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Social media in relation to acts of government and (un)shaping of citizenship

Introduction

Communication between people not only constitutes the basis for all social activities, but also integrates activities manifested by a civil society. Every project that becomes an embodiment of this ideology needs prior consultation within a given group or a society. According to Margaret S. Somers, who defines a communication plane that is vital from the perspective of collective activities, "public sphere is a space for contestation and participation, where legal entities, citizens, economic figures and members of families and local communities create public bodies and engage into negotiations and contestation over political and social life" (1993, pp. 589).

Apart from open space for communication, the key to understand civil society are the notions of activity and engagement. Hence, we may suppose that the moment of initiating social activities refers also to involvement in a discussion, deliberation and development of widely accepted social order through communication. Progressing media offer better and better tools, including network solutions, which used to be perceived as the Holy Grail of contemporary democracy. Although the press and commercial television hadn't initially had a chance to become the main place for public debates, they finally managed to create perfect conditions for open dialogue and discussion thanks to online utilities often addressed by Jürgen Habermas (Giddens, 2004, pp. 696). They were supposed to engage citizens in discussions over the future or popularize tools of direct democracy etc. to a greater extent. In other words, they were supposed to assist in development of the civil society. It is worth to summon factual examples and ask whether the idea has actually come true.

The article aims at verifying two hypotheses presented below:

HP1
Social media did not meet expectations of being a tool that provides access to the public sphere, improves social involvement and develops civic attitudes. Although the new media have increased involvement in quantitative terms, yet they still need to pursue qualitative perfection as understood according to the definition of "civil society".

HP2
Dispute over the Constitutional Tribunal in Poland, the media act and stricter abortion law (political conflicts typical of Poland and the whole Central Europe, e.g.

Hungary) have started a wide and emotional debate in the media. However, quality of the debate did not bring an added value in development of the civil society or the public sphere.

In order to confirm the hypotheses it was decided to conduct an analysis of Polish-language contents from the online communities. The analysis will allow to achieve the research objectives as well as provide a broader background for discussions about usefulness of the networks at civil society projects.

Civil society and deliberative democracy in relation to development of new media –the bilateral relationship

As far as the context of this article is concerned, it is vital to define the notion of "civil society" and illustrate its relationship with deliberative democracy. According to Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, deliberative democracy considers discussion and dialogue as a basis for development of public opinion and political choice[1] (Żardecka-Nowak, 2008). Most of definitions suggest that civil society is a part of the social space which remains independent of the state and abounds with voluntary cooperation between the associated individuals. Its core relies in voluntary participation of individuals and their association within the public debate as well as the ability to make unforced decisions that exert pressure on the state authorities. Civil society is a place for developing a consensus which may become the basis for further action. Hence, civil society assumes that there is a connection between the associated individuals and allows taking specific actions.

As communication is the basic requirement for establishing a relation between individuals, it seems that interactive media are the perfect space for civil society to develop. That was the initial assumption. Claus Leggewie (1998) is one of the researchers who describe favourable influence of the internet on civil societies. He draws attention e.g. to involvement of this medium in the process of creating decentralized social movements. At the same time, the researcher emphasizes that the network has significant limitations within the scope of political communication as well as the reach among people who actually decide to act through it. On the other hand, Benjamin Barber expected that use of the internet in political participation will result in its massive popularization which would allow to achieve the perfect model of participatory democracy that he advocated (1984; 1998–1999). Theoreticians who work in the field of democracy include many sceptics, with Robert D. Putnam being one of the most prominent of them. He believes that media have unfavourable influence on activities of citizens because they separate individuals and give just an impression of being active and a part of a group. The social capital begins to fade and the citizens eventually become "the lonely bowlers" (Putnam, 2008). Assuming that the internet is actually more popular among the favoured groups, it was also considered whether the internet can make more active those groups, which had previously been

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[1] The two notions were compared e.g. in: Buksiński, 2002.

inactive. If that was true, would the activation translate into increased efficiency of similar activities?[2] Taking into account the results of numerous researches, the both uncertainties can be resolved with a negative answer. It turns out that the internet does not lead to a greater diversification among participants of political activities. Everything suggests that most active are the individuals who display higher level of political activity in the real world. What is more, the efficiency of activities conducted through the internet is also negatively appraised (cf. the notion of *slacktivism* described below).

