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Social networks as a factor of political mobilization in Ukraine

In November 2016 Ukraine celebrated the third anniversary of the event that, despite the reevaluation of the traversed path and the massive disappointment of citizens because of unfulfilled promises and the failure of the authorities to fight corruption, forever inscribed in the modern history of Ukraine as a Revolution of Dignity. But only now does it become clear just how influential those events were from the perspective the role of social media platform play as an alternative political communication and mobilization.

Nowadays the media, commerce, services and communication moves towards world web. According to the International Telecommunication Union, at the end of 2015 there were more than 3 billion Internet users¹ in the world.

Internet attracts politically active citizens, and as an alternative source of pluralistic information that is not tainted by the censor². Global network has the following advantages: speed delivery of information, its openness, free expression of their own ideas and opinions, finding like-minded people in virtual space and further communication with them online. However, the Internet is able to cause a number of problems due to freedom of expression and pluralism, as network promotes irresponsibility on material posted and written words in a virtual world.

There is no consensus on the effectiveness of political mobilization through social media – range of estimates is very wide, from optimistic to quite skeptical. At the beginning of social media rise – in the late 1990's – internet treated as a potential tool to encourage citizens to political participation. Gradually, researchers tend to more negative evaluations – agree that citizens exercise a political activity through social networks, but this activity is vague and ineffective, and mainly its

¹ *Internet Users in the World*, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/> (15.09.2016).

² C. Labovitz, A. Ahuja, *The impact of Internet Policy and Topology on Delayed Routing Convergence*, http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/xpl/login.jsp?tp=&arnumber=916775&url=http%3A%2F%2Fieeexplore.ieee.org%2Fxpls%2Fabs_all.jsp%3Farnumber%3D916775 (15.09.2016).

task is to attract activists feeling to important political issues. Most researchers define as a mechanism of political mobilization transfer of latent opposition in manifested form. But this definition for all its accuracy is not complete because reflects only the political mobilization that aims to increase the political activity of the population, encouraging them to political participation³.

The spread of the Internet and increasing the number of its regular users leads to the transformation of the modern media market, new media services, which causes the formation of the new media environment for political self-organization of citizens.

For example, Apple corporation which made a revolution in the mobile market, releasing their first tablet computers (Ipad), which were sold in quantities of more than 250 mln. pcs., as well as the most popular smartphone ever – an Iphone which both caused an overview of the traditional approach of PC usage, but also accelerated the development of new social media, news resources and services that are now available in real time. Popularity of tablet computers has led to the collapse of the sale table PC's and strongly shaken positions the notebook market. Note that this example of technological breakthrough of Apple became the impetus for the production of similar or other products and services such technology giants as Google, IBM, Microsoft, Samsung, Facebook and emerging Chinese companies such as Lenovo, Huawei, Xiaomi and others. This led to significant changes in the market as mobile devices and computers, and media environment, any media and new services among which can be called social networks, online versions of newspapers and magazines, news resources, online banking, Internet TV, Internet radio, numerous instant messengers etc.

Today the market of IT-services and new media has become so powerful that the most expensive brands in the world lists first 4 positions occupied by the companies producing electronics and software, including the already mentioned Google, Apple, IBM, Microsoft, and in the top ten in general only 2 companies representing the food business (McDonalds, Coca-Cola)⁴. Significantly, the 10 most expensive brands, the two companies are in fact the world's most popular social networks (Facebook, Twitter).

Modern information and communication technologies and innovative capabilities of mass communication, which social media provide becomes a more important factor influencing the life and development of mankind. The advantages of this kind of media is unprecedented efficiency, availability, capacity, and most importantly – the interactivity and network architecture that enables and even

³ Т. Кремень, *Політична мобілізація за допомогою використання інструменту соціальних медіа*, <http://social-science.com.ua/article/1202> (15.09.2016).

⁴ Найдорожчі бренди світу, <http://www.dw.de/%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%B4%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B6%D1%87%D1%96-%D0%B1%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B8-%D1%81%D0%B2%D1%96%D1%82%D1%83/g-17663724> (15.09.2016).

encourages unlimited growth of their audience. That said, social media became the most popular part of the modern Internet, which is used every day by more than 3 billion people, 2.4 of whom actively are using social media.

Over 80% of companies worldwide are using social networks at its business. About 78% of people trust messages from social networks more than to its traditional sources of information and advertising⁵. The potential power of social media is enough sufficient to use them to organize a full-scale social cataclysm (just like “blogs revolutions” in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen).

