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A bridge between online and offline mobilization: #Rezist Movement

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Abstract

The Romanian Movement from January-February 2017 initiated on Facebook under the name #Rezist represented the largest protest since the collapse of the communist regime in 1989. The present research is based on the premise that the online participation to political life influences offline participation and that social media, particularly Facebook, has a great power of democratization, in the case of #Rezist Movement.Previous papers submit opposite views on how the internet and social media influences real participation to political and civic life. Some researchers talk about the limited effect of Internet on mobilizing new participants (Boulianne, 2015, Christensen 2011), while other papers highlighted the positive influence of the internet on political participation (Lee,Chen and Huang 2013). Another approach is that social media platforms allow quick access to social or political information, citizens learn about it, which determines citizen participation (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung and Valenzuela, 2012). How the Romanian online environment managed to change the political events in a moment of high social pressure, especially by acting offline? Is, nowadays, social media a force for democratization? As we will see in #Rezist Movement case, social media may have the potential to become political mobilization arenas among groups that are traditionally left out of debate or less visible in political arenas (Segaard, 2015). Based on ten interviews as qualitative research method and on the analysis of two Facebook groups who supported the protests from 2017, the present paper argues that Facebook was not only an online instrument of socialization and interaction between individuals or groups with similar interests, but a catalyst for the mobilization of former silent groups to emerge from the online environment.The research also validates the mobilization thesis of social media, Facebook being particularly effective in promoting and defending a national cause, like the one of #Rezist Movement.

Keywords: *online political participation; digital democracy; #rezist Movement; Facebook; protests.*

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A bridge between online and offline mobilization: #Rezist Movement

Introduction

Nowadays the development of social media has brought its role to attract those who in other circumstances were not involved in the political or civic life, especially the young people. In Romania, the political power of Facebook emerged in the 2014 presidential elections when, Klaus Iohannis, won the Presidency after being supported by numerous Facebook groups who mobilized young people, especially from Diaspora, to vote him.Since then Facebook gained also respect and fear by Romanian politicians, due to its technical and social possibilities (Boicu, 2017: 96). Can social media be a force for democratization? For example, social media'spledgeto be a democratization force can be feasible through instruments such as Facebook that allow a real dialogue between politicians and citizens and a stronger sense of political participation? As we will see in *Rezist* Movement case, social media, unlike traditional media, may have the potential to become political mobilization arenas among groups that are traditionally left out of debate or less visible in political arenas (Segaard, 2015). In the Romanian case, on the *Rezist* Facebook page one might identify characteristics of the people: wonderful, young, energetic people, without any prior political implications, most of them self-employed or in the private sector (mostly big corporations), with higher education and higher expectations (Ștefănel, 2017: 117). There is an increasing number of authors who speak about the new mobilization. For example, Cantijoch (2009) finds that the use of the Internet increases unconventional participation activities (such as protests or boycotts) and that this increase comes fromboth individuals who are Internet users and those who are not but who have traditionally participated in conventional activities and due to the effect of the Internet, now participate more in unconventional activities. (Borge and Cardenal, 2011). The political and social practices of the Internet invite us to question the possibility to reconfigure the various principles that structure democratic regimes (the principle ofrepresentation, of participation, of competition and limitation of powers) and the opportunities for citizens to make their voices heard (Wojcik, 2011: 17).

Digital democracy, political participation and social media

One of the most debated issues related to social media impact concerns civic and political participation of citizens, involvement in debating and solving local or national issues. *Digital democracy* involves connecting globally and sharing social experiences through the online environment with social actors in the furthest corners of the world. Thus, communication is direct, encouraged, accessible to a wide audience, exceeding the boundaries of time and space. In the age of new media, direct democracy takes different forms, from social media interactivity, to online expression, to group or interpersonal discussions, to content creation and sharing, and activities that generate civic empowerment. The optimists of social media participation are the enthusiasts of „Facebook revolutions, of social and political revolutions, of the democratization of totalitarian or authoritarian regimes, mending the appearance of online democracy" (Momoc, 2014: 151-155). In the age of internet, media consumers become information producers, social actors make their voice heard and defend their interests, "the emergence of a global village where an increasing number of people create, produce and share information" (Momoc, 2014: 154). The new media determines the political participation of citizens in several forms. Thus, access to public information, knowledge of political actors and political actions or social events is enhanced. Better knowledge does not automatically lead to an increased interest in politics, participation and debate, "access and knowledge may be the premises for a better political socialization of the

