

Networked individuals in the virtual political and social mediasphere

Marta du Vall & Marta Majorek

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Introduction

Scholarly research on the role of new communication technology in social and political life has a dual character. On the one hand, the Internet is of interest to us as a communication tool used in political campaigns by candidates, electoral advisers etc. On the other hand, researchers endeavor to understand and explain the influence of new media on the behavior of individuals and social groups. While it is indeed important to understand how the Internet, in a general sense, influences the functioning of the political sphere, from the authors' point of view the way in which the online environment can be used as a tool and factor of social change is particularly interesting.

This work is divided into three parts, which the authors hope will enable the reader to more easily find topics of interest. The first part consists of two chapters concerning new information and communication technologies. The main aim of the authors is to present the most recent information regarding the internet as a means of communication and the diverse uses and applications of the Web. Here the reader will also find a chapter with a more detailed presentation of certain new communication tools and technologies used in political and social activity.

The second part focuses on issues of political communication, and the changes resulting from the increasingly common use of new communication technologies by both the authors of political discourse and their audiences. There is no doubt that new means of communication have permanently changed the nature of the relations between politicians, citizens and journalists. Here the reader will encounter an extensive theoretical analysis of political communication, complemented by a presentation of the use of new technologies in American electoral campaigns. In the chapter entitled “Contemporary political drama”, on the other hand, the authors consider particularly disturbing trends observed on the cotemporary political scene, namely the issues of tabloidization, memeticization and YouTubization of politics.

The social aspect of new technologies is discussed in the third part of the book. In numerous researches dealing with the issue of the relation between the use of new information and communication technologies and the level of involvement in social and political life, two main opinions may be discerned. Firstly, there are those who do not attach great importance to new technologies and deny that there is a link between these technologies and social and political involvement. Their opponents argue that the use of technological innovations has, more or less directly, increased the level of involvement of individuals and groups. The reader will find a great deal of information regarding the activities of the participants of civic society – in particular, social movements, but also non-governmental organizations – in the environment of new information and communication technologies. The authors will analyze some of the tools and techniques used by cyberactivists aimed at eliciting the reaction of political actors, such as the activities of Anonymous and the ‘Indignant’. This part of the book concludes with a chapter, entitled ‘We are all hackers’, dealing with daily use of the Internet by ordinary citizens – all of us.

The basic method used by the authors in writing this work was the analysis of secondary sources (using desk research), which involved

seeking and analyzing existing, accessible academic publications dealing with the topic of the title. Of particular interest to the authors were publications concerning political communication, online social participation and works on the issue of new communication technologies and the Internet as sources of the information revolution, with particular consideration given to productive and receptive practices characteristic of new media. An important element for analyzing the data was the study of certain examples which in the authors' opinion presented the practical dimension of the use of new communication technologies in the political and social spheres. The selection of these examples was determined by both relevant criteria and the authors' own research interests. An analysis was also carried out of the content of messages accessible online and of the available statistical data from the authors' fields of interest.

Part I
New Information
and Communication Technologies

I. Social change and the information revolution

The experiences resulting from modernity have led to a range of questions and doubts regarding the future of what has been called modern society.¹ It is worth noting a view whose theoretical basis can be found in evolutionism, and which can be defined as a theory of a post-industrial² or a technetronic³ society, or also a knowledge society⁴ or service class society.⁵ According to this argument, positive tendencies that are characteristic of modernity will continue to evolve along similar lines, and current events indicate certain elements of future processes, especially in highly developed countries. Such an approach focuses exclusively on the positive aspects of modernity, and so its popularity has somewhat suffered in situations where the

¹ P. Sztompka, *Socjologia zmian społecznych*, Kraków 2005, pp. 89–90.

² A. Touraine, *The Self-Production of Society*, Chicago 1977; D. Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, New York 1965.

³ Z. Brzeziński, *Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technetronic Era*, London 1970.

⁴ P.F. Drucker, *Spółczeństwo pokapitalistyczne*, Warsaw 1999.

⁵ R. Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, London 1972.

problems resulting from modernity have become increasingly evident. This belief in the continuation of modern trends in the future has been expressed by J. Naisbitt in his concept of megatrends. Only the scale and complex nature of contemporary processes can change, which is characterized by the shift from an industrial to an information society, from energy technology to ultratechnology, from a national to a global economy etc.⁶

Research on modernity, and in particular on its negative aspects, has led to the elaboration of views negating the further evolution of modernity. In contrast to the vision of a post-industrial society, proponents of this theory present the concept of a return to the traditional idea of society and to the rebuilding of direct interaction, based on small primary groups. We can see the spread of ideas predicting the birth of a new type of society, qualitatively different from what is so far known to us, a postmodern society, which will appear in conditions of post-history or post-civilization.

It may be difficult to find a precise and unambiguous indication of the moment when modern society reaches the next stage of development. Moreover, it is doubtful whether such an undertaking has a sound basis. From a scientific point of view it is better to examine the whole complexity of phenomena that can be seen as the deciding factors in a new social dimension which can be distinguished from modernity. These include the determinants of a new international order: neocolonialism, the appearance of new, ecological social movements, computerization and the spread of electronic information media.

Modern man is no longer inclined to any kind of regulation; his actions now stem from spontaneity and impulse. Only learned habits can provide an element of restraint, and these can be rejected at any moment and replaced with others. With its lack of balance and organization, postmodernism also acts on the individual, who in spite

⁶ J. Naisbitt, *Megatrendy. Dziesięć nowych kierunków zmieniających nasze życie*, Poznań 1997.

of this is free to consider their action – a form of self-regulation ensues in the process of association with others. Health is no longer a priority, and what is emphasized is a physical and spiritual ability to take in new experiences, together with flexibility of action and reactions that are suited to a changing environment.