The election campaigns of 2010–2012 in Ukraine also confirmed this trend. However, those electoral campaigns couldn't even closely compete with the events in Ukraine late 2013–early 2014. The “Revolution of a Dignity” or “Euromaidan” not only led the collapse of Yanukovich regime and final reorientation of Ukrainian state for European vector of foreign policy, but also once again demonstrated the power of media component of the political processes. This new social media have become a springboard for protest communication and source alternative information comparing to the government controlled state media and Russian propaganda. It is clear that without a large number of Internet users this could not have happened.

Social media which have raised as a result of convergence of media and Internet technologies showing a significant increase of audience. Website Social network Facebook has 1.7 billion accounts, LinkedIn – 200 million, microblogging service Twitter – over 500 million account yet, Vkontakte – the largest in post-Soviet social networking site – 197 million* (according to its websites and stats).

Almost three years ago, Ukraine experienced events that ultimately redirected our state towards European integration, events that were called Revolution of Dignity or Euromaidan.

According to the BBC, the first time the word “Euromaidan” was used Nov. 21 in the social networks. Immediately hashtag #euromaidan got into Twitter trends. By November 22 it was used over 21 000 times when the shares are held in Donetsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lutsk, Uzhgorod and Lviv.

According to the media people massively responded to journalist Mustafa Nayem post in Facebook and Tweeter to join him at the Independence Square. Statements were posted on the personal page of Nayem November 21, 2013 at 19:55. Protesters responded quickly to organize themselves for Euromaidan.

Around 3 PM it was reported that the Ukrainian government has decided to “suspend negotiations with the EU”, so within 15–20 minutes a top-ended media instantly spread this news through its social networks. Somewhere closer to 16.00 there was a giant leap in attending to news media. 21 and 22 November had the

⁵ *“Нові ідентичності” в Україні та світі: підстави формування, концепції, прогнози*, <http://www.niss.gov.ua/articles/534/> (15.09.2016).

highest attendance Ukrainian online media in the history of any observations before. For example, the site of Ukrayinska Pravda attendance has almost doubled these couple days (according liveinternet)⁶.

Nearer to 19.00, it became clear that the number of people who are truly outraged decision of the authorities – is too much. People were waiting for a sign of opposition leaders, but it came from activists, journalists and concerned citizens.

That is why the role of social networks in such critical social situations is so important. It was no Klitschko/Yatseniuk/Tyahnnybok/Lutsenko affect whether people came to protest. There were those who had a large audience of fans and truly believers. So when Mustafa Nayem, Roman Shrike, Andriy Shevchenko, Lesia Orobets and hundreds of others have written their posts in social networks to go to the Maidan – thousands went.

During events of “Euromaidan” activists set up on Facebook a few dozens of communities for self-coordination and help⁷. There was information in these communities on topics such as saving the lives and health of protesters; gathering money, medicines and necessary things, about medical assistance, including information for blood donors, information on temporary deals housing for the participants of Euromaidan, search of people who disappeared during the protests etc.

Yandex Company, using open accounts for indexing network Twitter, explored how the activity of Ukrainian Twitter-users changed during the 2013–2014 years. According to it research in 2014 Ukrainian users doubled number of their accounts in Twitter twice – in January and July, the first increase was associated with the Revolution of Dignity, the second – with Malaysia Airlines plane crash in the Donetsk region. In July 2014 Ukrainians registered in Twitter about 100 thousands of new accounts. US researchers Asher Rospigliosi and Sue Greener noted: “In Ukraine, social media were crucial tool for internal organization and mobilization of protesters”⁸.

G. Veretennyk believes that “the revolution in terms of blogs and social networks helped to spread information and coordinate everything (announcing the time and place of meetings and pickets, and gave room for negotiations), promoted patriotism and universal values for Ukrainians etc.”⁹

While during the Orange Revolution of 2004 an important role in the coordination and organization of protesters played mobile phones, the raise of people to protest actions in 2013 was held through the social networks.

⁶ #евромайдан: українська цифрова революція та останній шанс аналоговим політикам стати цифровими, <http://watcher.com.ua/2013/11/29/evromaydan-ukrayinska-tsyfrova-revolutsiya-ta-ostanniy-shans-analohovym-politykam-staty-tsyfrovymy/> (15.09.2016).

⁷ О.Р. Личковська, *Соціальні медіа як фактори кооперації і дезинтеграції соціально-культурного пространства України*, „Вісник Одеського національного університету. Серія: Соціологія і політичні науки” 2014, т. 19, Вип. 2, р. 43–53.

⁸ A. Rospigliosi, S. Greener, *Proceeding of the European Conference on Social Media*, Brighton 2014, р. 78.