electorate" (Beciu, 2011: 286). The essential elements that transform social media into a mechanism of democratization are interactivity, connectivity and multiplicity, plus essential support for undermining political censorship. By linking technological development and the use of social media, Ulmanu (2011) investigates the "collective strength of intelligent mobs" that have the potential to generate social evolution and revolution, having in their pockets instruments with extraordinary communication and computational force, who give birth to new forms of action and interaction, social media being a "network of human networks" (Ulmanu, 2011: 66-69). The impact of social media on electoral campaigns around the world is indisputable. Social media have become indispensable for a modern political communication, with the increase in the number of users. Almost 2.62 billion people used social networks daily in 2018, globally, and the estimate number for 2019 is 2.77 billion (retrieved from https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/).

Statista.com presents a prognosis of the evolution of the number of Internet users in Romania in the period 2015-2022. In 2022, the number of active monthly Internet users is estimated to reach 12.04 million people. This would represent an increase in new users of 1.1 million, respectively, from 10.94 million users in 2015 (retrieved from: https://www.statista.com/statistics/567004/predicted-number-of-internet-users-in-romania/).

Presidential campaigns of Barack Obama and Donald Tramp, or The Arab Spring have opened interest to study the relationship between social media use and citizens' participation in political life or the community. Comprehensive studies have provided evidence in support of the statement that new media has changed the way in which political campaigns are taking place and that they have an impact on users, but it is difficult to anticipate the uniformity of these effects, given different groups and social contexts. Overall, studies has shown a beneficial relationship between social media use and participation. An initial conclusion was that the use of the Internet had a positive, but minimal, effect on political commitment. (Boulianne, 2009: 205). Boulianne also outlined the scheme of positive theoretical effects the internet can have on political engagement.

Figure 1 Theoretical positive effects of Internet use and political engagement
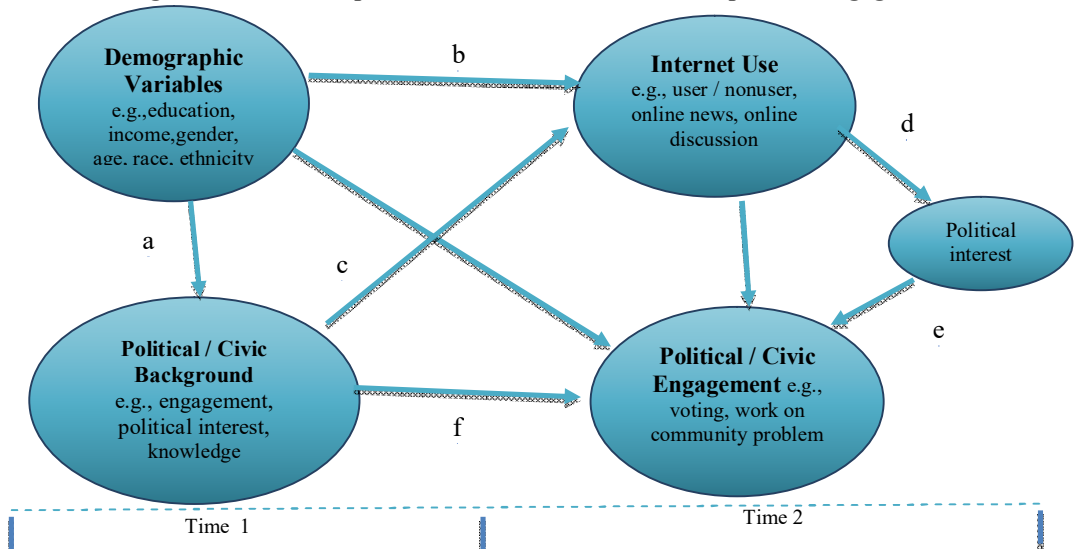
Source: Boulianne, 2009: 194