Modernity clearly favored the image of the pilgrim; postmodernism does not have any one universal model. We can see the appearance of the archetypes of the walker, the vagabond, the tourist, the player, with their lack of stability and love of the unplanned, leading to the inability to form mutual rights and obligations based permanent foundations. This state of constant motion, a type of feverish mobility, which is one of the characteristics of postmodernism, is joined with a sense of a lack of roots, further accentuated by the lack of permanent points of reference, all of which increases the volatile and ephemeral nature of the phenomenon.⁷

Such a situation may in the long term be difficult for the individual to bear. The lack of a reference point and of permanent indicators of one's own identity, which are gained by belonging to a group, leads to the impulse for the development of postmodern concepts of social ties. Here we may consider a new creation of the conditions of a social contract, surrendering part of our own freedom in exchange for something that will, at least partly, assure our safety, but it is also possible to attempt to recreate a premodern community in a new form.⁸ The criteria for belonging to it, whether ethnic, religious, political or other, are not important here. At the forefront there is the striving for a harmonious combination of the individual and the collective, the desire to be different, but at the same the need for belonging, fortuitousness and roots. It is quite significant the motive for this aspiration is not an attachment to the idea of a community *per*

⁷ Z. Bauman, *Globalizacja. I co z tego dla ludzi wynika*, Warsaw 2000, pp. 92–93.

⁸ Z. Bauman, *Wieloznaczność nowoczesna, nowoczesność wieloznaczna*, Warsaw 1995, p. 279.

se, but rather a sign of utilitarianism and instrumentalism, shown by the treatment of the community as a remedy of sorts for the unease and feeling of insecurity that accompany the individual in a postmodern reality deprived of permanent points of support.

Currently it is assumed that participation in the community is of a temporary nature – the individual becomes a member of a new tribe of his own initiative and ceases to be one in the same way. This happens if the community does not fulfil their expectations, if it loses its force of attraction or if a new community appears on the horizon, one which is more likely to satisfy their needs or enable the realization of individual goals. Therefore, despite the aspiration to create communities and in spite of the desire of the individual to belong, the randomness and casual interaction characteristic of postmodernism has remained strong.

These communal tendencies appear to coexist with another phenomenon that has been observed by researchers. This is the increasingly noticeable role of grassroots initiatives in the process of regulating social life and a clear marking of spheres of autonomy within specified hierarchies. An example of this, often seen as a harbinger of the disintegration of social order, is the phenomenon of subculture, characterized by a manifestation of difference and independence combined with a rejection of anonymity and a refusal to conform. This is a form of insubordination, situated between a desire to attract attention but without being pigeonholed, which has been called 'hiding in the light'.⁹ Perhaps this should be seen as a reaction to the failure of social engineering and the fiasco of the entire project of modernity.

A typical characteristic of the members of modern society has turned out to be a reluctance to engage in political life, as can be seen, for example, from the alarmingly low voter turnout in many countries. This state of affairs has been attributed to a loss of interest in politics or a lack of attractive political options. An explanation for this can

⁹ Cf.D. Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light*, London 1988.

also be found in the current process of increased individualization and a concentration on the private life of the individual at the expense of civic activism. This phenomenon is in turn associated with the development of technologies, seen as one of the key determinants of modernity. On the one hand, technologies stimulate political activity to a certain extent, facilitating access to information, shaping and stimulating opinion through various discussion forums connected by means of the internet. However, we can also encounter a diametrically opposite phenomenon: many researchers have raised the issue, mentioned above, of the disengagement of the individual, the phenomenon of an increasing sense of isolation and a decreased level of social interaction.

Postmodernism may still appear in changes of existing forms of political life. Its universally acknowledged characteristics, decomposition and fluidity, may create the basis for a new vision of politics and the role of political authority.¹⁰ The concept of a postindustrial society attaches primary importance to changes in social structure, the economy and systems of employment, and to new ways of building mutual relations between the theoretical and practical fields, represented by the world of science and technology. Even though these changes are not thought to have a deciding influence in the domain of politics and culture, they are not without significance. Thanks to science, the postindustrial world is aware that it can control its own destiny, and technology provides it with the appropriate instruments to do so. The increased importance of knowledge and technology has led to changes in the position of scientists, engineers and various kinds of technocrats, who are becoming the rivals of those in government, or their allies. Individualism, personal development

¹⁰ An example of this could be the events that took place during the 2004 presidential elections in Ukraine, which resulted in spontaneous grassroots movements of citizens. The political power and military resources that the defenders of the 'old order' had at their disposal turned out to be ineffective and failed to prevent the process of change.

of the individual and anti-institutionalism are signs of the changes that accompany the appearance of the postindustrial society.

Together with the development of the service sector, the postindustrial society has seen the expansion of technology – the postindustrial and technetronic societies have become synonymous. The influence of technology, especially in the field of communications through the medium of the computer, is undeniable.¹¹ These changes in turn require adaptations in the structure of employment, leading to the significant development of a ‘new working class’ represented by appropriately trained personnel (brain workers). Moreover, the particular relationship between the postindustrial society and scientific knowledge, has a fundamental influence on the value system that it recognizes

An analysis of the phenomenon of the scientific-technological revolution leads to another important conclusion. Science, understood as a creative force with a fundamental importance for society, becomes at the same time a catalyst for the process of integration of social, economic and political life. The consequences of the scientific-technological revolution can also be perceived in the area of social interaction: relations are becoming significantly broader and more frequent compared to the industrial era, but at the same time their nature is more indirect, and even superficial, which exacerbates a feeling of isolation, and, in the long term, the atomization of society. More and more often this society is given the epithet ‘leisure society’. This time is set aside for additional money-earning activities or various forms of recreation, available thanks to the spread of mass culture and new information and communication technologies.

