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Agenda setting in newsgathering during anti-government protests 2013-2014
in Ukraine.
The impact of social media on news organizations

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Abstract

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Following the Orange revolution in 2004, popular protests of Ukrainian citizens in 2013-2014 for the second time in the last ten years altered the political regime in the country. In the battle against the corrupt government, protesters have demonstrated a sophisticated use of the Internet and social media tools in news dissemination and mobilization of activism. This study investigates another dimension of the protests – the media effects of social media on news organizations within the framework of agenda setting theory. How user-generated content influenced media coverage of the protests by professional news sites and which issues have been perceived as important for public awareness. Based on a case study of one of the leading news sites and a popular Facebook page initiative, I research the agenda setting on the mainstream media.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

On January 23, 2014, the blogger Nazar Bartosik published¹ online a 31-page presentation in English to explain the key facts about ongoing anti-government protests in Ukraine that resulted in the deepest political crisis in modern Ukrainian history. The platform the user chose to post his publication was SlideShare, a popular social media tool that allows users to share documents for free. His presentation captured global attention – it was viewed almost 700,000 times in the first week of its publication. The presentation has been widely shared in social media, including Twitter and Facebook, and the geography of the audience varied from the United States to Germany, Russia, and Ukraine.

As a Ukrainian living abroad, Bartosik aimed to raise awareness in the West about the events in Ukraine. According to Bartosik, the situation in Ukraine was not likely to be resolved without support from outside, and the horror of the events was at the time not represented at all in foreign mass media (Bartosik, 2014). His efforts to fight for democracy in Ukraine were targeting the informational flow of Western media. Bartosik explained that since he was not in Ukraine at the time, informational support was the only means he could think of to help the Ukrainian people

Ukraine has not been widely presented on the agenda of international media until recently, from the beginning of anti-government protests in November 2014 and especially with the escalation of the conflict of international significance with Russia. For years, in the perception of the West, Ukraine has been placed in a grey area of the post-Communist world, on the backyard of European politics. The country has never been a consolidated democracy, such as Western democracies, nor a decidedly authoritarian regime, such as Belarus, and it has often been hard for foreigners to understand exactly what was happening in Ukraine and Ukraine's civilizational choice – to move in the direction of the European Union or in the direction of Russia. Thus, the coverage of Ukraine in international media was set in the context of other players: the EU, Russia and the United

¹ <http://www.slideshare.net/NazarBartosik/what-is-really-happening-in-ukraine>

States. For example, foreign media intensively covered a dispute between Ukraine and Russia over the natural gas supply in 2009. Russia, one of the main suppliers of gas to the EU and Ukraine, cut off Ukraine's gas supply due to a bilateral gas price dispute. Since through its pipelines, Ukraine is the main transmitter of Russian gas to the EU, the dispute affected gas supply to the countries of the EU. Thus, European media had a direct interest in covering this story, since their own countries faced gas shortages for several weeks.

During the last ten years, only a handful of events, such as the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the European Soccer Championship in 2012, became breakthrough events of international significance that brought Ukraine to the front pages of leading international newspapers. Other issues regarding Ukraine investigated by Western media were narrowed to less dramatic events: reconstruction of the Chernobyl nuclear station, elections, the fate of the imprisoned ex-Prime Minister Tymoshenko, various EU-Ukraine negotiations, and the infamous fistfights between deputies in the Ukrainian Parliament. The leading informational agencies, such as AP or AFP, have always had two-three reporters in Ukraine, while major international media, such as *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times*, did not have enough resources to keep bureaus in Ukraine, and thus, journalists reporting on Ukraine resided in Moscow.

The intensity of coverage of Ukraine has dramatically changed with the onset of anti-government protests and Russian aggression against Ukraine in Crimea that followed in March 2014. The latter conflict has impacted the entire system of international security. Thus, it has occupied a central spot in the agenda of international media. Ukraine has been on the front page of *The New York Times* 45 times² in the period of Jan 26-April 24, 2014. Dozens of other news organizations worldwide sent their journalists to Ukraine for in-depth coverage of the conflict. Anti-government protests and the Ukraine's conflict with Russia became moments of huge importance in the eyes of foreign and Ukrainian journalists.

² <http://grassglobal.com/2014/04/24/45-headlines-of-the-new-york-times-featured-ukraine-in-last-three-months/>

Alongside the work of professional journalists, the events in Ukraine showed a huge involvement of Internet users and media activists in reporting on the developments in the protests and the conflict with Russia. With the help of modern technologies, such as Twitter, Facebook, Ustream and YouTube, users provided evidence, shared impressions, helped in news gathering and distribution, coordinated efforts, and mobilized supporters for these causes. Social media became a hub for hundreds of grassroots initiatives that mobilized hundreds of thousands of active citizens across Ukraine and worldwide, interested in the Ukrainian events. The scale of such media activism could not be ignored by professional news organizations, and step-by-step they were accepting social media as a source in newsgathering.

The rise of social media use regarding the events in Ukraine showed remarkable numbers. Twitter, an online social networking and microblogging service that enables users to send and read short, 140-character text messages called "tweets", was the fastest way to learn news about the recent events in Ukraine. In the period of February 10-March 12, 2014, 3,785,648 tweets with the hashtag #ukraine were written³ by users of Twitter. With the outbreak of the Crimean crisis, the interest in Ukraine on Twitter was comparable to the interest in the 86th Academy Awards ceremony.

Massive tweeting was a joint contribution of professional news organizations and bloggers covering Ukraine. Many of these tweets had links to articles about Ukraine, written by professional journalists. Thus, tweets served as a promotion tool to engage Internet users to consume the news and analytics about the developments in Ukraine.

At the same time, a huge portion of tweets were users' personal reflections on the events happening in Ukraine, including reactions, evidences from witnesses, messages to raise awareness about organized actions, calls for action (to sign a petition, to appeal to politicians, to fundraise money for the victims of the conflict, etc). Media organizations could not disregard such a flood of messages and journalists made Twitter and Facebook

³ <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0BxzBAq84K9dOaGozUmlQUIRpXzA/edit>

essential tools in their newsgathering. Journalists searched through keywords (hashtags), followed users who most likely were protesters reporting from the ground, followed politicians' commentaries, and searched for experts and witnesses of events. Monitoring of social media through which users raised different issues were integrated into the informational news flow of the editions.

Protests also showed the interest of ordinary citizens in social media tools. Since the beginning of protests in November 2013, thousands of new users have registered their accounts in social media to follow events online. Researchers from the New York University noticed a rise in registration of Twitter accounts in Ukraine. It has increased⁴ from 20-40 registrations per day to 150-200 per day in the weeks following the beginning of protests.

The huge attention to social media and the Internet communication tools during the protests in Ukraine was an evidence of a convergence in today's news consumption. For example, journalists of *The New Moscow Times* searched user-generated content to inform⁵ their readers about early days of the protests. The pattern of news consumption has been shifting from a monopoly of the top-to-bottom approach, practiced by traditional media in the analog epoch, to the bottom-to-top approach, exercised by users worldwide in the digital epoch. The role of ordinary users in reporting and dissemination of information is dramatically increasing, especially during events that capture global attention. Journalists are increasingly aware that bloggers can create "rolling impacts that affect the mainstream media", writes Bivens (2008, p.117), quoting Tony Burman, CBC Editor-in-Chief.

The relations between users and news organizations occupy the central part of my research. I want to explore two main questions. First of all, what was the contribution of Internet users in newsgathering during the anti-government protests in Ukraine. Secondly, have users managed to bring the issues they presumed important into the public agenda by

⁴ <https://twitter.com/svitlanax/status/440274890759761920/photo/1>

⁵ <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/the-ukraine-protests-as-seen-through-social-media-photo-essay/490727.html#ixzz2mUAm3fn5>

means of news organizations?

On the other hand, the role of the Internet and social media in newsgathering should not be overestimated.. Traditional news reporting techniques remain the key competences for journalists. Reporters remain very dependent upon “official sources” due to the nature of their news agenda, argues Bivens (2008). At the same time, new challenges for news consumption have arisen since bloggers and civic journalists have undermined the monopoly of traditional media. Ethics and credibility are two of the core issues. The new media landscape exists within blurred margins between facts and assumptions, truth and falsehood, reliability and suspicion. The discussion of ethical standards in journalism has erupted with a new energy; the older generation of more traditional journalists blame their successors for the “sins” of journalism - false news, fabrication, unproved and inconsistent information, doubtful sources, etc. Singer (2003, p.151) argues that online journalism is the “gangly, misfit cousin of “real” journalism, that the Internet is a breeding ground for kooks and charlatans.”

Nevertheless, the situation in which professional media operate has dramatically changed. Traditional media have no choice but to co-exist with new media, where users might provide information from the epicenter of events while reporting sometimes emotionally, inaccurately, incompletely and unprofessionally. Still, Internet users and bloggers, representing an active part of the media environment, make a difference – they might actively interfere with journalists’ informational flow and raise the issues that are believed to be underrepresented in the public agenda. Findings on protests in Tunisia showed that social media allowed a ‘digital elite’ to break the national media blackout through brokering information for mainstream media (Breuer, Landman, and Farquhar, 2012). Findings by Al Ezzi (2008), indicated that Egyptian protesters managed to bring onto the agenda of the traditional media the discussions about protests retrieved from Facebook – 40 stories were published in Egyptian newspapers in the period of 47 days between two protests held in 2008.

Users' efforts to place issues onto the public agenda can be described in terms of media activism as organized collective actions, aiming to achieve some goals. To analyze the context of media, activism researchers should answer several questions. What is the cause of spontaneous users' reaction to the events of public importance? Media activism often arises as a response to restricted or insufficient media coverage of the issues that the media activists want to address. In countries such as Ukraine, where freedom of the press is restricted⁶, media activism during the protests has been seen as a response to various issues not being widely presented in the media agenda, in particular balanced media coverage, citizens' access to human rights defense, coverage of the violence committed by law enforcement agencies, etc.

Another question to explore in the issue of media activism is, what is the goal of the particular action? For example, the goal of the Facebook page "Euromaidan SOS" stated⁷ in its description was that "the page was created to provide legal assistance to those victimized during Euromaidan." Thus, the need for effective assistance to the victims was seen as an important issue to be addressed, meaning that victims among protesters did not feel they had full access to assistance from other sources, especially from the government, which, on the contrary, posed a direct threat to the protesters by detaining them in police custody. The need for advocacy of the interests of ordinary citizens mobilized other proactive citizens for action.

To analyze media activism we should ask, who are the actors and what is their background? To implement media activism online, users should have at least relevant experience in blogging, civic activism and the media industry to understand how to successfully inform about the issues they address. In Ukraine, many successful online initiatives during anti-government protests were launched either by representatives of non-profits or journalists with solid experience in the fields. Thus, their experience helped to bring professional standards to grassroots initiatives, making them more noticeable to the eyes of professional media.

⁶ <http://freedomhouse.org/country/ukraine#.U02IdeZdUvQ>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/EvromaidanSOS/info>

One of the examples to illustrate agenda setting by civic activists was the initiative of the Ukraine Crisis Media Center⁸ - a temporary institution launched by Ukrainian media experts and public relation specialists in early March 2014. The idea of the center was motivated by the misbalance of media coverage about Ukraine during the Ukraine-Russia conflict in Crimea. The majority of state-owned Russian media used propaganda as a tool to mislead audiences about events in Ukraine. Russian coverage also targeted international media. In response, the initiators of the Center gave a floor to speakers from the Ukrainian government and representatives of the expert community. The center also invited foreign and local journalists, providing them with first hand information, thus encouraging them to generate news within the international and local informational flow, and thus sustaining the Ukrainian point of view on the conflict.

New media research overview

The research on the Internet and social media in their compatibility with journalism take two main directions in academia. The first broad field of research targets issues of media transformations under the pressure of new technologies in the digital epoch. The second field of research explores the role of the Internet and new media tools for civic participation and political mobilization, also revealing the role of traditional media in news coverage during events of public awareness. There are details below.

The first category, namely research in media transformations in the digital epoch, flows in the following directions:

Research in blogging culture. The earliest researches dated from the end of the 1990s to the beginning of the 2000s. They focused on emerging blogging platforms that undermined the monopoly of professional media and let users publish their news for free. Dan Gillmor's *We, the media* (2006) became a manifesto of emerging blogging culture. The book advocated the role of bloggers to be viewed as a positive in journalism. Another term

⁸ <http://uacrisis.org/>

– “citizen journalism” – reporting by non-professionals about the issues of public interest, was introduced with the launch of the Independent Media Center, known as Indymedia, which covered the protests against the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999. The concept of hyperlocal journalism (Witt, 2004; Gabe, 2010), close to the idea of citizen journalism, focused on reporting from local communities carried out by bloggers and local residents. The key terms of such researchers are “blogging”, “citizen journalism,” and “user-generated content” (UGC).