Kazimierz Dziubka (2008, pp. 306) identifies the role of political debate as a tool which precedes a democratic action. In reference to civil society, the most closely related notion is the public sphere because it denotes a space for discussion and development of public opinion (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2006). Discussion whether the internet is a favourable "place" for developing public sphere has been present since its very beginning. Scholars have different opinions in this field. Social media platforms give a chance to exchange views, yet on the other hand they allow to gather around socially important issues and seem to be conducive to development of civil society and public sphere. The recent years have provided numerous examples (also in Poland) of online discussion groups, mostly on Facebook, which were forming around political issues. The groups were then moving their activities onto the streets (e.g. demonstrations against ACTA, the activity of the Committee for the Defence of Democracy, #black-protest). There are also some groups like e.g. the young, who perceive the online reality as less deceitful and less "ingrained". This point of view may encourage to use the said reality for political purposes (Lakomy, 2013; Nowak, 2008; Castells, 2013). This group of people is often referred to as the "generation Web 2.0". Some researchers, e.g. Mirosław Lakomy, believe that we can define them as "network citizens" who disagree with the model of passive participation and remain in favour of the participatory model (cf. Lakomy, 2013, pp. 10–151). The conclusions presented by Jakub Nowak seem to conform with such an attitude. Nowak claims that "development and popularization of new media broaden the dimensions of democratic debate and participation, which favours creation of new public spaces for civic activities" (Nowak, 2008, pp. 75). It may entail both positive as well as negative effects on democracy and the civil society. However, it is not possible that the Internet is able to eliminate one of the primary problems of the contemporary democracy, namely the deep mistrust among the society towards politics and politicians. According to Manuel Castells, the Internet is not actually fixing, but rather deteriorating the legitimacy crisis within politics (Castells, 2003).

Political activity which originated in the Internet began to be referred to as the *slactivism* (supposed authors of this term are Fred Clark and Dwight Ozard who used it to describe bottom-up activities of the young that aimed at influencing the society in a more personal dimension). In fact, it is a kind of an epithet which serves for emphasizing little or even no influence of such activity on political and social reality (Moro-

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[2] A more detailed review of unfavorable consequences of increased internet use in politics can be found in Mider, 2008, pp. 337–370.

zov, 2009; Putnam, 2008). The *slactivism* can manifest itself through such activities as signing an online petition, joining a group on Facebook, placing political slogans on clothes or vehicles as well as participation in consumer spurns that originate on the Internet. The opponents of activities that originate in the Internet point out that it is less effective on one hand, and on the other it may decrease the overall index of political activity among the individuals concerned.

The primary points against online political activities have been summarized by Stephen Coleman and Jay G. Blumler (2009). They emphasize that such actions are separated from the institutionalized politics, which can hinder or prevent from exercising control over the governing authorities. What is more, the ephemerality of those acts make them rarely reach the institutions, where the actual decisions are made. What is more, the low quality of similar activities is often argued. The activities may have a destructive character, which is being commonly underestimated or even stigmatized by the governing officials. The ease at which online activities are taken does not translate into increased ability to influence. It may seem that such an activity can be harmful to some extent, both in terms of a system as well as the individuals. By calming down the nerves of those who actually taken up the activity, it can result in withdrawal from real activity that brings real effects.

Although we may agree with at least some of the arguments against the activities taken from the Internet, yet it is difficult to completely underestimate this new area of activity. Even if a part of them that has some properties of *slactivism* may be considered as less effective, it is hard to depreciate importance of the Internet as an efficient tool for informing people about certain problems or mobilizing them to take action beyond the Internet (cf. Nowak, 2011). It is a tool and an environment of conscious civic participation, yet the author himself confirms that this applies only to a narrow group of citizens[3] (Nowak, 2011b, pp. 115). It may also play the role of "vigilance, notification and appraisal" which according to Pierre Rosanvallon is considerably more important that the participatory function or the deliberative function (see also Rosanvallon, 2011, pp. 53–55).

Analysis of discussions about political topics popular within the research period may help to solve at least some of the uncertainties and move us a step closer towards answering the question whether the Internet can be an efficient tool for developing a strong civil society?

Research methodology

The research has been conducted with the content analysis method (partially automatic) that utilized a tool for gathering and monitoring data obtained from the In-

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[3] The tools offered by social media services only augment this phenomenon through the so-called filter bubble, which refers to various algorithms that contribute to the way users see particular contents in the internet, namely according to their preferences, political views, taste etc. It is a common element of communication in the most popular social media services.

ternet.[4] The selected subjects reflect current problems in politics (2016) which are characteristic for a wider context of phenomena within the political debate in young democracies of Central Europe.

