

# NETWORK COMMUNITIES AS AN EXPRESSION OF INCLUSIVE CULTURE OF PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL PROTESTS: THE SUNFLOWER MOVEMENT CASE STUDY

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## ABSTRACT:

This article offers an analysis of the ways creation of a community influences the activity of users expressed in their network behaviour. It has been assumed that a varied choice of used tools and channels of communication characterising societies with a high level of technological development simultaneously influences fragmentation of network communication processes. Inclusive culture of participation becomes limited, which is the result of the degree of engagement of users which influence participation in a virtual community. This leads to their differentiation in relation to content and choice of the used channels during network communication. Another factor limiting participation is also communication activity of administrators of a virtual community who impose the dominating content of messages. The research results are a part of scientific research concerning the role of leaders in network communication as well as the creation of network communities that accompany political protests and demonstrations.

## KEY WORDS:

*Facebook*, inclusive culture, network communication, political protest, social media, the Sunflower Movement

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## Introduction

Internet technologies have become a part of contemporary society and social movements initiated by the Internet are a developing trend. Network communities are created spontaneously and they are flexibly dissolved; they have the nature of voluntary and temporary relations. Users do not stay in virtual communities after their emotional or intellectual needs have been met.<sup>1</sup> One of the common practices of participation of

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see: CHEN, B., LIAO, D.: *Social Media, Social Movements and the Challenge of Democratic Governability*. [online]. [2018-05-12]. Available at: <<http://cddl.fsi.stanford.edu/publication/social-media-social-movements-and-challenge-democratic-governability>>; PIECHOTA, G., RAJCZYK, R.: The Role of Social Media during Protests on Maidan. In *Communication Today*, 2015, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 91-92.



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individuals in communication on *Facebook* is taking part in certain virtual communities.<sup>2</sup> *Facebook*, despite the ongoing changes and gradual transfer of interest of younger users to other channels used in network communication,<sup>3</sup> still remains the key social networking site used during crises and political breakthroughs. Thanks to its reach and the possibility of transferring information on a global scale, *Facebook* enables political demonstrators to extend the impact of the ideas accompanying the protest but also makes it possible to create communities sharing the promoted values, which at the same time facilitate network participation. Treating the creation of virtual communities as a form of inclusive culture of participation of users in network exchange, the use of one of the communities created on *Facebook* during the Sunflower Movement protests is the key subject of our analysis. The name of the created community was the same as the name that had been used during protests that took place in March and April 2014 in Taiwan (officially the Republic of China). The *Sunflower Movement* community had been created to increase the reach and impact of information about this local protest among the international community and also to raise interest in the protest amongst national minorities living in the Republic of China. According to Michel Maffesoli, the development of network communication and its mass nature facilitates divisions and at the same time creates micro-groups that gather individuals who share similar values.<sup>4</sup> The phenomenon of tribalism (or tribal proximity) occurs online by creating certain groups, which in some situations may take the form of communities, by connecting users sharing the same objectives through network events, including political protests. Individuals who are members of communities externalise a certain identity, identifying it in processes of horizontal communication. Emphasising the role of resistance identity, which is expressed by demonstrators, Manuel Castells remarks that it stems from opposition and exclusion or it is, in fact, the opposition against the need to subordinate oneself. Identity on the network is liquid; the user may have many identities at the same time. Thus, participation in communities is changeable and after the events generating the activity end, participation expires, even despite further formal membership of the user in a certain network community.<sup>5</sup>

The article contains results of research carried out through qualitative and quantitative analyses where the activity of users was measured both during protests and after they ended. Qualitative research comprised the analysis of the published content; as a result, a thematic categorisation of the posts (published by both administrators of communities and other users) was conducted. This made it possible to prove the hypothesis assuming that making the aim of creating a community concrete, which additionally emphasises and enhances communication activity of protest leaders and administrators of the virtual community, limits the creation of an inclusive culture of participation. As we believe, the obtained results, which refer to creation of these limited cultures of network participation, are related to a varied choice of the used tools that characterises societies with a high level of technological development.

## The Role of Social Media during Protests

Popularity of using global social networking sites (such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* or *YouTube*) during protests and local manifestations of resistance results from their glocal nature.<sup>6</sup> Participants engaging in local protests use the social media to raise other users' interest in information about the course of protests, engage them in network participation and make political manifestations supralocal.<sup>7</sup> Social media have become

2 PEREIRA, C. et al.: The Importance of Facebook as an Online Social Networking Tool for Companies. In *International Journal of Accounting & Information Management*, 2014, Vol. 22, No. 4, p. 315-317.

3 For the purposes of this study, the term "network communication" means communication via online social media (remark by the author).

4 MAFFESOLI, M.: *Czas plemion*. Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2008, p. 45.

5 CASTELLS, M.: *Sila tożsamości*. Warszawa : Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2009, p. 302.

6 Robertson formulated the term "glocalisation", which is a portmanteau of globalisation and localisation, exemplifying the clash between what is global and what is local (for more information, see: ROBERTSON, R.: Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity. In FEATHERSTONE, M., SCOTT, L., ROBERTSON, R. (eds.): *Global Modernities*. London : Sage, 1995, p. 28).