Research in convergence and new media platforms. This branch of research includes the role of technologies in society and how technological advancements lead to innovations in media. *Being digital* (2005), written by MIT Media Lab founder Nicholas Negroponte, was an early book that described the technological shift in the 20th century and its influence on media transformations. A wide scope of researches targeted the transformation of news consumption due to emerging platforms such as cell phones, laptops and tablets. Researchers also examined the ways the news organizations transform from the inside – how the role of a journalist has changed, the issue of convergence as multitasking in newsrooms, and how to operate in such convergent newsrooms. Henry Jenkins’ *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006) was one of the most influential studies written. The key terms of the research in the field are “convergent newsroom”, “digital revolution”, “multiplatforms.”

Research in online journalism and the use of social media tools.

With the emergence of opportunities for journalism to expand online, a wide range of investigations of this new environment have been published over the last ten years (Allan, 2006; Kolodzy, 2006; Buczkowski, 2006; McAdams, 2005). They addressed the issues of journalism standards online, issues of sources, fact checking online, ethics online, technical innovations, etc. Also, based on case studies, some researchers (Aarts, 2005, Acquisti and Gross, 2006. Hemida, 2010) examined the role of particular social media tools such as Twitter or Facebook in newsgathering and journalism. Key terms used: online journalism, micro-blogging, ambient media, Facebook, Twitter.

The second broad field of research on the Internet and social media is tied to political science, in particular to the theories of civic participation and political mobilization. Since new media technologies have widely been incorporated into the life of citizens, popular social movements and political parties rely on constituencies that use the Internet and new media tools.

Emphasis on the nature of political regimes plays an important role to differentiate research in civic participation and political mobilization. The basic idea is that use of the Internet in a democracy and use of the Internet in an authoritarian regime might foresee different goals, to support the system in the former case, and oppose it in the latter case.

In the majority of consolidated Western democracies, the forms of political participation tend to support the system. The forms of political engagement by means of the Internet and social media vary from conventional participation (voting, donating money to a campaign or political group, canvassing, attending political meetings and electoral rallies) to unconventional participation (signing petitions, participating in authorized demonstrations and strikes, political consumerism) (Breuer, Landman and Farquhar, 2012). Howard (2011) emphasizes that the Internet helps to increase political participation.

The rise of the Internet and social media over last two decades has reinforced researchers' interest in the theories of political mobilization and political participation. Millions of users worldwide use new media tools daily to organize collective actions and transmit their views and opinions without barriers across continents. Researchers tend to acknowledge the positive influence of social media use on the level of political participation (Howard, 2011). The Internet and social media directly imply the idea of the public sphere, explored by Habermas (1990). He researched the development of European societies in the 17th and 18th centuries and concluded that the public sphere emerged as the informal gathering of members of the public for debating and sharing of information and ideas. According to Habermas, the public sphere functions separately from the government, the church, and

political parties, establishing the foundations for a vital civil society. On the other hand, the public sphere described by Habermas was narrowed to bourgeois and patriarchal arrangements, reflecting the realities of Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. By contrast, the Internet carries no such limitations and is the most inclusive of public spheres.

Cyber activism is one of the recent scholarly terms to describe activities organized by users online. Eltantawy and Wiest (2011, p.1207) argue: “cyber activism is a growing field of scholarly inquiry, though it is not yet well understood, and it is largely lacking a clear, cohesive direction.” Prominent examples of the cyber activism movement include anti-globalization and anti-war campaigns such as Occupy Wall Street, Global Drones Watch, human rights and ecology initiatives such as Amnesty International and Greenpeace, and movements that promote freedom of the Internet such as SOPA Strike.

Cyber activism has been developing gradually with the growth of the Internet and adjustment of values of the digital epoch. The early investigations conducted on the beginning stages of the development of such social networks as Facebook showed a modest impact of the use of the Internet on civic engagement. In particular, Boulianne (2009) confirms a positive but very modest social media impact on political behavior based on a meta-analysis of 38 studies.

Scholars devoted even more attention to the research of the role of the Internet and social media in authoritarian regimes.

Arab Spring revolutions were among the most noticeable events in recent history in the debate on the role of the Internet. On February 1, 2011 a CNN.com article headline declared, “Google, Twitter, help give voice to Egyptians” (Gross, 2011). On February 5, 2011 a NYTimes.com article headline announced, “Movement Began With Outrage and a Facebook Page That Gave It an Outlet” (Preston, 2011).

In researching the Arab Spring unrests, many scholars expressed very optimistic views on

the role of the Internet in protests. Breuer (2012) argues that the Internet played a prominent role in the diffusion of popular protest across the Arab world. The consequences of the protests that toppled down the regimes has re-energized the debate on the implications of social media networks for organizational strategies of political mobilization and patterns of protest diffusion, as well as the impact of social media networks on individual political engagement (Breuer, Landman, Farquhar, 2012).

However, other researchers (Mejias, 2011) expressed less enthusiastic assumptions regarding the role of the Internet during the protests, highlighting the weakness of civil society in Arab Spring countries. Williams (2011) argued that digital media were not dominant in Egyptian protest activity and, according to Wilson and Dunn (2011), Twitter users constituted an infinitesimal proportion of the Egyptian population (.001%).

As a reaction to the contribution of enthusiasts of social media, some researchers explore the concept called “Internet anxiety” (White and Scheb, 2000; Carr, 2011). Scholars argue that mass media promote the Internet even to those who do not use it. Findings of White and Scheb (2000) show that users believe that they are behind “other users” in Internet use and that projected Internet use is higher than the actual one.

Nevertheless, in the case of Ukraine, I see a sophisticated use of Internet tools that finally contributed to the overall success of the protesters. Since traditional media in non-free and partly free countries usually serve the interests of the ruling party, the Internet remains the only medium for free speech. Although governments may restrict Internet access for users as it is practiced in China, Vietnam and North Korea, citizens of many non-free and partly free countries have access to the Internet. Thus, users can rely on the Internet as an uncensored medium to spread the word to the international community, to disseminate news and mobilize supporters domestically. Users efforts to expand digital resistance may also target the domestic audience to break an informational blockade, imposed by the government-controlled media to ignore any types of dissident activities.

The Ukrainian anti-government protests of 2013-2014 most likely will be widely analyzed and researched by scholars. As an example of the most comprehensive use of the Internet, the Ukrainian protests will help researchers to measure media effects and to validate agenda setting theory from the perspective of the technological advancements as of 2013-2014. In contrast to the societies of Iran, Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia and even Turkey, where protests took place in 2009-2013, Ukrainian civil society had strong traditions of self-organization and institutional capacities, practiced during the last twenty years of the independence. Thus, protests in Ukraine referred to the positive expertise of professional civil society and the experience of the Orange revolution of 2004.

To implement this research project, I have formed one hypothesis and one research question.

H: By publishing masses of information online and interacting in social media platforms to bring attention to the issues, Internet users exert significant pressure on media organizations that cannot ignore user-generated content when covering topics of public importance.

RQ: How has the use of social media impacted the coverage of anti-government protests in Ukraine by news organizations?

Thus, in my research I aim to answer the question of how the use of social media has impacted the coverage of protests by professional news organizations, in particular, online news sites. What were the effects of user-generated content about the protests published online through the social media sites such as Facebook? And, how has the nature of news sources been evolving in journalism, based on the case study of the protests?

In order to meet the goals of the research, I will briefly review online initiatives launched by Ukrainian protesters to raise awareness of the protests domestically and abroad. To carry out the case study as one of the qualitative methods in communication theory, I will analyze some samples of selected articles published by the most popular news site

Ukrainska Pravda (pravda.com.ua) and publications from Euromaidan SOS Facebook page, one of the most popular protest pages in Ukrainian.. I will analyze how Ukrainska Pravda utilized user-generated content in newsgathering during November 30, 2013 – February 28, 2014 and what role the publications from the Euromaidan SOS Facebook page played.

The structure of my research is divided into the following sections. In the first chapter I briefly introduce the context of my research, discussing Ukraine from the perspective of global journalism and how international news organizations prioritized the country in light of the protests and the ongoing conflict with Russia. I also discuss the directions of those researches that are at the intersection of journalism, new media technologies and political science.

In Ch. 2, I will address theoretical issues of agenda setting in international journalism with the focus on theoretical approaches that evolve due to shifts in technology. The context of agenda setting in international journalism will be discussed using the cases of the Arab Spring (2011) and Turkish uprisings (2013).

In Ch. 3, I discuss the agenda-setting theory from the perspective of Ukrainian media, starting with an overview of the media landscape in Ukraine, and explain the emerging role of the Internet and social media in recent years that was finally revealed during the protests in 2013.

In Ch. 4, I explain the methodology of my research, describing the nature of data sets and the steps implemented.

In Ch.5, I discuss the results of the analysis and the implications of social media usage in the media landscape in Ukraine. Also, I briefly review the limitations of the method and provide suggestions for the future research.

Chapter 2 Agenda-setting theory

Agenda-setting theory. Literature review

Agenda-setting theory originated from the discussions of the role of television, which rapidly expanded in American society in the 1960s-70s. Based on their observations of government elections, Shaw and McCombs (1972) concluded that agenda setting was the main effect of news media on viewers. Agenda setting was identified as an effect of media that told people not what to think, but rather what to think about. The theory highlighted the correlation between the rate at which media covers stories and the extent to which people think that stories are important. Agenda setting theory also questions the role of journalists in bringing up the issues: “If media set the public agenda, then who sets the media agenda?” (Du, 2011, p.22). Emphasizing the role of journalists, McCombs (2011) argues that setting the agenda is primary responsibility for journalists.

Agenda setting theory operates with conceptualization of media effects, the term that explains the relations between the messenger alongside the message and the audience as a receiver of the message.

The term “agenda-setting” is widely used not only in academic but also in journalism discourse. Journalists’ professional jargon also maintains such terms as “framing” and “priming.” They are all conceptualized by researchers and have particular meanings. Let me distinguish these terms, since the concepts of priming and framing are closely related to agenda setting.

Priming theory was developed in a political science work by Iyengar, Peters and Kinder (1982). It explains how media can emphasize an issue by providing the context for its public discussions. For example, by extensive coverage of the Olympics, media create a situation in which even audiences not interested in sports tend to consume news about the Olympics.

Framing theory is attributed to Erving Goffman (1974) in his research in economics.

Framing explains how media highlight some aspects of a story to influence its understanding by the audience. For example, in reporting about protests media can describe protesters as radicals, and thus audiences interpret further reports with the notion that radical elements are involved. Even though some researchers such as Brosius and Esp (1995) see framing not as a clearly determined concept, but rather as a metaphor that cannot be directly translated into research questions (Scheufele, Tewksbury, 2007), framing is one of the most discussed issues among researchers of media effects. Agenda setting is related to these two theories and has been the most developed one. Graber (2005) believes that agenda setting is the single most-used approach to grasp media effects.”

Traditional news organizations in their everyday routine choose the news to be reported. Since the public is excluded from selection of news before publication by media outlets, it is a prerogative of media professionals to form the news flow. Thus, what the public knows and cares about is mostly the result of media influence through news selection. Media effects can be measured during longer periods of time (Nixon’s presidential term, the war in Iraq, Mexican Gulf oil spill). But since it requires extensive resources, many findings on agenda setting result from research on short-term but intense events. Brosius and Kepplinger (1990) found that agenda-setting effects were most likely to occur when coverage was intense and when there was a significant variation in the coverage from month to month.

Researchers suggest identifying three major categories of studies – media agenda setting, public agenda setting and policy agenda setting studies (Du, 2011). With the focus on the variety of news organizations that operate in the market, researchers aim to specify the concept of intermedia agenda setting, which helps explain how one media influences the coverage of other media. Since today the term “media” is expanded to social media and blogging, the intermedia agenda setting also helps to explain how user-generated content and social media tools influence the news flow produced by professional media organizations.