It is worth emphasizing that after a period of relative political stability in the first decade of 21st century, the second decade shows pronounced turbulence of social attitudes within local contexts. The phenomena include a shift in public support towards projects developed by the right-wing parties, greater interest in conservative and protectionist ideas, anti-elitism, support for a strong leadership or return to discussions about social and moral issues (abortion, euthanasia, minority rights etc.).

The subjects which has been widely discussed in the public sphere of Poland and currently within other countries of Central Europe as well (to a greater or lesser extent) have been selected as the most representative for the concerned political transition. They include: (anti)abortion law, role of the constitutional court and public media involvement in politics. The developed hypotheses have been verified basing on online content which included selected keywords that indicated that it referred to the field analysed herein.[5]

The time frame of individual contents was selected deliberately and focused on the periods of intensified discussions about the given subjects, which adopted monthly or bi-monthly intervals. In case of the anti-abortion act that was October 2016 (the so-called "black protest" on the streets of many Polish cities that followed the start of proceedings on the draft act which was supposed to restrict the abortion law). The discussions about media law took place between April and June 2016 (in that time the Sejm was working on the legislative procedure for the "large media law" which would regulate the status of Polish public media; later on the document was enacted and signed by the President of the Republic of Poland). The case of the Constitutional Tribunal in Poland was analysed on the base of a one-month period (March 2016, when the Sejm adopted one of many acts of law on the Tribunal and when the Venice Commission voiced its opinion, which gained great interest within the public about the previous acts of law).

It is worth adding that the scope of websites which featured the below contents included websites in Polish language except for those qualified by the algorithms of the tool as spam,[6] hence those that did not contribute to the discussion (e.g. websites containing short announcements etc.). To a large extent, they included online forums, social media services and news portals, where the Internet users are able to comment.

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[4] The tool can be placed within a broader methodological context based on the analysis of big data from researches on new media (the digital methods).

[5] The set includes the following phrases: *anti-abortion act*, *#blackprotest*, *the media act*, *the Constitutional Tribunal*. The selection criteria were complemented by a willingness to select one representative and unambiguous phrase for each subject which would allow for choosing only those contents that should be a part of database gathered in the current studies.

[6] That refers to content which does not contribute to discussion within the given areas. Here, it is worth adding that the tool selected for the research procedure (gathering of data, creating database and conducting partially automated analysis of the contents) was an online service designed for commercial use, yet available and successfully applied within social and political scope: Brand24.
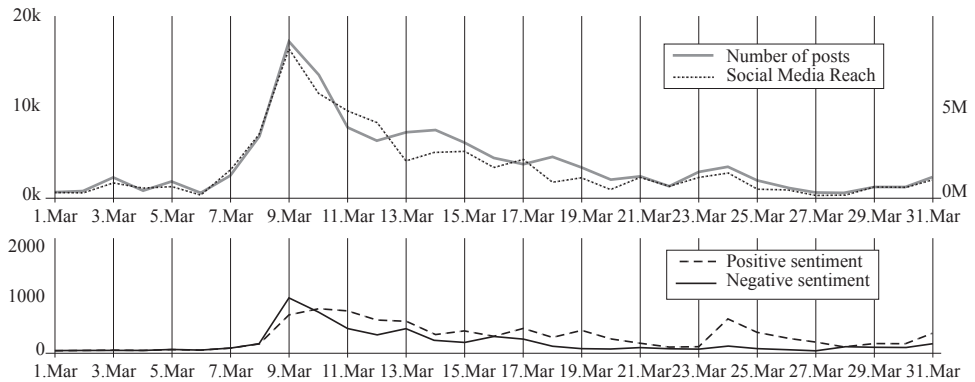
Result analysis

The following information has been gathered and analysed in the course of data collection:
−   quantitative distribution of text units over time (N);
−   emotionalism (sentiment) of the communication.

