

Mass Protests Online Mobilization in Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia (2013-2015): Results of Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the results of the comparison of the protest cases in Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia 2013-2015. The event analysis, cybermetrics and discourse analysis the message of the protest nature of social networks are mixed in the research design. The common and specific features in the representation of the mobilizing messages on social media in Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia are identified in the paper. The prospects for studies of protest activity in social networks, allowing to identify online a sharp increase in protest activity that can cause the offline conventional political processes are shown in the article conclusions.

Keywords

Internet-communication, mobilization of protest activity, political behavior online, cybermetrics, event analysis, discourse analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of studying the online strategies of mobilization of mass protests in the Post Soviet space is highly relevant for the scientists. The social stability maintaining requires the development of Internet-means to identify potentially dangerous effects on the situation in society, able to grow in the promotion of non-conventional political activity. The paper aim is to identify the specificity of the social networks protest discourses formation in Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia in the period of 2013 – 2015.

The research questions are as follows:

- What are the digital indicators of forming protest behavior in social media?
- What rational and irrational ways were applied to shape protest discourses in social media?
- What technologies of public opinion formation concerning to the crisis situation in the selected cases were used in social media in Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia?

The theoretical framework of this study can be divided into four groups of theories.

The first group includes the theory that considers social protest as a phenomenon and offers an explanation of the reasons for protest activity. This theory of infection by G. Lebon [10], the convergence of G. Allport [3], the mass behavior of H. Ortega y Gasset [15], studies of intra-elite schisms of R. Mills [14], the study of violent political and symbolic power of John B. Thompson [18] belong to the first group.

The second group includes the theory, considering protest as a process and distinguishes the different stages of the protest cycle. This group of theories is the basis of searching for the answer to the question about the mechanism of the transition radicalistic stage mass protest to its end. The theory of

collective behavior of N. Smelser [16], the organizational theory of resource mobilization of J. McCarthy [15] and M. Zalda [13] also belong to the group.

The third group of theories describes and explains the nature of the effects of the Internet communication and communication within social networks on the formation of consciousness and behavior of people, including protest attitudes. This group should include the works of M. Castells [5], analyzing the process of transition of society in the Digital Age as a result of active development of information and communication technologies. From the perspective analyzed in this work intensively circulating in social media communications (repost) important to us is the empirical study of detention of Russian social networking S. Green, who by the case of the presidential campaign of 2012 in Russia was recorded by the "echo effect", consisting in the broadcasting of specific messages (memes) [14].

The fourth group of writings that make up the theoretical basis of the study represents some pool of works concerning cross-national studies, based on the comparison of protest movements in different regions of the world and the Post Soviet countries, in particular (A. Manoylo [11-12], A. Dneprov [6]).

The analysis of protest events in Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia also based on the research of "Color revolutions" in the works of G.G. Khachatryan [8], E. Zelenev [19] etc.

2. PREPARATION OF THE PAPER

The design of the study includes:

- event analysis allowing to interpret the artifact component of the analyzed messages from social networks;
- typology of relevant documents based on the selection of the types of messages (online service of social media monitoring IQBuzz was applied);
- discourse analysis of the most frequently repeated messages and the analysis of the metaphors used in the expression of protest activity.

The specified empirical model is implemented in parallel in the process of studying four alleged cases: the protest events in Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia.

This research design is completely implemented for the cases of Euromaidan (Ukraine) and Moldova. Consider the basic results of studying the formation of protest in social networks in Ukraine in 2013 – 2014.

3. DETAILS

Fig. 1 presents the dynamics of the proportion of messages of conventional and unconventional nature in the Ukrainian networks in the initial ((November 18-30, 2013), the culmination (December 1, 2013 –January 16, 2014) and the

final (January 17 –February 22, 2014) periods of protest events.

