



Communicative Analysis of a Failed Coup Attempt in Turkey

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Abstract

A failed coup attempt occurred in Turkey on 15 July 2016. This incident has generated three significant results in terms of communication. Firstly, it has proved that there is a symbiosis, rather than a contrast, between the traditional and new media. Secondly, it has demonstrated that different communication technologies can assume various roles during the stages of a movement. Thirdly, it has revealed that mosques can serve as a unique communication network. This chapter attempts, on one side, to explore why the failed coup attempt has a communicative character and, on the other side, to investigate how different communication technologies played various roles during the stages of this event. The role of mosques in the coup attempt is examined under a separate heading. Finally, both the coup attempt and protests against it are considered in their own social context since each protest movement occurs within a particular context.

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Introduction

Turkey has a history of coups in which the military has intervened several times in country's politics since 1960. Not surprisingly, the country again witnessed an attempt, starting in the evening of 15 July 2016 and continuing until the early hours of the next day, in which a section of the Turkish military calling itself "Peace at Home Council" launched a movement against the government and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The attempt did not succeed, but the cost was heavy. During the attempt, many government buildings including the Turkish Parliament were bombed by fighter jets and helicopters, resulting in over 300 people being killed and more than 2000 being injured.

This incident has generated three significant consequences from the communication point of view while demonstrating a distinctive characteristic in terms of its onset, progress, and ending. First, it has shown that there is a symbiosis, rather than a contrast, between the traditional and new media. Many commentators have emphasized how social media, especially FaceTime, a popular video chat service, helped to quell the coup attempt. However, the role of traditional media in preventing the attempt has remained unexplored. In fact, these two forms of media coexisted and complemented each other in the coup attempt. The picture of President Erdoğan talking via FaceTime to a privately owned television channel has been not just one of the popular images of the event but also an iconic scene showing the interaction between the traditional and new media. Second, it has demonstrated that different communication technologies can assume different roles during the various stages of a movement. Indeed, during the event, while television served to meet the institutional information needs of the people, social media played a major role in coordinating and organizing the protests on the streets. Third, it has revealed that mosques, which are unique to Muslim societies, can be used as a means of communication. The Salas recited by mosques across the country not just encouraged people to take to the streets but also played a significant role in galvanizing those who were already on the streets to resist the coup attempt.

The role of the media in protests has become a popular research subject among scholars in recent years. In this context, social movements that have emerged over the last few years in diverse regions of the world (e.g., Arab Spring in MENA, Occupy Wall Street in the USA, Indignadas in Spain, Gezi Park in Turkey) have been well documented and analyzed. For example, Castells (2012) has examined the movements from both communicative and sociological perspectives. Other authors (Gerbaudo 2012; Khondker 2011; Park et al. 2015; Rosa 2014; Salem 2015; Tudoroiu 2014) have directly focused on the role of the media in the movements.

Although there have been many attempts to explain the role of the media in social movements, the majority of existing research has focused largely on the role of new

media, especially social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube (see, e.g., Anduiza et al. 2014; Harlow 2011; Kharroub and Bas 2016; Theocharis et al. 2015; Thorson et al. 2013). What has often remained invisible is the role of alternative forms of media in protests. For instance, little research (Ahy 2016; Boyle and Schmierbach 2009; Rane and Salem 2012) has explored whether the traditional media has effects on protests.

In this chapter, it is argued that protest movements are not solely linked to new or social media; instead, different media platforms may coexist with, interact with, and complement each other in a protest movement. The outline of the chapter is as follows:

First, it is revealed why this coup attempt has a communicative character by examining the communication infrastructure and media usage in Turkey. Then, the roles that different communication technologies played during different stages of the coup attempt are investigated. The role of mosques in this event is analyzed under a separate heading. Finally, both the coup attempt and protests against it are considered in their own social context since each protest movement occurs within a particular context.