Taking this into consideration, it is certain that we are living in an era of an information revolution, one which is in certain ways the aftermath of the scientific-technological revolution, characterized by the striking growth of forms of interactive participation of

¹¹ Z. Brzeziński, *Between Two Ages...*, pp. 9–10.

individuals. There is no doubt that this phenomenon is boosted by the development of new forms of communication,¹² which have changed the media environment and the areas of social dialogue. It can be said that we can see today a 'new media culture', and that the Internet represents a form of 'information highway'.¹³ The main signs of the information revolution include interactivity, i.e. the relations between the individual and their environment, through the channel of a given medium.¹⁴ By gaining the status of participant, the media recipient shares in their creation. The next stage of this process allows him to attain the position of broadcaster. A further element is hypertextuality, defined as interactive access to all data everywhere on earth. Just as digitalization is now a widely used method of creating content, so hypertextuality is becoming a means of storage and transmission. By its very nature, the Internet shares certain features with a natural form of human activity, namely interaction. The Web has a communicative dimension in that it enables, and even encourages individuals to add their own input to a collective medium. As a result, both the processes of information, and the form of social organization appearing around them, have a simultaneously collective and individual character. In contrast, reading a book leads rather to individual development, and to a certain extent isolates the reader from their environment, nor does it allow any change of the content. The Internet, on the other hand, owing to its openness, enables us to connect to the global circulation of information, and at the same time gives the opportunity to introduce new content in real time. This is of great significance, if we take into consideration the accelerated growth of human intellectual production.¹⁵

¹² New media are often defined as digital communication.

¹³ A. Jaskiernia, *Publiczne media elektroniczne w Europie*, Warsaw 2006, p. 58.

¹⁴ In this case, we will consider in particular what have been called 'new' media, or those which are called 'old' but which are adapted to become interactive.

¹⁵ D. de Kerckhove, *Inteligencja otwarta. Narodziny społeczeństwa sieciowego*, Warsaw 2001.

The era of the information revolution has been characterized by the phenomenon of intermediary, mediatized communication, which lends itself to the creation of the framework of a mediated society. This term covers both the concept of an information society (regarding the content) and a Web society in its form.¹⁶ The form is highly evident, but there is no gradation to be found within the formula: the Web, information, form and content have an equal importance and are closely connected with a chain of mutual relations. The new social stage that appears as a result of the process of mediamorphosis, i.e. the presence, or rather omnipresence of the media in society, presents several significant elements. Above all, its main characteristic is that it functions indirectly through interpersonal contacts, so the media become in a certain sense the 'natural' human environment, and the virtual space slowly becomes identical to reality. Global infrastructure, especially in the field of telecommunications, is gradually transformed into the basis of a network and circulation of information on an extremely varied scale, starting on the local level and finishing on the global.¹⁷

This brief outline of the influence of new technologies on the development of the information society and the increased possibility of unhindered involvement of individuals in the public domain is the basis for the contemporary forms of such involvement. The authors' analysis will consider new possibilities and areas of action, created by new media, in particular the Internet (a shorthand form of Internetwork). This worldwide computer network is logically connected thanks to the use of a common TCP/IP protocol, and provides or uses high-level services based on the functions of telecommunications and their infrastructure. This study is not exhaustive even from a technical point of view, as today it is very difficult to specify the services that are available online, since their number increase daily.

¹⁶ T. Goban-Klas, 'W stronę społeczeństwa medialnego', <http://www.ap.krakow.pl/ptn/ref2005/goban.pdf>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Without doubt the most important and most common elements of the Internet are the World Wide Web (WWW), e-mail, communicators, file-sending and file-sharing, work on remote computers, and social portals, which are very popular today. The Internet has imperceptibly entered our lives. Previously a means of communication, used only by scientists, it is now present in almost all areas of human activity,¹⁸ and has an influence on important political, social and cultural enterprises. It is also the first means of communication to allow its users to interact with one another at any moment and on a global scale.¹⁹

Contemporary society has also been called the 'Internet age', which emphasizes the groundbreaking change resulting from the interaction between man and an inanimate object – the computer, which constantly collects rapidly changing information about its user.

The hallmark of this active cooperation between machines and people is personalization, the basic principle of which is the use of interactivity to adapt the actions of a computer to statistical information describing a particular individual. Thanks to this wide range of information regarding the user, and possessing increasingly advanced means of communicating with people, the computer can, in a more or less active way, cooperate with man, leading to a feeling of partnership, or even affection for it.²⁰

However, any definition of the Internet must also include its civilizational and social aspects, and so goes far beyond purely technical terminology. These aspects consist of at least three elements, the network of networks based on a TCP/IP protocol, the community of people, who use and develop this network and the collection of resources, which can be found in this network.²¹

¹⁸ P. Wallace, *Psychologia Internetu*, Poznań 2003, p. 7.

¹⁹ M. Castells, *Spółeczeństwo sieci*, Warsaw 2007.

²⁰ W. Gogolek, *Teorie informacyjne mediów*, Warsaw 2006, p. 17.

²¹ W. Pisarek, *Słownik terminologii medialnej*, Kraków 2006, p. 84.

Document RFC 1462,²² one of the official documents of the Internet developed by the IETF,²³ defines the Internet as :

- A computer network composed of network using a TCP/IP (Transfer Control Protocol / Internet Protocol) ;
- A community of people who use and develop the network;
- A collection of information resources available via this network.

The above threefold definition very clearly shows the distinction between the different elements of the Internet: the technical side, represented by the first point, secondly the social aspect, and thirdly the informational element.²⁴ This work will present selected examples of the application of technology in the three areas mentioned above. All three elements are closely connected, and the use of the Internet is nothing other than the activity of individual members of society via a network, with the aim of finding and using the information resources that can be found therein. This concept of the Internet can be compared to the development of civilization. Building civilization, man uses two basic instruments: tools and words. The first of these is associated with the technical aspect of the power of man's influence on the reality that surrounds him and the effectiveness with which he changes it. The word is the basic instrument in discovering reality, in gathering and transmitting knowledge. These tools, together with the rules for their use, create technology.²⁵

The Internet is therefore constructed in a similar way to civilization, in an equally decentralized and disorganized manner. We see the appearance of ways of understanding the Internet, which itself is

²² RFC 1462 – Request for Comments 1462 or FYI on ‘What’s on the Internet?’, a document prepared by Ed Krol and E. Hoffman in 1993 as part of the work of the Internet Engineering Task Force, an organization responsible for developing standards for the functioning of the Internet.