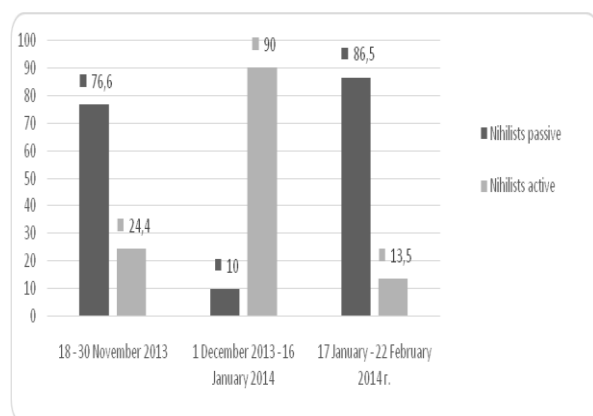


Figure 1. Distribution of messages with active and passive vocabulary nihilism in the Ukrainian social media (from 2013 to 2014).

Class of documents containing the vocabulary of the nihilistic nature (calls for active and radical protest actions of the unconventional opposition), is approximately the third of the entire discharge (see Fig. 1). Comparative analysis of quantitative expression of protest attitudes in texts, social media posts leads to the following conclusions: compared with the second selected stage of the protest (December 1, 2013 – January 16, 2014) at the first and third stages there are quite a low percentage of the active-nihilistic messages. This trend can be explained by the fact that the first stage of the conventional opposition did not have such a resource of formation of public protest as "violent precedent", which appeared in the night from November 30 to December 1, 2013 and at the third stage the active phase of the mobilization of protest actions had a downward trend due to the fact that the main aim of the protesters was reached at the second stage. Therefore, the main purpose of unconventional opposition at the last stage was not so much mobilization, but informing about what is happening and maintaining a high level of protest. According to the results of event analysis, the third stage continued violent confrontation between supporters of Euromaidan and policy; however, the confrontation has acquired the routine and mundane nature. It can be argued that the beginning of the third phase the balance of power in Kiev finally settled, reaching the limit of involvement of inhabitants of Kiev.

Can also be attributed to the decline in the number of active-nihilistic messages in the third stage and return to the level of the first phase of the protest (which prevailed in the passive complaints in opposition to radical statements) of general fatigue from the prolonged conflict, not revealing the winner, not leading to the resolution of problems. Confrontation is too serious and too fundamental to stop being an attractor of public attention, however, it is still too soon to exit from dualistic more predictable struggle between the two sides, therefore, social initiative bogged down in the expanded confrontation, not being able in such a short time to organize a significant alternative to antagonizes actors.

Together with the stabilization of the situation in Kiev, the rise of protest activity in other cities of Ukraine (Lviv, Chernihiv, Poltava, Dnipropetrovsk, Sumy, Chernivtsi, etc.), which, however, has no significant effect on the dominant discourse, as events in each of the cities are not decisive for the outcome of the current confrontation, influencing the outcome only locally.

Characteristic of the whole period of the protest on the Euromaidan metaphors were about the exclusiveness of the Ukrainian people and the identification of Ukrainians with the victims of the "power of lawlessness" together in one the metaphor of the "hell experiences of the Ukrainian people". The most characteristic of the association, clarifying the content of this metaphor are as follows: "...our bonfire Ashton, Nuland and other "experts" extinguish gasoline". In addition to broadcasting the fear of what is happening, this idea can be traced to exploitation of Ukrainians politicians of other countries. Comparing all the posts of a nihilistic nature in respect of the various actors, the picture that emerges is clearly feeling the Ukrainians themselves as targets of Russian Federation, American, European political actors on the background tests of social injustice on the part of Ukrainian authorities. At the core of this idea there is a new discourse linking the events in Ukraine with the shaping of a "fascist regime". One of the messages relayed in the Ukrainian social media, the analyzed period shows: "...under the Cabinet of Ministers played the German offensive marches and developing flags with swastikas and runes of the third Reich..." or "...all that is happening now in Ukraine – fascism".

These reports formed a climate of fear, moral panic and despair.