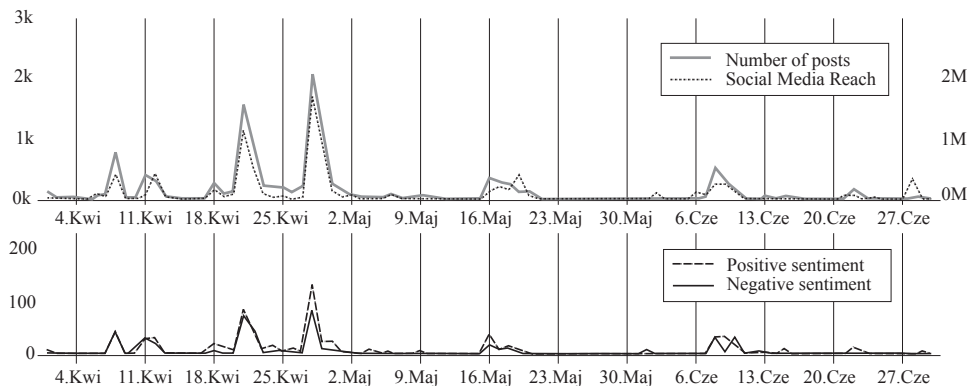The data is presented in charts (1–3) that constitute a basis for analysis and subsequent conclusions or generalizations.[7]

Chart 1. Distribution of content and emotionalism (sentiment) over time (TheConstitutional Tribunal)
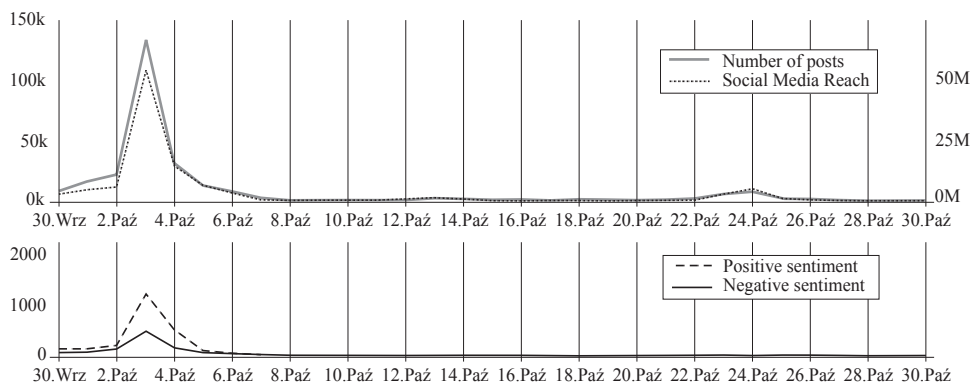

N=116,640.
Source: brand24.

Chart 2. Distribution of content and emotionalism (sentiment) over time (media act)

N= 18,498.
Source: brand24.

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[7] The second stage did not require to develop categories for analysis of individual text units. The data has been qualified according to the tool's algorithm, which does not allow for drawing unambiguous conclusions within the scope of positive/negative emotions that accompany the answers. However, it allows for conservative conclusions within the area of emotionality of the discussion.

Chart 3. Distribution of content and emotionalism (sentiment) over time (#blackprotest)

N= 274,007.
Source: brand24.

A comparison of entities that display the highest influence on activity of other users of the Internet has been developed basing on the gathered data.[8] It was illustrated in table 1.

Table 1

**Distribution of the impact coefficient within all three analysed fields
(5 most influential entities)**

Social media channel	Impact coefficient
Constitutional Tribunal	
Gazeta Wyborcza (Twitter)	8.8
TVN24 (Twitter)	6.7
TVN24 (Facebook)	6.7
Gazeta Wyborcza (Facebook)	6.2
TVP INFO (Twitter)	3.4
Media law	
TVP INFO (Twitter)	12.7
TVN24 (Twitter)	10.8
Gazeta Wyborcza (Twitter)	6.5
Onet (Facebook)	4.6
TVN24 (Facebook)	3.9
#blackprotest	
TVN24 (Twitter)	7.4
Gazeta Wyborcza (Twitter)	5.5
TVN24.pl (Facebook)	2.7
TVP INFO (Twitter)	2.6
Newsweek Poland (Twitter)	2.5

Source: Brand24.

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[8] The impact was calculated on the basis of the influence score, i.e. a percentage share of a given entity in the influence on discussion about given subject in social media. The result is calculated as a percentage proportion between the number of contribution of a given subject, the number of their "friends" or subscribers and the visibility coefficient calculated for contents published on the selected social media services in relation to all contributions on a given subject in the social media.

