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TOTAL RECALL: THE POLITICAL CRISIS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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Introduction

Every change in technology entails a number of changes in the ways it can be used. With the advent of social media, which belongs to a collective category of Web 2.0, the so far irrefutable position of the traditional media has been compromised. A new area of information flow based on the idea of public generating and sharing content has emerged. Unlike traditional media, social media, its existence and condition, is strongly dependent on the commitment of its users. By this I do not mean the demand for particular media stimulating its supply, but the thoroughgoing transformation of the medium's nature: the key feature of social media is networking. Network of connections accelerates information flow and extends its reach. It is based on a natural human need for communication and knowledge transfer: upon gaining access to new information, with some exceptions, our natural desire is to share it with others. We can therefore claim that social media is a natural consequence of our needs. It constitutes a new online discourse, in which people create, recommend and preserve content much faster than traditional media do (and are able to do), as well as incessantly network them, which is not possible in the case of traditional media.

In the following paper I would like to examine the changes the advent of social media brought to politics and handling political emergencies. First, I will briefly analyse the key characteristics of social media, trying to expose its aspects that can affect politics most. Then, I will take a closer look at the notion of crisis as a social phenomenon and explore what use can be made of social media in the face of critical situations. I will refer to two thinkers who have strongly influenced the analysis of media in the political context: Jürgen Habermas and Manuel Castells¹. As Habermas put emphasis on the concept of deliberative public sphere and developed a theory of communicative action, this reference would make a good starting point for the subsequent analysis of the communicative aspects of social media². Castells, in turn, provides a profound insight into the concept of ‘network’ as a social structure. Afterwards, I will introduce the *securitization* theory developed by the Copenhagen School in security studies, which provides a framework for analysis of critical situations and security threats. I will then try to put theory into practice, looking back at recent examples of political crises in which social media played an important role, to eventually pose a question of the perspectives social media gives to the future political discourse.

Personalization of the content we are presented within social media platforms is the result of increasingly precise and intelligent mechanisms operating on the data, such as the Edge Rank mechanism managing Facebook con-

¹ Stefanie Plage carries out a more complex comparative analysis of the role of media within contemporary social life as seen by the two authors in her article: S. Plage *Mass Communication, Information Technology and Social Exclusion in Contemporary Society: Reconciling Public Sphere and Network Society?*, http://www.essex.ac.uk/sociology/documents/pdf/graduate_journal/2008_2009/plage%205.pdf, 18.03.2014.

² For a broader reconstruction of Habermas’s concept of Public Sphere in context of Media see: R. Benson, *Shaping the Public Sphere: Habermas and Beyond*, <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/uploads/006/243/Benson%202009%20American%20Sociologist%20FINAL.pdf>, 18.03.2014.

tent. It has a direct impact on both information we receive and likelihood it will make us actively use the portal. Social media makes manifesting our commitment simple and effortless. The messages tailor-made for us make half the battle to achieve the effect of social networking. Giving a “like” or adding content to “favorites” requires minimal effort – a single click of the mouse button. Contrary to what the names of functions in question suggest, the fact that we “like” certain message does not necessarily mean that we actually approve of its content. It rather suggests that we consider it important in some way, distinguish it from other messages and want to be evaluated based on the fact that we have expressed particular interest in it. Some additional engagement is required in various forms of sharing content require some additional involvement, such as the Facebook “share” feature or “retweet” on Twitter. Even more valuable are the comments – they constitute a form of critical engagement, which forces us not only to notice the content or pass it on, but also to refer to it and add some personal contribution, an added value. Nevertheless, although it might seem pretty advanced within the social media engagement scale presented above, it is still not gruelling. As Malcolm Gladwell argues analysing the phenomenon of social media activism, the only way to get many people we would not otherwise have contact with (Gladwell defines social media networks as built around weak ties with acquaintances and strangers we would never stay in touch with outside the Web) do something on our behalf is by not asking too much of them³. Indeed, if giving the social media feedback cost us more than a single click or typing a few characters, we would probably express it seldom or scarcely. However, we cannot ignore the fact that, no matter how easy it is, people engage and want to contribute to the social media discourse. Jason Chan identifies five characteristics that dif-

³ See: M. Gladwell, *Why the revolution will not be tweeted*, “The New Yorker”, 4.10.2010.

ferentiate social media from other forms of traditional media: Collectivity, Connectivity, Completeness, Clarity and Collaboration⁴. Let us remember this distinction because it is essential for the great importance social media has gained in recent years and it gives a basis to understanding its inevitable popularity.