7 See: SEIB, P.: *Real-Time Democracy: Politics and Power in the Social Media Era*. New York : Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, p. 145; EDWARDS, G.: *Social Movements and Protest*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 63; GARLAND, C.: As Barriers Fall, Contingency Becomes Possibility. Protest Resisting and Escaping Containment and Categorization. In LAMOND, I. R., SPRACKLEN, K. (eds.): *Protestas Events. Politics, Activism and Leisure*. London, New York : Rowman & Littlefield International, 2014, p. 121; KUSENOK, K.:

carriers of two types of content: they promote ideas of the protest and publicise repercussions against demonstrators.<sup>8</sup> Reports published by participants of manifestations, particularly through *YouTube*, are then used as the reason for social mobilisation. Additionally, through live broadcasting they may become the source of news for global media outlets, duplicating content because of lack of reliable media sources present in places of protests (North African countries or Ukraine). Through global social media the public opinion may take part in the protests, a certain coalition with other organisations or social movements and journalists working for global media organisations might be formed. Using the information available on social networking sites, these media outlets further disseminate the content shaping the public opinion. Given the growing importance of network communication during protests, it is necessary to underline that such independent media exist outside state control, in real time, and they are able to influence interactivity and personalisation of the published content. According to Jeffrey S. Juris, network communication, besides the creation of 'indymedia', suggests a strong dialectics between technology and negotiated forms of social practices, leading to the creation of a new media culture. This stems from idealistic beliefs that are directly implemented through technology and that influence the development of horizontal communication and cooperation between users.<sup>9</sup> New media practices created through social networking sites depend on internal and external information transfer, i.e. on building alliances and agreements with other entities, through which ideas of protest are promoted, external support is obtained, users are mobilised and a platform for dialogue is created. Research proves that individuals more and more depend on others in their online communication concerning information, knowledge and opinions; their behaviour is shaped by information stream and social dynamics.<sup>10</sup> Leaders of protests and their organisers carry out conscious and coordinated communication with recipients, creating groups and communities through which they are able to pass on information and influence users to make them engage in certain actions. An important role in the functioning of network communities is played by their administrators, who not only create dominating content but also channel the activity of users through shared information. Vincent J. Roscigno and William F. Danaher emphasise the importance of content published on such networks during protests: activists (protest leaders) want to influence public opinion, so they engage users in creating news in such a way as to make the told stories reach the hearts of people interested.<sup>11</sup> Henry Jenkins discusses the influences shaping the culture of participation, providing the direction for information search, encouraging users to create their own content and strengthening social interactions between them.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the notion of "participatory culture" was first used and widely popularised precisely by Henry Jenkins.<sup>13</sup> He linked this phenomenon to the development of networks. The theory was criticised due to further development of network communication and identification of areas, such as economics or politics, where participatory culture was autonomously shaped. This led to the revision of the theory with its creator's involvement. Henry Jenkins wrote a monograph with Mizuko Ito and Danah Boyd. The publication is titled *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era* and puts participatory culture under critical analysis triggered by the reflection over the changing space of network communication. Starting from the redefinition of the notion and scope of participatory culture, which first defined the activity of members of fan communities, the authors extended and modified the concept of participatory culture. Development of the

Multilingualism on Social Media in the Maidan Movement. In SCHREIBER, W., KOSIENKOWSKI, M. (eds.): *Digital Eastern Europe*. Wrocław : Kolegium Europy Wschodniej, 2015, p. 82-85.

8 EDWARDS, G.: *Social Movements and Protest*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 224.

9 JURIS, J. S.: The New Digital Media and Activist Networking within Anti-Corporate Globalization Movements. In *Annals. American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 2005, No. 597, p. 193-195.

10 See, for example: BOND, R. M. et al.: A 61-Million-Person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization. In *Nature*, 2012, No. 489, p. 295-298; MESSING, S., WESTWOOD, S. J.: Selective Exposure in the Age of Social Media: Endorsements Trump Partisan Source Affiliation When Selecting News Online. In *Communication Research*, 2014, Vol. 41, No. 8, p. 1059-1061; BODE, L.: Political News in the News Feed: Learning Politics from Social Media. In *Mass Communication and Society*, 2015, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 19-21; TURCOTTE, J. et al.: News Recommendations from Social Media Opinion Leaders: Effects on Media Trust and Information Seeking. In *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2015, Vol. 20, No. 5, p. 530.

11 ROSCIGNO, V. J., DANAHER, W. F.: Media and Mobilization. The Case of Radio and the Southern Textile Worker Insurgency, 1929-1934. In *American Sociological Review*, 2001, Vol. 66, No. 1, p. 30-33.

12 For more information, see: JENKINS, H.: *Kultura konwergencji. Zderzenie starych i nowych mediów*. Warszawa : Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2007.