McCombs (2004) identifies intermedia agenda setting as interactions among news organizations. Alongside with news sources and news norms, he sees intermedia agenda setting as one of the three key elements that shape the overall media's agenda. Researchers found evidences of intermedia agenda setting in the case of newspapers. Proress and McCombs (1991) argued that newspapers of nationwide circulation influenced agenda setting of local newspapers and television news programs, which "borrowed" topics for their coverage. According to Roberts and McCombs (1994), political advertisement had inter-media agenda-setting effects on coverage of elections by both newspapers and TV-channels.

Limitations of agenda-setting studies result from different cultural and economical environments in which media operate. According to Du (2011), differences in media systems may have implications for media effects at both the individual and the collective level and, thus, the agenda-setting process may differ from country to country. Thus, studying the effects of social media use in Ukraine and Egypt might result in different findings due to a lack of coherence between the practices of civil society or religious norms in the two countries.

Initially, agenda-setting theory was suggested within the framework of an analog world, where television occupied the central role in imposing "pictures of the world". Today researchers revise the agenda-setting theory due to a technological shift. With the rise of the Internet and social media, the media effects of television as a primary source of information have been questioned. McCorms (2005) argues that across the broad array of communication sites on the Internet there is considerable diversity in the agendas that are being presented.

More radical views are put forth by Berger and Freeman (2011). They believe that many postulates of agenda setting theory do not work in the digital epoch, and the theory is not functional in relation to new media. Researchers highlight the diversity of sources of information provided by the Internet: "As the media becomes personalized, the agenda is

diluted or not uniform and is therefore claimed to be no longer transferrable.” (Berger, Freeman, 2011, p.3). I explore the issue in details below.

Agenda setting in the digital epoch

Initial researches about the role of the Internet on the agenda setting theory go back to the early 1990s. Morris and Ogan (1996) claimed the Internet was a mass medium in the mid’-90s even though access to the Internet was more a privilege for IT-specialists than an everyday household habit. Roberts (2002) predicted that the Internet would expand widely and would require continuing attention from scholars: “Communication researchers need to study the Internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC) as a new arena to reexamine mass communication structure and theory”

Since the 1990s the Internet has been dramatically transformed, having grown to become one of the biggest global media, interconnecting 2.5 billion users⁹ as of 2012. Quickly, the users turned from a silent majority to polarized active minorities with different agendas and interests. According to McCombs (2005), the Internet introduced myriad new channels. Technological innovations brought customers better usability of the Internet, tailoring it to the individual needs of customers, whereas traditional media targets the needs of larger groups of customers.

The proponents of new approaches in studying agenda setting in the digital epoch highlight the accessibility of technologies for researchers to obtain information and measurements easily. Newhagen and Rafaeli (2006, p.6) argue that “almost any aspect of the Internet can be studied because the content of communications that occur by computer can be “easily observable, recorded, and copied.”

Researchers of agenda setting who express moderate views on the role of the Internet stress the complexity of measuring media effects in cyberspace. While the structure of the Internet defies vertical hierarchy, and the Internet remains a system of horizontal

⁹ <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

communication, media effects are exercised through thousands of online channels that generate millions of users. As a result, researchers have to deal with a huge set of online data to verify their findings. On the other hand, the Internet provides users with access to diverse perspectives. “The world becomes a more global village and audiences learn more about the world outside and form “pictures in their heads” about issues,” writes Roberts (2002, p.453).

Morris and Ogan (1996) suggested one of the earliest classifications of Internet-based communication. They defined four main categories of online communication: one-to-one asynchronous communication (e-mail), (b) many-to-many asynchronous communication (EBBs), (c) one-to-one, one-to-few, one-to-many synchronous communication organized around a topic or object (i.e., role playing, chat rooms), and (d) asynchronous communication, which is characterized by the receiver’s need for information (i.e., Web sites). Although the classification was developed almost 20 years ago, it is applicable to today’s realities of the Internet and social media as well.

The debates on agenda-setting theory have been re-energized with a revision of the traditional approach of agenda setting under the pressure of many agendas in contemporary society. At the same time, future research should clearly differentiate between the status of agenda setting during peaceful times and during times of citizens’ mobilization, such as protests. Protests as a public demand for political and social transformations emphasize key messages, such as a call for government resignation or public pressure to adopt new legislation, while other agendas might be temporarily denounced in the public discussion.

Agenda setting in international journalism

Despite the rise of civic journalism accelerated by the accessibility of technologies for newsgathering, professional journalism still dominates in reporting worldwide.

International journalists or foreign correspondents through whose lenses domestic audiences perceive reality follow events that capture global attention around the world.

Williams (2011) argues that one of the key features of foreign correspondents is to imply

the function of translation. Translation is seen as the process by which information from a foreign cultural environment is edited and transformed for the consumption of the domestic audience. By this, foreign correspondents “have to make the unfamiliar familiar to their audiences” (Williams, 2011, p. 77).

The history of international journalism in the 20th century has been impacted by the outcomes of World War II, in which the United States, France and Britain have expanded their influence worldwide, including dissemination of news. According to Straubhaar (2007), the United States still dominates in export of international news, action-adventure programs, drama, films and documentaries. It might lead to homogenization of standards in news reporting, influencing the selection of topics and issues to be reported.

Since the number of foreign correspondents has declined during the last thirty years in many Western news organizations, discussions about the quality of the reporting are constantly raised (Otto and Mayer; 2012, Fahmy, 2009). One of the biggest critics of foreign reporting, Williams (2011, p. 77), argues, “Ill-informed, lacking background knowledge, unable to speak local languages and spending only a short period of time in any location, many correspondents from western countries feel able to comment on and criticize societies and cultures of which they have little understanding.” Working in non-Western environments, key international media, representing the United States or the EU, may simplify cultural, political and economic issues in the countries they report on.

Internet users and bloggers, who may be direct witnesses or even participants in the events, often critically view such reporting. Technologies help users to challenge international reporting by posting footage, photos and tweets online. The biggest news organizations, such as the BBC and CNN, have recognized the value of user generated content (UGC) and suggested channels for users to submit their pieces. IReport was launched¹⁰ by CNN and the BBC introduced¹¹ an upload service Have Your Say on their site.

¹⁰ <http://ireport.cnn.com/>

¹¹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/10725415>

To illustrate the role of social media in the agenda setting of international journalism, I will turn to the lessons of the Arab Spring (2011) and anti government protests in Turkey (2013-2014).

Uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen called the “Arab Spring” blew up in 2011 and targeted the dysfunctional policies of authoritarian regimes in these countries. For decades, citizens of these countries had faced corruption, violations of basic rights, including freedom of speech and assembly, human rights abuses and economic mismanagement. The population of the region numbered 300 million people, two-thirds of which were young people below 29 years of age. At the same time, new technologies, such as smartphones and laptops and access to the Internet were on the rise in the area.

According to many researchers (Khondker, 2011; Eltantawy and Wiest 2011; Aourach and Alexander, 2011), Arab Spring protests became the most noticeable evidence of the rise of media activism in Arab countries with the help of new media technologies influencing public and media agendas in the region. Gerbaudo (2012) and Bellin (2012) identify Twitter and Facebook as the main tools that fueled the protests.

At the same time, other researchers (Wilson and Dunn, 2011; Anderson, 2010) mention the limitations of the new media tools. According to Wilson and Dunn (2010), Twitter users constituted an infinitesimal proportion of the Egyptian population (.001%), thus, Twitter cannot be seen as a driving force of the uprisings.

Lotan (2011) emphasized the importance of social media specifically in reaching international audiences. According to the researcher, people from around the world tuned in to Twitter feeds to learn about the revolutions and share what they learned.

During the protests users posted their messages in both Arabic and English. The number of tweets in Arabic dominated. Still the importance of tweets in English prevailed for the international community. “There is a clear indication that Twitter was used to actively and

successfully engage an international audience in the Egyptian revolution” (Wilson and Dunn, 2011, p.1269).

The buzz about the Arab Spring was widely noticed around the world while the discourse itself was dominated by a relatively small group of “power users,” explain Wilson and Dunn (2011). But the majority was a massive group of relatively passive users who offered expressions of support, shared related content, and retweeted power user content.

International coverage of Arab Spring uprisings heavily relied on information from social media. Western media identified key users and organizations to reports on developments.

Anti-government protests in Turkey began in May 2013. During the first days of the protests, traditional media ignored them. “CNN Turk decided to show a documentary about penguins instead of broadcasting live from the protest,” wrote Alex Kantrowitz from PBS¹². Dissatisfaction with media coverage caused Turks to turn to social media: “The images shared on social media propelled more and more people into the streets, and the fury intensified as the mainstream media only tepidly acknowledged the protests were taking place.”

The recent developments in Turkey led the government to see social media as a powerful tool in the hands of protesters threatening Prime Minister Erdogan’s legitimacy. In March 2014 the Turkish government denied its citizens access to Twitter and Facebook. This is not just evidence of limitations of freedom of speech and expression, but may also serve as an evidence of the government’s awareness of the role of social media in news dissemination and civic mobilization.

With Twitter and Facebook blocked, the rise of unrest may be limited to other forms of communications such as phone calls or instant messaging. But the mobility of group communication through calls and instant messaging is quite limited. In Turkey, with its 32

¹² <http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2013/07/the-secret-behind-the-turkish-protesters-social-media-mastery/>

million Facebook users as of 2013,¹³ the role of modern technologies such as Facebook might be vital for civic participation of socially active citizens.

In the next chapter I discuss agenda setting from the perspective of Ukrainian media. I briefly overview the context of the protests, historical parallels, and the effect of violence on media coverage. I continue with the overview of the media landscape in Ukraine because the situation with media freedoms may explain the role of the Internet and social media in recent years that was finally revealed during the protests in 2013.

¹³ <http://www.thecountriesof.com/top-10-countries-with-most-facebook-users-in-the-world-2013/>

Chapter 3 Agenda setting in Ukraine

Social media and news organizations during protests

The anti-governmental protests in Ukraine that had finally resulted in the government's resignation in February 2014 were the most dramatic events in the history of the independent Ukraine. The protests also culminated¹⁴ in more than 100 protesters killed, more than 150 disappeared and more than 1,000 injured. They contrast with previous protests in the history of Ukraine; none of the earlier ones led to death. The Orange Revolution in 2004 was widely praised worldwide as a triumph of peaceful protests (D'Anieri, 2010; Wilson, 2006; Åslund and McFault, 2006). It was a combination of peaceful strategy by protesters and the choice of then-President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma, who did not order the police to use violence against the people.

From the beginning of the November 2013 protests, then-President Viktor Yanukovich chose a different tactic: based on his order, riot police violently attempted to suppress protesters. This approach backfired and led to an even greater mobilization of protesters. Users' videos of police violence detonated immediately on social media and captured the attention of news organizations¹⁵ worldwide, which aired the amateur footage. Protesters used advanced and relatively cheap technologies, such as cell phones and online streaming, to document police brutality. The government overlooked the role of new media technologies in the documentation of events and dissemination of the news. State officials mainly trusted in the absolute power of government-controlled television to frame reality for audiences.

Anti-government protests of 2013-2014 were accompanied by extensive use of social media to set the agenda of news coverage in Ukraine and worldwide. Early researches about the Ukrainian protests acknowledge that "Twitter and Facebook have been effective means to convey messages about the violence to the international community"(Barbera and

¹⁴ <http://life.pravda.com.ua/person/2014/02/21/153011/>

¹⁵ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10487567/Video-emerges-of-police-brutality-in-Ukraine-against-protesters-calling-for-president-to-resign.html>

Metzger, 2014).

Reports on protest activities on Facebook, protesters' evidences in Twitter and raw footage from battlefields posted on YouTube became essential attributes of news consumption. The interest in social media and the Internet was reinforced by the state of traditional media. Leading Ukrainian TV channels reported on protests with bias since the government could pressure media owners. In response, millions of Ukrainians turned to social media and online news sites to seek comprehensive information about the protest developments. "The media coverage of Euromaidan events argued in favor of online media as the only means of information opposing propaganda," write researchers of Eastern Partnership Media Freedom Landscape 2013¹⁶.

Overall, the reporting about protests by Ukrainian media implied two main narratives – pro-government media aimed to show protests as minor unrests by radicals, who controlled a couple of acres of downtown Kyiv, while independent media and the Internet aimed to show protests as a people's revolution against the corrupt government. To demonstrate the sense of protests, protesters deployed the term "the revolution of dignity" that was later "borrowed" by traditional media¹⁷.

At the same time, research on protests should not simplify the landscape to the notion of "people against government". The scene of the protests showed the complexity of different interests perceived by different actors who wanted to achieve different goals. Rogers and Dearing (1987) noticed that the classical agenda theory approach simplifies the relations between actors. They suggested distinguishing among three different agendas: the priorities of the media, those of the public and those of policy. All these three actors interact in a complex way, and their actions may lead to effects in different directions.

