

## Book Reviews

### Digital transformations in Turkey: Current perspectives in communication studies

*Banu Akdenizli (Ed.)*

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As the title, table of contents, and introduction to *Digital Transformations in Turkey: Current Perspectives in Communication Studies* clearly indicate, the overall aim of this book is to address some of the most conspicuous issues relating to the digitalization of mediascape in Turkey, a country that has increasingly been of interest to international media as well as academics in various fields of the humanities and social sciences. In the introduction, editor Banu Akdenizli lays out a historical and contextual frame for an audience not necessarily familiar with Turkish politics and political institutions. Thanks to this background information, the audience receives a general context with which to follow the case studies presented in three separate parts of the book. Editor Akdenizli uses Wallerstein's world systems theory to frame Turkey as a semi-peripheral country, confirming the argument that "the impact of communication technologies is felt usually the most directly and forcefully" in countries like Turkey. Based on this assertion, Akdenizli provides a summary of communication transformation within the era of Republic, with an emphasis on the 1980s and 1990s digitalization of communication in the country. As Akdenizli states in the Introduction, this is "the first

English-written book addressing recent ICT transformations from multiple perspectives in Turkey" (p. xvi). Hence, the book bears a certain responsibility to cover a wide perspective. In accordance with that mission, the list of contributors includes prominent academics in Turkey working in the fields of new media studies as well as political communication, communication sociology, and youth studies.

*Digital Transformations in Turkey* consists of three sections, each including five chapters by various contributors, providing a transdisciplinary collection. The first section is entitled "Culture, Society, and the Individual." The first chapter is coauthored by Baruh, Bal, and Cemalcilar and focuses on particular types of Twitter users in Turkey to explore their attitude toward privacy. The authors conceptualize privacy as a psychological matter and adapt a previously developed Multidimensional Privacy Orientation Scale to scrutinize this issue. Although not stated explicitly, the text implies that attitudes toward privacy have cultural associations, which is an interest area for further exploration and research. Having said that, this section of the book could have been geared to a broader audience by providing a more extensive discussion of the quantitative data presented in the text.

The following chapter consists of an ethnographic inquiry which informs about the everyday usage of new media technologies and, more specifically, the usage of mobile phones and the

Internet by the economically disadvantaged people. Coauthors Ergül, Gökalp, and Cangöz observe families in a poor neighborhood of a mid-sized Turkish city. The fieldwork was conducted in 2008; hence, the findings and the discussion do not present an up-to-date perspective. Nevertheless, there are some interesting findings and analysis, such as the high penetration rate of mobile phones compared with landlines, the creative forms of communication via digital lowering the cost, or the gender and generational differences of digital media usage.

The third chapter conceptualizes massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs) as a tool that “legitimizes capitalist values ... as 1) dialectics, 2) commodity/commodification, and 3) surplus value, exploitation, alienation, class” (p. 47). Based on in-depth interviews with 10 young males who are contextualized as “digital natives,” Ülger concludes that these youngsters lack “the critical point of view for the stories and actions authorized and legitimated as capitalist through the game narratives that allow them entry as apprentices into capitalist culture” (p. 60). Bearing the small and rather homogenous sampling of the interviewees, the work appears to present a rather narrow perspective toward the issue of discussing the relations between capitalist notions and the MMOG players. As stated by the author in the concluding remarks, this subject is open to debate and hopefully more inclusive and extended researches would enlighten us in the future.

The fourth chapter (by Lüküslü) provides a thorough analysis that scrutinizes relations between nostalgia, the digital interactive space, and the reconstruction

of childhood memories. Lüküslü takes on an exciting research topic by looking into an interactive online site to analyze the feeling of being a child in the 1980s. The author presents a very enjoyable read that discusses the issues of collective memory construction through cyberspace, and nostalgia over a lost childhood, while placing these issues within the political frame of the country. The author states “the construction of generational memory of those who were children in the 1980s had been instrumental in coping with the vast transformations of the period” (p. 73). With her contribution, Lüküslü exemplifies the ways in which analyzing cyberspace could be beneficial to researching generational memory. Her work is very innovative in introducing memory studies into the analysis of cyberspace and new media transformation.