Conclusions

Basing on the data, the theoretical concepts of media sociology and the knowledge about civil society and social activation, the following conclusions have been formed:

1. The Internet as "a place of lost chances"

All charts that illustrate the moments of publication of the given subject are characterized by cyclical increases in interest at short time intervals (one or two days) and their popularity (usually) dynamically decreases. On one hand, this data is not surprising because of the specificity of the events that arise great interest in media. It is also worth emphasizing that this fully confirms the trends which are typical of a shortened lifetime of an information understood as a product within the media market (Jupowicz-Ginalska, 2010, p. 58). If we combine this fact with the theory of deliberative democracy and the expectations towards the Internet as a catalyst for fully democratic debate,[9] it may seem that the expectations and hopes which are typical of the Internet enthusiasts are not currently reflected in the communication practice. The Internet makes communication more dynamic and expands it, yet at the same time it is characterized by cyclical increases in interest which occur in parallel to phenomena observed in traditional media. However, as opposed to the above, the interactive network allows continuing the discussion, participating in the problem-solving processes or treating initial interest in a problem as a stage in the path towards the essential part of the dispute, which consists in suggesting and attempting to introduce particular solutions that are favourable for the mobilized group of citizens. Meanwhile, it turns out that the stage of mobilization is often the last stage which makes the whole communication process more dynamic and intense, yet barren in terms of developed solutions and effects. In this way, social media become only (or surely) a catalyst or a plane of stimulation, thus the so-called "platform of lost chances."

2. Slacktivism

Online activity which can be characterized as politically motivated are often less engaging in moderate and long periods of time. As it was already mentioned, the literature identifies this phenomenon as *slacktivism* which refers to fake activity stimulated mainly by:

– psychological factors and determinants of internal nature, such as the sense of self-complacency or the willingness to get rid of an uncomfortable feeling connected with the need of self-fulfilment and self-recognition. Hence, it's all about creating an image of oneself which would materialize social models of e.g. good citizen or a person who remains politically active. The ideological foundations for the concept of civil society, which are the element of the school curriculum and culturally

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[9] This attitude has a long tradition in the literature and often "comes back" to the agenda of matters related to democratizing function of the internet. It has manifested itself already in 1990s when the commercialized internet was perceived as the way to overcome crisis in democracy based on traditional media and their influence that was driving tabloidization (cf. Wilhelm, 1999, pp. 154–179) in the first years of the 21st century. In that time, the new "opening to the society" and enthusiasm about the new *millennium* have risen hopes of a greater independency among the citizens (cf. Baciak, 2006) or after 2011 when the "Arab Spring" or demonstrations against ACTA have shown the power of mobilization through the internet (cf. Lakomy, 2013).

inherited point of reference within socialization process, may constitute a strong stimulus that encourages to involve in activities which can help to accomplish the said models. At the same time, other factors that remain on the other extreme of an individual's pursuance (e.g. lack of free time, fear of the consequences of involvement, the specificity of communication tools that can pronounce and dilute relationship etc.) cause a dissonance that leads to a willingness to compromise that fulfils the above needs, but at the same time has a low value from the perspective of efficiency within political activity. This activity can be aptly symbolized by the "Like!" button referred to in numerous publications on *slacktivism*. The button seems to give the users a false impression of political involvement;

– factors from the field of personal branding, which aim at creating an image of a supposedly politically involved individual. This is dependent on (external) social considerations – the expectations and willingness to meet them. The effect of those factors is relatively covered by the internal matters, hence encourages the individual to calculate economically and compare the effort exercised in actual political activity with the consequences in the form of e.g. fulfilment of the need to be recognized. In times when organic reality merges with virtual reality, the convenience and effects of online activities characterized by low involvement as well as many persons who are able to observe us in a single "spot" forces the users to choose an intermediate path that leads between the involvement and the political passivity: simulates online communication activities (e.g. through a one-time participation in a discussion over important political subject, subscription to a given online profile, sharing important information to friends etc.).[10]