Three semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted. The first interview was conducted with the General Manager of CNN Türk, the second with the Domestic News Manager of Anadolu Agency (AA), and the third with the Vice President of Religious Affairs (RA). The importance of these three institutions stems from their key roles regarding the coup attempt. CNN Türk, the CNN International Turkish affiliate, is the media outlet that President Erdoğan spoke to via FaceTime on the night of the event to urge people to take to the streets. AA is the official news agency of Turkey that met the information needs of many media outlets due to its wide news network covering the coup attempt. RA is the official religious body of Turkey that gave the order for the Salas to be read from mosques across the country. The interviews enabled to collect critical data concerning the event.

The Communicative Character of the Recent Coup Attempt in Turkey

In the 15 July coup attempt, various media platforms were not just intensively used by the government and protesters to foil the coup attempt but also by plotters to manage the attempt. Hence, it is important to primarily investigate the existing telecommunication infrastructure and media usage in Turkey.

Telecommunication services in Turkey are currently widely provided by Türk Telekom, which has a monopoly in the sector. There are also 460 other operators providing service in the telecommunication sector (e.g., internet service providers, mobile operators, satellite communication operators, and cable platform services providers). With more than 300,000 km of fiber infrastructure, Turkey has 4.5G technology for mobile communication. In Turkey, there are nearly 70 million broadband subscribers, and the number of mobile subscribers is about 78 million in this country of 80 million people (Information and Communication Technologies Authority 2017).

In Turkey, social media takes first place among the activities for Internet users. According to a latest report released by We Are Social (Kemp 2017), there are

48 million active social media users in Turkey, and of these, 42 million connect to social media via their mobile devices. The report reveals that 87% of Internet users go online every day, and 36% of web traffic takes place using laptop and desktop computers, 61% via mobile devices, and 3% through tablets. PC and tablet users spend an average of 6 h 46 min per day; however, this activity falls to 2 h 59 min on mobile devices. Internet users who use both channels to access the Internet spend an average of 3 h 01 min on social media platforms. A survey conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute (2017) reports that 83.7% of the individuals use the Internet to participate in social media.

Television is the leading outlet for traditional media usage in Turkey. Among the 20 million households in the country, over 19 million has one or two televisions. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (2015), the most popular entertainment and cultural activity of 94.6% of people aged 10 years and above is watching television. During the daily 5.5 h spent in front of television, magazine programs and series are the most watched (Deloitte 2014). Television is mostly watched between the hours 21:01 and 24:00 (Radio and Television Supreme Council 2016). Interestingly, the starting time of the coup attempt fell within this time slot.

The data presented above offers important clues concerning why the 15 July coup attempt has a communicative character. First, it shows that Turkey has a relatively advanced communication infrastructure. This infrastructure paved the way for an uninterrupted communication between protestors who took part in anti-coup demonstrations. The same infrastructure also facilitated the connection between President Erdoğan and multiple television channels via FaceTime and Skype. The data also demonstrates that social media has become an important platform for daily communication between individuals in Turkey. The intensive social media usage between individuals in Turkey resulted in the fast dissemination of vital information and rapid mobilization of protests. Finally, this data reveals that the traditional media has not yet lost any ground. Television is still a popular medium of communication in Turkey; thus, the people watching television at the start of the coup attempt were able to observe the events via the news, especially the breaking news.

The Sequence of Events on the Night of 15 July

It was an ordinary day, just like any other, on 15 July 2016. Yet, around 10:00 p.m. local time, military forces closed off the main routes over the Bosphorus and Atatürk Airport in Istanbul, Turkey's largest city. They also established strategic checkpoints in different parts of the capital city, Ankara. Then, above both cities, Turkish F-16 jets roared across the sky at a low level, just a few hundred feet above the rooftops. Shortly after, the first images of the uniformed soldiers began to appear over social media, urging people to go to their homes. Meanwhile, some national television channels reported clashes between the police and the army on the streets of several major cities. People were astonished and were unable to grasp the situation. Something was happening, but what? A terror attack? A coup? There was total confusion and uncertainty.

Only one example is enough to give an idea about what people were thinking at that moment. V.M.A. (full name concealed) was sitting in a park in Ankara when the jets buzzed across the skyline of the city showing red and blue lights and leaving a white light beam behind them. V.M.A., who was as astonished by the situation as anyone else, tried to understand what was happening. The red, blue, and white color spectrum caused by the jets brought the French flag to mind. V.M.A. concluded that it was a fly past to show of support for the French people who had been hit by an ISIS attack the day before (V.M.A., personal communication, 18 July 2016).

When Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım broadcast live on the Turkish NTV television channel at 11:05 p.m. local time to say that they were investigating the possibility of an uprising, then the military maneuvers became clear. Only 1 h after the Prime Minister's statement, the coup plotters released a statement announcing the coup attempt on Turkish Radio and Television (TRT), the state-run television broadcaster in Ankara. This was not unexpected as it was what the military had done in the previous coups in 1960, 1971, and 1980, when there had been one main radio and television station in the country.

President Erdoğan was on holiday in Marmaris, on the southern Turkish coast, when the coup attempt unfolded; thus, he was unable to appear on any media platform in the early hours of the uprising. At about 11:44 p.m. local time, immediately before the statement from the coup plotters had been read out on TRT, the local press in Marmaris received a message via WhatsApp stating that the President was going to make a statement. Press members who received the message immediately went to the hotel where President Erdoğan was staying. He gave a brief statement on the doorstep of the hotel and made his first call for people to take to the streets in protest.

Interestingly, the statement was unable to be broadcast on any national television channel due to a "technical" problem. The statement was relayed from the Facebook account of one of the journalists who was present (Irmak 2016). Yet, whatever had happened, this statement never had the desired effect in the social media. At that time, President Erdoğan was involved in a situational assessment with his aides and, at the same time, watching the coup statement being read out on television. The presenter was saying that the Turkish military had completely taken over the administration of the country. Although President Erdoğan has faced significant challenges since he came to power in 2002 including Gezi Park protests starting with environmental protests and turning into a general riot against his regime in 2013, this situation was considerably different and was probably the greatest challenge in his political career.

Erdoğan on FaceTime, FaceTime on CNN Türk: The Traditional and New Media Are Hand in Hand

President Erdoğan's unconventional appearance on television via FaceTime was the pivotal moment of the coup attempt. It was a marvelous moment to watch since it was a merging of the old and new media. When President Erdoğan appeared on CNN Türk at 12:24 a.m. local time, it was Hande Fırat, the Head of the Ankara office of the channel, who held the smartphone that facilitated his appearance. According to her own account

(Fırat 2016), Fırat called the Presidential Principal Clerk and requested a live broadcast. Upon learning that his previous statement had not been broadcast on national television channels, President Erdoğan promptly welcomed the offer as he needed to show the public he was in safe hands and not being held hostage. Soon after, all preparations were made for the broadcast. Then, President Erdoğan sat in front of a white curtain in order not to disclose his location and gave his message: “. . . I call on our people to gather in squares and airports. . . Let us gather as a nation in city squares. . . Those who attempted a coup will pay the highest price. . .” (BBC Türkçe 2016).

This broadcast is important for at least two reasons. Firstly, it proved that every protest movement has a breaking point. This is especially so in the case of this movement, because it was the main trigger of the protests against the coup attempt. Although people were used to watching President Erdoğan on a podium almost every day, seeing him framed on the tiny screen of a smartphone was both astonishing and terrifying. Even the President, who was sitting atop the state, seemed deprived of conventional means of communication. Yet, the scene motivated those who had doubts to take to the streets and protest.

Secondly, it reminded that the capacity of an infrastructure which allows communication is as important as the content of the communication. Indeed, President Erdoğan successfully made his broadcast because Turkey had launched its fourth-generation mobile telecommunications technology, called 4.5G, just a few months before the event. The former 3G technology did not allow smooth video chat due to spectrum use limitations. Obviously, as indicated by Nini (2016), it will never be known what would have happened if President Erdoğan had been unable to make his broadcast.

Becky Anderson from CNN International conducted an interview with President Erdoğan after the event, in which she reminded President Erdoğan of the importance of the moment he took to the air on CNN Türk, using FaceTime, by asking him this question: “. . .do you have an appreciation, to a certain extent, of the free press and social media since your recent experience?” (CNN International 2016). The implication behind this question referred to President Erdoğan’s previous adverse attitudes toward social media. During the Gezi Park protests in 2013, President Erdoğan had called it “the worst menace to society” (Guardian 2013). At a campaign rally in 2014, he had talked about eradicating Twitter (Rayman 2014). Moreover, he had compared social media to a “knife in the hand of a murderer” in 2014 (Arab News 2014). Thus, once President Erdoğan resorted to FaceTime in an attempt to rally people against the attempted coup, the irony immediately appeared. He probably had no other choice; yet, the situation was deliciously reminiscent of a famous phrase by a prominent figure of Turkish politics, former President Süleyman Demirel, who said: “Yesterday was yesterday, today is today.”