The last chapter of the first section presents the case of a single blog/website that targets an ethnic identity group. In her article, Akkaya focuses on cyberspace as an example of an alternative public sphere in relation to identity (re)construction and even deconstruction of Gypsies in Turkey via the digital platform. Based on the analysis of blog entries, including reader comments, that turn the space into a discussion forum, Akkaya presents a comprehensive analysis of perception of the Gypsy identity. The research also includes an in-depth interview with the author of the blog. The methodology is also compatible with the argument that the blog is considered both a space and a text, and, in this way, the study benefits from discourse analysis as well as textual analysis. In an unpretentious tone, the article lays out

a critical analysis of a blog in relation to the opportunities it provides to subordinated and misrepresented identity groups. This is one of the most coherent works in the edited book and it presents a good example of new media research incorporated with cultural studies.

The second section of the collection is titled “Industries, Design and Practice” and draws examples from the fields of PR, higher education, journalism, and social movement activism. Coauthored by Uzunoglu, Öksüz, and Genç, Chapter 6 discusses PR professionals and their engagement with Web 2.0 in relation to their profession. Research is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with 29 PR experts, and the authors conclude that social media is recognized as an important tool of PR practices. Nevertheless, these experts still employ third parties in their social-media relationship to the public.

Chapter 7 of the book reflects on Saka’s self-ethnographic work, derived from his teaching experience in a higher-education institution in Istanbul. At the beginning of the article, Saka provides a context in which to discuss the digital experiences of education by offering definitions of key concepts such as convergence, transmedia, and gamification before moving onto his teaching experience as a case study of how digital media could be incorporated into a higher-education-level course. These three concepts, Saka argues, intertwine in his experimental teaching practice. The author shares his vision of designing the course in a way that would encourage students to engage in an interactive, collective, and continuous learning process. This is a valuable model of teaching,

but including student feedback on the experience would have complemented the teacher’s point of view.

Chapter 8 is an article by Akdenizli that focuses on political communication in the digital era. Akdenizli builds her work on PEW Journalism Project of 2012 titled *How Mainstream Media Outlets Use Twitter* and designs her work on analyzing the way the 20 “most followed” journalists in Turkey use Twitter. Analyzing the tweets of 20 journalists for a period of 2 weeks in March 2012, Akdenizli concludes that the journalists did not consider Twitter as a reporting tool, that their tweets had a different agenda from that of the mainstream media, and that they would sometimes function as a communication channel when they retweeted other individuals’ stories. As the author also states in the conclusion, this research could be extended by conducting in-depth interviews with the journalists in relation to their narration of the social media experience.

The following chapter by Bıçakçı focuses on corporate communication and analyzes corporate websites in relation to corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication. Bıçakçı selects the “top 20 most reputable corporations in Turkey” listed in the 2013 Reputation Index and questions how well these corporations inform the public in relation to CSR performances via their websites. The author argues that these corporations share a good amount of their social responsibility engagement in order to “protect, promote and enhance their reputation” (p. 173). But because the research starts with the reputation index and analyzes the most reputable corporations’ websites, it is hard to decide

whether the successful CSR communication is the result of positive reputation or if it is a strategy to protect the existing reputation.

Chapter 10 scrutinizes the Socialist Feminist Collective (SFC) and the publication of that group: *The Feminist Politics*. Yanıkkaya starts with a detailed account of socialist feminism and the way it is being perceived historically as well as developing the discussion in relation to public sphere(s). Then she provides a historical frame of feminist media in Turkey, conceptualizing these as the counter public spheres. And finally, she moves to the case study of SFC and their media. In that part, Yanıkkaya both examines the website of the journal and conducts interviews with two participants of the SFC.