Another idea is actively formed in the Ukrainian social media, is concerned on the justification of force against dissidents ("loyalist"): "the bloody regime killed.....You can, and should!".

The antimaidanian pro-Russian statements also took place on the social media of that period:

"...must be a complete imbecile to understand that the ultimate goal of the EU and the United States is grappling seizure of Russia with its untold natural resources. Unfairly as it turns out what territories and wealth it owns! Golden billion will last a long time..." or "...I don't think most people in the Russian-speaking East of the country to support the transformation of Ukraine into a police state".

Among the most important results of the analysis of the case related to the Moldovan protest events, the definition of the features of this case in comparison with other Post Soviet states and the data typology is unloaded from a global network of communications about these events in Moldova message (unloaded 100 000 messages, for the period from 05. 21.2015 to 02. 12.2016 years, when sampling mistake of 4% - 515 selected message, a step selection = 194), and discourse content analysis of selected documents.

Selected through a systematic selection of the communication was the subject to quantitative and qualitative analyses. During the quantitative treatment strategies the classification of messages was carried out in accordance with the criteria used in the process of the automated typology of the protest of the Ukrainian case. The results of the typology are represented in Fig. 2.

Unloaded with the online service for monitoring social networks 100 000 messages Moldavian networks for the period from the 21-st of May, 2015 to the 12-th of February, 2016 were divided into groups that relate to 3 stages: the formation of protest moods (21.05 – 11.07.2015); conflict (the height of the escalation of the protest) (12.07 – 24.09.2015) and post-conflict (the decline of the protest wave) (25.09.2015 – 12.02.2016) – see Fig. 2.

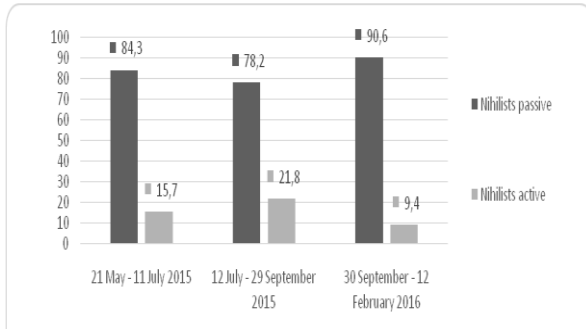


Figure 2. Distribution of messages with active and passive vocabulary nihilism in the Moldavian social media (from 21 May, 2015 to 12 February, 2016).

In accordance with the results of the event analysis, the period up to May 21, 2015 can be considered a phase of protest. Note the fact that the first demonstrations against government corruption, mass meetings of producers of agricultural products, the overlap runs across the country, protests against the fiscal policy, the requirement to pay compensation, the decision of a question with the price of fuel have already occurred in late February and continued throughout the spring of 2015. However, in the social networks of Moldova, a message of the protest period has not been recorded. A surge of protest rhetoric and its further growth took place on the 21-st of May, 2015. In accordance with the data event analysis, the growth of protest activity in social networks could be explained by the reaction to the March of unionists in the center from demanding the immediate accession of Romania to implement "the project of European integration". During this period, the proportion of the active-nihilistic rhetoric has reached 15,7% of all messages identified as protest messages. In the same initial period of protest activity in Ukraine, the figure was 24.4% (see Fig. 1).

Noteworthy is the fact that even in the midst of the protest events, the proportion of radicalists messages in the Moldavian social networks accounted for slightly more than a fifth (21,8 %) of the total number of documents with protest rhetoric. Note that in the Ukrainian networks, the same indicator was as high as 90% - see Fig. 1. Thus, the Moldavian users have shown a much more high level of conventionality in expressing their disagreement with the course of government, rather than Ukrainians involved in communication through the social networks.

The case "ElectricYerevan" (Armenia) is in active development and currently implemented event analysis of protest events, which revealed the opposition applied unconventional technologies of forming protest units through the representation of these events in social networks (see Table 1).