13 See also: JENKINS, H.: *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York, London : Routledge, 2013.

Internet and communication technologies increased the importance of the so-called participatory media, which create participation using ties between members of communities and the common goal that leads to the creation of the common good.<sup>14</sup> Christian Fuchs believes that the Internet is dominated by professional entities managing information and using data, what in the theory of participatory democracy makes participation of an individual never fully participatory in nature.<sup>15</sup> He believes that it is important for an individual to consciously and actively participate in the acts of political resistance. Christian Garland emphasises that using social media in protests is a process where crystallisation of real social discontent occurs, revealing the existing antagonisms.<sup>16</sup> Protest leaders are people who not only define this discontent but also give it meaning through the shared content influencing other users.<sup>17</sup> According to Diana C. Mutz and Lori Young, in a more and more fragmented media environment, the meaning of information published by opinion leaders plays a more and more important role, because people are constantly dependent on suggestions and information provided by others on a social network. What is more, users trust this information more than the news obtained directly from mass media.<sup>18</sup> Opinion leaders on social networking sites may be identified by their communication activity; they are more prone to respond to messages, they initiate conversations and disseminate information. During the Orange Revolution, treated as one of the first protests where new media were used, Andriy Ignatov, one of the leaders of the events, claimed: *"In order to cover a larger audience, we had to attract our target audience, the people who are usually better networked than the rest. We strived to reach investigative journalists, human rights lawyers, entrepreneurs and students. In short, we wanted to reach the most networked people in Ukraine."*<sup>19</sup> Channels available on social media are one of the most important carriers of both information and agitation directed at network communities by leaders and protest organisers. In case of young people, they often constitute the only source of information limited by preferences to this content, which confirms values and ideas the users identify with.<sup>20</sup> Brian E. Weeks, Alberto Ardevol-Abreu and Homero Gil de Zuniga believe that people who are engaged with political news and information on social media are becoming leaders who are able to shape political attitudes and behaviour of their Internet peers.<sup>21</sup> A similar stance is taken by Chun Wing Lee who analysed the behaviour of young users during protests in Hong Kong in 2014<sup>22</sup> and confirmed the influence of peer relations as a factor enhancing mobilisation and increasing the level of participation in political protests with the use of network communication. The author emphasises the importance of social media as a tool of transmission of political messages towards young users.<sup>23</sup> According to Chun Wing Lee, the importance of Internet messages in protests is rising. Users receive messages through the Internet, but the strength of influence of these messages on political socialisation is clearly visible particularly in smaller groups.<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey S. Juris emphasises that the Internet does not only provide technical infrastructure which supports protest movements. Through the network an isolated structure is formed, which enhances the organisational logic, leads to decentralisation of activities and creates flexible local networks with a glocal dimension that constitute dominating organisational forms.<sup>25</sup>

14 See: JENKINS, H., ITO, M., BOYD, D.: *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era: A Conversation on Youth, Learning, Commerce, and Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016.

15 FUCHS, C.: *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*. London: Sage, 2013, p. 70.

16 GARLAND, C.: As Barriers Fall, Contingency Becomes Possibility. Protest Resisting and Escaping Containment and Categorization. In LAMOND, I. R., SPRACKLEN, K. (eds.): *Protest as Events. Politics, Activism and Leisure*. London, New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2014, p. 121.

17 See: GERBAUDO, P.: Populism 2.0. In FUCHS, C., TROTTIER, D. (eds.): *Social Media, Politics and the State: Protests, Revolutions, Riots, Crime and Policing in the Age of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube*. London: Routledge, 2014, p. 69-72; SRINIVASAN, R., FISH, A.: *After the Internet*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017, p. 85.

18 MUTZ, D., YOUNG, L.: Communication and Public Opinion. In *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 2011, Vol. 75, No. 5, p. 1038-1040.

19 SEIB, P.: *Real-Time Democracy: Politics and Power in the Social Media Era*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, p. 145.

20 PIECHOTA, G., RAJCZYK, R.: The Role of Social Media during Protests on Maidan. In *Communication Today*, 2015, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 94.

21 WEEKS, B. E., ARDEVOL-ABREU, A., GIL DE ZUNIGA, H.: Online Influence? Social Media Use, Opinion Leadership and Political Persuasion. In *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 2017, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 215-217.

22 The Umbrella Revolution (remark by the author).

23 LEE, C. W.: Schools, Peers and the Political Socialization of Young Social Movement Participations in Hong Kong. In *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 2016, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 111.

24 LEE, C. W.: Schools, Peers and the Political Socialization of Young Social Movement Participations in Hong Kong. In *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 2016, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 123.

25 For more information, see: JURIS, J. S.: *Networking Futures*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

## Social Media as a Tool of Transferring Democratic Values

Individuals taking part in protests learn democratic attitudes and behaviour. They learn how to reconcile different views that have a common paramount goal resulting from the shared values, and how to discuss differences and negotiate decisions.<sup>26</sup> Networking of protests is the manifestation of activity of a bottom-up democratic movement. The aim of these activities is rebuilding social trust and providing subjectivity to individuals who get the chance to speak out their demands, usually concerning the deficit of democratic values and civil rights. According to Andrew Chadwick, the hybrid nature of communication makes complex perception possible.<sup>27</sup>

On the one hand, the hybrid nature points to individual constitutive elements, but on the other it emphasises the hybrid structure as a whole. New media are more flexible, acting without greater control and being a direct product of users' minds.<sup>28</sup> Another feature of new media is their potential for reorganisation, which is innovative in nature, enables the creation of new forms of cooperation and co-creation, allowing interactive participation – engaging and mobilising users in certain communication activities that impact communication attitudes. The change of the dominating system requires creating bonds amongst individuals, which will make it possible to share outrage; they will also create the sense of unity and form and transfer alternative visions.

Thanks to social networking, the mobilisation of individuals is possible, as well as organising activities, their mutual communication and coordination and also creating collective practices that protect the individual from repercussions.<sup>29</sup> Research by Brian E. Weeks, Alberto Ardevol-Abreu and Homero Gil de Zuniga proves that while interacting with social media, prosumers<sup>30</sup> political behaviour differs from the political behaviour of non-prosumers.<sup>31</sup> Social media being more and more closely tied into the life of citizens lead to an increase in the number of people who do not only look for easy interactions in this communication space but also for a platform for discussing political news.