The Role of the Media in the 15 July Coup Attempt

The role of the media in the coup attempt has been a controversial issue. Not only journalists but also scholars have emphasized that social media, especially FaceTime, played a key role in the failure of the attempt (see, e.g., Boyle 2016;

Srivastava 2016). However, one of the more interesting remarks on the role of the media in the coup attempt has come from Unver and Alassaad (2016), and a closer look at their study offers a profitable ground in the context of this chapter.

The study of Unver and Alassaad, *How Turks mobilized against the coup*, aims to show that mobilization against the coup attempt was first initiated online, then gained momentum through the network of mosques, and finally continued to the grass roots. Their work provides an insight into how people mobilized against the coup attempt through empirical data. However, it seems that the authors are wrong in their claims concerning the reasons that motivated protesters in the coup attempt.

On the one hand, Unver and Alassaad argue that President Erdoğan played a belated role in mobilizing protesters against the attempted coup. Despite the fact that the authors do not ignore the triggering effect of President Erdoğan on the protesters, they tend to evaluate the mobilization as a natural political reflex of people who already were on the streets when the coup attempt started. One can wholeheartedly agree with the notion that the initial protests began sprouting up simultaneously in various cities in the first hours of the event. Yet, after President Erdoğan's appearance on television over FaceTime, the protests intensified and turned into a nationwide movement across the country. There are at least two reasons to support this.

First, there were problems in accessing Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube since the Internet was blocked through throttling when the coup attempt started. Social media was only accessible through a virtual private network program which allows users to circumvent limitations. Turkey Blocks, a watchdog group that monitors Internet bans, confirmed that access to these three social media platforms was restricted in Turkey after 10:50 p.m. local time (Turkey Blocks 2016). Once the government recognized that the Internet and social media could act in their favor against the attempted coup, they immediately lifted the restrictions. Although restrictions lasted a little less than 2 h, it is important to note that protesters were able to use neither social media nor other online digital tools during this period. Therefore, they were unable to organize a massive protest over these platforms in the first hours of the coup attempt. Second, it is important to indicate that a portion of the people who went onto the streets when the coup attempt began had formed long queues at many shops, ATMs, and gas stations in the cities. Thus, the mention of a natural reflex could be considered as the survival instinct of worried people rather than being political as Unver and Alassaad emphasized.

On the other hand, Unver and Alassaad claim that the mosques and digital media had the more important role in mobilizing people against the coup attempt. According to the authors, both these elements created a two-way channel for political communication. Clearly, Unver and Alassaad are correct in asserting the importance of mosques and digital media, but for a better understanding of the role of the media in the coup attempt, a more nuanced analysis is needed. Within this context, instead of answering the question of which means of communication played a greater role, it would be more accurate to emphasize that different communication technologies assumed different roles during the various stages of the coup attempt.

The results of surveys conducted by three leading Turkish research companies are a gauge of what Turkish citizens thought of the event. The importance of these

surveys stems from the fact that they included people who took to the streets on the night of 15 July. Interestingly, all three surveys revealed that more than one means of communication played a significant role in mobilizing protesters against the coup attempt.