²³ Internet Engineering Task Force – an informal, international association of individuals interested in technical and organizational standards for the Internet.

²⁴ J. Zieliński, *Ideologia Internetu*, <http://www.winter.pl/ideologia.html>.

²⁵ A. Siciński, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Technika a społeczeństwo, antologia*, Warsaw 1974, Vol. I, p. 10.

a certain symbol. Unless we are referring to it in a strictly technical context, the Internet can represent:

- a) the shift from a work society towards an information or knowledge society;
- b) progress and modernity;
- c) an indication of changes, a “pulse gauge” of modernity and, simultaneously, a metronome that dictates its rhythm;
- d) the ‘web aspect’ of nature, technology and social phenomena – even of the world as a whole;
- e) the extreme complexity of modernity, its opacity and fragility.²⁶

Other important traits of the internet are its vast scale and global nature. Its users are estimated at more than two billion, while in Poland eighteen million people are connected to the Internet.²⁷

The Internet is also characterized by the following features:

- A multichannel nature, i.e. the existence of many possibilities of sending information from one computer to another ; in the event of one channel being blocked, it is possible to use another;
- Practically unlimited possibility for growth of the Internet as measured by the number of connected users or devices (the only limit can be the result of connection problems);
- The lack of a clear structure or hierarchy of specific entities connected to the Web and participating in the exchange of information;
- The lack of one control center, although attempts have been made to coordinate and regulate the activities of the Web.
- A tendency to treat the Internet as a platform for the realization of various activities and services, including those of a media nature, such as internet marketing.²⁸

²⁶ A. Metzner-Szigeth, *Internet, komunikacja komputerowa i nowe media charakterystyka techniczno-medialna i czynniki transformacji społeczno-kulturowej*, Tychy 2006, p. 86.

²⁷ <http://manager.money.pl/strategie/emarketing/artikul/w;polsce;jest;ponad;18;milionow;internautow,252,0,895484.html> (20.05.2011).

²⁸ M. Sienko, *Człowiek w pajęczynie – Internet jako zjawisko kulturowe*, Wrocław 2002, p. 37.

The social aspect of the functioning of the Internet as a global computer network cannot be studied without any reference to purely technical questions. One should note the fairly universal use of the Internet as a medium. Traditional media such as the press, radio and television are inextricably connected both with the specified form of information, which is spread via a given medium, and with the specified method of processing and transmitting this information. The Internet, on the other hand, like almost all computer technologies, is a completely universal instrument and enables almost any kind of information to be sent in almost any way. Web²⁹ pages, which are most often seen as typifying the Internet, use HTTP,³⁰ whereas e-mail is based on SMTP.³¹ Other ways of sending information via the Internet are created using news groups – USNET based on NNTP,³² and FTP³³ allowing the sending of files between computers and a server. Another service, considered by many to be the future of the Web, is voice transmission using the protocol VoIP.³⁴ Seen from this perspective the Internet creates a system of transmitting and processing information (sound, data, images) between particular Web users.

It would therefore be appropriate to consider the various Internet services as media, and the Internet itself as a metamedium – an environment (cyberspace) that enables the creation and functioning of these media. A significant difference compared to traditional media is the fact that inappropriate use of the latter does not result in harm to the medium itself, whereas incorrect use of the Internet can harm not only other users but also the network itself, for example damaging the efficiency of servers or the speed of connections.

²⁹ World Wide Web, www.

³⁰ Hypertext Transfer Protocols.

³¹ Simple Mail Transport Protocol.

³² Network News Transport Protocol – a communication protocol used for discussion groups.

³³ File Transfer Protocols.

³⁴ Voice over Internet Protocols – a digital technology allowing phonetic speech to be transmitted using internet connections of specialized networks using an IP protocol, commonly known as ‘an internet phone’.

‘Internet use is like a trip around a huge, wild natural park; there are many things there (some wild, others tame), that are beyond our wildest dreams; the Internet is constantly growing, and it always has room for new people.’³⁵ The Internet is a truly fascinating ‘cornucopia’. It has been said to suggest a group of hundreds of millions of consultants, who answer every call. It lures us with a huge quantity of worthwhile information, but it can disappoint and cheat less surefooted travelers.

The primary role of the Internet stems from the very nature of the media and the role that they play in social life and in mass or public communication. In contrast to other elements of social reality, the media possess predispositions and abilities to activate society in many areas. This primary role is at the same time a basic one, their particularization and realization occurs in specific acts, which presents many dangers of dysfunction in relation to society and the assumed communicative goals, and so there are repeated, processed roles which are adapted to the reality of the primary role.³⁶

H. Lasswell’s classic 1948 concept indicates three basic roles: the media observe the environment with the aim of identifying the threats and opportunities that can appear in it and which can influence the values, order and structure of a given society. In addition, they coordinate the reaction of particular elements of society to changes in its environment and transmit societal heritage and cultural values from generation to generation. C.R. Wright has added a fourth role, that of entertainment, associated with relaxation, rest and the possibility of forgetting about the problems of the real world. Taking into consideration the various concepts that have so far been expressed, D. McQuail distinguishes five basic roles of the media:

- Information: the provision of information regarding events and situations in society and in the world, indicating the relations of political power, aiding innovation, change and progress.

³⁵ P.E. Hoffman, *Internet, poradnik*, Warsaw 1995 p. 28.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 124.

- Correlation: explanation, interpretation and comment on the significance of events and information, ensuring the support of recognized authorities and norms, socialization, coordination of discrete social activities, building consensus, determining a hierarchy of importance and signaling relative status.
- Continuity: expression of the dominant culture and recognition of subcultures and cultural changes that are taking place, building and maintaining a community of values.
- Entertainment: providing the opportunity for recreation, change and the resources for relaxation, reducing social tension.
- Mobilization: campaigns in the name of social goals in the sphere of politics, war, economic development, work and sometimes religion.³⁷

Theorists of the new media often refer to recognized concepts and theories of communication. This is a valid view, since the new media also fulfil a role that belongs to traditional media. The functions that are indicated most often are:

- Informative, whose purpose is to inform society of events;
- Educational, requiring the analysis and explanation of the importance and meaning of events and facts;
- Platforms for political debate: the media, in particular public media, should facilitate the formation of political opinion, reflecting various positions and ideas;
- Supervision of government and political institutions: the media, watching over the public interest, follow political activities and 'give' political agents a 'good or bad press';
- Persuasive: the media should transmit the opinions and programs of all political parties.³⁸

³⁷ D. McQuail, *Teoria masowego komunikowania*, Warsaw 2007, p. 111–113.