According to G.G. Khachatryan, A.V. Shestopalova [8] the groups with political demands are trying to influence the groups with social demands in a social network. Table 1 shows some kind of these protests forming technologies applying through the social networks.

The "official statements" – the declaration of the activists of the movement "No plunder!" on the beginning of a three-day sit-in protest at Liberty square from June 22, 2015. Application of methods of subgroup "communicating with a wider audience" illustrates the use of a variety of slogans ("We are the future", "The country is becoming a country") and caricatures and symbols (fist clutching a stylized image of the electrical discharge).

Table 1. Forming technologies non-conventional opposition protest attitudes in social networks (Case - ElectricErevan).

Type of technology	Method example	The number of made events
Nonviolent protest and persuasion	"Official statement", "Communication with a wide audience", "Group shares", "Symbolic public stock", "Pressure on individuals".	26
The rejection of political cooperation	"Refusal to support the authorities", "Refusal of citizens from cooperating with the government", "Alternatives to civil obedience".	10
Non-violent intervention	"Social intervention", "Political intervention", "Physical intervention".	14

From the actions, picketing of Baghramyan Avenue in Yerevan can be distinguished. Symbolic public action is reflected in the symbolism of the graphic images of the protesting people, distributed online and on the streets of the cities, which became centers of protest. Pressure on individuals is reflected in the sarcastic Internet meme about the officials, and the organization of watches of the demonstrators on Baghramyan Avenue.

Block "methods of rejection of social cooperation" was practically unused – the protesters have used only 1 method (6,25 % of the total number within the block) – public disobedience, manifested in the refusal of submission to the demands of the authorities to leave Baghramyan Avenue and other places of holding regular protests. Block "methods of refusal of economic cooperation: the strike" is not used: in the studied events. Possible implementations of methods of this unit prevented the same specifics of the local situation in the case of economic boycott [3].

The rejection of political cooperation found expression in the practice of the abandonment of loyalty to the authorities, the public support for the decisions of public authorities, assistance to the security forces to restore order through the appearance of messages in the network, literature and the oral message, calling for resistance, disobedience in the absence of direct supervision and reluctant and slow obedience in the case of open pressure. Also during the protests in Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor, cases of sit-ins, "people's disobedience", failure to comply with order to disperse the meeting or rally were repeatedly documented. As specific examples of the use of methods of nonviolent intervention can indicate the protesters use of tools such as the hunger strike (the most famous was the action with the participation of a member of the Coordination group "No robbery" D. Sanasaryan) and non-violent psychological exhaustion of the opponent (including the permanent display of women and children among the participants). Such techniques such as non-violent entry into the forbidden zone for protesters, blocking the actions of the security forces of his body, "peaceful occupation" of certain territories in the Armenian capital (France square, Liberty square, Mashtots Avenue and Yerevan's Baghramyan Avenue) and exposing provocateurs were also used.

In General, it should be noted that in the course of events in Armenia, the unconventional the opposition used the

immaterial part of the methods, the use of which is envisaged in the technology of "color revolutions". The most complete application found the block methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion, the methods and techniques of the blocks of the abandonment of political cooperation and nonviolent intervention were applied to a large extent. At the same time the methods of the rejection of social and economic cooperation were almost completely ignored. The latter allows to assume that in Armenia it was possible to use the docked option analysis technology, that is provoked by equitable public dissatisfaction with the use of political techniques.

Concluding the results of all three cases, note the following resources for forming protest mood in the network:

- Emphasis on the problems of oligarchic capitalism;
- Exploitation of the potential split of the political elites in the process of formation of instability in the society;
- Focusing on the context of corruption in the government;
- Involvement of youth in the process of forming protest units;
- Using the tactics of the struggle: camp, capture/cordon public buildings;
- Supporting and stimulating the involvement of external Western leaders;
- Initiate a protest wave ahead of the presidential elections.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Research was financed by the grant of the Russian Fundamental Studies Fund № 01201451097 "Predictor Mining Methodology in the online content analysis".

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