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Mass collaboration as a factor of the Ukrainian revolution 2013-2014

Abstract

The research is focused on the influence of modern open collaboration in the field of communication for development of the revolutionary events in Ukraine in 2013-2014. The research shows the role of the information society dynamics coupled with the deteriorating situation of civil and political liberties in creating conditions for social upheavals. The paper analyzes the development of open collaboration tools such as virtual social networks and video streaming services and their role in information support of the revolutionary processes. This study was motivated by the results of one of the previous studies on conditions and factors of revolutionary events in the region of the Middle East and North Africa, which took place in 2010-2011. The research also shows that the deployment of the information revolution on the background of restricting civil and political freedoms plays a crucial role in the initiation of social upheaval unlike previously assumed a negative economic situation as the main reason.

Keywords: *revolution, social media, open (mass) collaboration, Ukraine*

Abstrakt

Badanie skoncentrowane są na wpływie nowoczesnej, otwartej współpracy w zakresie komunikacji na rzecz rozwoju wydarzeń rewolucyjnych na Ukrainie w latach 2013-2014. Wskazana rola dynamiki społeczeństwa informacyjnego w połączeniu z pogarszającą się sytuacją wolności obywatelskich i politycznych w tworzeniu warunków dla wstrząsów społecznych. Analizuje się rozwój otwartych narzędzi współpracy, takich jak wirtualne sieci społecznościowe i usługi strumieniowego wideo oraz ich rola w informowaniu o procesach rewolucyjnych. Badanie było motywowane wynikami jednego z poprzednich badań nad warunkami i czynnikami zda-

rzeń rewolucyjnych w regionie Bliskiego Wschodu i Afryki Północnej, które zaszły w latach 2010-2011. Badania pokazują także, że rozwój rewolucji informacyjnej na tle ograniczenia swobód obywatelskich i politycznych odgrywa kluczową rolę w inicjowaniu społecznego wstrząsu, w przeciwieństwie do poprzednio zakładanej negatywnej sytuacji gospodarczej jako głównego powodu powstań.

Słowa kluczowe: *rewolucja, media społecznościowe, współpraca otwarta, Ukraina*

Formulation of the research problem and hypothesis

The development of revolutionary events in Ukraine in 2013-14 took place under the conditions of efficient newest facilities used by media for publicity and communication. The open collaboration technologies, incarnated in social communication systems in virtual networks or video streaming translations systems, played a considerable role. In this aspect, it could be compared to the terms and factors that stimulated the development of the so-called "Arab spring" in 2010-2011. The communication of protesters in social networks was important for consolidation in the region. However, such phenomena were peculiar to some countries and world regions but they did not engender social perturbations there. It is supposed, that mass collaboration became the main factor of revolutionary events being enhanced by such additional factors as the speed-up of society informatization with a simultaneous worsening of the situation in the democratization sphere. In such a case, it would be possible to forecast the development of revolutionary events in societies, which were undergoing technological transformations.

The purpose of this research is to confirm the thesis of an essential role of the phenomenon of mass collaboration in the initiation of revolutionary events in Ukraine in 2013-2014. The mass collaboration was associated with the introduction of modern means of communication in the sphere of information relations. Additionally, there is a contradiction between rapid computerization and the level of respect for civil liberties, which does not meet the requirements of the information society.

It is possible to assert that rapid informatization, the increase in the number of telephones in population and the facilitation of an access (mainly mobile access) to the Internet network in the context of free exchange of information on the background of considerable civil and political freedom limitation (such conclusions were made in well-cited researches Wolfsfeld, Segev & Sheafer, 2013, pp. 115-137), became the basis of revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa. Certainly, there are other opinions con-

cerning the causes of revolutions in the countries in that region. Thus, Howard and Parks (2012, pp. 359-362), Anderson (2011, pp. 2-7), Hussain and Howard (2012) came to the conclusion that protests had developed as a result of resonance caused by modern communication technologies in different local context. Bellin (2012, pp. 127-149) indicates the peculiarities of Egypt and Tunisia where the ability to freely share information on social networks overlapped with the heightened emotion and sense of impunity. However, the majority of authors state that open communication of the citizens incorporated in social networks became a main trigger of public movements, for example, within the framework of The April 6th Youth Movement *(April ..., n.d.)*. Social media provided the platform for rapid association of "interessants" around the common aim, for specification of their objectives and coordination of actions so that they became the instrument of revolution.

The objective of this research is to obtain confirmation of the thesis concerning the substantial role in the initiation of revolutionary events in Ukraine in 2013-2014, and the mass collaboration phenomenon, related to the position of the informative relations in the world of modern communication facilities. The goal is also to elucidate the contradictions between rapid informatization and the level of civil laws and freedoms observance that did not meet the requirements of the informative society.