³⁸ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Teoria komunikowania publicznego i politycznego*, Wrocław 2002, p. 120–121.

Wiesław Sonczyk lists the following functions of the media:

- Informative and opinion-forming;
- Educative: teach, educate, entertain;
- The media as the 'fourth estate'.³⁹

On the other hand, Tomasz Goban-Klas indicates three fundamental roles of the media:

- Construction of reality;
- Indication of standards of behavior, lifestyles and also norms and dominant models;
- Creation and distribution of knowledge.⁴⁰

The Internet is a medium which is still developing and is still far from reaching its full potential. Every day something new appears online. Over the last decade or so, the worldwide development of the Internet has reached the point where not only is it one of the fundamental means of communication, changing traditional attitudes to this process, and blurring the geographical boundaries between people, but it is also changing the traditional attitude to business.

As a medium, the Internet has become the fastest and largest source of information, taking over the role of many traditional information channels, adding the element of interaction, which is not available in any other medium. Interaction is the distinguishing sign of the Internet, and has been an important reason for its popularity.

The Internet was very quickly adapted for advertising, leading to the constant development of new forms of advertisements and various methods of using it to promote services and products. For many reasons the Internet can be considered the fastest-growing marketing channel. Recognition of the potential of the Internet as an independent medium has allowed the development of many business

³⁹ W. Sonczyk, *Media w Polsce*, Warsaw 1999, p. 149–155.

⁴⁰ T. Goban-Klas, *Media i komunikowanie masowe. Teorie i analizy prasy, radia, telewizji i internetu*, Warsaw 2009, p. 114.

models which could only be implemented through this very medium. Its characteristic traits, such as interaction, ease of access, global range and flexibility have enabled the use of the Internet in its basic roles in the following areas:

- Information,
- Communication,
- Commerce,
- Marketing,
- Advertising.

The Internet is an excellent information carrier, which thanks to web technology can transmit audiovisual multimedia material. It precisely this combination of various forms of information that has allowed the Internet to assume an important position in the media landscape.

Quick access and unlimited capacity mean that the Internet can provide information and entertainment simultaneously. Its advantage over other media is its breadth and unlimited area of activity. Internet users can independently and actively seek out content that is of interest to them, rather than passively accept it, as is the case with other media.⁴¹

Relatively cheap and easy access to technology has led to the creation of millions of web pages. Web portals and search engines have become a permanent source of information, and therefore an ideal advertising and promotion medium for companies. These are sought out by numerous portals and websites focused on a particular theme, which allows their message to reach a their target audience of users who are interested in that theme. The Web gives users almost unlimited access to various kinds of information. Online everyone in has the theoretical possibility to compare information and opinions from numerous sources. The Internet breaks down barriers of the information society, significantly weakens the monopoly of traditional

⁴¹ K. Pikoń, *ABC Internetu*, Gliwice 1997, p. 34.

media, taking away their dominant position in commenting on facts, events and behavior. Therefore some traditional media have started to transfer part of their activity online. Smaller websites meet with serious online competition from websites which can cleverly combine all the activities of the Internet in their pages.⁴²

It is possible to use online resources to contact many witnesses of an event who analyze it from different points of view, which gives a broader perspective on reality. The Internet contains a great deal of information of a political, social, economic or cultural nature. Locating it does not require much time. Within a few seconds various data, images, graphs and tables, articles and analyses appear on our screens. Cyberspace benefits from an almost unlimited store of information, which increases the recipient's knowledge, if he can find it and adapt it himself.

Unfortunately, the Internet is not a sure source of information. The quantity of data of unknown origin can create confusion, and may undermine the reliability of medium. The problem of the enormous number and questionable reliability of online information and sources has been labelled by R. Tadeusiewicz "information smog".⁴³ Attempts to limit the negative effects of this smog involve accessing websites universally accepted as reliable with high ratings awarded by recognized authorities, and whose owners are usually prestigious organizations. Another method of verifying particular online sources is the time-honored practice of assessing the value of printed references. This includes above all social, environmental acceptance of sources, as shown by the number and frequency that these sources are referred to by recognized authorities in, for example, the field of science. It has also been shown to be effective to compare information from different independent online sources, to use commercial information resources

⁴² M. Nowina Konopka, *Wiedza, informacja i komunikacja w rozwoju społeczeństwa informacyjnego*, Warsaw 2006, p. 115.

⁴³ W. Gogołek, *Technologie informacyjne mediów*, op. cit., p. 243.

and the websites of government offices that participate in legislation and produce state reports.⁴⁴

The one effective method of verifying information remains common sense. The necessity of seeking alternative sources of knowledge and information obliges the user to reflect and distance himself from certain information, and teaches him critical thinking. It seems, therefore, that while the internet has an opinion-forming character as a collection of information created and selected by people with particular views, it is also a tool that allows free searching. It is precisely the complementary nature of online information that makes the Internet so popular. The problem is not so much finding the information but categorizing it sensibly. A valuable indicator here is the recognition of sources found online. It is not easy to arrive at a reliable source of information. Great care should be taken in verifying data which we intend to use. Internet portals are a useful aid in this instance, as they offer their users a wide range of services aimed at finding an information source together with a short description of it. Thanks to such databases we can find the information we have been seeking and learn who is its author. The number of Polish Internet portals is huge, and, based on the average frequency with which these websites are visited, they are an important source of information about the world around us. The choice of information contained therein, and the comments that are attached, can be the basis for the interpretation of various facts by Internet users. In this regard the Internet does not differ fundamentally from traditional media.