The first survey was carried out by Andy-Ar (2016) on 19 July 2016 with 1496 respondents. The participants were asked “Did you watch President Erdoğan’s statement on television on the night of the coup attempt?,” and 83.9% responded “Yes.” The second question was “Did you or any of your relatives go out on the street after President Erdoğan’s call for people to take to the streets?,” to which 65.7% responded “Yes.” The second survey was conducted by SETA (Miş et al. 2016) between 18 and 24 July 2016 through a semi-structured interview with 146 respondents. The researchers detected that three factors motivated the participants to take to the streets. First was President Erdoğan’s call to take to the streets, second was the coup declaration being read on TRT, and third was the Salas that were broadcast from the mosques. Finally, the third survey was administered by Konda (2016) on 26 July 2016 and comprised 1875 respondents. One of the questions posed in the survey was “Through which source did you receive the initial news about the coup attempt?” The responses were as follows: 62% of the participants stated television, 24% friend or acquaintance, 9% social media, 3% news websites, 1% SMS, and another 1% mosques. A further question was “At what point of the events did you decide to take to the streets?,” to which 53% responded that they did so after President Erdoğan’s call to go into the street, 27% went before this call and 20% took to the streets after 16 July.

To examine the role of the media in the coup attempt, this chapter proposes that this role can be classified under three distinct stages (Khamis et al. 2012): The first stage is when the attempt unfolded, the second stage occurred when the anti-coup protests began, and the third happened when the attempt ended. Different means of communication played different roles in all these three stages.

First and foremost, television and FaceTime played a major role in the events of the coup attempt. The reason was twofold; the attempt began at the peak hours of the television in the country, which was partly why television served as a vital source of news and information in the first hours of the event. The second and more important reason was that President Erdoğan made his crucial statement on television via FaceTime. The ratings provide evidence of the role played by television and FaceTime in the coup attempt. Table 1 shows the ratings of the four leading news channels (NTV, CNN Türk, Habertürk, and A Haber) in Turkey on the night of 15 July and the relation to the crucial moments of the coup attempt and the time slice of President Erdoğan’s FaceTime connection.

A semi-structured interview was conducted on 30 November 2016 with Erdoğan Aktaş, the CNN Türk General Manager. According to Aktaş, since the ratings of news channels in Turkey are measured in 15-minute slices, it becomes difficult to determine the rating of the FaceTime connection that started at 12:24 and ended at 12:31 a.m. local time. The FaceTime video chat was relayed not just through many national television stations in Turkey, but also via several international channels around the world. Hence, it is even more difficult to determine precise ratings since

Table 1 Ratings of the Turkish television news channels on the night of 15 July

		NTV	CNN Türk	Habertürk	A Haber
	12:00–12:15 a.m.	12.43%	12.81%	5.45%	9.80%
FaceTime broadcast 12:24 a.m. (start)	12:15–12:30 a.m.	15.35%	16.30%	6.78%	9.67%
FaceTime broadcast 12:31 a.m. (end)	12:30–12:45 a.m.	18.28%	14.48%	6.53%	11.15%
	12:45–01:00 a.m.	18.64%	12.83%	5.80%	13.60%

Note: The ratings data was obtained with special permission from Erdoğan Aktaş, CNN Türk General Manager

the ratings of other television channels need to be included in these measurements. However, the data in Table 1 shows that total ratings of the four news channels reached nearly 50% at the most critical time slice of the coup attempt and remained stable at this level. Even more importantly, since the connection was broadcast live on more than one television channel, this created a multiplier effect and reached a large audience as with in the social media. Television preserved its effectiveness before and after the broadcast. For example, TRT who broadcast the moment when the coup declaration was read out and FOX TV who broadcast the moment when the fighter jets bombed the Turkish Parliament live peaked in the ratings in Turkey (Medya Tava 2016).

In addition to television and FaceTime, news agencies played an essential role in the attempted coup with AA. During the event, AA became a vital source of news and information due to having a wide-ranging news network in the country. A semi-structured interview was carried out on 1 February 2017 with Zekeriya Kaya, AA Domestic News Editor, in which he stated that nearly 800 AA reporters were active on the night of 15 July. Furthermore, Kaya emphasized that many television stations and Internet news sites obtained their first news and images about the event from AA. According to Kaya, this explained the sixfold increase in the volume of news distribution of AA on the night of 15 July.

Interestingly, radio was another conventional medium which played an active role on the night of the coup attempt. When President Erdoğan appeared on television to make his call for people to take to the streets, the call was heard by people outside via people in their cars turning up the volume of their radios.