The notions I would like to focus on in the following paper and analyze in context of their relevancy to the social media era are the notions of “crisis”, “threat” and “securitization”. I would argue that all of them can change the picture of state’s political situation by being under the influence of social media. In both cases social media proves its role as a tool used commonly within the society, at the same time elaborating a feedback loop between the state and society, which might strongly affect the ways of both doing and planning the politics.

Crisis as a social phenomenon

Among various functions of media, their informational aspect is undoubtedly of great importance. We expect media to provide us with reliable and up-to-date content. The more rapid and dynamic the related events are, the more important becomes the time in which information is transmitted. It is also crucial how it is targeted – different messages are directed to different recipients. At the peak of the “media events” pyramid we will find all kinds of crises. A crisis – a notion fairly broad, yet vague, can be simply defined as a period of breakthrough, change, a decisive turning point and a time of economic collapse⁵. A special kind of crises is the political ones. They are usually

⁴ J.C. Chan, *The role of social media in crisis preparedness, response and recovery*, <http://www.oecd.org/governance/risk/The%20role%20of%20Social%20media%20in%20crisis%20preparedness,%20response%20and%20recovery.pdf>, 17.01.2014.

⁵ See: W. Kopaliński, *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych*, Warszawa 1967, p.417.

temporary and short-lived, refer to current events, have a rapid course and are likely to lead to change or trigger off a sequence of changes⁶. At the same time they most often take place in the social environment involving two or more parties, representing different interests and degrees of power. The relation-driven nature of such situations, their social dimension and hence their reach, allow us to speak of them as crises. Jurgen Habermas, although he developed his crises theory way back before social media came into being, paid much attention to the position of individuals in context of social emergencies. He claimed: *Only subjects can be involved in crisis. Thus only when members of a society experience structural alterations as critical for continued existence and feel their social identity threatened can we speak of crises. Disturbances of system integration endanger continued existence only to the extent that social integration is at stake, that is, when the consensual foundations of normative structures are so much impaired that the society becomes anomic. Crisis states assume the form of a disintegration of social institutions*⁷.

This statement can not only be easily applied to the political crises, but it also refers to the most basic category Jason Chan ascribes to social media – collectivity. The latter is inseparably linked with the adjective “social”, and so will repeatedly appear in the further analysed case studies, proving its crucial role in both social media and social reality context.

The collective nature of both crises and social media affects not only the way the crises occur, but also the way in which critical situations are defined. Traditionally a crisis, defined as a threat to the social order and therefore the state integrity, used to be recognized and managed by the authorities. The state was the right subject to first name the critical situations and subse-

⁶ See: W. Szewczak, *O pojęciu kryzysu polityki* [in:] M. Kołodziejczak, R. Rosicki (ed.), *Od teorii do praktyki politycznej*, Poznań 2012.

⁷ J. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, London 1976, p. 3.

quently react in order to avoid their harmful consequences and to protect the society. At present, the state's monopoly on defining the critical threats has been compromised. Due to the operations of social media the society gained an effective tool for communicating and formulating its statements in a collective way. This, in return, gave a handy solution to the state, which could start monitoring the Web and, thereby, gather information on burning social issues needing to be solved. In this sense, the notion of threat has to be re-defined. Before I try to investigate its redefinition, it seems advisable to set the subject of Web 2.0 aside for the time being and have a quick look into the field of security studies, for which "a threat" is one of the fundamental notions. Here I would like to address the Copenhagen School⁸ in security studies, which proposed a number of tools that prove useful in emergency analysis.

The securitization theory

The Copenhagen School introduced a scheme of analysing how certain matters can be managed within the states' governance. They can be either non-politicized (being not matters for state action and not included in public debate), politicized (being 'managed within the standard political system') or securitized (framed as security questions through acts of securitization)⁹. What should interest us in the context of formulating security issues and critical threats is the latter category. The *securitization* theory argues that: *The process of 'Security' is thus a self-referential practice, because it is in this practice that the issue becomes a security issue – not necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as*

⁸ It emerged in the 1990s and is one of the major schools of thought in the security studies. It developed the sectoral approach in security studies and introduced the notions of *securitization* and *desecuritization*. The main representatives are Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde.