⁹ Г. Веретенник, *Розвиток блогів та соціальних мереж в умовах революції в Україні*, <http://kgimv.nau.edu.ua/images/Konferentsiya.pdf> (15.09.2016).

That obviously explains the activity and aggressiveness of Russian electronic media around the world and in Ukraine's media market as well. According to the National Institute for Strategic Studies analysis information components of "hybrid war" were enabled in Ukraine a long time before the Russia military aggression in the East of our country. Aggressive information-psychological impact suffered not only Ukrainian society, but the citizens of the former Soviet Union, as well as the US population and the EU citizens. Information front continues to play a key role in achieving a number of goals that tries to reach the government of Russia nowadays:

- using a heavy socio-economic situation in Ukraine to split Ukrainian society to further rejection of the European integration process;
- justify the annexation of the territory of a sovereign state, ignoring international law;
- move the focus of its own citizens from internal problems towards the "external enemy" and to justify their criminal acts¹⁰.

Television remains one of the most powerful channels of influence. The most powerful and active among Russian foreign broadcasting, without a doubt, is TV channel Russia Today (RT), founded in 2005, which has a broadcast in more than 100 countries and has 700 million audience. Channels "RT US" and "RT UK" go on air with their own studios in Washington and London. Citizens of most countries can access RT via the Internet, satellite and cable channels. In addition, RT spreading its own product to YouTube. It should be emphasized that the format of RT channel made possible its active presence of the television market in Europe and the US. Moreover, in late 2014 was additionally launched an Internet portal (Sputnik), which uses the information flow of RT¹¹.

It should be stated that the activity of Russian propaganda the US media is significantly increased with increasing interest of American audiences to events in Ukraine. In addition to the international news agency RT, which is financed from the budget of Russia a few other media such as "First Channel" represent Russia abroad. The target audience of its propaganda – the ordinary European and American citizens, including representatives of the last waves of emigration from the USSR especially in Germany, United States, Canada and Israel, Sweden, Finland, France, Italy and Spain, Baltic States and Belarus and of course – Ukraine¹². It should be noted that the quantity of postsoviet people in

¹⁰ *Російське іномовлення як інструмент маніпулювання громадською думкою у трансатлантичному просторі*, <http://www.niss.gov.ua/articles/1834/> (15.09.2016).

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Євросоюз боротиметься з російською дезінформацією*, <http://www.dw.com/uk/%D1%94%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%8E%D0%B7-%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%8C%D1%81%D1%8F-%D0%B7-%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%96%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%8C%D0%BA%D0%BE%D1%8E-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B7%D1%96%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%86%D1%96%D1%94%D1%8E/a-18329318> (15.09.2016).

Germany alone is at least 3 million people. More than 100,000 live in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, even more – in Poland, not to mention Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. For the majority of immigrants from the Soviet Union, the Russian language is, if not the main, the dominant language or even mother tongue than is successfully used by propaganda media of Russia.

Russian information agencies successfully exploited the idea of freedom of expression and information for the implementation of disinformation in American and European media space. According to Timothy Snyder, a famous American historian, professor at Yale University, “Russian propaganda aim is to show that the truth, in fact, does not exist”¹³.

As I have already noted early, during the revolutionary events in Ukraine domestic and foreign media social networks have become a source of information, especially Facebook and Twitter that contented the messages of world leaders and heads of international organizations (Barack Obama, Stefan Füle, Catherine Ashton, etc.), messages of Ukrainian politicians, messages of the opinion-leaders and journalists.

Popular online site Ukrayinska Pravda offered readers a collection of media messages and messages from social networks, this method of presentation was very effective, because through these lists the events of the Revolution of Dignity broadcasted almost in real time, creating the most complete information picture about the events in the state.

Internet social networking services enable witnesses to cover their events along with professional journalists and thus considerably supplement the general information. Today, users of social networks are involved in the collection, processing, publication and dissemination of socially significant information, that is why many media experts believe that the development of so-called citizen journalism that promotes democratization in the field of media should exist. The advantage of citizen journalism social media is the speed of presentation and to maintain constant feedback from the audience, everyone can comment, read, express their opinion, receive a response recipient, amend or deny the information.

Before a crash of Malaysian Boeing in July 17, 2014 Ukrainians never thought, despite the Russian aggression, did not know and did not understand the magnitude of the network force and therefore the impact of social media in today’s world. It is clear that disaster of Malaysian Boeing, which was shot down by Russian terrorists over the territory they control in eastern Ukraine, immediately caused a huge surge of information.

