi protesters entered into a sort of dialogue with Erdoğan and other member of the government, taking up their pronouncements, twisting them around and changing their meanings – the appropriation of Erdoğan’s name-calling of the protesters as “Çapulcu” is a prime example of this. Twitter and Blogs played an important role in discussing the politics of the protests (Smith/Men/Al-Sinan 2015). However, easier access does not necessarily mean greater effectiveness in pushing ones’ cause. An online-signature in general counts less than a signature on a petition in older times. The like- and sign-buttons can be pushed easily and do not necessarily signal a strong or long-term commitment to a cause. And exactly for these reasons it can be ignored much easier by those in power.

When turning to the relationship between social movement publics and everyday publics, we can observe much more overlap between activists and sympathizers than was true in pre-digital times. Facebook and other means of digital personal communication, merged by mobile phone, can serve to organize and instigate protest much faster (ASIS&T PANEL 2014). The line between everyday publics and intermediary ones can be overstepped much more easily, or to say it otherwise: It is much less visible. This can work out to strengthen a movement and has led to the very fast development of the Gezi Park protests. But the blurring of the lines between spontaneous and organized communication also can lessen the cohesiveness and durability of protest movements. Via Facebook word gets around much faster than through word of mouth. The number of people joining the Gezi Park protests right after the police tried to squash the protest, provides ample evidence for this. But while the “politics of identity” was articulated strongly in Gezi Park (Çelik 2015), the “politics of influence” was less firmly grounded, since protesters joined on the basis of a plurality of different causes. Once the park was cleared, there was little virtual ground on which to gather again and think collectively about new strategies. This points to the importance of a merging of virtual and real grounds of protests and of a convergence of digital and non-digital means of communication and action (Haunss 2015). With the prominence of digital media and virtual mobilization, interestingly enough, we see an increase in the importance of a physical space to gather and engage in protest (Alonso 2015). Gezi thus has been rightly associated with the Occupy- and “Claim the city”-movements (Özkırımlı 2014), although it is also different from these in other respects as it can be classified as an anti-government movement. When very different “politics of identity” are part of one protest movement, then they obviously have to share an existing and physical place, to conquer a public space, for common activities and the mixing of their bodies.

CONCLUSIONS

Digital media and digital means provide resources for social movements, but also can lead to weakened ties among their members. As we all know, there are other drawbacks. As people on the internet are much more anonymous, they more easily can utter and exchange barbarous and inhuman views, that are antidemocratic, discriminatory and exclusive. And they can do it in language and style that is hateful and aggressive towards people with another view. The “Gezi spirit”, contrary to this, has stressed cooperation and tolerance of other viewpoints (Baser 2015). This might be the realm where the Gezi Park movement will have its longest repercussions, since it showed that people from very diverse backgrounds and multiple, even conflicting opinions and opposing views can still communicate with each other respectfully and with an openness to new ideas (Uluğ/Acar 2015).

The three-level-model includes a reference to the existing power structure in society that prefigures the influence and effects of publics at all three levels of the public sphere. It also determines the means and media

to communicate. Media are social technologies and reflect the existing hierarchies in society. This holds true for digital media as well. While social movements can use them in their quest to stage protest events, publics on the complex level of the public sphere can do the same. At the same time, they have much greater means to use them effectively and persuasively. But more than this, they have the power to crush protests and sanction protesters and sympathizers as Gezi has shown.

The repeated blocking of Twitter and social media by Erdoğan's government and the immediate reactions by the online-communities shows both, the power of the elite and how much they feel at times threatened by social movements and their digital means to communicate and organize. Quite a few articles, mostly written still under the influence of this great gathering and powerful protest, predicted, that the Gezi protests enhanced the ideal of a contentious democracy and put human rights issue lastingly on the agenda when discussing Turkey's EU-membership (Saatçioğlu 2015). But Erdoğan's government since then has moved to crush oppositional movements and to persecute opposing voices more harshly. Given what is called the "refugee crisis" in the EU, their leaders have exchanged human rights issues for a contract with Erdoğan. But again, many international scholars have signed petitions against the persecutions of academics and journalists, and have posted dissenting views on social media sites.

In sum, for now we have to live with the ambivalence of the thesis I followed in this paper: The internet and digital media are supporting social movements in their quest to stage protest events, among others through performativity and visualization. At the same time protest movements become more instable as internet and digital media are completely tied to the social hierarchies. As communication scholars, this gives us ample opportunity to study what is happening in the public sphere as a democratic space for the self-understanding of society more closely and to encourage us to strive for a better understanding of the processes involved.

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