⁹ R. Emmers, *Securitization*, [in:] *Contemporary Security Studies*, A. Collins (ed.), Oxford, 2007, pp. 111-112.

such a threat. (...) The process of security is what in language theory is called a speech act. It is not interesting as a sign referring to something more real; it is the utterance itself that is the act. By saying the words, something is done (like betting, giving a promise, naming a ship)¹⁰.

The act of securitization consists of two elements. First, some issues, entities or phenomena must be described as existential threats to certain subjects (referent objects). Then the subject that defines (securitizing actor) must persuade the audience (it can be either the society, politicians, social elites as well as other groups potentially having impact on public policy) that the issues in question pose a real existential threat to the endangered object. The latter can also be of various kinds. What matters, is that it has to be important enough to be considered a security issue when threatened. The spectrum of referent objects is very broad, ranging from survival of ecosystems, through the large transnational corporations liquidity, up to the sovereignty of states or the sense of identity in religious groups. Next, existential threats are defined as risks that may have an impact on the existence and the survival of the referent objects.

This short insight into the *securitization* theory gives us a basis to examine social media through a prism of defining and naming certain issues that prove existential to the society's security and, thereby, are critical as political issues. As mentioned, the verbal stage of securitizing is followed in the non-verbal reality by far-reaching, practical consequences. This brings us to the social media-influenced redefinition of the notion of "threat". As I have already argued, it arises from the way the threats are defined within the society. It is no longer the state that has the monopoly on proclaiming that something poses an existential threat to a state-related referent object. Social media gave

¹⁰ B. Buzan et al., *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*, London 1998, p. 24, 26.

the society a forum to express its views and concerns and thereby take an active part in the verbal stage of securitizing certain issues. It gives its users a unique opportunity to (at least theoretically) freely, equally and transnationally share opinions, name problems and mutually search for best solutions. Consequently, the state can monitor social media, get the social feedback and include it in the process of securitizing things. It can also contribute to minimizing the risk of using extraordinary measures, as the latter can be avoided if the emergency is recognized at an early stage. This, in return, works in favour of democracy, as each usage of extraordinary measures, even developed within the constitutional framework, can be dangerous for the regime.

The analysis so far reveals a dual function of social media is revealed. Both aspects apply to the notion of crisis and should not be confused with other functions of social media referring to different fields of usage. Firstly, it serves the society to self-organize and reinforce its clout in regard to critical issues. In this aspect, social media contributes to making massive manifestations of social discontent easier to run and more visible. Secondly, social media can be used by the state authorities to monitor social moods and thus allow including the society in securitization processes, which has former been an exclusive domain of the state. As Manuel Castells argues in *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (2012), *the Internet provides the organizational communication platform to translate the culture of freedom into the practice of autonomy*¹¹ and in this way gives strong basis to forming of different social movements. I will return to this issue in the subsequent part of this paper when giving a closer look to the dynamics of arising crises on particular examples.

¹¹ M. Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, Cambridge 2012, p. 231.

Political crises in social media and crises in political social media

Facebook allows manifestation of discontent in an extremely simple manner. Not only without leaving home, but also without visiting the offices or participating in demonstrations, and even without sending signed petitions or e-mails. Clicking one 'Like' below the appropriate entry is enough. With the right amount of clicks every problem can be noticed¹².

This statement, despite perfectly recognizing the social mechanism essential for the discussed cases, refers to the more general problem of crises in social media. They are defined differently than crises in classical sense. "Social media crisis" is a term used in the field of Public Relations and refers to the situation of a problem which occurs in or is amplified by social media, resulting in negative publications in traditional media, changes in business (or political) process or financial losses¹³. This definition can be supplemented with elements such as image loss or impairment of entity's functioning (this usually refers to companies, but can be also applied to political organizations or states). Here, two phenomena should be clearly distinguished: a political crisis in social media and a crisis in political social media. They do not exclude each other, however, the lack of understanding of the difference between them may lead to unwanted ambiguity. The concept of a political crisis in social media always refers to events in the real world, which are, to different extent, reflected on the social platforms (regardless of whether the seeds of crises lie in the network or outside of it). Speaking of them, we use the classical definition of "crisis". Meanwhile, crisis in political social media means nothing but a social media crisis regarding the profiles devoted to political topics: ranging from politicians' social profiles, to fanpages of political movements and organi-

¹² Kryzys w czasach Facebooka. Raport o kryzysach PR w mediach społecznościowych, <http://blog.sotrender.com/pl/2013/04/kryzysy-w-mediach-spolecznościowych-raport>, 10.01.2014.