Mobile phones also featured prominently in the coup attempt. That night, GSM operators sent text messages signed by President Erdoğan to their subscribers asking them to stand up for democracy. Additionally, they provided extra talk and Internet packages to their subscribers. Text messaging also helped the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to mobilize and coordinate its membership. That night, AKP sent text messages to its nearly ten million registered members, urging them to take to the streets in a show of support for the government. Mustafa Ataş, the AKP Deputy Chairman and the Head of party organization, stated that about 30 million text messages were sent from the headquarters of the party to the members on the

night of 15 July. According to Ataş, party members were successfully mobilized through text messaging (Selvi 2016).

The role of social media surfaced after people took to the streets, and this platform facilitated the protests against the coup attempt. By using social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, protesters were not only able to just communicate with each other, but they could also quickly organize and mobilize in the cities where the most chaotic events happened. The role of social media, especially Twitter, becomes clear in the light of empirical data; on the night of 15 July, between 10:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. local time, 71,938 tweets were sent. In the same time interval on an average day, 16,500 tweets would be sent. This corresponds to a fourfold increase. Furthermore, between 12:00 and 4:00 a.m. local time, the number of tweets related to the attempted coup was 495,000, which corresponds to a 35-fold increase compared to the average figure of 14,142 over a normal day (Can 2016). In total, seven million tweets were sent on the night of 15 July under popular hashtags such as #DarbeyeHayır (no to coup), #VatanİçinNöbetteyiz (on guard for the motherland), and #TekYürek (single heart) (Demir 2016). Not surprisingly, the number of tweets continued to increase after 10:00 p.m. local time and reached a peak after President Erdoğan's FaceTime broadcast.

What is particularly interesting is that the coup plotters used online digital tools to organize themselves, and this is why the plotters did not intervene in the Internet although they destroyed the country's satellite communication and cable TV operator, Türksat. The plotters tried, on the one hand, to cut the flow of information by taking out traditional means of communication, for example, trying to seize the major Turkish broadcasters such as TRT and CNN Türk. On the other hand, they allowed the Internet to stay active as they were using instant messaging applications, especially WhatsApp, which enabled them to send encrypted messages over the Internet. Therefore, if they had shut down the Internet, it would have resulted in a collapse in their internal communication networks. Clearly, the plotters made a strategic mistake because although Türksat was experiencing a blackout and satellite platforms like D-Smart and Digiturk were also unable to broadcast, these platforms could present themselves on the Internet. The irony was that while the plotters, on the one hand, were trying to seize control of the traditional means of communication, the Internet and especially social media, on the other hand, were experiencing one of their busiest moments in the country. Actually, the plotters were trying to stage "an analogue coup in a digital age" (Unver and Alassaad 2016).

In the process of the coup attempt, the two most popular live-streaming services, Twitter's Periscope and Facebook Live, were effectively generating information about the attempt. Around 2:00 a.m. local time, "more than 80 streams were active on the Periscope platform in Istanbul, compared to 30 in London and two in San Francisco" (Frier et al. 2016). Meanwhile, Facebook's real-time map demonstrated that a large group of users were active in Turkey (Couts 2016). Both these platforms allowed users to either stream the instant events of the coup attempt or show protesters on the street resisting the plotters. The Google search engine was also active. While tanks were rolling down the street, the protesters were searching on

Google for ways to stop tanks. According to Google Trends (<https://trends.google.com.tr>), the online searches for “How to stop a tank” skyrocketed on the night of 15 July. This was in a sense the embodiment of the “search engine society” argument that Halavais (2009) argued years ago.

The coup attempt was suppressed in less than 24 h; however, the so-called “democracy watch” protests continued for 29 days to protect the country against another potential attempt. The media played an essential role in this process as well. For instance, television channels, newspapers, magazines, and Internet portals covered the coup attempt with all its details. Furthermore, governmental and non-governmental organizations prepared publications (e.g., reports and photograph albums), which brought to the forefront the dramatic side of the event. These publications, while enabling the formation of a wide consensus against the coup attempt, also led to the building of a societal memory regarding the event.