A bridge between online and offline mobilization: #Rezist Movement

Based on the analysis of several studies considered statistically significant, it is suggested that the use of digital media has a limited effect on political participation. In the case of studies on young people, there is an increased civic engagement compared to studies using users of all ages (Boulianne, 2015: 524-538). To explain how political participation is influenced by social media use, there are the following detailed approaches by Boulianne (2015). First, there is a weak link approach, users are invited to participate in community life and are aware of the opportunities offered by digital networks (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung and Valenzuela, 2012: 319-336), social media being a public space originally used for collecting news and information about family, friends, or organizations (Bouliane, 2015: 524-538).

Another approach is that the information that users have learned from others can be used in new contexts and the information becomes in this way influential (Bode, 2012: 355-357). This study considers that Facebook, providing personalized information to users, creates community commitment that translates into participatory political behaviors and generates social capital. Social media platforms allow quick access to social or political information, citizens learn about it, which determines citizen participation (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung and Valenzuela, 2012).

Another study strengthens the idea of learning about social and political issues using social media, an activity that facilitates participation. (Loader, Vromen and Xenos, 2014: 143-150). Accidental exposure to news can influence users (Bode, 2012, Xenos,Vromen& Loader, 2014) and thus develops citizens' knowledge of social or political issues that subsequently generate civic and political participation.

Dimitrova and Bystrom (2017: 386-406) studies the relationship between internet use and political engagement demonstrating that participation is positively affected by the active use of social media, and passive use has a negative effect. The social media effects depend on several factors, including the type of channel examined (Twitter, Instragram, Facebook), the specific characteristics of the public (age, political interest, psychological factors), user motivations (relationship maintenance, campaign involvement) the use of social media (for informational or relational purposes) or context of the campaign as a whole (Dimitrova, Matthes, 2018: 337-342).

Social media is characterized by Larry Diamond as "liberation technology" that allow citizens "to report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation, and expand the horizons of freedom". The author includes in the liberation technology any form of communication and information that extends political, social and economic freedom and concludes that "not just technology but political organization and strategy and deep-rooted normative, social, and economic forces will determine who "wins" the race" (Diamond, 2010: 69-83). Social media is an accelerator of events, but simple network communications cannot overturn governments, it requires online activity and participation (Drew, 2013).

The political protest is an opposition action to government policy, to some events or situations. Tajfel characterizes the collective protest based on some defining aspects: the protest involves actions by a group of individuals to solve a common problem, the protesters identify themselves as members of the group and their actions are not singular, they establish relations with other social groups pursuing the same purpose (Tajfel, 1981).

Controversies related to online political participation

Researchers analyze the role of the Internet as a monitoring, dissemination and mobilization tool that is increasingly important in the functioning of democracy, with controversy between **mobilization, normalization** and **substitution** paradigms.

The "**standardization or normalization**" thesis asserts that the internet allows the mobilization of people who are offline. People sort the information according to preexisting interest and tend to frequent online areas where they can chat with users who share the same opinion as they do. Thus, discussions in the online environment reinforce their previous, initial beliefs (Wojcik, 2011: 1)Sunstein argues that the Internet will not widen users' horizons in antithesis with many advantages, limited effect could arise due to the use of filtering software and the selection of information that is consistent with the user's predispositions and beliefs. Forming groups of people with the same visions will result in a polarization of the group (Sunstein, 2001, apud. Ulen, 2001). This polarization of opinions leads to "balkanization" of political discourse (Flichz, 2008: 159-185).

The authors Hirzalla, van Zoonen and de Ridder argue that the mobilization thesis tends to be validated by online manifestations in specific cases, while the normalization thesis is based on general situations of using the internet. To deepen the nature of internet use in political situations, the authors investigate the use of online voting on Dutch parliamentary elections in 2006, concluding that in the Dutch situation, the mobilization thesis is valid among young people and the normalization thesis is valid among older people (Hirzalla, van Zoonen and de Ridder, 2011).