¹³ Based on the definition by experts from Altimeter Group.

zations, to the accounts of political bodies and governments. When diagnosing such crises, we use the PR criteria included in the definition of “social media crisis”, which refer primarily to the characteristics of Web 2.0. Although this sort of crises may rapidly spread and transfer to the real world, the main subject of analysis is the mechanism of its expansion and its ‘networked’ dimension. In response to such crises, it is important not only to refer to the usually very emotional content, but also to be aware of the specific rules governing virtual communities. Removing an inconvenient comment may result in repercussions much worse than ignoring it, and every unfortunate comment, even deleted immediately after publication, may repeatedly resurface and strike at its author. Both kinds of crises can be political, it is also likely they overlap and combine. However, the distinction gives us a utile tool to classify the complex landscape of Web 2.0.

Reporting crises in social media

The massive earthquake which struck Haiti in 2010 gained a name of the first “Twitter Disaster¹⁴” – the microblog was the place where first reports of the alarming situation appeared. It was also the channel where current information from the disaster-affected area appeared, while TV broadcast failed. Thanks to the widespread availability of Twitter, reports about the disaster were edited simultaneously by countless informants and were much broader than it would be possible with traditional media. This event can be considered as another media breakthrough since the so-called “CNN effect” in 1991, when CNN provided the first ever live broadcast of an armed conflict, showing the

¹⁴ See: N. Bruno, *TWEET FIRST, VERIFY LATER? How real-time information is changing the coverage of worldwide crisis events*, “Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper”, University of Oxford, 2011.

mass audience live pictures of military operations in Iraq during the first Gulf War. Thanks to its microblog formula, Twitter became an invaluable channel for real-time content distribution. Messages limited to 140 characters won the hearts of press and media, but in the first place – individual Web users. This led to a significant breakthrough in journalism: following the changes it had to devote more attention to the process of creating content and its flow, introduce a more polyphonic, diverse narrative and allow new, previously disregarded sources.

As after every significant breakthrough, also in this case the new medium quickly spread from one field to others and reached popularity as a useful tool in social and political reality. In the era of traditional media political crises coverage was a difficult task. Unilaterally transmitted messages often reached the audience with delay. Due to much lower information and source accessibility, impartiality and transparency were challenged. Press releases were exposed to the pressure of political subjects, especially taking into account that their final receivers had no means to easily verify their credibility. It is plausible that due to this many potentially critical situations passed unnoticed or were nipped in the bud, while others artificially gained notoriety. Moreover, a centralized message did not, and could not cover a complete, diversified image of social moods and attitudes. Today, traditional media increasingly tend to make use of social media and rely on its content. Commenting on recent election protests in Iran, Golnaz Esfandiari recalls how *Western journalists who couldn't reach – or didn't bother reaching? – people on the ground in Iran simply scrolled through the English-language tweets posted with tag #iranelection*¹⁵. Esfandiari puts emphasis on the linguistic aspect. She refers to a Green Move-

¹⁵ G. Esfandiari, *Misreading Tehran: The Twitter Devolution*, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/07/the_twitter_revolution_that_wasnt, 20.02.2014.

ment Persian-speaking activist, who did not gain much popularity among Western journalists who did not speak Farsi, but became a valuable source of information on the social mood for those who did. This example exposes the dialectical nature of social media. Egalitarian on one hand, it gives everyone free access to generating content and does not interfere in it or manage it (or does it only to a very limited extent). On the other hand, it favours those who have competencies to access and make use of the content, as it does not help users to make use of the provided data – this is left to users on their own. Speaking of data, easily accessible does not necessarily mean useful. The lack of clearly defined borders and visible distinctions between content target groups exposes us to new obstacles. Personalized content works well for private needs, but leaves much to be desired in the search for information. Nevertheless, social media platforms serve their users as a field for incessant exploration, and journalists – as an excellent social litmus test. The trends, social changes and first signs of social discontent or potential critical threats are nowhere as visible as in social media.