Social media change the way citizens are engaged politically, allowing free access to wider political discussions.<sup>32</sup> Michael Xenos, Ariadne Vromen and Brian D. Loader emphasise the role of social media in reducing barriers of political participation and levelling inequalities in the degree of political engagement.<sup>33</sup> Brian E. Weeks and Lance Holbert underline the role of social media in enabling citizens to consume, produce, disseminate and comment on political information, thus creating new possibilities of shaping political beliefs. Connecting people digitally, social media enable them to create new proposals of opinion-forming impact on others.<sup>34</sup>

26 VALENTINO, N. A., SEARS, D. O.: Event-Driven: Political Communication and the Preadult Socialization of Partisanship. In *Political Behaviour*, 1998, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 148-150.

27 CHADWICK, A.: *The Hybrid Media System*. [online]. [2018-05-08]. Available at: <<https://www.andrewchadwick.com/hybrid-media-system/>>.

28 See: LIEVROUW, L. A.: *Alternative and Activist New Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011, p. 192; EDWARDS, G.: *Social Movements and Protest*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 52.

29 For more information, see: JURIS, J. S.: *Networking Futures*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

30 The term "prosumer" was coined by Alvin Toffler in 1980, in the book *The Third Wave*. Prosumer is a person who consumes and produces a product. It generally refers to a person using commons-based peer production (remark by the author). For more information, see: TOFFLER, A.: *The Third Wave*. New York, Toronto, London, Sydney, Auckland: Bantam Books, 1980.

31 WEEKS, B. E., ARDEVOL-ABREU, A., GIL DE ZUNIGA, H.: Online Influence? Social Media Use, Opinion Leadership and Political Persuasion. In *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 2017, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 229-231.

32 DE ZUNIGA, G. H., PUIG-I-ABRIL, E., ROJAS, H.: Weblogs, Traditional Sources and Political Participation: An Assessment of How the Internet Is Changing the Political Environment. In *New Media and Society*, 2009, Vol. 11, No. 4, p. 554-555.

33 XENOS, M., VROMEN, A., LOADER, B. D.: The Great Equalizer? Patterns of Social Media Use and Youth Political Engagement in Three Advanced Democracies. In *Information, Communication and Society*, 2014, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 153-155.

34 WEEKS, B. E., HOLBERT, L.: Predicting Dissemination of News Content in Social Media: A Focus on Reception, Fending and Partisanship. In *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 2013, Vol. 90, No. 2, p. 227-229.

# Background of the Sunflower Movement Events

The Sunflower Movement<sup>35</sup> was a burst of civil disobedience that contributed to rising political awareness and further international awareness of the unique Taiwanese identity.<sup>36</sup> It also led to political changes and the national party *Kuomintang* (in 2014 ruling in Taiwan) losing local election. In January 2016, the ruling party lost both the presidential election (the office was taken over by Tsai Ing-Wen from the pro-independence *Democratic Progressive Party*) and the Taiwanese parliament election, where the *DPP* also won the majority. Events in the streets of Taiwan began on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2014, after the President of the Legislative Assembly (Yuan)<sup>37</sup> had announced quicker ratification of the trade agreement with the People's Republic of China.<sup>38</sup> Protesters (mainly young people, students of Taiwanese universities) made their way to the Parliament building and barricaded themselves there. The police made two futile attempts to get into the building. Protests officially ended on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2014, after the government's promise to revise the agreement. Signing trade treaties between the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China would have resulted in the further economic dependence of Taiwan. By implementing the policy of bringing Taiwan and PRC closer together in the economic and trade dimension, *Kuomintang*, in fact, kept up the *status quo* in relations between these two states. Actions implemented by the *Taiwanese National Party* have proven to be inadequate for ambitions of the Taiwanese to fully acknowledge their country in the international context, which is the effect of the sense of a distinct Taiwanese identity. In this context, signing trade treaties should be treated as a symbolic event, which influenced public opinion in an important way, spurring the outbreak of the Sunflower Movement. According to Castells, the cause of any protest is usually emotions triggered by an event important or game-changing enough for the protesters to overcome fear of danger they are exposed to. Anger, as a factor, is the trigger hampered by fear but at the same time, in the process of communication with others who share the same opinions, it leads to a collective action that causes social mobilisation and creates a collective actor by arousing enthusiasm.<sup>39</sup>

In the very course of protests of Taiwanese students, the occupied space was important. It was through this space that the symbolic aspect was referred to, which violated the space of state authorities. A community came into being as a result of uniform views of participants, what in connection with the symbolic location generated opening of the public space. This space adopted a political dimension and enabled individuals to regain their representation.<sup>40</sup> The venue of political protests was hybrid in nature, created between social networking sites where activation and mobilisation of protesters took place and the public space occupied by them. The space of autonomy was created with a glocal nature (local in the municipal space and global thanks to new technologies providing the protest with a global dimension).