Owing to its intensive recent growth, it is difficult to deny that the Internet is one of the mass media. It has an enormous significance for media users and creators, in business communication, in the field of science and in private life. Its role as a medium for effective communication has also been noticed in both administration and politics. New forms of technology enable the creation of virtual discussion forums, opinion polls, the organization of plebiscites and

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 245–246.

voting.⁴⁵ The virtues of this communicative role are demonstrated by five basic qualities:

Harmonious coexistence with all other technologies and methods of transmitting and processing information;

- 'Accumulative character' – the absorption of earlier technologies and tools, rather than their elimination;
- 'Complexity', thanks to which the Internet connects individuals and groups;
- Global nature and independence 'from all borders and distances: political, economic, social and even geographical';
- Dependability – increasing 'goodwill', tolerance of mistakes in the behavior of other Web users.⁴⁶

Paralleling the growing availability and popularity of the Internet, newer and more advanced technologies have been created for the exchange of information: e-mails, discussion fora, chats, internet telephone services and videoconferencing. These technologies are divided into two groups of methods of communication in the virtual world, namely direct (synchronous) communication, formed by systems of fast, direct online contact of people, where recording of content is marginal, and indirect (asynchronous) communication, characterized, aside from offline exchange of information, by its storing for future use.⁴⁷

The basis of direct communication via the Internet is e-mail, a service by which a sender may in a brief period of time send a communication to a receiver in the form of text files, spreadsheets, graphic objects or music files. It is currently the fastest and least expensive form of communication among Web users. It requires an account on an electronic server or a program for mail use. There are

⁴⁵ M. Nowina Konopka, *Wiedza, informacja i komunikacja w rozwoju społeczeństwa informacyjnego*, op. cit., p. 109.

⁴⁶ W. Gogolek, *Technologie informacyjne mediów*, op. cit., p. 98.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 99.

a range of possibilities which can optimize e-mail use. People who communicate via e-mail are at risk of receiving spam. This refers to electronic messages that are sent out to recipients who do not expect them, and are of a commercial nature.

E-mail has been called the 'flywheel' of a company.⁴⁸ This refers to both communication within the company, and with outside world – with other firms, clients and other e-mail users. Another direct Internet communication service is Internet Relay Chat (IRC), which, as its name suggests, allows communication with many people all over the world.⁴⁹ Users of this service are required to register on the appropriate channel; people who log onto the same channel simultaneously can exchange correspondence in real time, i.e. in 'written conversations'. Internet communicators are tools enabling the sending of written or spoken messages. In 1996 there was developed a remote connection service similar to IRC, namely ICQ (I Seek You). Communicators that are available online are a source of competition for telephone companies. An important communication service is videoconferencing, where the transmission of high quality sound and images to many internet localizations allows for the participation in one meeting of people in different parts of the world. Videoconferencing is widely used in business, academic research and education.

Another distinct form of online correspondence is indirect communication, more different from classic examples of information transfer. By nature it involves more than one person, enabling individual interaction and the creation of private information exchange groups. The most common model has one sender and many recipients. A further characteristic of indirect communication is that the information sent by users is recorded. Recipients are able to respond at a time of their choosing, since indirect communication has an asynchronous nature. This means that the recipient's reaction

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ M. Nowina Konopka, *Wiedza, informacja i komunikacja w rozwoju społeczeństwo informacyjnego*, op. cit., p. 111.

to a communication that has been sent to him can be delayed, thus allowing him to reflect on any incoming information.

The most important characteristic of the Internet is its global nature. As one of the results of information technology, it has offered companies new possibilities of worldwide commerce. The data that it sends does not know any national borders. In order to maintain a competitive edge, companies must learn to make use of the opportunities presented by the Internet. Firms using the Web can enjoy a range of economic benefits.

The rapid development of the Internet and the growth of its popularity have led to the recognition of its great potential for the provision of products and services. Among the first Internet services were those associated with the phenomenon itself, such as the creation of websites and other essential services for a company to work online. Currently, almost every service or product sufficiently transportable to be sent or supplied in a simple way can be ordered online. The Internet is an excellent transmitter of information allowing the effective and swift sending of information on the price, delivery time or other important features of a product, for example music clips from a CD, or extracts from a book or CD, before its purchase.

The Internet has become a permanent element of the business environment, and is used as a means of expanding companies' scope of activity. A prime example of the commercial use of this technology is the sale of flight tickets online, with the Internet replacing traditional travel agencies, whose activities were limited by practical considerations. The Internet is geographically unrestricted, allowing tickets to be sold worldwide using one website.⁵⁰

An important commercial aspect of the Web is its informative role in the search for goods and services. Over 50% of Internet users who make their purchases in the traditional way first check the product online. Most often, consumers decide to buy online for reasons of economy of time and money, and also due to a wider range of products

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 88.

and more information on them. An important factor regarding choice in e-commerce is the brand-name, often seen as a sign of reliability.⁵¹ The sale of products and services online has benefits for both the buyer and seller. Both sides save money, since the seller is not obliged to spend on traditional methods of sale, such as hiring employees in every branch, and maintaining shopping premises. The Internet presents new opportunities for doing business. Among these are easier access to markets, distribution, advertising and increased competitiveness and innovation. The Internet economy, e-business or e-commerce are very popular phrases and refer to such services as online banking (e-banking) online business (e-business) the electronic exchange of data between companies (e-commerce) the electronic economy (e-economy) or electronic administration (e-government). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development defines e-business as 'the automation of business processes (internal and external) realized by means of a computer network'.⁵² A model for online business using information systems and internet technology would include the following elements:

- Exchange of information between producers, distributors and recipients of products and services;
- Preparing contracts;
- Sending documents;
- Organizing teleconferences ;
- Seeking new contracts
- Searching for information (business intelligence).⁵³

The growth of the online economy is considered to be the most far-reaching concept of economic development and an opportunity for the increasing competitiveness, innovation and effectiveness. It

⁵¹ M. Castells, *Galaktyka Internetu*, op. cit., p. 91.