Political social media

The great advantage of social media over traditional media is that they shorten the distance between the sender and the recipient of the message. This aspect is particularly important in the political context, this is when social media serve as a carrier of political communicates. This mechanism works both ways: politicians or state structures representatives can reach out directly to individual citizens and communities, at the same time becoming easily accessible to everyone. These mutual benefits made politicians love social media. The Cieślak's study from 2014 shows that in 2011 over 80% of American congressmen used Twitter and Facebook, and more than one third of Americans

took the opportunity to contact them via Internet¹⁶. Another example is the fact that the European Parliament published on its fanpage a list of websites and social media profiles belonging to individual MPs, of which, as it turns out, as much as 70% are active on Facebook¹⁷. Making direct contact between politicians and the society easy and commonly accessible has positive consequences for the democratic system and the State as such. Still, this is only one dimension of political social media. I would not like to underestimate or diminish it, as it plays a significant role in establishing relations between authorities and the society. It facilitates introducing desirable, democratic practices in public discourse and takes advantage of technological progress in order to satisfy the social need for more profound and direct insight into the politics. However, we observe a growing number of cases in which political engagement in social media has consequences reaching much further than just building the politicians' public image or carrying out citizen-friendly election campaigns. These far-reaching cases become more and more visible in the political landscape and in consequence cannot and by any means should not be omitted. A large percentage of the cases are the social movements I have already mentioned in context of the *securitization* theory. We can distinguish two basic types of social movements in social media. The first type is the already existing movements, which moved into cyberspace, created their virtual identity and continued their previous activity using Web 2.0. The second type is the new movements, self-organized via social platforms. In both cases, social media is an important starting point for mustering and maintaining the manifestations, but experience shows that sooner or later it has to move from the Web 2.0 comfort zone into the real public space. Castells describes this pattern,

¹⁶ M. Cieślak, Politycy w mediach społecznościowych – jak to się robi na świecie, <http://www.kompassocialmedia.pl/blog3M/info?itemId=95545>, 17.01.2014.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

claiming that: *While these movements usually start on the Internet social networks, they become a movement by occupying the urban space, be it the standing occupation of public squares or the persistence of street demonstrations. The space of the movement is always made of an interaction between the space of flows on the Internet and wireless communication networks, and the space of places of the occupied sites and of symbolic buildings targeted by protest actions*¹⁸.

Case study 1: the Arab Spring

Three years ago, during the Egyptian revolution, the April 6 Youth Movement, a pro-democratic and anti-governmental Egyptian youth group, organized the so-called ‘Day of Anger’ (also known as Day of Wrath, Day of Revolt), designed to topple the then-President Hosni Mubarak. The protests in Egypt were influenced by the Tunisian revolution and the hopes the latter has raised, as well as the government’s decision to raise the food prices. As the early strikes were brutally repressed by the authorities, social anger accumulated. More and more people started expressing discontent, which led to more demonstrations and subsequent bloody responses of the government. The protesters sought support and social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, came as a handy tool for promoting the cause, gathering people and organizing further protests. Numerous relations and amateur videos showing violent scenes of the riots were being recorded, uploaded and eventually flooded social media, which quickly turned the eyes of the political world to the situation in Egypt. As the later analysis show, social media and individual engagement had an unquestionable impact on the dynamics of the revolution. *An analysis of a large data set of public tweets in Tahrir Square during the period of Janu-*

¹⁸ M. Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope...*, p. 222.

ary 24-29 shows the intensity of Twitter traffic and provides evidence that individuals, including activists and journalists, were the most influential tweet originators, rather than the organizations present at the scene. In other words, Twitter provided the technological platform for multiple individuals to rise as trendsetters in the movement¹⁹. All of this was possible since social media was the only communication channel beyond governmental control at the time. What is more, it was the easiest way to reach the public and potential supporters.

*Internet networks, mobile networks, street demonstrations, occupations of public squares and Friday gatherings around the mosques all contributed to the spontaneous, largely leaderless, multimodal networks that enacted the Egyptian revolution*²⁰. As Castells shows, the scale of the revolution was the resultant of its diverse background combining virtual and physical actions. *Urban networks had taken over the role that Internet networks had played in the origins of the protest. People were in the streets, media were reporting, and the whole world had become aware of a revolution in the making*²¹.