Background of the rebellion

Comparing to the situation in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine has several fundamentally similar features. While examining the state of affairs in Ukraine, there are two main processes that were parallelly developed during the period preceding the revolution of 2013-2014. On the one hand, the rapid spread means independent interpersonal communication (mass collaboration) and the growth of independent media channels that became possible by the expansion of the Internet access (including wireless Internet), with a simultaneous increase of the part of population involved in social networks. And on the other hand, there was a steady deterioration in civil and political freedoms. At the same time, Ukraine occupied a moderate position in the world rankings by revenue *(Україна ..., n.d.)*, corruption *(Corruption ..., 2013)* and other indicators of the quality of life *(World ..., 2013)*.

A general Internet audience in Ukraine constitutes one half of the population, demonstrating progressive dynamics. According to the data statistic by Vishlinskyi (Вышлинский, 2013), in 2013, the share of citizens that have

computers (including tablets) amounted to 54% (in 2008, there was 26%), from which 79% had the Internet connection (in 2008 the percentage was only 40%). At the end of 2013, over 50% of Ukrainians who were 16 years old and older used the Internet at least once a month that is 6% more in comparison to the index of 2012. At the end of 2013, the most popular reason of the Internet use were social networks (65% internet users in comparison to 63% for the same period of 2012).

The rapid increase in the population share,which indicates the use of social networks, became characteristic of the last years: in 2010, there were 35% of the population as active Internet users, and in the first part of 2013, it became 63%. In the middle of 2014, about 42 million of Ukrainian accounts in social networks were registered in Ukraine, and that was the number almost equal to the overall number of the population of the state (around 45 million). Leaders in the number of Ukrainian participants are networks ВКонтакті (VKontakte) (over 27 million) and Одноклассники (Odnoklassniki) (about 11 million). Facebook occupied the third place in popularity with more than 3.2 million Ukrainian users. During one year, the audience of the Ukrainian sector of Twitter grew substantially (in one and a half times) to over 430 thousand of participants and a major splash of growth was in the period of Euromaidan *(Огляд ..., n.d.)*. The same source reports that among users of the most popular network, around two third are people who are 16-35 years old, and among users of the second popular network, about 55% of them are in a 26-45 age category.

According to the ITU Measuring of the Information Society Report *(Measuring ..., 2014)*, in 2013, Ukraine occupied only the 73rd place in the world rating of IDI (IT development index). However, Ukraine got the 13th position at the same time (according to the IDI abilities sub-index). The results testify to a high level of population education as the base for rapid mastering of new information and communication technologies. Interestingly, the countries of the Middle East and North Africa region, in particular Egypt and Tunis, occupy lower positions in rating according to the IDI abilities sub-index, as well as according to its other tools used in this kind of comparative studies.

At the same time, starting from 2010, coinciding with the date of V. Yanukovych coming to power, civil freedom was substantially limited in Ukraine, and that was particularly noticeable on the background of positive dynamics that took place after "Orange Revolution" in 2004-2006. According to the "Freedom House" classification, Ukraine moved from "not free" to "partially free" and to "not free" again during less than ten years. The worsening of the situation concerning civil liberties was not perceived

as critical, as the President declared a political course for association with the European Union that was mainly interpreted as a prospect of democratization and the increase in the standard of living and civil freedom.

The major critical point and the factual information cause of revolution became the statement aimed to stop the association process, made by the Prime Minister of Ukraine – M. Azarov – on November 21, 2013.

Collaborative drives of revolution

For Ukraine, as for the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, not the number of Internet users and social networks was crucial, but, above all, the dynamics of growth. Despite the rapid increase of social networks users, the level of their penetration at the beginning of 2014 remained one of the lowest in Europe – 27% (the average was 40%) *(Active …, n.d.)* i.e. the potential of increasing was present and during this period there was a rapid growth of this indicator.

Along with the increasing number of social networks users, their activity grew substantially, in particular, during the opposition intensifications on Maidan Nezalezhnosti in Kiev. Thus, the average duration of individual daily traffic of Twitter participants in November – December of 2013 grew from 39 min. to 1 hour and 26 min. *(Как события …, n.d.)*.

Due to a sufficient coverage of the audience by social media, there was a sudden and rapid increase in the number of informative inquiries made via Internet directions to the news websites, many of which were not controlled by the authorities. Consequently, the number of transitions from social networks to the well-known news website "Ukrainska Pravda" grew during twenty-four hours in more than 8 times (Дмитренко, 2014). The general number of visits to this news resource grew almost twice, reaching 550 thousand during twenty-four hours and then remained at a high level, attaining a record value of 1,6 million entries on January 24, 2014 (Сваневський, 2013). Under conditions of the increasing activity in social networks, the value of news services increased greatly. According to report by Gemius.ua *(Как события …, n.d.)*, in January 2014, 51% of Internet users visited these resources and spent 3 hours and 3 minutes on average, that is substantially much more than at the beginning of the protests (46% and 1 hour 31 min accordingly).