3. Primacy of traditional media in the new media

The gathered data unambiguously indicate that discussion about particular subjects analysed here is predominated by the editorial offices from traditional media sector. Still, they are active within the framework of social media services. It is worth mentioning that in the conducted research all of the most influencing social media accounts belonged to the recognized offices of TVN24, Gazeta and TVP INFO. In the selected examples (i.e. within the area of political communication), the media complement or expand the traditional offer (Szews, 2014). Again, this is not a new phenomenon from the perspective of the principles that govern the media economics. However, adopting the critical perspective of the theory of democracy and the civil society, in particular their ideological element that glorifies e.g. the bottom-up activities, it is worth to analyse how the current way of media operation contributes to or hinders civic activity within the field of communication. It turns out that a belief about a network that lacks the primacy of power and a fully democratic civil society that provides all citizens with the same possibilities to voice opinions, which originated in 1990s and is still present within some scholarly circles,is actually not reflected in communication and reality of the commercial

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[10] It is worth emphasizing that shortage of psychological research hinders explicit conclusions in this matter. Hence, it is hardly possible to explicitly define the motivation on the basis of the applied research method. However, basing on other similar analyses we may suppose that it would be an important factor which influences the shape of communication as described herein.

Internet.[11] Taking into account the analysed examples it is worth asking to what extent the usefulness and the properties of online communication create actual possibility to conduct a discussion, joint development of solutions and the possibility to popularize the bottom-up social initiatives? It seems that "jamming" such activities by significantly more popular and influential media may remain in contrast to similar postulates.

4. Trivialisation within politics

Analysis of individual units of text on a given subject makes it possible to determine the most popular contents among the users and identify them as the criterion of usefulness of the Internet and the factor that shapes civil society. Then, in the qualitative part of the current research, it will be possible to additionally identify their value within the area of discussion about politics. As it turns out, the effects of such analysis may indicate the trend of readership, sharing and other activities in the field of communication, which are characterized by trivialization, depreciation or tabloidization of the subject. What is more, politics and most of other social phenomena become the space for broadcasting popular culture.[12] The case of the Constitutional Tribunal can be a good demonstration of this regularity (see Fig. 1).

**Fig. 1. The most willingly shared Polish Facebook post of 2016,
referring to the Constitutional Tribunal case.**

Magda Gessler ✔ udostępnił(a) post użytkownika Maciej Stuhr.
9 marca · 🌐

Brawo Maćku !!!! Popieram !!! WIELKIE BESOS ☺ A Wy moi kochani ???

Maciej Stuhr
9 marca · 🌐

Pani Krysieńko kochana! Panie Krzysztofie i wszyscy oburzeni! Macie sejm, macie senat, macie prezydenta, macie sądy, macie telewizję, swoje wiadomości, macie radio, rozjechaliście Trybunał Konstytucyjny, dajcie wy nam się przynajmniej pośmiać. A tak przy okazji- mój żart bynajmniej nie był wymierzony w pamięć o kimkolwiek. Przeciwnie! W imię godnej pamięci, a przeciw wszystkim tym, którzy sobie od lat tupolewami i wyklętymi wycieracie gębę zbijając polityczny kapitał.

Pozdrowienia z Bratysławy!

👍 Lubię to!   💬 Skomentuj   ➤ Udostępnij

○○☺ 26 tys.   Najpopularniejsze komentarze ▾

Source: Facebook, March 09, 2016[13].

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[11] To a large extent it is represented through introduction of the "prosumer" notion into the vocabulary of media theoreticians.

[12] Interestingly, the black protest has started with a provocative comment published by actress Krystyna Janda on public fun page on Facebook. She recalled the strike of Island women of 1975 and accused Poles of lacking solidarity that would allow to organize a similar strike in Poland.

[13] Magda Gessler is one of the most famous Polish celebs for many years leading culinary programs.

The above fact, through a phenomenon of culture and politics celebritization, actually moves context of the discussion from issues being important to the discourse (political functions of the state authorities) towards social relationships and opinion of supposed authoritative figures of the public life. This, in turn, seems to be a less important contribution helping to solve the political conflict. What is more, it may seem that some part of the social energy (which could be used for creating relations, developing discussions, self-organization or a debate with apt arguments) "vanishes into nothingness" and from the perspective of economics of action becomes wasted during fake or futile undertakings. This makes the Internet, once again, a communication plane which is potentially more valuable and impressive in terms of the content volumes. However, from the perspective of ideological foundations for the concept of civil society, the Internet is feeble within the area of operation.