The "**mobilization**" thesis argues that the internet includes new types of participants, being useful due to the low costs of usage and participation. Allows people with common interests to come into contact without being restricted to the individual social circle. Using the internet makes it possible for citizens to participate but does not guarantee effectiveness. The Internet would facilitate mobilization and be more effective in promoting common, global causes.

The positive influence of the internet on political participation was also highlighted by Lee et alii, who focused on attracting traditional participants to problem solving through e-democracy or e-petition. The study analyzed the citizens' experience and desire to participate in the referendum petition using the e-petition. The results showed the tendency to use petition on paper by older, less educated people and more strongly identified with a certain party. In addition, Internet use increases political participation, participation in e-petitions (Lee et alii, 2013). In the same sense, the use of the Internet, this participatory device, facilitates mobilization and is particularly effective in promoting and defending local or global causes, anti-war movements (Wojcik, 2011: 2).

Another thesis deals with the "social dynamics" generated by internet use. The study examines the forums proposed by the French municipalities to generate discussions. The exchanges on these forums, which seem to be conflicting places, have a controversial character, are generated more by an emotional reaction rather than by rational reaction, but are concerning the general interest. The influence of the forum in the local public space is indirectly manifested through this new media tool in the context of collective actions. Online activists have complex opportunities to engage in discussions or actions and invest less in classical political activities (meetings, leaflets). On the Internet they can express their ideological choices without restriction, they can become friends with a favorite candidate, can distribute content (Wojcik, 2005).

A bridge between online and offline mobilization: #Rezist Movement

The theory of substitution concludes that new media develops slow or soft activism, known as "slacktivism" or "clictivism," referring to people who prefer their political activity to take place only in the on-line environment (e-petitions, groups in social media) avoiding the risks of offline activism (travel, public exposure, sometimes repression). Morozov talks about the democratizing power of the internet in relation to the political regime of the countries, making a parallel between western obsession in promoting democracy by digital means and the role of the Internet in totalitarian, authoritarian regimes (Morozov, 2011: 197-202).

The term "activism" refers generally to the practices of individuals who challenge the status quo to provoke social, political or economic changes. Harlow, S. and Guo, L, in the study on the reform of American immigration and how digital communications technologies are increasingly used to trigger protests has applied the qualitative method of focus groups. Enriching the criticism of Morozov's "slacktivism," focus group participants rhetorically asked, "*if a click on a link is enough to do activism, would anyone sacrifice some time and effort to join a protest or march?*" Thus, "slacktivism," or "clictivism," which simply involves a mouse click on the computer, is likely to dilute "real" activism, and it takes time for Facebook's activists to turn into real activists, outside the digital space (Harlow and Guo, 2014: 463-478).

Methodological design
Case Study – Romanian #*Rezist* Movement
#*Rezist* Movement was born during the night of 31st of January 2017 when the Romanian Government secretly approved an ordinance modifying The Penal Code and The Penal Procedure Code in order to pardon certain committed crimes, like the abuse of power and the government corruption (Moga, 2017)In that evening, a spontaneous protest took place in Bucharest that gathered 25.000 people mobilized via Facebook. Protests continued in the next days in Bucharest and other cities in the country, the raising numbers of people reaching the peak on 5th ofFebruarywhen over 500.000 protesters registered across the country. During this time, the mobilization came from Facebook through people who shared each other information with the hashtag #*Rezist*, and from Facebook organized groups like *Coruptiaucide*, and days after the beginning, through the #*Rezist group* and #*Rezistenta group*. The government withdrew the contested ordinance and the Ministry of Justice resigned (Boicu, 2017).

The objective of this study was to prove that the online participation to political and civic life influences offline participation in the particular case of #*Rezist* Movement.

Therefore, the research questions of the present paper are, as follows:
Q1. Did people mobilized each other to participate at protests through Facebook?
Q2. Is Facebook an instrument of democratization?