As we can see, social discontent and mutiny found a vent and spread in cyberspace to quickly evolve into fully measurable, actual revolution. In the foregoing description we can find the key characteristics ascribed to social media by Jason Chan, including collectivity, connectivity and collaboration. The same features accompany most of the protest movements. Evgeny Morozov in “The dark side of Internet for Egyptian and Tunisian protesters” corroborates this thesis, and adds that *it is only natural that the new protest movements in the Middle East turn to Facebook and Twitter: These platforms are cheap and*

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

*provide almost instantaneous visibility to their causes*²². It is also worth mentioning that protesters in Egypt were mainly young people, under 30, often students. This explains how they made such a good use of social media – it was the natural environment for their generation. As eventually Mubarak was removed from his position, they did not rest on their laurels, but continued the undertaken actions and fought for the democratic future, using the already built social media potential to remain visible to the international environment.

The Egyptian case proves that social media cannot be overrated not only as an effective tool for bringing people together, but also as a medium enabling a coordination of large groups of strangers brought together by a common cause. Coordination and organizing the protests via social media can, as shown, prove very effective, albeit it is not always attainable for the protesters. A good example can be the situation that occurred at the same time in Tunisia, where the Internet was a subject to a strong state censorship since the very beginning of the social unrest. This prevented the citizens from planning and organizing protests using social media. However, the latter played an important role as a channel for conveying information outside the borders of the country. Numerous commentators named both of the given examples “the Facebook revolution”. People all over the world realized the immense power that social media gives its users – the power that allows people to induce political pressure or even intimidate governments.

The above analysis shows that in face of political crises social media can either serve a passively (reporting on the course of events) or actively (as a tool for organizing political actions). They allow a more profound insight into causes and courses of crises, bring many of them out into daylight and give

²² E. Morozov, *The dark side of Internet for Egyptian and Tunisian protesters*, “The Globe and Mail”, 28.01.2011.

many voices that traditional media would not recognize or downplay a chance to be heard and reach the public consciousness. Apparently, marginal protests are likely to rapidly spread on the Web, gain new supporters and escalate into large-scale phenomena. They can be a highly destabilizing factor for the society when uncontrolled messages spread fear, anger, panic, shock and awe. This makes them “existential threats” within the framework of *securitization* theory and it should result in putting them on the states’ security agenda. Thanks to social media those threats can be noticed at an early stage and averted. Since naming the threats is a big part of managing them, the open, dynamic communication platforms provided by Web 2.0 should both allow the society or smaller social groups to freely gather and express their interests, and the State to notice their needs and take extraordinary measures to resolve potential sources of conflict before it occurs. Gladwell notices how this has affected the traditional relationship between the society and the authorities: *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*²³.

Social media allows to gather and distribute information on a large scale, involving the public in anti-crisis measures (a perfect example can be the crowdsourcing actions, which is gathering opinions on the crises-related issues from individuals of different social backgrounds and statuses to gain the fullest possible picture of the situation and consequently be able to help managing the crisis) or even using the 2.0 platforms for emergency training, collective

²³ M. Gladwell, *Why the revolution...*

problem-solving and decision-making. An example of a tool used for such purposes are the gamification practices²⁴.

Case study 2: the ACTA protests

As I tried to show above, the Arab spring fits the type of a political revolution, which made use of social media to self-organize, catch attention and gain support. As a counterexample I would like to have a look into another crisis, which would not occur if not for the Web 2.0. The example I have in mind are the massive protests against ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement), which occurred in Poland in 2012. The social media origins of the protests were two-fold. Firstly, the protesters were convinced that the agreement would compromise their freedom on Web 2.0. They claimed it would endanger their free access to data gathered on the Net and strongly criticized the government for planning to sign the agreement. Secondly, the mechanism of how the protests rapidly grew to a considerable extent was deeply embedded in social media platforms – they were the main place for information transfer. Protesters spread the word via social media and gained numerous supporters. An interesting thing is that, at some point, the crisis kept growing due to the stampede effect. Social media is easily affected by temporary vogues. At that time, being anti-ACTA became in good taste. Thus it gained many supporters who were not really into the substance of the protests nor were they aware of the effects the agreement would bring. Provided with several keywords and slogans repeated by the initiators of the protests, they just followed the tide. In face of more and more visible protests and accusations aimed at the Polish government, the latter could not remain passive. The sting