## Network Communities during the Sunflower Movement

From the very beginning, technology has played a key role in the Sunflower Movement. A central website was launched by the protest's organisers; it was used as a common point of entry for information related

to the activity of the Sunflower Movement. The portal mainly contained tools with an open source code, hosted in order to create a network engaging and supporting activists. By initiating the protest on the Internet, the Sunflower Movement used the existing community of open source and technology activists in Taiwan and they in turn played a key role in creating tools and platforms enabling mass mobilisation.<sup>41</sup> Activity on social media was diversified to different channels in order to increase the force of impact during the protest.<sup>42</sup>

From the beginning of protests seventeen different communities and groups were created, using global social networks such as *Facebook* or *Twitter* and basing communication processes on local channels popular in Taiwan, e.g. a Japanese application *LINE* (a tool for group communication). *The Black Island Youth* group created on Facebook became the most popular community amongst the protesters (with over 300,000 fans).<sup>43</sup> This group put in order and publicised official legal documents, converting them to fragments that are easy to read by the followers of the protest. The application *Google Docs* was used in these activities and groups of law students searched for other articles, statistics and reports, also for those prepared by foreign analytical centres, mentioning threats connected with signing trade treaties between Taiwan and PRC. Materials prepared by the *Black Island Youth* group went viral, but due to the language barrier (they were available in Chinese) their reach was limited. Other activities occurring on the network included creating global *Facebook* events, like "*Overseas Students in Solidarity with Taiwan's Anti-Pact Movement*" (海外留學生聲援台灣反服貿運動), which gathered over 14,000 users during a one-day marathon of writing protest letters against the attempt to ratify the treaties.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the website <http://4am.tw> was created and its content was available in English. Protest organisers relied on the innovative system of digital communication and cooperation of users based on a few open source tools, including *Hackfoldr* and *Loomio*.

On 25<sup>th</sup> March 2014, seven days after formal commencement of the protests, the *Sunflower Movement* community was formed (over 60,000 fans), with the following objectives formulated: "*Taiwanese young people are occupying the Parliament to end a democratic crisis. On 18<sup>th</sup> March, the Ma administration forced the agreement through without due process. Once the trade agreement with China is passed, it will have a severe impact on Taiwanese people from all lines of work. We demand the government to rescind the trade agreement, and not proceed until a more reliable monitoring mechanism is established. Our cause:*

1. *We call for a citizen constitutional assembly.*
2. *Spurn the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement.*
3. *We demand that the cross-strait agreement monitoring mechanism be institutionalised in this legislative term.*
4. *We implore the legislators of both the ruling and opposition party to join our cause.*<sup>45</sup>

After launching the *Facebook* community, on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2014, a *Twitter* channel was created. The first post added by administrators was formulated as follows: "*Please support us by sharing our articles and liking this page. Any like of you will be essential for Taiwanese people.*"<sup>46</sup>

By choosing English and Chinese<sup>47</sup> as dominant languages in communication with users, the community administrators strived to establish the network community with two types of goals. Firstly, the use of a global social medium helped them increase the reach of the content promoting the protest, speeches of leaders, reports from the course of the protest and press releases available in different foreign languages prepared by administrators of the community and aimed to be shared by other media. Secondly, through sharing media content originating from other

35 The term "Sunflower Student Movement" refers to the use of sunflowers by the protesters as a symbol of hope as the flower is heliotropic. The movement is also known as the "March 18 Student Movement" or "Occupy Taiwan Legislature". The manifestation took place between 18<sup>th</sup> March 2014 and 10<sup>th</sup> April 2014, thus lasting for 23 days (remark by the author).

36 More about Taiwanese identity in: PIECHOTA, G.: Promoting the Image of a Country in the International Arena. Case Study: Taiwan. In *Global Journal of Advanced Research*, 2015, Vol. 2, No. 10, p. 1637-1639.

37 Parliament in the Republic of China (remark by the author).

38 Taiwan has a special international status. It is a country recognised by only 16 countries in the world, in Europe only by Vatican. Since 1971, Taiwan has not been the member of the United Nations (so far Taiwan's attempts to come back to the UN have been futile). Taiwan has about 23 million inhabitants and almost 98% are Chinese (some of them came to Taiwan at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and about two million came to Taiwan with Kuomintang, after the lost war against the communists in 1949). Mainland China (the People's Republic of China) regards Taiwan as a rebellious province (remark by the author).

39 CASTELLS, M.: *Sieci oburzenia i nadziei. Ruchy społeczne w erze internetu*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2013, p. 210.

40 CASTELLS, M.: *Sieci oburzenia i nadziei. Ruchy społeczne w erze internetu*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2013, p. 22-23.

41 CHAO, V. Y.: *How Technology Revolutionized Taiwan's Sunflower Movement Facebook and Google, the Favored Tools of Dissidents, Are Now Shaping Taiwan's Relationship with China*. [online]. [2018-05-12]. Available at: <<https://thediplomat.com/2014/04/how-technology-revolutionized-taiwans-sunflower-movement/>>.

42 CHEN, B., LIAO, D.: *Social Media, Social Movements and the Challenge of Democratic Governability*. [online]. [2018-05-12]. Available at: <<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3cb7/b183ac191f37311b8ac77ca34280a7257ea5.pdf>>.

43 *Island Nation Youth – An Official Facebook Homepage*. [online]. [2018-05-12]. Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/Islandnationyouth>>.

44 *TW Students Abroad – An Official Facebook Homepage*. [online]. [2018-05-12]. Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/twstudentsabroad/>>.

45 Description of the virtual society at the time of protest: *Sunflower Movement – An Official Facebook Homepage*. [online]. [2018-10-15]. Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/sunflowermovement/>>.

46 The post was liked by over 500 people, shared 28 times, commented on 4 times (remark by the author).

47 Press releases were replicated in other languages (besides English and Chinese), e.g. in German, Russian, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic (remark by the author).

countries and expressions of support from people and social groups on the wall of the community, globality of the Sunflower Movement was confirmed.<sup>48</sup> Administrators created communication through working in a close-coupled system. A coherent message titled as a press release was created and it was available in different foreign languages. At the same time community members were provided with messages which proved that information about the protests would gain interest outside Taiwan, mobilising people to support the ongoing movement.