To respond to these research questions, the author of this study used the interview as a qualitative research method to find out about the use of social media, especially Facebook, in connection to the protests from the mentioned period. Thus, 10 members of #*Rezist* and #*Rezistenta* groups, active members on Facebook, and participants at the protests from the winter of 2017 were interviewed. The interviewees were randomly selected following answers to the announcement made to the administrators of the two groups via Facebook Messenger.Using the research interview,

we obtain, through questions and answers, "verbal information from individuals and human groups to verify hypotheses or to describe scientifically the sociomedicalphenomena". It has a first exploratory purpose that leads to the formulation of valid hypotheses and it is an essential tool for collecting "information to test hypotheses" (Chelcea, 2001: 122-125).

The interviewused both closed questions (*Have you participated in the Victory Square protests?*) and open questions (*What were the results you expected from the #Rezist Protests?*), which provided the interviewees the freedom to express their views related to the researched events, adding also direct questions (*What made you to get out of the online environment in the street?*), by which they could describe their feelings and motives. The interview also covered clarification questions (*How did you learn about the anti-corruption protests in Victory Square generated by The Ministry of Justice announcement?*) and the amplification questions to develope the previous answer (*Did you mobilize other friends to protest? If yes, how did you do this via Facebook?*). This investigative approach can be labeled as "in-depth" or "comprehensive" (Krahn& Putnam, 2005, apud Popa, 2016: 18), encouraging interviewees to describe their own states and experiences. (Clinchy, 2003, apud Popa, 2016: 18).

The 10 respondents were selected after they agreed to offer interviews following the announcement about the research sent to the administrators of the two mentioned Facebook groups.The 10 respondents are aged between 27 and 52, 6 women and 4 men, with the following socio-demographic characteristics:

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Nr	Name Initials	Age	Sex	Level of education	Profession
1	O.B.	36	Male	higher education	Journalist
2	C.A.	42	Female	higher education	Public relations specialist
3	R.O.	32	Female	higher education	Journalist
4	L. C.-S.	30	Female	higher education	Economist
5	N.F.	29	Male	higher education	IT specialist
6	C.C.	36	Female	higher education	Public relations specialist
7	M.I.	27	Female	higher education	Marketing specialist
8	B.S.	27	Male	higher education	Economist
9.	F.A.	52	Female	higher education	Writer
10.	D.B.	33	Male	higher education	Cadastre specialist

Source: Author's own compilation

Results

Regarding the most used social media channels, eight of the ten respondents named Facebook as their favorite social media channel, followed by Instragram, Pinterest, YouTube, LinkedIn, Whatsapp and Reddit. One respondent also mentioned the use of Odnoklassniki - a popular socialization channel in Russia and the former Soviet countries. As to why they prefer Facebook as a social platform, the respondents listed as the main reason the fact that it is the most popular social network in Romania, but also the fact that most of their friends use it and that it contains information in their area of interest. As an

element of background, in 2016, the number of Facebook users in Romania was 9.6 million people, which represented 44.4% of the population, respectively 85.43% of the Internet users. (retrieved from: Facebrands.ro) In terms of time spent on Facebook daily, the average response was one hour and thirty minutes, and regarding the purpose of using the social media channel, 4 respondents out of 10 said they were using it to get information, 2 for job-related activities, 2 for the entertainment function and 2 to socialize with other people.

To complete the general information on how respondents use social media, the questionnaire also included the question "What types of information do you collect through Facebook?".Respondents placed first the news from Romanian society, followed by information about real and virtual friends, travel information or information about urban events.

Regarding how the respondents learned about Government's decision on the evening of January 31st, they named Facebook as the source of information, friends who also found out on Facebook, messages coming through Whatsapp or television and Facebook simultaneously. The fact that people were coming to Victory Square to protest was a piece of information that four of the ten respondents found on TV and Facebook simultaneously, four found out on Facebook and two found out from friends via messages on Facebook Messenger and Whatsapp.

Concerning effective participation in the protests, nine of the respondents were present in Victory Square the first evening and only one interviewee preferred to stay in the online environment both on the first night of protests and in the coming days. If we talk about the frequency of protest participation, the nine active offline interviewees said they had participated in all the protests by February 5th inclusive (the day with the largest number of protestors gathered in Victory Square) and later on from time to time, depending on how they mobilized each other with their friends.