²⁴ Gamification is the use of game mechanics, such as scoring points, applying certain rules or competing with others, in the fields unrelated to games, in order to promote desirable behaviors.

of criticism first hit the government's virtual identity: thought to be transparent and freely accessible, the fanpage of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister did not perform its function anymore as its admins started deleting posts and comments added by the protesters. Although such actions were explained as reactions to vulgar and aggressive hate speech, the forthcoming analysis have shown that it was less than 3 per cent of the deleted contents could be defined as offensive and unacceptable according to the law of Facebook Policies²⁵. Such reaction of the government has shown its deep lack of understanding of the rules governing social media. This, in turn led to a series of hacker attacks aimed at the websites of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, the President, Parliament and Ministry of Culture. Although the criticism was initiated and expressed mainly on Web 2.0, the protests eventually moved to the streets, and so the ACTA issue became a subject of public, and political interest. What I would like to point out in this case is what Edwin Bendyk puts in the following words: *Castells in his book >>Communication Power<< argues that the essence of power is today the ability of agenda-setting, this is picking the topics media and public opinion would cover. (...) In case of the ACTA protests, although it seemed impossible due to its complexity and non-mediality, the agenda was set by the opponents of the agreement*²⁶. There is a significant twist in the practice of agenda-setting in comparison to the ways described above. We can examine it through the lens of the Framework Buzan provided us within the securitization theory. The speech act accompanying the defining of existential threats to the state's security used to be in state's competence. Now its weight is moved to the society's side. In this way a social-media-originated crisis not only affected the politics, but also had impact on redefin-

²⁵ See: <http://blog.sotrender.com/pl/2012/01/jak-nie-powinno-sie-reagowac-na-kryzys-pr-na-facebooku--czyli-kasowanie-wpisow-na-fanpageu-kancelarii-premiera/>, 08.03.14.

²⁶ E. Bendyk, *ACTA, dzień po*, translated by author, <http://bendyk.blog.polityka.pl/2012/01/22/acta-dzien-po/>, 08.03.2014.

ing the ways of doing security. Bendyk adds: *The pros and cons of the spontaneously-organized anti-ACTA movement, which erupted with great force, but at the same time quickly and quietly fade out. The protests can be thus handled as an episode, albeit underestimating them would be rather a bad idea – young people, who went out to the streets claiming that ACTA compromised their freedom, are an example of social power not only worth analyzing, but also constituting an early-warning, since it was the society that disciplined the authority this time*²⁷. Indeed, the ACTA case is precedential and the state should learn the lesson. Otherwise, even being able to monitor social media, authorities would not be able to prevent prevent or successfully manage the subsequent similar situations.

The realm of Web 2.0 is a subject of numerous studies, ranging from theoretical academic papers to popular newspaper articles. The same applies to the political aspects of Internet. It is inarguable that the link between Web 2.0, politics and democracy (especially taking into account its egalitarian and deliberative features) constitutes new perspectives for the concept of public sphere and civic actions. Andrew Chadwick examines the phenomenon of Internet-enabled e-democracy as a tool of participatory democracy and deliberative democracy in the widely discussed article “Web 2.0: New Challenges for the Study of E-Democracy in an Era of International Exuberance”²⁸. The author outlines the 1990s e-democracy paradigm and its development into the contemporary form of Web 2.0 involvement and the implications it has for e-democracy. Another insight to the topic is provided by Zizi Papacharissi, in

²⁷ E. Bendyk, *Bunt sieci – premiera*, <http://bendyk.blog.polityka.pl/2012/04/04/bunt-sieci-premiera/>, translated by author, 08.03.2014.

²⁸ A. Chadwick, *Web 2.0: New Challenges for the Study of E-Democracy in an Era of International Exuberance*, “I/S: A Journal of Law and Policy for the Information Society” Vol. 5:1, 2009.