Mosques as a Communication Network

One of the interesting features concerning the 15 July coup attempt was the involvement of mosques and the use of Sala. Mosques are a religious institution where Muslims gather for prayers, and Sala has its etymological roots in Arabic and means a kind of an Islamic call to prayer. Traditionally, Salas are read out to announce Friday prayers or funerals at the mosques. Hence, the main meaning of the word Sala is “annunciation.” It can be argued that the Salas that were read out on the night of 15 July had two purposes: first to announce the coup attempt in line with the meaning of the word and the second to rally people against this attempt.

Historically, Sala is not a new practice; it has been used, for example, during the Turkish War of Independence 1919–1922. During the Arab Spring, although not specifically the Sala, mosques and prayers played a particular role in the protests (Aslam 2017). That the same thing has not been seen in the protest movements in the West indicates that the cultural features and religious beliefs of societies may be determinant in the decision about which medium could be used in protests.

A semi-structured interview was conducted on 14 November 2016 with Mehmet Emin Özafşar, Vice President of RA. He explained that on the night of 15 July, the imams, the highest-ranking religious officers in mosques, began reading the Salas without having received any order from RA. Özafşar then continued to state that to avoid any confusion, RA sent a text message to its 110,000 imams, asking them to read the Sala and call for Tekbeer (a kind of Islamic call) in their mosques. There was an immediate positive effect; the people on the streets passionately replied with the slogan, Allahu Akbar (God is greatest), and this is why the reading of Sala continued for weeks even after the coup attempt had been suppressed.

Viewed closely, it can be argued that the network of mosques in Turkey is not complicated. At the top, there is the RA under which there are the offices of the mufti in all 81 cities and 919 counties in the country, who represent the highest religious authority in their locations and under them are the mosques. According to Özafşar,

there are 86,762 mosques in Turkey. In terms of the distribution across the cities, in Istanbul and Ankara where the most intensive anti-coup protests took place, there are 3317 and 2994 mosques, respectively. Given their widespread presence in the cities, mosques have been relatively effective communication networks in Muslim societies.

Considering mosques as means of communication, the open to communication structure of these religious institutions resembles the structure of traditional means of communication. Through the loudspeakers connected to their minarets, mosques allow only one-way communication just like in means of mass communication. However, what makes mosques unique is not their communication structure but much rather the fact that they turn communication into a religious character. Mosques played an important role during the coup attempt when on the night of 15 July, the imams read the Salas, calling for the people to take to the streets, which became an irresistible religious order. Thus, the mosques were able to effectively play their role in the events that unfolded. This was partly because of the political identity of the protesters, of whom nearly 80% had voted for AKP in the general elections of 2015, which is known for its conservatism (Konda 2016). Thus, the Salas called from the mosques showed a total parallelism with the religious beliefs of the protesters known for their conservative identities. In this respect, the Salas surrounded these protesters with their holy ambiance and motivated them to stand against the coup attempt even risking death.

Conclusion

An advanced communication network provides possibilities not only for a movement to become visible but also for a counter movement to parry it. However, this does not mean that communication technologies alone have the ability to start and end a protest movement and only focusing on technology inevitably turns into a discussion of determinism. When protest movements are evaluated with slogans such as “Facebook revolution” or “the revolution will not be tweeted,” the discussion inevitably is locked in the question of “what the determinant is” (see, e.g., Gladwell 2010; Shirky 2011). Technology cannot be considered as the main cause of protest movements as many other social factors (e.g., political, social, economic, psychological, cultural, and religious) are at play in these movements (Ainger 2016), neither can it be interpreted as completely ineffective as it can facilitate protests (Comunello and Anzera 2012).

The 15 July coup attempt was a movement that aimed to usurp the government and unseat President Erdoğan. While the plotters attempted to do this by cutting the interaction of the government with social powers, the opposite movement endeavored to suppress the coup attempt by keeping communication channels open. Therefore, the common feature of the both movements was their communication style; however, the social factors that motivated people to take to the streets were different. Those who took to the streets on the night of 15 July believed that the goal of the coup was to capture and divide Turkey, which would result in chaos and civil war (Konda 2016). Consequently, both movements started and ended as a chain of

numerous overlapping events in the same social context. In this process, different communication technologies played their own roles at various stages of the coup attempt. As the stages changed, so did the means of communication and the role they played.

Cross-References

- [Online Social Media and Crisis Communication in China: A Review and Critique](#)

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