¹⁶http://mediafreedomwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/EaP-Media-Freedom-Landscape-2013_EN3.pdf

¹⁷<https://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/ictvs-documentary-revolution-of-dignity-now-has-english-language-subtitles-338913.html>

Implying the above-mentioned scheme to Ukrainian protests, it is worth while to differentiate the agendas of each of the three actors: the media, the public and politicians. Media were divided into those, whose policy was to serve the government and those who served the public. The public was divided into those who fought against the government and those who defended government policies. Also, among politicians, the role of the opposition, whose priority was to oust the ruling party, was growing with the advance of the protests, while the role of the pro-government party was meanwhile diminishing. The role of social media in Ukraine was overwhelmingly beneficial to protesters and the opposition, even though supporters of the government also used social media for their cause.

Unlike the passive audience of traditional media, users of social media may actively interfere with informational flow and promote their own agenda. During the active stage of the protests in Ukraine, some users disagreed with the coverage of pro-government news organizations and took action. In January 2014 media activists announced a boycott of the “Inter” TV channel due to its biased coverage of mass protests¹⁸. Earlier, activists targeted Korrespondent.net, one of the leading news sites, likewise due to its biased coverage of the protests. On Facebook activists were sharing an appeal to unfollow Korrepospondent.net. The initiative resulted in the loss of at least 2,000 fans of Korrespondent on Facebook during a single week¹⁹. In January 2014, another pro-government site Podrobnosti.ua was under pressure. The newsroom lost access to its official Twitter account. Presumably, an ex-employer, who disagreed with editorial policy and seized the control of the account to publish tweets denouncing the newsroom. One of such tweets was posted²⁰ on behalf of Podrobnosti and stated: “We (*Podrobnosti*) are the most false news.”

Informing on Ukrainian protests through social media had two main directions – targeting a local audience, in particular, the citizens of Ukraine, and targeting the international

¹⁸ <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/euromaidan-activists-call-for-boycott-of-inter-tv-channel-334683.html>

¹⁹ <http://watcher.com.ua/2014/02/06/korrespondent-net-vtrachaye-svoyi-pozytsiyi-sered-ukrayinskyh-media/>

²⁰ <http://grassglobal.com/2014/02/17/twitter-of-podrobnosti-ua-online-news-site-has-been-hacked/>

audience, including Ukrainians living abroad, international news organizations and foreign governments.

Media activists targeted users and journalists to inform about protests developments and abuses by riot police. Their informing also aimed to spread the word about injured, missing or killed protesters. An important goal was to mobilize audiences for street rallies.

Social media also helped to coordinate informational flow through established media hubs on social media. In particular, Facebook provides users with the option to create a public page, an open or closed group. There is no limit to the numbers of subscribers in pages and groups. Thus, during the Ukrainian protests, media activists launched hundreds of pages and groups that represented protest groups on the national and local levels. The rapid growth of subscribers to the pages, tens of thousands per week, was a direct evidence of popular civic mobilization during the protests.

The top Facebook pages, launched in the beginning of the anti-government protests, united up to three hundred thousand users alone.

- Euromaidan www.facebook.com/EuroMaydan - 281,000 fans;
- Euromaidan SOS - www.facebook.com/EvromaidanSOS - 93,000 fans;
- Euromaidan in English - www.facebook.com/EnglishMaidan - 38,000 fans.

As of April 2014, the Euromaidan page was one of the top 3 Ukrainian pages²¹ on Ukrainian Facebook.

Informing the international audience was a priority for the protesters. For this purpose, users employed English as a main language of news dissemination through Twitter, Facebook, blogs and e-newsletters.

Twitter users, whose native language was Ukrainian or Russian, translated tweets into English, some users tweeted in English to reach worldwide audiences. Three most active

²¹ <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/ukraine>

Twitter users from Ukraine, who reported on the crisis (namely @Kateryna_Kruk, @MaximEristavi, and @ChristopherJM) received from 18,000 to 28,000 interactions²² in Twitter during the period of March 2nd — April 1st. 2014. The numbers indicate that their messages engaged thousands of users, including influential Western news organizations, for whom following breaking events through Twitter is common practice.

Users organized teams for collective action. A team of volunteers formed the Civic Center of Euromaidan, one of the most powerful grassroots initiatives during the protests, producing a weekly an e-newsletter reporting on the main events occurring in Ukraine. With 25,000 subscribers in Facebook²³, the Civic Center of Euromaidan called on friends and journalists to distribute posts and e-newsletter to the wider audience. A similar initiative, the Civic Center of Euromaidan Lviv, published²⁴ the main chronicles of Ukrainian events in ten languages, from English to Italian. Activists called on users to disseminate the translated news across the globe.

In March 2014, when the conflict with Russia ignited, civil society leaders established the Ukraine Crisis Media Center an informal initiative of an English-language press center to inform Western media on the crisis developments, followed by Russian invasion of Crimea. The initiative was evidence that Ukrainian media organizations were not capable of informing the West effectively about the crisis in Ukraine. The center was “a required daily stop for dozens of Ukrainian and foreign journalists,” wrote²⁵ Brian Bonner, editor-in-chief of KyivPost.com. Also the center played an important role in fighting Russian official propaganda that targeted international media:

The biggest untruths that Ukrainians are trying to counter on the world stage include the Kremlin’s attempts to define the EuroMaidan Revolution and the new government as dominated by neo-Nazi extremists, rather than as a broad-based democratic uprising to topple a corrupt dictatorship. - Brian Bonner.

²² <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0BxzBAq84K9dOVXRMRmZpWWx4RVE/edit>

²³ <https://www.facebook.com/hrom.sektor.euromaidan?fref=ts>

²⁴ <http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/voznyak/530b24d9a9cc9/>

²⁵ <https://www.kyivpost.com/guide/about-kyiv/crisis-media-center-springs-into-action-339299.html>

All the above-mentioned efforts of Ukrainian users and activists are evidence of proactive approaches to set the agenda of Ukrainian events in the eyes of foreign audiences and media. Access to new media technologies, universally used worldwide by big media organizations as well as by ordinary users, enabled Ukrainian media activists to send messages to target audiences and interfere with the news flow about the protests in Ukraine.

Media landscape in Ukraine

To understand the role of social media during the protests, one needs to examine the media landscape in Ukraine, in particular the rise of the Internet and the role of television that dominates as a source of information for the majority of the Ukrainian population.

The Ukrainian TV market has been quite diverse in terms of programming and content, but business tycoons, called oligarchs in Ukraine, have owned the majority of influential TV channels. The 1+1 TV channel has belonged to the oligarch Igor Kolomoyskyi, the “Inter” TV channel – to Dmytro Firtash, and the “Ukraina” TV channel – to Rinat Ahmetov, who is the richest person in Ukraine. Three other national channels, including ICTV, STB and Novyi have belonged to Viktor Pinchuk. Within the Ukrainian political system, oligarchs heavily influenced political life in Ukraine by funding political parties in order to protect their own business interests. Having built relations with the government, oligarchs trade media loyalty to the government in exchange for their access to tenders and licenses without competition.

According to the report “Ukrainian Media Landscape” (2013, p.8), “TV content monitoring results show that recent years have been characterized by political influence over the most popular national TV channels. First of all, it is visible in their news programs.” Opposition parties do not have equal access to audiences. In terms of numbers, government officials appeared on TV 2.4 times more than he representatives of the

opposition.

Since television targets the majority of the Ukrainian population, diversified social media and the Internet remain as the key source of alternative information in the country.

The Internet has significantly grown in Ukraine during the last five years, turning from a segment media to mass media, show findings of the report “Eastern Partnership Media Freedom Landscape 2013” (2014, p.63). According to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 49,8% of the adult population in Ukraine had access to the Internet as of September 2013. The Internet access expanded from big cities to regional centers and small towns. The market of Internet providers in Ukraine has been diverse and competitive since the late 1990s, the time when it has been constantly developing. An average monthly payment for broadband Internet access is around \$12-\$15, one of the cheapest in the world. The cost of the Internet in Ukraine made the service accessible to new customers and helps the market to grow.

The positive factors for freedom of speech on the Internet included the launch of three online TV stations. In May 2013, Spilno.TV TV (translated as “together.TV”) was launched as a crowdsourcing online TV station. Also, a group of 15 journalists, previously retired from the “TVi” channel, announced²⁶ the launch of another online TV station - HromadskeTV (translated as “public.TV”). In November 2013, HromadskeTV went live. Finally, in November 2013 Espresso.TV was launched²⁷. The emergence of three independent online televisions has had a positive impact on the editorial policies of conventional TV channels, whose broadcasting was traditionally viewed as biased, unethical and pro-governmental. The launch of the new media also indicated that Internet technologies are relatively well developed in Ukraine and that there is a public demand for online streaming²⁸.

²⁶ <http://bit.ly/QBp1Rk>

²⁷ http://www.telekritika.ua/rinok/2013-11-06/87317?theme_page=1060&

²⁸ <http://bit.ly/1lwKIvG>

On the other hand, in 2013 the market forces had a negative impact on the freedom of speech on the Internet. One of the biggest media holdings, UMH, owned by Boris Lozhkin was sold²⁹ to the businessman Sergiy Kurchenko, a close ally of President Yanukovich. The deal had a huge impact on the work of influential online news resources, including Korrespondent.net, Forbes.ua, and Bigmir.net, that were previously owned by Lozhkin's UMH. The majority of editors and journalists from these online sites have retired due to the pressure and censorship from the new owner. The quality of news has immediately dropped as a consequence. These news resources, such as Korrespondent.Net, became a tool for pro-government propaganda³⁰.

Cyber attacks against online news sites

The growing role of the Internet in serving up news for the audiences has a positive influence on maintaining media freedoms worldwide. The opponents of free speech respond with cyber attacks targeting news sites and social media. Ukraine is a case. In 2013-2014, Ukraine witnessed an increased number of cyber attacks against independent online media and media activists. According to an IMI report³¹, 49 cyber attacks against journalists in Ukraine were made in 2013.

The attacks reflect a general pattern of silencing Internet voices during protests in many countries. The attempts to shut down the Internet were carried out during the uprisings in Iran³² in 2009, Egypt³³ in 2011, and Syria³⁴ in 2012. Even in Turkey, the country that aspires to join the EU, the government blocked³⁵ Twitter and Facebook upon the rise of anti-government protests in March 2014.

During the protests in Ukraine in 2013-2014, unidentified hackers applied different strategies of cyber war. First of all, they attempted to crack users' emails and files. For

²⁹ <http://ukrainianweek.com/News/82716>

³⁰ <http://grassglobal.com/2013/11/27/chomu%D1%87-korrespondent-net-bilshe-ne-isnuye/>

³¹ <http://imi.org.ua/news/42716-2013-stav-naygirshim-dlya-svobodi-slova-v-ukrajini-za-ostanni-11-rokiv.html>

³² <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/iran-blocks-internet-on-eve-of-rallies/>

³³ <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748703956604576110453371369740>

³⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/29/syria-blocks-internet>

³⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/21/turkey-blocks-twitter-prime-minister>

example, in October 2014, the computer of Oksana Romanyuk, the executive director of the Institute of Mass Information (IMI), was hacked, and the private email correspondence was leaked publicly³⁶.

Also, hackers targeted social networks and news sites through distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack as an attempt to make a machine or network resource unavailable to its intended user.

On December 2, 2013, the site of Ukrainska Pravda was under a DDoS attack. It was the first identified attack against a news resource from the time the protests began on November 21, 2013.

On December 13, 2013, Cityband.com.ua, a resource that had published a map of protests in Kyiv, was shut down. The notice on its front page said³⁷: “Our site is under DDoS attack. We had to close hosting. Sorry, friends. Instead we have created a more informative map on Yandex – Cityband Euromaidan.”

On December 14, 2013, journalists at Liga.net posted a message to their official page in Facebook: “We are currently under a very strong DDoS attack. Our technical team is fighting the night through.” The site www.yanukovich.info, that published findings on corruption schemes of President Yanukovich’s family, was shut down by DDoS attacks for a couple of days in the middle of December 2013.

Unknown hackers have likewise attacked other online news resources covering the Ukrainian protests – Glavcom.ua, Censor.net and RadioSvoboda.org.