## Research Methodology

Taking into account the theoretical considerations concerning the role of social networking sites during protests and political manifestations and also their impact on the creation of participatory culture in network communication, *Facebook* can be treated as a participatory medium. Considering the knowledge on participatory culture published by Henry Jenkins, Mizuko Ito and Danah Boyd,<sup>49</sup> we claim that culture has a dominating impact on participation. In addition, its hierarchical nature triggers the mechanism of selection leading to the restriction of participation. According to the above-mentioned researchers, a distinguishing feature of participatory culture is building bonds between members of the community engaged in the exchange and creation of content, what is manifested in the inclusive participatory culture. The carried-out research aimed to prove the assumption that the *Sunflower Movement* on *Facebook* had created a participatory culture with a limited level of inclusiveness. Considering cultural factors that place Taiwan amongst countries where culture is collective and has a hierarchical structure,<sup>50</sup> an attempt was made to unveil how communication of administrators of the community and objectives formulated by them had influenced attitudes and network behaviour of users. Henry Jenkins, Mizuko Ito and Danah Boyd claim that many media platforms defining themselves as participatory at the same time do not favour development of collective participation and do not engage young users in cultural participation practices and in activities for the benefit of democracy and social change.<sup>51</sup> Two research questions were derived from the adopted hypothesis:

*RQ1: To what extent did the purpose the community was created for determine communication processes which occurred within the space of the created virtual community?*

*RQ2: What was the impact of communication activity of community administrators on the creation of the inclusive culture of participation?*

The research consisted of the analysis of the existing material, i.e. posts published on the *Sunflower Movement* community's page on *Facebook* by both administrators and users. In the quantitative part of the research, the number of posts published by administrators and users was analysed, with regard to the traffic they had generated. In the qualitative part, which was aimed at the content published on the wall of the community, categorisation of topics was conducted. Then, each post was ordered into a specific category, enabling us to specify the content on the wall of the *Sunflower Movement* community. The thematic categorisation of posts published by administrators comprised the following topics:

- photographs as independent content;
- posts reporting on the course of the protest;
- posts expressing support for the protest by other people and organisations;
- press releases;
- reporting on the protest by other media;
- information about promoting the protest through other social media channels.

48 Media coverage shared on the community website included, for example, articles published in *The Economist*, *Le Monde* and on online news portals such as *ria.ru*, *Al-Jazeera*, *Asahi*, *CNN* or *BBC* (remark by the author).

49 See: JENKINS, H., ITO, M., BOYD, D.: *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era: A Conversation on Youth, Learning, Commerce, and Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016.

50 In the culture compass developed by Geert Hofstede, Taiwan's culture is seen as collective (for more information, see: *Country Comparison – What about Taiwan?*. [online]. [2018-05-15]. Available at: <<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/taiwan/>>).

51 See: JENKINS, H., ITO, M., BOYD, D.: *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era: A Conversation on Youth, Learning, Commerce, and Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016.

In the case of posts published by the users a division of content into the following topics was made:

- photographs as independent content;
- posts reporting on the course of the protest;
- posts expressing support for the protest by other people and organisations;
- reporting on the protest by other media;
- sharing films;
- content not connected with the protest.

The previous categorisations of posts added to the wall by administrators recognise the differences in two categories that correspond with differences in using communities in general. Administrators did not add other content than that concerning the protest and they did not add any film content; this was done by users themselves. The categorisation enabled us to answer these auxiliary questions related to the research questions as stated above:

*AQ1: How did administration activities of administrators shape communication behaviour of users?*

*AQ2: Did traffic generated by administrators' posts influence creation of content by users, channelling it solely into publishing content supporting the protest?*

The activity of administrators of the *Sunflower Movement* community was analysed in two periods. The first one encompassed the time of the protests (from the day of establishing the community to the official end of protests on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2014), the other corresponds with the remaining time of the community's functioning (until the end of December 2017 when our research was carried out). The adopted timeframe allowed us to conduct a comparative analysis of the community's functioning during and after the protests. The analysis of the activity of members of this virtual community on its wall was limited to the analysis of communication activities during the protests. Such a solution was adopted because the content of posts after the end of protests tackled various issues with no connection to the original objectives of the community.

## Findings and Discussion

*Table 1: Activity of the Sunflower Movement administrators in the period of protests and afterwards and traffic generated by the community*

Data measurement period	The number of published posts	The number of likes	The number of comments	The number of shares
25 <sup>th</sup> March 2014 – 10 <sup>th</sup> April 2014	345	192,782	2,348	15,177
11 <sup>th</sup> April 2014 – 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2017	155	75,412	1,307	5,746

*Source: own processing*

Based on the analysed data derived from measuring the communication activities of administrators of the *Sunflower Movement* community and the behaviour of its users, two tendencies can be noticed. First of all, during the protests the activity of all members of the community was higher than after the end of the protests. In the period of the protests (from launching the community on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2014 until the day the events officially ceased to exist) over two times as many posts were published than in the remaining period of more than three and a half years. Second, after the end of the protests, the communication activities did not cease, but they became limited and the discussed issues changed. The community thus changed its purpose, becoming a place of publishing other types content instead of information associated with the protest itself. After the end of the protest, communication behaviour of users changed as well. While the number of posts published by administrators dropped by nearly a half, users three times less frequently shared the posts

published by administrators after the end of protests, and commented on them nearly two times less frequently. This data shows that with the end of protests, the level of users' engagement decreased significantly, mainly due to the fact that the events, because of which the users followed the shared content, ceased to exist.