Responding at the question "What caused you to leave the online environment in the street?" 70% of the interviewed people were determined by the government's decision, the way and context in which it was communicated, 40% were also determined by appeals from Facebook friends and described the motivation for participation as follows: "*The fact that I disagree with any legislative measure that would relax the regime of sanctioning corruption acts or acts assimilated to corruption.*"; "*The government's decision, but especially the manner and context in which it was made public - on the night of January 31st,*"; "*The fact that the government communicated the decision during the night - appeals on Facebook*" or feelings, psychological factors "*Anger, frustration and the need to do something* ", but also the rapidity of the publication of the act in the Official Monitor - a respondent wonders rhetorically "*Does the procedure change overnight?*".

During the protests, most respondents said there was no need to look for information about the situation because stories about the protests quickly followed in their Facebook news feed, and the others either searched for information through the *#rezist* hashtag, in Facebook groups dedicated to the move, either searched for news on Facebook accounts of TV channels. In addition, five of ten interviewed people said they persuaded and mobilized other friends to join the protests, while the other five said there was no need for mobilization as their friends were already determined to come to Victory Square or they were already there.

Among the ways in which respondents mobilized their friends to protest, the study highlighted discussions on Facebook Messenger, inviting friends to be part of the

special social media groups created for the *Rezist* Movement and posting messages on their wall every time they were present in Victory Square to motivate others. At the question "What were the results you expected from #*Rezist* Protests?", 50% of the respondents said they wanted to immediately repeal Ordinance 13, 25% wanted the fall of the government and the decline of the Social Democratic Party and 25% wanted to mobilize the youth in order to have beneficial results in the next elections.

At the end of the interviews, the ten supporters of the *Rezist* Movement were asked to argue whether, in the context of the protest movement, Facebook can be considered a tool of democratization. 9 of 10 respondents answered yes to the question, most of the reasons being common to all participants in the study. So Facebook „*can be an instrument of democratization in the sense of building and consolidating democracy, especially through the freedom of expression it allows and the ability to distribute information within extremely large communities of users.*" In the case of the protests from Romania, the democratizing force materialized in the fact that "*the mass of protesters mobilized through Facebook (...) by sending extremely fast information and details about the protest (place, reason, time, etc.)*". The idea of the rapidity of the transmission of information is complemented by another respondent by the fact that the citizens of Bucharest "*surprised the relevant aspects in video and photos, made live broadcasts to directly transmit the effervescence of the protesters, succeeding to propagate in real time the information, both at national level and beyond the borders.*" Also, respondents point out that during the protests in the winter of 2017 "*through Facebook we mobilized with food, accommodation, donations, sanitation actions of protest sites, we created unique moments like creating the Romanian flag*" Another respondent completes the arguments with the fact that there is no censorship within Facebook. "*It helps to spread information quickly, without censorship, (so the protests have attracted the attention of the international press); you can check from a number of sources if a rumor is a fake news reading several opinions, you start asking questions and even taking attitude.*"

Two of the respondents who have argued for Facebook's democratizing force have also found arguments for how this social media channel can be used anti-democratic: "*especially because of the easiness with which, using AI technology, bots and trolls, infuses large masses of people, shapes opinions, imposes major impact perceptions, dominant on public opinion. Social networks are already instruments of political campaigns, but also instruments of fighting in the hybrid war.*" Also, in another respondent's opinion, Facebook can lead to "*manipulation, misinformation or hate propaganda. The difference is the way each individual uses it.* "" The only respondent who has not seen a democratization tool in Facebook said that people can only talk and set protest days and hours through Facebook, "*no decisions can be made, nothing can be changed just because is being discussed on Facebook.*"

Conclusions

Using the qualitative method of the interview, this research concludes that social media, in general, and Facebook, in particular, have been sources of information and mobilization, being decisive in how citizens have taken individual decisions regarding their participation to protests.