In addition to cyber attacks, the work of journalists and independent online resources was challenged by unidentified journalists who launched fake sites, which echoed popular news sites. In particular, Ukrainska Pravda discovered two copycat sites, launched in summer 2013. The first, Ukrainska Kryvda,³⁸ stole the design of Ukrainska Pravda and published

³⁶ https://www.ifex.org/ukraine/2013/10/10/protest_harassment/index.php

³⁷ <http://grassglobal.com/2013/12/14/ddos-attacks-target-media-covering-protests-in-ukraine/>

³⁸ <https://web.archive.org/web/20140208064745/http://www.kryvda.com/#.U1mEiOZdUvQ>

biased anti-opposition articles. By launching³⁹ Ukrainska Kryvda, initiators violated copyright laws, registered their site in Russia and located their hosting in Australia, having protected the identity of the people behind the site. The second site stole the brand “Ukrainska Pravda” and registered domain name similar to pravda.com.ua–ukrpravda.ua⁴⁰. Both fake sites demonstrated that the methods to combat independent journalism in Ukraine had become more sophisticated. As of March 2014 both fake sites have been deactivated after months of their activity.

Media activism and agenda setting by Internet users in Ukraine

Media activism as a form of civic activism explores technologies as the most effective tools of societal transformations. The traditions of media activism in former Soviet Union countries go back to samizdat as an illegal publishing of dissident newsletters and literature pieces disseminated from hand to hand. Blogging is the most common form of media activism across dozens of blogging platforms: LiveJournal, WordPress, Blogger, Tumblr, etc. With the arrival of social networks such as Twitter, Pinterest, Facebook, Orkut, that allow users to easily post their content, the definition of bloggers expanded to practically any Internet user.

When today’s users and bloggers actively practice media activism through online discussions, petitions, causes and flash mobs, it indirectly indicates that they may reject traditional sources of information and demand alternatives by creating their own content. Since media activism, now often called cyber activism (Eltantawy and Wiest, p.1207, 2011) unites millions of users, its organizational power may challenge any social institution, including government and traditional media.

Studies on political agenda setting (Ailst, Walgrave, 2011) note that politicians recognize the crucial role of the media in setting a public agenda. According to findings of

³⁹<http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/ukrainska-pravda-demands-investigation-of-clone-site-paper-329009.html>

⁴⁰<https://web.archive.org/web/20140106114350/http://ukrpravda.ua/>

researchers about members of parliament in Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark, MPs “consider the mass media to be one of the key political agenda setters directly competing with the Prime Minister and the powerful political parties.” Further research requires measuring the role of social media in setting the political agenda.

Meanwhile, as the case of the Ukrainian protests indicates, politicians make use of social media. Even before the anti-government protests, opposition politicians in Ukraine, especially the young, embraced the power of social media. Media activism by Ukrainian opposition MPs Andriy Shevchenko and Lesya Orobets brought attention as examples to social media use during the protests in Ukraine. Andriy Shevchenko has widely used Twitter to report on protests. He attended Independence Square on November 30, when riot police for the first time used violence against protesters. He tweeted⁴¹ about police brutality as a witness, and thus attracted a lot of attention from the public. The number of his Twitter followers grew from 6,000 in November 2013 to 62,000 in February 2014.

Lesya Orobets has been one of the most prominent voices of the protests in Ukraine. She often was in the epicenter of the fight, posting expanded status updates on her Facebook profile⁴². She also posted chronicles of ongoing clashes with riot police, and reflections on government strategies to defeat the protesters. Also, Orobets put out calls for support of injured protesters, described her visits to hospitals in order to protect protesters from police, and reported with photos from the epicenter of standoffs. Thus, Orobets effectively utilized her digital skills to communicate with users and journalists, who followed her posts. Journalists transformed some of her posts into news, referring to her Facebook profile as a source of information. As of March 2014, 72,000 users followed Orobet’s public updates on Facebook⁴³.

Orobets has acknowledged the importance of sending the message to the international community during the crisis to promote an alternative to pro-government views on

⁴¹ <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0BxzBAq84K9dOdWhEZnZLZXpvOEU/edit>

⁴² <https://www.facebook.com/lesyaorobets?fref=ts>

⁴³ <https://www.facebook.com/lesyaorobets?fref=ts>

protests. Thus, Orobets called on her followers in Facebook to help her with translation⁴⁴ of her posts into English. After translation those posts were published separately to inform Western journalists on developments in Ukraine. It was a way to set an agenda of the protest coverage while competing with other sources, such as government-controlled TV channels.

For years, a traditional way for politicians to seek media attention has foreseen arranging press conferences, writing press releases and sending them to media organizations. With the emergence of the new medium - social media and the Internet - politicians got new opportunities to send their messages directly to constituencies. The protests in Ukraine emphasized an even more proactive role of politicians - to use social media as a key tool for sharing politicians' statements in public without journalists as mediators. Today politicians actively target social media that help them to reach two audiences: journalists, seeking for story ideas online, and users, consuming news online.

Moreover, social media and the Internet served to reinforce the institutions of civil society by expanding the public sphere to the cyberspace. The issues of government accountability, corruption, health and education reforms have been widely discussed online among hundreds of thousands of active Ukrainian citizens, interconnected through laptops, cell phones and tablets. The Internet and social media have helped the most appealing civic initiatives⁴⁵ to flourish. Discussions online resulted in coordinated efforts offline, bringing together people of common interests, even if they did not know each other before. The previous patterns of mobilization online have helped to fuel anti-government protests with thousands of people in the fall of 2013.

In Ukraine, Facebook became the leading social media platform for communication among socially active protesters. The protests themselves were first initiated in a post published by a well-known journalist in Ukraine in his Facebook on November 21, 2013, and throughout the months, they have been fueled with further online discussions.

⁴⁴ <http://bit.ly/1nu5kJg>

⁴⁵ <http://tabletochki.org/welcome>

As of December 15, 2013, the list of the most popular Facebook users in Ukraine according to Watcher included three journalists, five politicians, one businessman and one traveler. Each of them had up to 48,000 subscriptions or followers. The numbers for one of the most popular users - the journalist Mustafa Nayem have shown a constant growth of users' interest in his posting during the last five months. While in late November 2013 Mustafa Nayem had 33,000 users who followed him in Twitter, on December 15, 2013 the number was 48 700 and on March 18, 2014 – 110,000. Thus, the number of followers increased by 300% in the period of four months.

The growth of public attention and popularity of Facebook may be also explained in terms of technology innovations. Until recently Facebook has limited the number online friends for every user by 5,000. As soon as any user reached the limit of 5,000 friends, he / she could not added anyone else. Consequently, users' interaction with other was limited to 5,000 other users maximum. This has changed since 2011 when Facebook introduced a new feature - subscription⁴⁶. Subscription let users follow any other Facebook user's updates through a web feed. Web feed is a data format used for providing users with frequently updated content. If earlier, in order to see content in Facebook, users had to add each other to "friends", now a user may use subscription for this purpose. Once a user subscribes to another user's web feed, notifications on updates from the latter will be sent to the former automatically. This innovation helped users to be connected with many popular users and follow their public updates.

Since the beginning of the crisis, international journalists and users started actively looking for news from Ukraine. The majority of news was in Ukrainian and Russian, but not in English. The demand for the news from Ukraine has rapidly grown, much more than key informational agencies such as AP, Reuters and AFP deployed in Ukraine could supply. At least one local English language newspaper KyivPost covered Ukraine on a daily basis, but it was not enough to meet the expanding search queries on Ukraine.

⁴⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook/introducing-the-subscribe-button/10150280039742131>

As a result of growing demand for news from Ukraine, social media were seen as a source for grassroots evidences and reports from Ukraine. Alongside Facebook, Twitter was another highly demanded social media tool due to its effectiveness in sharing information. Unlike Facebook, posts in Twitter (tweets) are accessible worldwide for anyone, both for registered and unregistered users. Browsing by key words, in particular “ukraine”, “protests”, “euromaidan” anyone could find messages from Ukraine, including reporting from protesters, local journalists and media activists. Still Ukrainian and Russian were the main languages of reporting in Twitter, but some users were dedicated to posting their messages in English.

Realizing the importance of tweets in English, some users monitored tweets written in Ukrainian and Russian and translated them into English to disseminate among the English speaking audience. Data by the social network analytics site Topsy shows⁴⁷ that the number of tweets about Ukraine with the keyword “ukraine” has rapidly grown in the period of February-March 2014, the time of massive killings of protesters and Russia’s invasion into Crimea.

The role of citizens in forming the public agenda grew with the development of new technologies of the digital epoch. In democratic societies the process of hearing public voices might be accelerated by official institutions, who invite people to raise their concerns and form the public agenda. For example, in 2011 the government of the United States launched a site of petitions⁴⁸ called “We, the people.” The site serves as a channel for the citizens to influence public and media agenda by sending causes. Any registered user can sign a petition. The Administration staff review every petition that collects 100,000 signatures within a month from its launch.

Users from Ukraine and abroad targeted the “We, the people” site to raise awareness about the crisis in Ukraine. The petition to appeal to the US government to impose sanctions

⁴⁷ <http://bit.ly/11PkYLd>

⁴⁸ <https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petitions>

against the Yanukovych government has collected more than 100,000 signatures during the first 10 days of the protests⁴⁹. An official response from The White House team was sent to every user who had signed this petition. Another petition⁵⁰, calling on the US government to liberalize visa regime for the citizens of Ukraine, got 100,000 signatures in March 2014. The voices of citizens, especially those, collected through sites such as Whitehouse.gov, attract media attention. Many news organizations in Ukraine reported about both petitions.

To conclude: today, the monopoly of traditional media to set the public agenda has been seriously undermined by new media technologies. Active use of Twitter, Facebook and other Internet tools introduced a new partnership between the public and media organizations to collect and disseminate information. But it is far beyond newsgathering. Users exploit these tools to advocate collective actions and coordinate their efforts by means of the Internet. Additionally, social media emerged as a joint platform for users and journalists to meet each other and exchange media influences - journalists trade their articles to users, and users trade their ideas to news organizations and participate in news production.

In the next chapter I explain the methodology of my research, describing the nature of data sets and the steps implemented to answer the research question about the use of social media in the coverage on anti-government protests.

⁴⁹ <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2013/11/30/7003680/>

⁵⁰ <https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/allow-ukrainian-citizens-90-day-entrance-usa-passport-without-visa/m0BDgkb5>

Chapter 4. Methodology, data analysis

Method of research

A long tradition of qualitative and quantitative research within the framework of communication theory addresses media organization and their informational flow. Among the most common methods of quantitative research in communication are questionnaires and content analysis. Qualitative research in communication relies on data analysis, such as document analysis or ethnographic content analysis. Some researchers in communication studies use elements of both approaches in researching media effects. Until recently the majority of studies have addressed the work of traditional news organizations, such as newspapers, radio and television, reflecting the patterns of popular media consumption. With the emergence of the Internet and migration of newspapers online, researchers have also focused on news consumption through online versions of media outlets, in particular, researching readers' preferences, interaction effects and public participation in online newspapers. (See for example, Althaus and Tewksbury, 2002; Skogerbø, 2011; Taipale, 2013; Ihlebæk and Krumsvik, 2014).

Research into social media is relevantly new. There is no one single approach to analyze social media impact on news organizations. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses apply to the research in social media. Research in social media foresees some challenges unknown for traditional media. Unlike research in traditional media that relies on newspaper archives, transcripts of TV shows or online databases such as LexisNexis, social media databases are not yet fully developed. Also, companies that operate social media sites practice a policy of restriction in providing public access to data and content. For example, Facebook restricts public access to the data, since the company's business model is based on selling the demographics of its users to advertisers. On the other hand, administrators of Facebook public pages have access to data on users' activities through a tool called Facebook Insights. Insights helps administrators of the pages to track a user's engagement and interactions, in particular the number of comments left, the number of posts seen, etc. Facebook Insight provides basic analytics of users' behavior and

preferences.

Compared to Facebook, Twitter provides better public access to user-generated content – anyone can browse a user's content posted on Twitter. Twitter raw analytics can be accessed through such sites as Topsy.com, Twitonomy.com, Twtrland.com, etc. Such tools help to track social media trends, hot topics discussed, growth of the audience in social media, users' interactions and their daily posts.

Research into social media also faces barriers, based on the difference between the work of news organizations and activities on social media. First of all, the publications in social media and news organization are different. Unlike traditional media that work according to journalism standards and corporate codes and whose content can be categorised by genres, content on social media is extremely diverse. Journalism standards do not apply there; consequently users may publish false news alongside well-written reports. Publications from social media can be short or long, grammatically correct or written in slang, etc.