Results of the popular news aggregator NewsWhip monitoring shows that among the eight highest-rated European news, six created by Russian propaganda mouthpiece Russia Today¹⁴. These news implemented the policy of the Kremlin,

¹³ *Yale Professor Talks Russian Propaganda in Ukraine*, <http://emorywheel.com/yale-professor-talks-russian-propaganda-in-ukraine/> (15.09.2016).

¹⁴ *Сила соціальних медіа. Або чому не можна нехтувати соцмережами*, <http://pidubny.com/syla-sotsialnyh-media-abo-chomu-ne-mozhna-nehtuvaty-sotsmerezhamy/> (15.09.2016).

where Ukraine accused of all possible sins: the Ukrainian weapon Buk and Ukraine were blamed for the crash, and that Putin was supposed to be targeted by rockets...

Here is the way it works – Russia Today produces content, throws it into the network and all the other just share these links, taking them to the highest-rated messages. What are the consequences of this popular Russian messages on social networks?

The world of journalism has lost significant position after the economic crisis of 2008. Since the traditional media and even respected editors have to save on everything on what is possible. Some reduced photographers, some had to cut journalists.

Western media, looking for the popularity of topics in the mentioned services aggregators, understand its popularity for people often just repost it. And as editors often do not have enough journalists to enlighten all the news around the world, they often use the services of so-called media-workers, which are often low-paying students or interns). Clearly, in such situations, the topics are selected and written not by a journalistic standards.

Certainly there are lots of media holdings and sites with authority and finances. But in light of the rapid development of the Internet and the emergence of new online media, the specific number of poor-quality information pages a choking mass of well-known publications. So it is easy to lose yourself in this massive information highway and understand what is really happening.

Thus, more people get distorted information and on the basis of such distortions audience create its distorted opinion. This view affects the local politicians who have to please the audience. From local politicians it goes to higher levels.

The technological revolution that began with the advent of personal computers and mobile devices with access to network spawned a number of new services, like social networking, virtual space of communication and socialization. The phenomenon of new social media that work on technologies and principles of Web 2.0, that helps consumers make content via their posts and can collaborate, cooperate, communicate, share information, identified new opportunities to exchange information and established principles of virtual communication, which now forms part of our living space. Besides these technological capabilities of virtualization policy, when citizens, voters may consume fewer information sources and evaluate politicians without a direct contact but through the prism of audiovisual and electronic media. However, comparison of illusion and fantasy world, along with the operation of real laws of life make Internet communication very attractive to young people, especially in unfavorable environments, as they require no defined social status and roles, and even more to fight for a place in the social hierarchy. Thus forming reference groups carried out freely, chaotic and uncontrolled. All these factors contributed to the emergence of the phenomenon of cyber-socialization that according to Ukrainian researcher Helen Kudashkina is a new kind of socialization.

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Pawło Katerynczuk

Сети społecznościowe jako czynnik mobilizacji politycznej na Ukrainie

Artykuł podejmuje problem wpływu sieci społecznościowych na przebieg tzw. Rewolucji Godności (*Revolution of Dignity*) mającej miejsce na Ukrainie w latach 2013–2014. Autor zaznacza w nim, że rozwój instrumentów komunikacji społecznej w wirtualnej sieci wpłynął znacząco na aktywność obywatelską społeczeństwa, m.in. dzięki nieograniczonemu dostępowi do alternatywnych źródeł informacji. Korzyści płynące z wykorzystania Internetu pociągnęły za sobą również szereg niebezpieczeństw, związanych z masowym procesem komunikacji. W szczególności autor podkreśla znaczenie dezinformacji oraz działań propagandowych prowadzonych przez rosyjskie media, których aktywność odegrała istotną rolę w opisywanych wydarzeniach.

Słowa kluczowe: media społecznościowe, propaganda, Ukraina, mobilizacja polityczna, Rewolucja Godności.

Павло Катеринчук

Социальные сети как фактор политической мобилизации в Украине

В статье поднимаются проблемы влияния социальных сетей на ход так называемой Революции Достоинства (*Revolution of Dignity*), имевшей место в Украине в 2013–2014 гг. Автор отмечает, что развитие инструментов социальной коммуникации в виртуальной сети значительно повлиял на гражданскую активность населения, среди прочего, благодаря неограниченному доступу к альтернативным источникам информации. Преимущества, вытекающие из использования интернета, принесли за собой также ряд опасностей, связанных с массовым процессом коммуникации. В особенности, автор подчеркивает значение дезинформации, а также пропагандистской деятельности, проводимой российскими СМИ, активность которых, сыграла важную роль в описываемых событиях.

Ключевые слова: социальные сети, пропаганда, Украина, политическая мобилизация, Революция Достоинства.