⁵² M. Nowina Konopka, *Wiedza, informacja i komunikacja w rozwoju społeczeństwa informacyjnego*, op. cit., p. 153.

⁵³ M. Castells, *Galaktyka Internetu*, op. cit., p. 152.

leads to the dynamic growth of the information service sector and the elaboration of new business models, innovative work practices and business methods, and so to the creation of new occupations and work opportunities. There are various ways in which e-business can be conducted: business-to-business (B2B), business-to-consumer (B2C), government-to-citizen (G2C), consumer-to-consumer (C2C) or business-to-employee (B2E).⁵⁴

For many reasons, the Internet can be seen as the fastest-growing marketing channel. On the one hand there are the results achieved by online marketing campaigns, and also the wide range of opportunities for using the Internet in marketing, such as various forms of advertisements, with the possibility of adjusting them to suit the audience. Regardless of whether the aim of the advertising campaign is to raise brand awareness or provoke a direct reaction, an increasing number of Polish managers are noticing the advantages of the Internet and are using it to build an appropriate, effective media mix. As early as the preparation stage for brief offers, advertising agencies use the Internet as one of the channels for communicating with the target group.⁵⁵

The Internet enables customers to be informed about the features and price of products via company websites. Easily accessible and inexpensive instruments allow companies to send an offer to their target group of customers very fast. Thanks to the Internet all promotional activities, from information and advertisements for products, to the subtleties of PR, can be carried out at a significantly lower cost than using traditional methods.

The Internet provides us with a wide range of tools for all stages of marketing. However, just like in traditional marketing, an effective strategy is needed, involving preliminary research. Its advantage is that access to the customer is simplified, and research tools are much cheaper. Based on the information obtained through online research

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 153.

⁵⁵ W. Gogołek, *Technologie informacyjne mediów*, op. cit., p. 169.

it is very easy to develop a strategy and clearly define what methods will be most effective for the company.

Above all, online marketing is cheaper than in other media. The cost of reaching ten thousand recipients using Internet marketing techniques is almost the same as that for reaching a hundred potential customers via the traditional methods. Furthermore, most of the cost is in creating the basic content and in the automation of the website functions.

In parallel with the development of media, the range of advertising channels has also been increasing since the posters and signs of Pompeii to the contemporary plethora of advertisements in the press, on the radio, in films and on television. However, the most striking, most advanced and most impressive tool for the distribution of advertising material has been the Internet, especially as a result of its interactive nature. Taking advantage of the achievements of all earlier media, its unique effectiveness stems from its ability to adapt advertising to its audience – the contents of the same advertisement depend on information describing a particular Internet user, for example their age, interests, geographical location and even the time of day. Online advertising achieves all marketing objectives, as it ensures that the product is noticed, awakens the interest of potential buyers, persuades them to buy, and facilitates purchase.⁵⁶ The future of Internet advertising lies in its personalization, i.e. its adaptation to the information describing its addressee, which is not difficult, since a tendency to talk openly about oneself online is part of human nature. It is estimated that a quarter of all questions online refer to local information, especially regarding commercial information. This is the result of the growth of Internet communication among groups of individuals with the same interests, having similar activities or geographical location, and the adaptation of advertisements to the current location of their recipients. Online advertising has a fundamental significance to the

⁵⁶ T. Goban-Klas, *Cywilizacja medialna. Geneza, ewolucja, eksplozja*, Warsaw 2005, p. 81.

size of websites which offer free access, as their basic source of income comes from advertisements.

Other forms of activity among Internet users in the virtual world that have been adapted to online advertising are:

- Communication – websites and Internet applications used for the direct exchange of information between two individuals or groups of individuals;
- Business – websites and applications used for online purchases;
- Web searches – sites and Internet applications used to display results and web addresses sorted according to definite criteria.⁵⁷

Factors that have a particularly significant influence on the development of internet advertising include:

- Speed at which information is sent;
- Ease with which information is sent to many recipients;
- Precise identification and choice of a group of addressees;
- Low costs compared to traditional advertising.⁵⁸

Thanks to the interactive nature of the Internet, online advertising is not passive, and its content, form, and the strength of its presentation depend on the recipient. Thus it becomes more ‘intelligent’, and adapted to particular groups.

Internet technologies are creating methods and forms of distribution for advertisements that were hitherto unavailable. Their effective use leads to ever more effective promotion tools, which can be divided into four categories: banners and other forms of advertisements generated on computer screens, e-mail advertising, sponsoring and other forms of online advertising.

The Internet is an ideal advertising medium for the promotion of products and services, above all because of its completely multimedia nature. Internet advertisements can contain text, images, sound

⁵⁷ W. Gogolek, *Technologie informacyjne mediów*, op. cit. p. 170–171.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 170.

and film. The Internet contains the equivalents of press, radio and television advertisements. It has an advantage over other media in that it is completely interactive and can persuade the audience of the advertisement to actively familiarize themselves with the product or service being promoted, by making information available on websites, as the advertisement is an invitation to visit a website, where the Internet user may learn about the details of the products or service.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ T. Maciejowski, *Narzędzia skutecznej promocji w internecie*, Kraków 2003, p. 187–188.

II. Popular tools and techniques used in the process of communication via the Internet

The new Internet generation have a very significant role in the functioning of the process of online communication. Next Generation Users (NGU) use modern communication tools on a much larger than average scale. These users are typified by a high degree of production of digital content; they create their own websites and blogs, and upload films and photographs. They are also keen on sharing various material on social portals and on participating in discussion groups. For these users the Internet is a basic source of information and a natural environment for social and political activity.⁶⁰ As Don Tapscott has noted, 'young people' use the possibilities offered by modern technology to transform all institutions of contemporary life, from the workplace and the market, to politics and education, and to the role of the family. They think that if something does not function

⁶⁰ M. Filiciak., J. Hofmøkl, A. Tarkowski, *Obiegi kultury. Społeczna cyrkulacja treści*, Warsaw 2012, p. 48.

properly, it should be changed.⁶¹ What is particularly important is that the new generation are concerned about the society to which they belong and believe that they can have a significant influence on the world around them.⁶² Statistics show that, to a great extent, new communication technologies are replacing other forms of activity, including the way leisure time is spent. It is worth mentioning that the average Internet user in Poland has been one for six years (data from the World Internet Project Poland, 2011). They spend on average more than two hours daily online, in 90% of cases in their own home.⁶³ As a result, the political and social milieu is basically compelled to avail of Internet tools so as to enable new media users to participate in social and political life.