- photographs as independent content
- posts reporting on the course of the protest
- posts expressing support for the protest by other people and organisations
- press releases
- reporting on the protest by other media
- information about promoting the protest through other social media channels

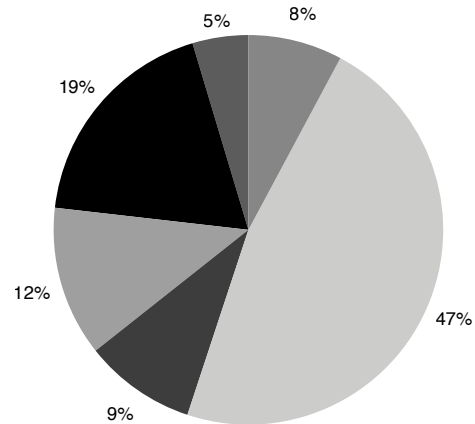


Chart 1: Communication activity of community administrators in the period from 25<sup>th</sup> March 2014 to 10<sup>th</sup> April 2014 with reference to thematic categories of posts  
Source: own processing

- photographs as independent content
- posts reporting on the course of the protest
- posts expressing support for the protest by other people and organisations
- press releases
- reporting on the protest by other media
- information about promoting the protest through other social media channels

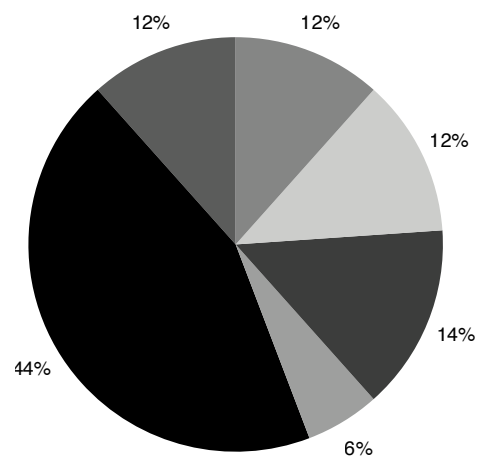


Chart 2: Communication activity of community administrators in the period from 11<sup>th</sup> April 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017 with reference to thematic categories of posts  
Source: own processing

In the course of the content analysis and thematic categorisation of posts published by administrators in the study period, a division was made which leads to a conclusion that the dominating content on the community's wall during protests was reporting on its course in posts and informing users about the ways other media outlets reported on the events, mainly outside Taiwan.

Another important phenomenon was translating the content of press releases to different languages and the fact that media reporting on the protest worldwide used this content. It may be assumed that administrators of the community created a virtual editorial office, distributing press releases globally. After the end of protests only the number of references to media coverage published in relation to reporting on the protest and its consequences did not change. It should also be mentioned that media reports shared within the community mostly raised interest of users who most often commented on them or shared them.

All posts after the end of the Sunflower Movement events published by administrators (besides seventeen that are not provided in the table because their topic was different than the set categories and concerned e.g. such issues as protests against building a nuclear power plant or demonstrations for legalising single sex relationships) made references to the Sunflower Movement events. It may be stated that although the protest reached its end on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2014, it was still 'alive' in the space of the network community.

For example, on 28<sup>th</sup> April a series of photos was published that illustrated brutal reactions of the police against the protesters (using water cannons) and the text was about a manifestation against the construction of a nuclear power plant in Taiwan.

In the period from 30<sup>th</sup> October 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 and from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 to 15<sup>th</sup> January 2016, no communication activity of community administrators was noticed.

Table 2: Activity of community users during the protests

Data measurement period	The number of published posts	The number of likes	The number of comments	The number of shares
25 <sup>th</sup> March 2014 – 10 <sup>th</sup> April 2014	345	192,782	2,348	15,177
11 <sup>th</sup> April 2014 – 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2017	155	75,412	1,307	5,746

Source: own processing

\* other languages mainly included English, but German, Italian and French were also present.

We were also interested in the communication behaviour of users in the space of the *Sunflower Movement* community. While the dominating language of content created by administrators was English, in the case of the activity of users the Chinese language prevailed. This leads to a conclusion that the community functioned in two dimensions – global, as suggests the reach and reception of posts published by administrators – and local, associated with consolidating users within the network space.

The communication behaviour concerning posts published by users showed similar tendencies as in the case of posts published by administrators: posts were marked as likes or shared. However, considering the total number of pieces of information (929) published by users in the time period between launching the community and the end of the protests (15 days), the activity of 'netizens' concerning the published content was much lower than the one generated by posts published by administrators. Most of the content published by Internet users did not lead to any reaction of other users.

- photographs as independent content
- posts reporting on the course of the protest
- posts expressing support for the protest by other people and organisations
- sharing films
- reporting on the protest by other media
- content not connected with the protest

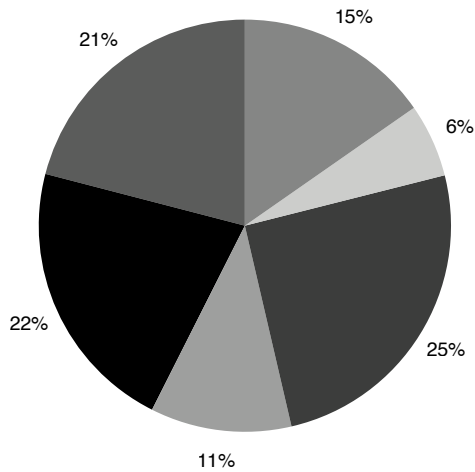


Chart 3: Topics of posts shared by users during the protests  
Source: own processing

Analysing topics which were published by users on the wall of the community, we may assume that they were two types of them. First, they referred to information concerning the protests, presenting their course via photos, films and shared messages originally published by other media or also by other groups expressing their support, e.g. students belonging to Taiwanese minorities and living in the USA, Canada or Germany. Second, other content was published on the wall; however, it was not connected with the objectives of the community.<sup>52</sup> Analysing the activity of users, such reactions as liking, commenting and sharing were reported only concerning the content which presented media reports related to the events of the Sunflower Movement originating from other media channels and information about support for the protest from abroad.<sup>53</sup> After the end of the protests, information, mainly in Chinese, was shared by a group of the same people and reflected on various themes (not connected with the protest and not generating any user activity).