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It may be concluded that the two hypotheses formulated in the introduction have been confirmed. Hence, thanks to the mentioned capability of social media services, or rather the users of such media, to mobilize citizens, the number of activities taken within the field of civil society has increased. However, it is hard to talk about development of the public sphere as understood by theoreticians. The made decisions do not deepen the discussion and do not lead to a compromise or at least a partial agreement between antagonist attitudes. They do not create valuable projects. The dispute about the Constitutional Tribunal, the media law or the anti-abortion law triggered quite broad, yet very emotional discussion which hindered agreement between the both parties of this conflict. Not only the directly involved groups have remained in the dispute, but also the rest of society which needed to support one or the other side.

It is worth emphasizing that social media undoubtedly play an important role in the process of political activation, which is the key condition for any manifestation of civil society. However, it worth to realize that we talk here mostly about some stages or a function of such activity. When the party of Jarosław Kaczyński has taken office, we were experiencing numerous demonstration of the Committee for the Defence of Democracy (abbreviated in Polish as "KOD") or the women strike. In both cases, the activities started on the Internet. As far as we cannot talk about the actual effects of demonstrations organized by KOD, the case of the women strike forced the governing party to withdraw (at least so far) from the controversial solutions. It is hard to speculate whether the social awakening will be continuous in its nature and whether the political authorities will eventually be afraid of the "punishing power of the people." Undoubtedly, such a prompt mobilization among the citizens will not be possible without social media.

On the other hand, it is regrettable that media, which were created to facilitate communication and popularize it, to some extent did not manage to meet the expectations. According to the presented analyses, the main players within traditional media are the most influential entities in online discussion. Furthermore, the quality of debate is

often lower than the quality observed in other places (see also Charles, 2014).[14] The idea about developing deliberative democracy, which may use the Internet as its tool, seems to be hardly achievable at this moment. Change of the tool does not change the core of the problem. Just like before, as a society we are currently capable of short-term outbreaks (e.g. to come out to the streets in the rain, to place a short comment under an article, to take a photograph wearing a shirt with a slogan) because they are easier than a substantive debate which allows each of the sides to present their arguments in a clear and understandable way. It is still undecided whether the number of demonstrations that have recently taken place in Poland can be seen as a manifestation of the power of Polish civil society. However, we may conclude that the internet and the possibilities which it offers do not contribute to stronger civil society, do not deepen the discourse and, consequently, do not make consensus at socially important matters easier.[15] The emotional debate moves from the internet onto the streets, where it is similarly difficult to find reasonable arguments.

At least two important functions of civil society mentioned by the scientists who work in this field (i.e. the influence on social solidarity, communication between individuals of various views and the function of facilitating consensus) are still not being accomplished. The time will tell whether this is a phenomenon that abides absolutely, or whether it is only a stage on the path towards our "deepened knowledge on the internet" which would be understood as a tool for accomplishing political objectives.

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[14] According to Charles, the space covered by the internet does not favour development of public debate from many reasons, of which one refers to its quality and emotionality.

[15] For instance, there is a closed group on Facebook that gathers women who supported the strike. Its members actually exchange interesting and useful information. However, it is hard to definitely state that information which negate or broaden own point of view may emerge in a closed circuit.

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Abstract

From the very beginning, the Internet has been bringing many hopes for solving social and political problems of the western democracies since they have reborn after the Second World War. Decreasing level of citizens' participation, worsening media quality (tabloidization) and, finally, the crisis of ideas about liberal democracy – all that gave the network an image of a remedy for all the contemporary problems. As its widely accessible, encourages involvement and abounds with information, the internet was supposed to serve the citizens and allow them participating in democratic institutions in a comfortable and efficient way.

Meanwhile, it turns out that after a period of some positive examples which were confirming the above hypothesis (online activists, the Arab spring etc.), the contrary trends became visible. This arises some uncertainties and puts forward a question whether the pro-citizen image of the internet is not a myth that originated from spectacular impact of certain events, whereas within the level of an individual the value of this network for creating civic attitudes is significantly overestimated?

In order to find answer for this question we have undertaken a research that took the form of an analysis of social media contents (posts, comments) which were particularly interesting for the public opinion in 2016 (the case of Constitutional Tribunal, the Black Protest, media act). We have assumed that the analysis of activities and actions of citizens (users) would allow verifying whether involvement of people is factual or simulated. We have also decided (basing on the acknowledged concepts of civil society) to verify extent of the activities (if they actually exist) that translate into quality of democratic institutions, in which people participate according to the bottom-up manner.

Key words: civil society, social media, political participation, internet