By using social media during protests, this paper confirms the theory of learning about social and political issues (Loader et alii, 2014, Gil de Zúñiga, Jung and Valenzuela, 2012). People learned about protests through interpersonal communication

using Facebook, information became influential (Bode, 2012) and increased the chances for respondents to participate in protests from the first day - "*I was part of several groups created on Facebook, I had access to real-time information.*"

Of those interviewed, 80% produced and disseminated written or video information during protests, especially through Facebook, and 30% were dissatisfied with "*blocking the internet. The only information point in the Square, for a short period of time, were reporters pro-demonstration*". Thus, not only technology, but also political organization and strategy determines who wins the race. (Diamond, 2010)

Respondents identified themselves with *#Rezist* Movement and established relationships with other groups that pursued the same goal, were convinced of the legitimacy of the action, they felt the democratic future threatened and considered that free justice is in real danger, believed in collective and political effectiveness, these being the determinants of protest actions (Tajfel, 1981, Cojocaru, 2016). They came out to protest from "*the desire to be with all those who went out into the street trying to change something*", determined by "*the general emulation and the main opposition to the anti-European actions of the government*", believing in the efficiency of the action "*I thought that it is good to come out to protest, that it is the only chance to change something, those laws of justice not to be approvde.*"

The motivation for the protest was the desire to democratize and change the society, and Facebook, through its interactivity, connectivity and multiplicity proved to be an instrument of "online democracy", essential in undermining political censorship and linking protests to the democratic world. Links or exhortations have become very important. (Beciu, 2011, Momoc, 2014, Săvulescu, Vițelar, 2012, Ulmanu, 2011) *"On the evening of the adoption of Ordinance 13/2017, I was in Brussels. I showed my indignation in several Facebook posts, then I went to the street the following evening, when a protest was held in Brussels, in front of the headquarters of the Permanent Representation of Romania to the European Union ". (O.B., journalist)*

The thesis of a weak link between the use of social media and political commitment, of a positive but minimal effect, is invalidated (Bouliane, 2015) by the present research. It is validated the approach that the participation is positively affected by the active use of social media, the characteristics and motivations of the participants, age, political interest, psychological factors (Dimitrova, Matthes, 2018). Thus, most respondents are young, have a high level of education, all are social media users, spending an average of 1.5 hours a day on social media platforms.The thesis of standardization or normalization is partly validated by the fact that online discussions reinforced previous, initial beliefs and mobilized those who were already active online (Wojcik, 2011), led to the formation of groups of people with the same visions.

The present empirical research validates the thesis of mobilization because, through social media, people with common interests have come into contact, without being limited to a certain social circle of individuals. Social media facilitated the mobilization and it is particularly effective in promoting and defending national causes, social dynamics (Wojcik, 2005, 2011, Lee, et alii, 2013). Social media users were more likely to be contacted by friends, groups and organizations, and they were suggested to participate at protests (Boulianne 2017), Facebook becoming a „network of human networks" (Ulmanu, 2011): *"I posted every time I went to the Square and I urged my virtual friends to join us. And I know some people have listened to me." (interviewee).*Facebook mobilization is not only about protesting, but also about other actions during this time, as another respondent said:"*through Facebook we mobilized*

with food, accommodation, donations, sanitation actions of protest sites, we created unique moments like creating the Romanian flag".

Also, the research answers at the question: Is Facebook a force of democratization?The interviews showed other characteristics of Facebook as a tool of democratization:the freedom of expression, the ability to distribute information within extremely large communities, the posibility to send information extremely fast and in real time, a space without censorship. Of corse, this thesis should not ignore the possibility that Facebook may be used for undemocratic purposes, as some of the respondents said.

Romanian social mediain January-February 2017, in particular Facebook, was not only an online instrument of socialization and interaction between individuals or groups with similar interests but a catalyst for the mobilization of former silent groups to emerge from the online environment and to argue their beliefs in the offline environment. #Rezist Movement pointed out the democratizing force of social media by bringing in offline environment activists who previously expressed their opinions mainly on the internet, who were not interested in the real political arena.

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