Despite appearing as ‘open’, the community was, in fact, strongly centralised. When administrators defined its goal, at the same time they determined the direction of communication, influencing attitudes and behaviour of users. The dominating objective pursued by the members of the network community was dissemination, mainly through other media, of information about the protests, its course and reactions of authorities to protesters’ actions. Considering the complicated international status of Taiwan, the protest was treated as an attempt to appeal to the international community and to emphasise the Taiwanese identity and mark the distinctiveness of the Republic of China from the People’s Republic of China. The created community was politically open – many of these who participated in the protests in Taiwan did not do it on behalf of political parties or non-governmental organisations; attempts at appropriating the idea of the protest and using its narration for one’s own purposes made by these entities were unsuccessful.<sup>54</sup> The issue of free trade and sovereignty of Taiwan was central; it was the opposition

52 In eight posts (not included in the Chart 3) users disputed legitimacy of the protest (remark by the author).

53 Support for protests was expressed by social groups from Canada, USA, Germany, Switzerland, India, Australia, Malaysia, Italy, France, Ukraine, Panama, Holland, Hungary (remark by the author).

54 At the beginning of 2015, one of the consequences of protests organised by the Sunflower Movement was the rise of a new political power with a centre-left orientation – *The New Power Party*, which became the promoter of human rights, political freedoms and Taiwan’s independence. After the parliamentary election in mid-January 2016, the *NPP* had a few Yuan members and built a ruling coalition with the *Democratic Progress Party*. The party’s yellow and black colours are a direct reference to the symbol of the Sunflower Movement (remark by the author).

against silk economic domination of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of China. The creation of this network community was connected with a distinctive determination of goals (increasing the reach and influence of information about the protest) that set the direction of communication behaviour of administrators and, as a result, other users active in the community, thus limiting the inclusiveness of participation. The aim of the community and the activities of their administrators, including launching the network’s editorial office and enabling journalists to access information about the protest in their national languages, brought about the situation that the community became the information and propaganda tube about the events.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

The research presented above results in several conclusions. The directed communication activity of administrators shaped the behaviour of users in accordance with the goal it had been created for. The posts published by administrators not only generated more traffic than posts published by users but they also provided guidance for communication, channelling content created by the community. This may prove the thesis put forward by Henry Jenkins, Mizuko Ito and Danah Boyd that the way of creating a participative culture conditions the culture’s character. The more hierarchical culture is, the more excluding the nature of its mechanisms is. The hierarchical nature of culture uses the mechanism of selection, which limits the culture of participation. The authors remark that participative culture is connected with the phenomenon of “participation policy” which results in the fact that the mechanism of cultural participation is used to engage people in political or civic matters through the network. According to the authors, participatory culture means, for example, sharing the same values by the group and acting of its members together. Its essence may be counter-culturalism or anti-authoritativeness. It might be a set of practices focused on available social forms of cultural production and sharing as well as a set of patterns thanks to which these social practices may enable learning, civil action and increasing competences; it is created thanks to people and not thanks to technology.<sup>56</sup>

Users treated the community in question as a space of communication activity limited to creating and sharing content in accordance with the objectives of the community. At the same time, the traffic users generated on the basis of publishing their posts was concentrated on those that concerned the objective of the community or came from the group’s administrators.

Summing up the above-mentioned considerations, we may conclude that the aim of creating the community and the communication activity of its administrators limited the inclusive nature of participatory culture in the *Sunflower Movement* community. A high level of technological development in Taiwan is a factor further increasing the potential possibilities of participation. ‘Netizens’ can, at least potentially, use the technological possibilities to remain active in different virtual communities, searching for the most convenient ones that would enable them to fulfil their communication needs. On the other hand, as Henry Jenkins, Mizuko Ito and Danah Boyd claim, these practices do not develop the participatory culture, but they rather concentrate on the selection of information. This leads to a situation when netizens are not engaged in active participation but they remain passive members of the community.<sup>57</sup>

The research findings may be useful for administrators of virtual communities in the process of managing the acts of virtual communication, especially during political or social protests. A more spontaneous and open communication enables a more involved and active audience to create content as well as share information supplemented with their own comments. This is important not only for the development of participatory culture but also for activating participants to establish interactions with other people that create active communication instead of only passive participation based on tracking published content.

55 Content of the posts published by administrators consisted of one-sided views and values and of identifying the stance about the protest amongst the community’s active and passive participants (remark by the author).

56 See: JENKINS, H., ITO, M., BOYD, D.: *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era: A Conversation on Youth, Learning, Commerce, and Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016.

57 See: JENKINS, H., ITO, M., BOYD, D.: *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era: A Conversation on Youth, Learning, Commerce, and Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016.

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