On-line-television became another factor that promoted the distribution of information during the revolution. Thus, the newly created national channels, as well as independent stream channels of the stream broadcasting

played a leading role. Also, they are the specific examples of open collaboration. At the same time, leading television channels did not play the key role, though their audience had increased on the Internet. In January 2014, their websites were visited by about 12% of Internet audience, while in October – by 14%, but in the case of some websites their audience increased by not less than 50% *(Огляд …, n.d.)*. Undoubtedly, the record popularity was gained by the stream broadcasting organized from the place of events by individual streamers who mainly used telephones or tablets that made it possible to be mobile and to avoid excessive attention to them. Stream translations were conducted by Internet channels and Espresso TV, Public TV constantly, Spilno. TV, Spilnobachennia, Ukrstream TV, Radio Svoboda, Aronets Live. Streamers used the services of the Streaming Video American Company Ustream, so were able to quickly organize and provide access to the broadcast channel for a large audience. Ukrainian Internet projects (Hromadske.tv, Grom TV, Spilno.tv and UkrStream.tv. Thus, Spilno.tv and UkrStream.tv) which were actively broadcasting protests, were using the above-mentioned service as a stream video platform. The Upstream Service conducted twenty-four-hour direct translations from all regions under critical situations. The feature of technology is the immediate availability for an ordinary witness of events. After registration as a user, at the presence of Wi-Fi or 3G, a person can broadcast live ether video from an external webcam or smartphone camera, tablet or laptop. Stream material is saved as a video that can be watched later.

Taking into account a high traffic from Ukraine in the period of revolution, the operators of the stream video website started a program called Ustream for Change in February 2014. Thanks to the program, public journalists got opportunity to distribute real-time videos without any limitations as to the number of revisions, advertisements, and with the possibility of a free advancement and technical support.

The availability of such a platform ensured success of some media projects, such as noncommercial UkrStream.tv, which had over 40 million views. The channel covered only expenses for the lease of cameras and places for filming, mainly due to the voluntary contributions from open accounts (Мандрык, 2014).

Video hosting service YouTube remained as a popular instrument in the distribution of video content of "public" origin, which was the major video distribution channel during the "Arab spring". The service YouTube Live provided an opportunity to organize an "on air" service. Moreover, starting with December 2013 – just with the development of an active opposition in Kiev, the restrictions about the minimum number of subscribers were re-

moved. YouTube video hostings, as well as Hangouts On Air that belongs to the social network Google+, used the aforementioned TV channels, in particular UkrStream.tv, Espreso.tv, and others. "Hromadske.tv" even became the biggest channel in the history of YouTube, according to the number of hours on air. Before the end of November 2013, the videos of the TV channel got 126 million views, and its audience on YouTube amounted to 307 thousand subscribers. Ukrainian users watched over 4.4 million hours of video on the YouTube channel, and the number of hours of the Ukrainian content from October 2013 has increased by 37% (Ворона, 2014). It was important for the rapid distribution of information via video channels whose over 25% of views were from mobile devices.

The feature of new television projects became completely new to the Ukrainian media. According to the principle "here and now", this format helps to show adequately and operatively. Television projects put an accent on their "public" character, bringing in a wide circle of authors, the use of numerous stream reportages, ignoring the quality of an image in favor of topicality, using a transmission from any available device to the ordinary citizen mobile devices cameras, as well as using public support. Therefore, over 2 million hryvnias were donated to"Hromadske TV" from the citizens of Ukraine before the end of events on Maidan.

It is necessary to admit, that success and format of "alternative" TV projects, such as "Public TV" or "Espresso TV" (for example, the audience of "Public TV", which started broadcasting on November 22, 2013, exceeded by 500 thousand in a week), was a good example for "traditional" TV channels. Those, who adopted the direct translation from the hot spots of Maidan and regions, found supporters both among the traditional TV audience and in the network. The high-rated TSN and "5 kanal" had the second and third positions accordingly, in the Ukrainian segment of YouTube among the news resources *(Hromadske.tv ..., n.d.)*.

The public character of the revolution was fully met by the format and organization of news channels, which often worked according to volunteer principles. "Public TV," "Aronets Live," actively attracted independent streamers and were very close to the environment of protesters, showing a direct open collaboration, and meeting with information queries of citizens. The central channels were clearly radicalized instead, especially those which demonstrated the civil position of journalists, who actively used on air materials of independent authors from Kiev and regions. The pro-power channels remained the supporters of the traditional state of affairs, often manipulating with the use of information they provided.

As a result of the research, there are grounds to assert the appearance of the modern systems of mass collaboration, formed on the basis of the newest informative-communication technologies that provided consolidation of protest groups at the background of the worsening of civil and political freedom. These, in general, were considered as crucial factors which contributed to the development of revolutionary events in Ukraine in 2013-2014. There is a substantial similarity with the situation in the Middle East and North Africa region in 2010-2011, resulting in "Arab Spring". Moreover, considering the results of some previous researches (Федонюк, 2011; Федонюк, Стрілка, 2014), there are grounds to assert that situations of such character are possible to forecast, taking into account the dynamics of informatization processes of the society and the development of democratic processes.

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