“The Virtual Sphere 2.0: The Internet, the Public Sphere and Beyond”²⁹, where she traces the main narratives regarding internet as the public sphere and place for civic engagement, as well as the ways subversive movements emerge in the latter. Nevertheless, most approaches to the topic cover it quite comprehensively, putting emphasis on general mechanisms governing the virtualized society³⁰ rather than the question of specific dynamics of political crises 2.0. Those, except for few exceptions (such as the analysis of Castells or Bendyk) mainly appear in media themselves, as comments to the ongoing events. As the topic is dynamic and evolves quickly, it constitutes a field for debate to be opened and run permanently along with the course of political events. Although it can be argued that the vogue for herein analyzed Facebook and Twitter *will fade as online audiences migrate to new services*³¹, which is plausible taking into account the pace of technological change, those new services will evolve from the same core characteristics which make cyber reality so influential within the political discourse. Even the most recent occurrences, such as the opposition rallies in Ukraine, show the same patterns concerning the use of cyber networks as in the former cases. As we once entered the Era of Web 2.0, there is no way back, it might only evolve into more advanced and thereby more efficient forms.

²⁹ Z. Papacharissi, *The Virtual Sphere 2.0: The Internet, the Public Sphere and Beyond*. [in:] A. Chadwick, P. Howard (ed.), *The Handbook of Internet Politics*, New York 2008.

³⁰ See also: C. Hood, H. Margetts, *The Tools of Government in the Digital Age*, New York 2007; R. Inglehart, C. Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy*, London 2005; T. Miller, *Cultural Citizenship*, <http://www.revistas.usp.br/matrizas/article/viewFile/38292/41116>, 19.03.2014; M. Seong-Jae, *From the Digital Divide to the Democratic Divide: Internet Skills, Political Interest, and the Second-Level Digital Divide in Political Internet Use*, “Journal of Information Technology & Politics”, Volume 7, Issue 1 January 2010; P. Norris, *Digital divide: Civic engagement, information poverty, and the Internet worldwide*, <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Books/Digital%20Divide.htm>, 19.03.2014.

³¹ E. Morozov, *Facebook and Twitter are just places revolutionaries go*, „The Guardian”, 7.3.2011.

One more thing worth mentioning is the social media “content recycling”. It is much easier and therefore much more frequent than in the case of traditional media. Decentralized nature of the communities, countless groups and networks formed around certain events or topics, constant content flow within those groups – these are all factors that influence the data life cycle. They maintain commitment of their members and facilitate returning to particular topics, which in other circumstances would be probably forgotten. Hence the social media content is easily renewable and more likely to be brought back to life than the traditional media content. “Social” messages live longer, or if we refer to the idea of Big Data – have no “expiry date”. Here lies the greatest strength and the greatest danger Web 2.0 brings. Political leaders change, so do social moods, the press follows current events. But as yesterday's newspapers go to waste, yesterday's entries in social media, stored on the servers, stay frozen, able to be restored in the least expected moment. This, in turn, makes outbreaks of further crises more likely. Our historical and political memory wears off as time goes by. Memory stored on the networked servers is a total recall.

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Abstract

The article describes the significant impact social media has on politics and handling political emergencies. After analysing key characteristics of social media, the author takes a closer look at the notion of crisis as a social phenomenon and explores what use can be made of social media in the face of critical situations. Using the theoretical framework provided by Barry Buzan in his securitization theory, she looks back at the recent examples of political

crises in which social media played an important role, to eventually pose a question of the perspectives given by social media to the future political discourse.

PAMIĘĆ ABSOLUTNA: KRYZYSY POLITYCZNE A MEDIA SPOŁECZNOŚCIOWE

Abstrakt

W artykule opisano znaczący wpływ mediów społecznościowych na politykę i możliwości zarządzania politycznymi sytuacjami kryzysowymi. Po przeprowadzeniu analizy najważniejszych cech charakteryzujących media społecznościowe, autorka koncentruje się na pojęciu kryzysu jako zjawiska społecznego i potencjalnych zastosowaniach mediów społecznościowych w obliczu sytuacji kryzysowych. Korzystając z aparatury pojęciowej zawartej w teorii sekurytyzacji Barry'ego Buzana, przygląda się niedawnym przykładom kryzysów politycznych, w których media społecznościowe odegrały istotną rolę, by w końcu zadać pytanie o perspektywy oferowane przez media społecznościowe przyszłemu dyskursowi politycznemu.