Furthermore, unlike professional media, social media set no entry barriers for contributors. While news organizations employ professionals, media activists, bloggers as well as professional journalists generate the content of social media.

Thirdly, the content of news organizations is easily organized, since publications come regularly - on a daily or weekly basis. Publications in social media are streaming 24/7. Fourthly, the volume of content from news organizations is limited, while the mass of information from bloggers and users cannot be estimated. The variety of user-generated content is hardly searchable compared to publications of newspapers or TV channel scripts.

The different nature of publications and contributors' behavior in social media and news organizations set limitations to the methods of research in social media. Content analysis may lack appropriate classification and categorization of information, the method of online

questionnaires might be useless since Internet users often hide their demographics, the method of focus groups is questionable due to the lack of group integrity in cyberspace.

In my research I employ case study, a common technique of qualitative research technique. It is the most appropriate method in a situation of a constantly changing landscape of social media use by journalists. Today journalists are paving their way to deep integration of social media tools in their work. A few years ago, professional journalists, including those of *Ukrainska Pravda*, a news organization I refer to, ignored the use of Twitter and Facebook. In 2010 they registered *Ukrainska Pravda* accounts on Facebook and Twitter, now they demonstrate an extensive use of social media. According to data by Twitonomy⁵¹, *Ukrainska Pravda* publishes up to 330 tweets in Twitter per day.

Thus, a case study of social media usage during one particular event – anti-government protests, embraces the research in the particular period of time (November 2013-February 2014), helping to identify the state of social media usage by news organizations in that time frame. Also, the case study method gives an opportunity to analyze the variety of sources under the broad notion of social media.

Merriam (1988) describes four main characteristics of the case study:

- *Particularistic*. This means the case study focuses on a particular situation or event. In my case, it is anti-governmental protests in Ukraine in the context of social media use.
- *Descriptive*. This means the final product is a detailed description of the topic. I explain the variety of implications of the social media usage that shape media landscape;
- *Heuristic*. It helps to understand readers what is being studied. Thus, I provide some interpretations and new meanings of the journalism and social media during the protests;
- *Inductive*. Examination of data provides new generalizations and principles. I will explain new relationships between news organizations and bloggers communities, journalists and users.

⁵¹ <http://bit.ly/1ilnWTQ>

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2003), the case study relies on diverse data sources. In my case, data sources include a variety of documents retrieved from the Internet and social media: posts on Facebook, messages on Twitter, publications on news sites, data with social media analytics. Another key source of data I use relates to my observation of behavior of the Internet users online, including professional media and media activists, their interaction and communication. In December 2013-January 2014, I conducted interviews with five Ukrainian journalists. The timeframe for data selected and observations (from November 30, 2013 to February 28, 2014) was chosen since it was the first time the Ukrainian government used violence against protesters, leading to an intensification of the protests. The date February 28, 2014 was chosen as it was the day when Russia invaded into Crimea, thus, public attention switched from the protests to the Russian aggression.

Until recently social media were not a primary focus of researchers in communication studies since media organizations, being conservative by nature, did not trust social media as source. Hanusch and Obijiofor (2011) argue that the introduction of new technologies in many newsrooms has been met with much resistance. In the United States the institutionalization of social media as a journalists' source occurred under the pressure of big media organizations, in particular, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* or *Associated Press*. The AP stylebook (2012) introduced Social Media Guidelines. The guidelines precisely described the situations journalists when use user-generated content and regulated fact checking of information. Thus, to some extent social media have been set in the agenda of news organizations.

In Ukraine the process of institutionalization of social media took a different path. The rise of social media influenced first of all individual journalists who started to use social media. Later on, the culture of social media came to news organizations. The process was also accelerated by expansion of social media usage - more and more people started sharing their views in Facebook and Twitter. It is worth mentioning that the institutionalization of social media applies not to all social media platforms. For example, LiveJournal, a popular

social network in Ukraine in 2007-2010, has not become integrated into the work of media organizations, thus journalists hardly ever referred to LiveJournal as a source of information.

Sampling

Many news organizations in Ukraine reported on anti-government protests. Also, users published their content about the protests across a variety of social media platforms. To gain comprehensive results of my research, I chose Ukrainska Pravda (pravda.com.ua) in the sampling of news organizations and Facebook in the sampling of social media platforms. In the next paragraphs I explain my reasons for this selection.

Selection and justification of online media

Dozens of online sites in Ukraine informed about the protests, but the quality of the reporting was doubtful for many of them. Some leading web sites, such as Korrespondent.net and Podrobnosti.ua reported from pro-government positions, claiming protesters were radicals, and the reports that favored press releases from law enforcement agencies were presented as the main news. Thus, their reporting was biased even if readers could not always identify the manipulations of such reporting. Other small news sites disseminated unproved information from unidentified sources, and their coverage of protests was sensational or vague. Those sites usually served the interests of particular politicians or other parties. Thus, my intention was to choose a news site that reported in accordance to journalism standards.

The criteria for the selection of the news site were the following:

- High reputation within journalism community;
- At least four years of business activities in the market;
- At least 15 people in the staff in the newsroom;
- Priority in covering social and political events in Ukraine.
- News organization is actively present in social media, in particular in Facebook and Twitter.

Ukrainska Pravda (pravda.com.ua) corresponds to the above-mentioned criteria. Ukrainska Pravda, known as one of the most respectable news sites in Ukraine, was founded in 2000. Today it has a team of 20 journalists. Ukrainska Pravda is one of the most popular news sites in Ukraine covering politics and social issues in Ukraine: in March 2014 its traffic skyrocketed⁵² up to four and a half million users per day. Hundreds of thousands of users follow Ukrainska Pravda through social media platforms. In Facebook Ukrainska Pravda had 197,000 followers⁵³ as of April 2014. In Twitter Ukrainska Pravda had 158,963 followers as of April 17, 2014. According to SocialBakers, Ukrainska Pravda is the #1 most popular brand in Ukrainian Facebook⁵⁴ and the #3 most popular media brand in Ukrainian Twitter⁵⁵.

Identification of source within social media platforms

The website Alexa.com helps to identify the most popular websites for each country. For example, in the United States three social networks are ranked⁵⁶ in the top 10: Facebook (#2), LinkedIn (#7), and Twitter (#9). Similar data for Ukraine shows⁵⁷ Facebook (#7) is the only Western social media network ranked in the lists of top-10 sites. Two Russian social networks —Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki – are ranked #2 and #8 in the list correspondently. Twitter is ranked as #28 site in Ukraine as of April 2014.

I chose Facebook because from beginning of protests it played a significant role in discussions, sharing of information and mobilization of protesters online. 60,4% of Facebook users in Ukraine aged 18-34 years old⁵⁸. Many of them represent the educated class - people with higher education, entrepreneurs, young professionals and students. Many civic activists and journalists in Ukraine identified Facebook as the key platform for

⁵² <http://watcher.com.ua/2014/04/07/4-5-mln-korystuvachiv-vidvidaly-ukrayinsku-pravdu-protyahom-odnoho-dnya/>

⁵³ <http://bit.ly/1pyQK5k>

⁵⁴ <http://bit.ly/1huJXDZ>

⁵⁵ <http://bit.ly/1iloidb>

⁵⁶ <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/US>

⁵⁷ <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/UA>

⁵⁸ http://www.allin1social.com/facebook/country_stats/ukraine

online discussions, and only some of them used the Russian social network Vkontakte, which primarily targeted young people (registration is open to users at age 13) or Odnoklassniki, which primarily targeted older users.

Civic activists and journalists played a crucial role in the fueling the protests in Ukraine by organizing coordination through Facebook since the first days of the protests. The official EuroMaidan Facebook page, started on November 21, 2013, reached over 126,000 likes on December 4, 2013⁵⁹ - write Barbera and Metzger (2013) from New York University. They argue that “almost all of the information on this page is in Ukrainian, suggesting that the information is geared to locals rather than the international community, and there is evidence of vibrant interaction.” Key Facebook pages “served a dual purpose of providing information and news-like content and of helping to coordinate efforts on the ground,” - explain⁶⁰ researchers.

Thus, I identify Facebook as one of the most useful social networks in Ukraine from which to gauge the media effects of the content posted by media activists online. It is my primary source of users’ information for this research. Compared to Twitter, which provides messages of up to 140 characters, including text and photo. Facebook has no limitation on the length of the content. Thus, Facebook better provides journalists with the details and the context of the events to build and investigate stories based on the users content.

Data collection

In 2013-2014, in Ukraine protesters applied a variety of innovative and sophisticated tools to achieve their goals online. In 2004, many of those tools, including social media, either did not exist or had not been actively used. Just for targeting international audiences, Ukrainian protesters employed the power of social media through a dozen strategies. I identify all those strategies as pressure on news organizations by the users to promulgate the information they deem to be underrepresented in media agenda.

⁵⁹<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2013/12/04/strategic-use-of-facebook-and-twitter-in-ukrainian-protests/>

⁶⁰ http://smapp.nyu.edu/reports/Ukraine_Data_Report.pdf

- disseminating news in Twitter in English through the hashtags #euromaidan #ukraine;
- organizing Twitter Storms - a global tweeting campaign on the issues of the protests - <http://digitalmaidan.com/>, <http://keyhole.co/realtime/hNqqJq/digitalmaidan>;
- establishing a number of blogs in English to inform journalists and users on recent developments - <http://euromaidanpr.wordpress.com/>;
- launching an e-newsletter in English - <http://bit.ly/newsletterENG>;
- launching a site about President Yanukovich's corruption in English <http://yanukovich.info/> targeting international media organizations such as The New York Times, The Guardian, The Washington Post;
- conducting a wide advocacy online campaign to call on the US and the EU to impose sanctions against state officials in Ukraine;
- translating protesters appeals in English and posting them in social networks, in particular Facebook, Twitter.

Domestically, users and online activists consolidated their efforts to report on the protests through additional available tools, including live streaming from the protests through Ustream.tv, searching for missing protesters through social networks, informing on the protesters needs for those who wanted to help. Also, many online activities helped people coordinate their efforts offline, inform about human rights abuses by police, track corrupted state officials, fundraise and create networks of protesters all round Ukraine. Thus, online initiatives were not narrowed to the issue of dissemination of information but extended to organizing actions and establishing new institutions of civil society.

During the anti-government protests users launched dozens of websites to assist protesters and bring media attention to the protests. Some of the sites include:

- Map of the protesters' needs: <http://maydanneeds.com/>
- Site of all online streams of the protests - <http://euro-online.kiev.ua/>
- Interactive 3D landscape of the protests - <http://3deuromaidan.com/>
- Crowdsourcing of needs for the protesters - <http://helppeuromaidan.info/>

- Timeline of protests - <http://maidanchronicles.com/>
- Tracking riot police officers involved in clashes - <http://nezabudemo.org/blog/>
- Tracking corrupted state officials and police - <http://skoty.info/>

Since the beginning of the protests, media activists have launched almost a hundred pages and groups on Facebook that represented protest groups on the national and local levels. The rapid growth in popularity of the pages and active discussions held among users were direct evidences of civic mobilization during the protests. Some of the pages helped to coordinate protester's activities and thus, were a source of information for media organizations.

The top Facebook pages, launched in the beginning of anti-governmental protests, attracted up to three hundred thousand users as of April 2014:

- Euromaidan www.facebook.com/EuroMaydan - 281,000 fans;
- Euromaidan SOS - www.facebook.com/EvromaidanSOS - 93,000 fans;
- Euromaidan in English - www.facebook.com/EnglishMaidan - 38,000 fans.
- Civic Center of Euromaidan - <https://www.facebook.com/hrom.sektor.euromaidan> - 25,000 fans;
- Maideners - <https://www.facebook.com/maidaners> - 12,250 fans
- Samooborona Maidanu - <https://www.facebook.com/samooboronaMaydanu> - 19,380 fans
- Cybersotnya - <https://www.facebook.com/cyber100ua> - 16,450 fans
- Doctors of Maidan - <https://www.facebook.com/maidanmed> - 5,100 fans

I chose the Euromaidan SOS Facebook page as a main page for observations. The period for data gathering and observation was November 30, 2013 to February 28, 2014.

Euromaidan SOS was one of the most popular (96,000 fans) Facebook pages during the protests. It was founded by a group of civic activists on November 30, 2013 the day when for the first time the police used violence against the protesters. According to page founders, during the first days of its activity, the page attracted up to ten thousands

Facebook users⁶¹. The goal of the page was “to provide legal assistance to those victimized during Euromaidan.”