The third section of the book is titled “Institutions, Governance, and Democracy” and the articles collected in this section include discussions on digital mediascape as the alternative sphere of political communication. The first chapter of this section directly questions the Internet policies and media freedom in Turkey during the last decade. In her article, Tunç offers a broad look at media ownership and political power relations as well as censorship efforts to ban social media in relation to dissent and resistance, including the issue of hate speech on social media. She exemplifies social media networks such as Twitter and the authoritarian attempts to control Twitter, especially in 2013. Tunç’s article, along with Akdenizli’s work on journalists’ use of Twitter, opens up the debate on the uses of social media networks in cases of media censorship.

Chapter 12 is derived from extended research material looking into uses of social media platforms utilized by political party leaders during the elections in 2011, and is coauthored by the team of Binark, Çomu, Telli-Aydemir, Bayraktutan, Doğu, and İslamoğlu. The article examines the political communication practices of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) via social media, and Twitter, more specifically. This article is particularly informative as it develops a frame of discourse analysis and incorporates historical context of the governing political party of Turkey. The work is an important contribution to the literature of political communication and social media. The team argues that even in a Web 2.0 environment, a top-down approach is visible and the information dissemination flows one-way, without totally recognizing participation of citizens. Moreover, the authors conclude, the dominant discourse on social media platforms are polarizing rather than opening up a space for a negotiating environment.

The following chapter by Çelik focuses on conflict and power relationship between the Turkish state and the Kurdish identity struggle. Inspired by Foucault’s work, the article conceptualizes the Turkish state as the “technological surveillant state” (p. 257) and depicts the resistance of the Kurds as surveilled bodies. Based on in-depth interviews with 40 middle-class users of ICTs, including mobile phones and the Internet, in a sample of cities in Turkey, the study reveals the emotional aspect of control over communication technologies that are very much personalized. Çelik’s work also informs us about the digital counterpublics and utilization of social media

as alternative communication platforms for resisting identities. She states that while the Kurds utilize the net as the counterpublic space to reach out to a wider population, they also recreate their discourses of identity. She concludes by arguing that especially the young political Kurds appropriate the Internet to transform the political language as well as their traditionally constructed subjectivities.

Chapter 14, by Akser, presents the case of a political hacker group in Turkey known as the Redneck. Summarizing the acts of the group as well as framing the concept of hacktivism, Akser argues that the group has modified the perception of hacking and even cyber-terror for the Turkish public. Akser enunciates that, with a clear ideological stand, Redneck opposes the AKP government, employs humorous and playful tactics, and reveals information that the government-controlled mainstream media would not disseminate. Hence the group “has led the traditional media in Turkey to play more active role in relaying information to the public” (p. 283).

The final chapter of the book, coauthored by Akdenizli and Çetin, is a work on political communication by parties in Turkey during the 2014 local elections. Similar to Chapter 12, this piece also works on the uses of social media during election campaigns, where the researchers analyze the official Twitter accounts of four political parties represented in the Parliament. The central question of the study is whether or not the social media would offer a dialogic communication. Following content analysis of the Twitter accounts of four political parties the authors conclude that the social media is not used dialogically. Instead,

the communication is constructed in a one-way flow, as was also assured by the former study presented in the book.

*Digital Transformations in Turkey* is a rich compilation of research conducted in Turkey and provides the reader a variety of case studies from a range of fields and sectors. It is well organized to cover a broad spectrum of digital communication's uses in Turkey. Although a few chapters could benefit from a more coherent structure and a more convincing layout of the research methods, the editor has successfully collected 15 pieces that would represent the sample of topics discussed in relation to digital transformations.

It appears to be the consensus among scholars working on/with new media that it is all about social media platforms, and more specifically Twitter, as a majority of the articles exemplified that particular platform to analyze the digital transformations. The cases mostly appear to confirm that Web 2.0 is more proactively and innovatively used by subordinated groups or identities, and that social media platforms prove to be a useful tool to break the cycle of silence for these; moreover, it is a space for visibility and resistance to subordination and homogenization. However, the institutions or individuals with institutional power do mostly employ digital media for a cheaper and faster one-way flow of communication and information dissemination. In summary, although not for the uninitiated reader, this book is a useful compilation for an academic audience.

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