Based on the example of the Euromaidan SOS Facebook page, I wanted to measure the effects of agenda setting during the protests. First of all, I analyzed the data on users’ activities and interactions on the Euromaidan SOS Facebook page in the given period of time through Facebook Insights, a tool for Facebook analytics. The data set from the page was downloaded in Excel files, analyzed and transformed into charts.

Secondly, I observed the news reports about the protests with references to the Euromaidan SOS Facebook page as a source, published by Ukrainska Pravda. Thus, I measured the impact of the content, provided by the Euromaidan SOS Facebook page to the work of the newsroom of Ukrainska Pravda.

I turned to Google Advanced search to identify reports about the protests published on the site Ukrainska Pravda in the given period of time. I identified reports through searching by the keyword “Євромайдан SOS” (Euromaidan SOS). The results of Google search showed articles containing the keyword “Євромайдан SOS” (Euromaidan SOS).

Since the number of reports identified by the selection criteria surpassed a hundred articles, for research purposes, I used the method of stratified random sampling, described by Altheide, and Schneider (2011). The method refers to “random selection of cases within certain categories or strata” (p.60 retrieved from Henry, Julnes & Miles, 1985). Since the method relates to qualitative analysis, the frequency and representativeness of the data is not the main issue. Also, the selection should not be purely random. The main focus of the method is that sampling helps to identify the narrative that later could be further examined by identifying more reports (Altheide and Schneider, 2011).

⁶¹ <http://life.pravda.com.ua/society/2014/02/28/154600/>

Chapter 5. Results and discussion

The results of the study conclude that the anti-government protests in Ukraine led to a growth in the popularity of social media as a medium for free expression, as well as the rise of users' intervention in agenda setting. During the protests, users have not only increased news consumption but also have created masses of user-generated content that has pressured professional media organizations. Using the case study of the Ukrainian protests of 2013-2014, we have witnessed the process of normalization of social media in the eyes of news organizations that had come to widely apply user-generated content in news reports and closely follow the discussions online. On the other hand, news organizations remained selective in their sources within social media and put more trust in well-known users, especially journalists, civic leaders and politicians, than ordinary users. Still, news organizations accepted the content from ordinary users when it could be verified. Visual content from users regularly went through the verification process. Also, initiatives launched by civic activists during the protests had a significant influence on news coverage of the protests by professional media.

The results of the study can be explained in detail through the case study of activities of the Ukrainska Pravda news site and the Euromaidan SOS Facebook page.

In the period of November 30, 2013 - February 28, 2014, Ukrainska Pravda published more than one hundred reports referring to the Euromaidan SOS Facebook page (I identified 262 mentions of Euromaidan SOS through Google search in the given period of time). In a week since the page was launched, Ukrainska Pravda published⁶² the first report mentioning the Euromaidan SOS Facebook page as a source. Other publications by Ukrainska Pravda witnessed the newsroom having widely accepted user-generated content in its publications about the protests. Beginning with the second day of the protests, Ukrainska Pravda published daily chronicles of the protest developments, utilizing social media as one of the primary tools for newsgathering. The sources in social media, quoted

⁶² <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2013/12/5/7004837/>

by Ukrainska Pravda, can be categorized as the following:

- National and regional level news organizations that published the information about the protests;
- Journalists, reporting on protests through their social media accounts;
- Public pages in Facebook, such as Euromaidan SOS, that provided topical information about protest activities and their participants;
- Politicians and diplomats as public figures, who posted their news in Facebook and Twitter;
- Opinion leaders, including civic activists and professionals, who reported on the developments of the protests;
- Ordinary users in social media who provided evidences about the protests, such as photos and video.

On the other hand, news organizations, such as Ukrainska Pravda, were selective in introducing user-generated content to their sites since editors and journalists are used to publishing verified information. The identification of sources and the quality of content served as the criteria as to whether to use the information. At the same time, visual content could be published even from random users. Consequently, the hypothesis of my research that users put significant pressure on media organizations, which cannot ignore user-generated content in covering topics of public importance, is mainly confirmed. Let me turn to the details of the case studies.

The Euromaidan SOS Facebook page became a trusted source from the first days of the protests due to its content, a well-established reputation among journalists and popularity among Internet users. The initiative formed its mission as a humanitarian one - to provide legal assistance to those, victimized during Euromaidan and to collect and analyze information to protect peaceful protesters. The implementation of the mission required specific skills in human rights protection - many civic activists that have a rich experience in the field, joined the group. Close ties between civic rights activists and journalists, both representing active civil society in Ukraine, helped Euromaidan SOS to establish

partnerships with media organizations during the protests. The rapid growth in popularity of the Euromaidan SOS Facebook page served as an additional factor for the media organizations to consider its publications. About 5,000 users joined the Facebook page during the first 24 hours of its activity. During the next five days the number of followers reached⁶³ 20,000 users (chart 1).

The Euromaidan SOS Facebook page published content that targeted the issues of protesters specifically those who were arrested and detained by police, who disappeared after violent clashes with police or those who were charged with criminal offences and needed legal defense. Thus, the content was newsworthy in the eyes of media organizations. In the report from December 7, 2013, *Ukrainska Pravda* reported⁶⁴ that the initiative Euromaidan SOS continued to collect information about those “injured during the dispersal of the peaceful protest on Independence Square on the night of November 30, 2013.” The report cited these figures – police dispersed 157 protesters, 11% protesters were above 18 years old, 48% were aged 18-25 and 41% – over 25 years old. The numbers about protesters was exclusive information for reporters since none organization collected such data and law enforcement agencies did not release this information publicly. *Ukrainska Pravda* also reported about the upcoming event initiated⁶⁵ by Euromaidan SOS to raise awareness about police brutality, and published the link to the event in Facebook.

Another publication on the site of *Ukrainska Pravda* informed⁶⁶ about Euromaidan SOS appealing to the newly appointed Minister of Internal Affairs to start an investigation regarding the massive killings of protesters in Kyiv. The publication appeared on *Ukrainska Pravda* site on February 24, 2014, just two days after a new interim government took in power and four days after the shootings of protesters on Instytutska Street occurred. *Ukrainska Pravda* quoted Euromaidan SOS representatives and passed along a key message of the appeal to the Minister: “We are waiting for a public response and

⁶³ <http://bit.ly/1gXHUog>

⁶⁴ <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2013/12/7/7005312/>

⁶⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/events/220015268171268>

⁶⁶ <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/02/24/7016009/>

immediate and effective action." Thus, media became a channel for exercising public pressure on the government to investigate criminal offences. The article sent readers to the post published⁶⁷ on the Euromaidan SOS Facebook page on February 23, 2014. The post on Facebook earned wide public attention and gathered 1,612 "likes" and 6,170 "shares" of Facebook users.

The data from Facebook Insights, an analytical tool for the Euromaidan SOS Facebook page, confirms the constant growth of public interest to the activities of the Euromaidan SOS initiative. It also shows that news consumption on the page would rise significantly upon events involving abuse of protesters and the resulting need for assistance, such as searches for those, who had disappeared. The first splash of interactions on the page took place soon after the police stormed⁶⁸ protesters' barricades in Kyiv on December 11, 2014. Users made about 300,000 interactions on the page (chart 2), including tagging the page in their status updates, commenting and sharing the posts on the page. Since the Euromaidan SOS Facebook page published information about victimized protesters, it was a logical destination for users and media organizations to follow up protesters' clashes with the police.

The second spike of interactions on the page took place starting on January 22, 2014, when first three demonstrators died during clashes with the police⁶⁹. Also, on January 23, 2014, Dmytro Bulatov, one of the prominent activists, disappeared⁷⁰. The stories received huge international coverage because events signified new developments of the protests.- Activists became targets for government-organized repressions and shootings. 700,000 interactions on the page followed the publications about deadly shootings and Bulatov's case (chart 2). The personalization of Maidan victims through death figures and Dmytro Bulatov brought the highest attention to the Euromaidan SOS Facebook page during the entire period of the protests.

⁶⁷ <http://on.fb.me/1jolj1h>

⁶⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/11/kyiv-protests-police-barricades-chainsaws>

⁶⁹ http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/23/world/europe/ukraine-protests.html?_r=0

⁷⁰ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/25/ukraine-activist-leader-missing>

The third jump of interactions occurred during the most tragic events in the history of the protests – massive shooting of unarmed protesters⁷¹ by the police on February 18-20, 2014. Almost 700,000 interactions followed the reports about those killed (chart 2). The Euromaidan SOS Facebook page was among the first to start identifying those who were killed. The lists of victims were published on the page and constantly updated. Media organizations such as Ukrainska Pravda constantly published reports based on the lists of those victimised on February 18-20, 2014.

Also, data from Facebook Insights shows that the increases of users' interactions with the page corresponded with the number of new users who followed the page. The page gained from 5,000 to 7,000 new daily likes⁷² during the most dramatic described earlier (chart 3).

Discussion

The emergence of the Internet as an influential medium re-energized the debates on agenda-setting theory, for years devoted to the media impacts of traditional media, such as television or newspapers. Many researchers (See, for example: Roberts, 2002; Newhagen and Rafaeli, 2010) foresee new opportunities for research on agenda setting, while some (McCombs, 2005; Berger and Freeman, 2011) doubt the application of the previous agenda setting approach, because the diverse audience of the Internet may have dozens of agendas. Nevertheless, agenda-setting theory is applicable to Internet audiences during events of large importance and high intensity that help to consolidate diverse audiences into one audience. In 2013-2014 Ukrainian anti-government protests demonstrated a high level of consolidation of citizens, for whom the Internet and social media transformed from tools of news consumption and entertainment to sophisticated tools of mobilization, collective action, coordination and public discussions. According to recent findings in the Ukrainian protests, “activity on social media is incredibly responsive to events on the ground” (Barbera, Metzger 2013). The findings on the Arab Spring protests by Khondker (2011),

⁷¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/20/ukraine-dead-protesters-police>

⁷² <http://bit.ly/1mHRD6R>

Eltantawy and Wiest (2011), Aourach and Alexander (2011) also confirm the rise of media activism with the help of new media technologies.

Fewer researchers have investigated media effects of the protests on the work of news organizations. Those who did showed a significant impact of social media on the work of traditional media. Findings on protests in Tunisia stated that social media allowed a “digital elite” to break the national media blackout through brokering information for mainstream media (Breuer, Landman, and Farquhar, 2012). Findings by Al Ezzi (2008), showed that Egyptian protesters managed to bring into the agenda of the traditional media the discussions about protests retrieved from Facebook – 40 stories were published in Egyptian newspapers in the period of 47 days between two protests held in 2008.

In my research, I wanted to expand the discussion of media effects of social media on news organizations through a correlation between the popularity of social media sources and the way professional journalists work. The results of the study suggest that unknown users have no significant impact on the work of news organizations. The issues of verification remain a priority in seeking news sources for news organizations; thus, journalists avoid users whose identity is hidden. Findings showed that content grabbed from social media are mainly produced by identified users, in particular, civic activists, journalists, politicians. This corresponds with data from Ukrainian Facebook that journalists and politicians were among the most popular Ukrainian Facebook users in 2013 and 2014. On the other hand, users may actively target the agenda of news organizations – Internet users announced a boycott of a few news organizations likewise due to their biased coverage of the protests.

News organizations also identify public pages with relevantly big number of followers as news sources. The reason for this is that media organizations give credence to such pages, especially if pages, such as Euromaidan SOS, occupy a particular niche in informing about the protests. Euromaidan SOS made huge efforts in advocating the rights of protesters systematically, from the first days of the protests. Similar Facebook pages united doctors,

lawyers or self-defense units for action.

Another possible explanation for using pages as a source refers to the notion of media pressures on journalists through social media interactions. Journalists and editors of news organizations monitor social media on a daily basis and may notice the growth of popularity of new Facebook public pages. As soon as a page becomes popular, more users share the page updates, thereby raising public awareness about the page among their friends. Since journalists are active social media users who consume updates from friends, this effect puts pressure on journalists to recognize the page as an important one. In turn, journalists impose pressure on news organizations to consider the page as a possible source. Further research is required to study such effects within a framework of intermedia agenda setting.

Technology also impacts agenda setting. In particular, technological advances in comprehensive social media platforms encourage news organizations to use Facebook or Twitter as sources. As an example: Facebook public posts are accessible to all users, including those non-registered in Facebook. Media organizations would rather not refer to Facebook or Twitter as sources, if the information posted by users in social networks is not available to the public. Also, in 2011 Facebook introduced a new feature, a subscription that let users follow any other Facebook user's updates through a web feed. This innovation helped ordinary users connect with many popular users and follow their public updates.

This study has several limitations. The case study method provides findings and interpretation based on a wide range of documents, but based on observation of a few objects, in my case, *Ukrainska Pravda* and the *Euromaidan SOS* Facebook page. As a result, a wide range of other sites and Facebook pages that informed about anti-government protests, were not taken into account. The period covered in the research was limited to the first three months of the protests, while the protesters remain in Kyiv as of April 2014, and media effects of the protests on the public agenda are therefore being exercised during

a longer period.

One of the key weaknesses of the research was a method to track reports through advanced Google search. The algorithm of Google search constantly changes, and the technology is closed to the public, thus, search results might not provide 100% accuracy. The use of Google Search in the scholarly environment is criticised. The most appropriate method is to use a customized algorithm such as API, but this requires additional financial resources. On the other hand, the technique of sampling I used requires raw data.

This research has been developed during this past winter of protests in Ukraine. Thus, I as a researcher may not have had enough time and distance from the events, and consequently, my emotional involvement in the protests might be considered as a study weakness.

Another weakness was the lack of a rigorous methodology. Future research using online content analysis in a stricter fashion might have yielded other insights.

In my opinion, many issues of the Ukrainian protests of 2013-2014 will be widely explored by future researchers. The use of new technologies will be one focus of such researches. Future studies could attempt to explain the selectivity of media organizations in news sources. They also can target the issue of horizontal communication between protesters. Also, researchers may explain the effects of intermedia agenda setting – how traditional media such as TV channels and newspapers used online sites and social media as sources. Future studies may also expand news sources to those operating in the regions of Ukraine to investigate coverage at a distance, while the main stage for the anti-government protests was Kyiv.

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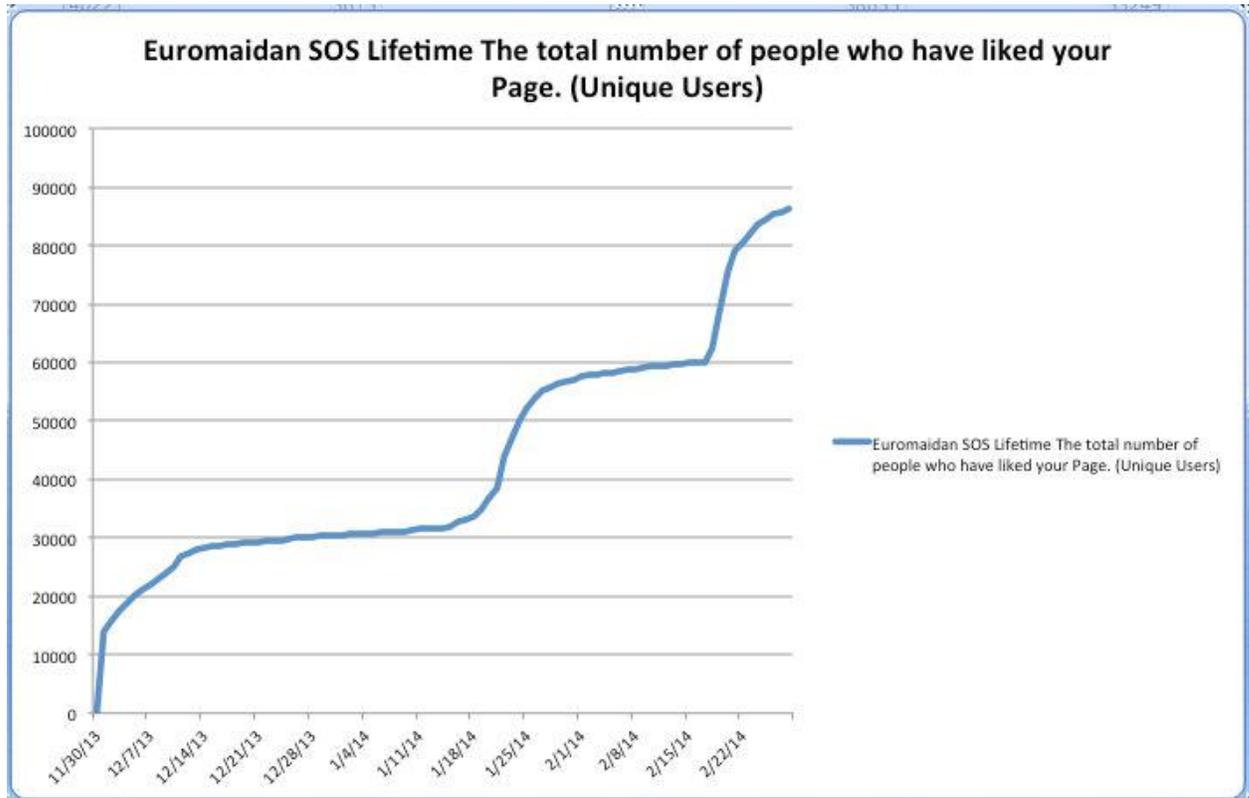
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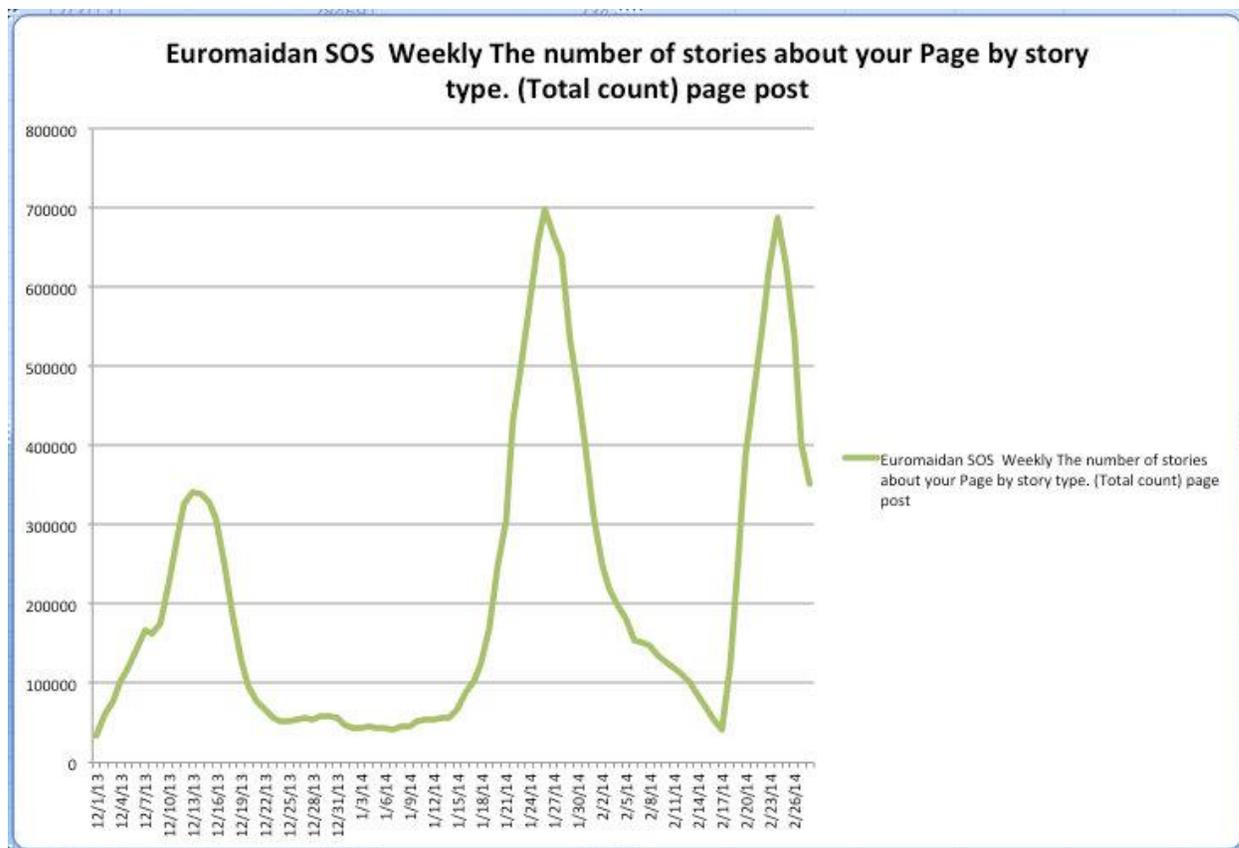
Appendixes

Chart 1. The Euromaidan SOS Facebook Page. The total number of people who “liked” the page.



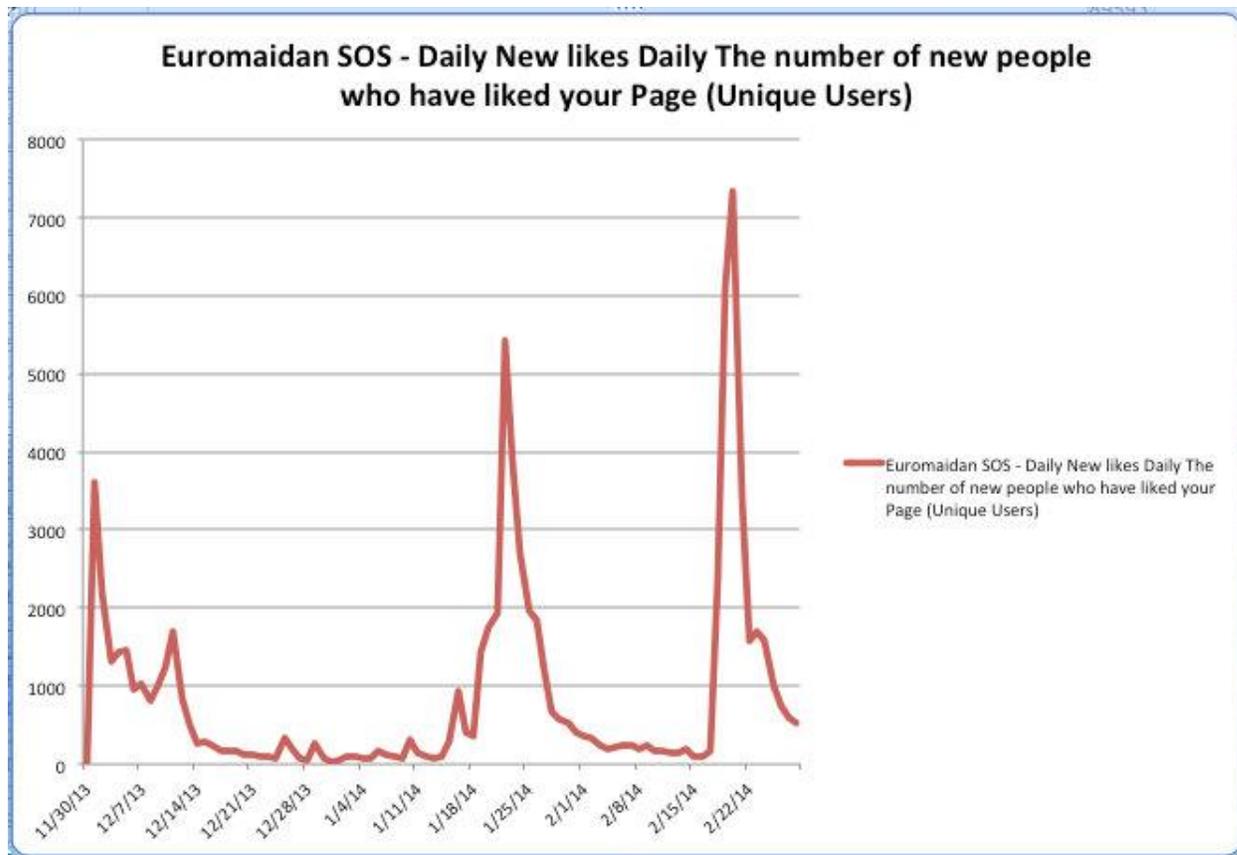
Source: Facebook Insights for Euromaidan SOS

Chart 2. The Euromaidan SOS Facebook Page. The number of stories (interactions) about the page.



Source: Facebook Insights for Euromaidan SOS

Chart 3. The Euromaidan SOS Facebook Page. Daily new “likes.” The number of people who have “liked” the page.



Source: Facebook Insights for Euromaidan SOS