In order for 'information' to reach interested parties, the appropriate communication tools should be used. In the past, these were leaflets, newspapers and brochures. Faced with the advances in digitalization and the effects of the development of information technology,⁶⁴ politicians and social activists have increased the range of media used to communicate with society.

Without doubt blogs, as online journals are popularly known, are a form of online communication which is used very frequently. It might be thought that the blog is a new Internet invention. However, the history of this phenomenon goes back to the mid-nineties. At first, blogs were mere attachments to websites, considered by their

⁶¹ M. du Vall, *Obywatelski hacking jako implikator zmian społecznych w XXI wieku*, [in:] *Demokracja elektroniczna. Kontrowersje i dylematy*, ed. M. Marczevska-Rytke, Lublin 2013, p. 115–116.

⁶² D. Tapscott, *Cyfrowa dorosłość. Jak pokolenie sieci zmienia nasz świat*, Warsaw 2010, p. 406–407.

⁶³ Cf. D. Baran, *Internet w Polsce*, [in:] *Polski system medialny 1989–2011*, ed. K. Pokorna-Ignatowicz, Kraków 2013.

⁶⁴ R.S. Brzoza, *Demokracja elektroniczna jako element procesu wirtualizacji, symulakryzacji i medializacji życia społeczno-politycznego*, [in:] *Demokracja elektroniczna. Kontrowersje i dylematy*, ed. M. Marczevska-Rytke, Lublin 2013, p. 76.

authors to be worth sharing with other Internet users. The real growth of the 'online journal'⁶⁵ began in the 21st century. Today the term can be found in the most recent dictionaries, and almost every newspaper or magazine dealing with politics, business, culture or sport has something positive to say about the phenomenon. A blog is simply a type of website in the form of a diary. The originality of the blog is in its simplicity, ease of publication, and its topical content. A particularly important characteristic of the online journal is that it is edited by one person, which gives it a very personal aspect, especially as very often the author posts his thoughts, opinions, comments and even recordings illustrating his worldview. The interactive nature of blogs allows the author and his readers to contact one another, which can lead to heated discussions. The basic features of blogs are integration, informality, independence, economy, simplicity, regularity, relations with others, speed and trust. Blogs address the reader directly and are open to their comments, which can lead to the formation of a community. Their most important characteristics should be topicality and regularity, which is particularly relevant for political communication.⁶⁶ Among the most popular blogs in Poland are NaTemat.pl, Blog.onet.pl, Blog.pl, Blox and Wordpress, while microblogs are most often created using social networking services such as Twitter.

Websites are used above all for information or public relations purposes, but they can also play a role in political and social campaigns. A well-designed website can improve the image of a political party, individual political figure or charitable organization. Frequent errors may lead to loss of interest in a website, or, even worse, in the party or organization. If a website uses too much visual material, too many films or photographs, then viewing requires too much time, which has a discouraging effect on the viewer. Therefore the most important

⁶⁵ G. Mazurek, *Blogi i wirtualne społeczności – wykorzystywane w marketingu*, Kraków 2008, p.15.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 19–21.

element of a website is its content, as this determines to a great extent how interesting it is.⁶⁷

Social network services are a further example of websites that have huge numbers of users. Their enormous popularity makes them an ideal marketing channel. These websites are an online meeting-place for people seeking new acquaintances, who exchange various kinds of information via their individual profiles, using a special interface.⁶⁸ Social networking services have a wide range of communicative applications allowing users to contact each other in the way they find most convenient. A very important aspect of these sites is the possibility of creating user groups according to specified criteria. It is possible to distinguish two types of social networking service: external social networking (ESN), i.e. open services, which all Internet users can join and use, and internal social networking (ISN), which are intended for a closed online community, such as the employees of a particular company, the members of a specific organization or a group created by a particular user.⁶⁹ Services such as these require the creation of a virtual profile and a network of contacts among Internet users. The resulting network of users can be of use to advertisers and other organizations interested in users' opinions. Such online services are usually the result of a shared background among the users, who can be current or former classmates or the inhabitants of the same town or city.

Networking is the realization of the universally known principle that a group of people can achieve more than one individual. In the field of technology, this rule is expressed by Robert Metcalfe's law stating that the usefulness of a network is exponentially proportional to the number of network connections.⁷⁰ Networking involves taking care of relations with others so that one can turn to someone, when

⁶⁷ R. Brady, *Marketing w Internecie*, Warsaw 2002, p. 109.

⁶⁸ In the most basic meaning of the term, an interface is a process of communication.

⁶⁹ <http://kis.pwszchelm.pl/publikacje/VII/Laskowski.pdf> (20.12.2012).

⁷⁰ S. Wrycza, *Informatyka ekonomiczna. Podręcznik akademicki*, Warsaw 2010, p. 123.

one is in need of information and support, and help someone, when they require this.⁷¹ It is the accumulation of social relations, bonds of trust, loyalty and solidarity, finding its expression in self-organization, which is defined by Robert Putnam as social capital.⁷² The characteristic of networking include duration (the longer a relation lasts, the more solid the connection), consistency (it is more important to maintain an acquaintance than to make one), trust (nobody will recommend or help an individual or organization if they do not trust them), reciprocity (the best way to receive is to give) and input (a network is not permanent or unchangeable, but is rather in a state of constant development, and therefore it always requires activity).⁷³ Intelligent networking needs a high degree of awareness of clearly defined goals and strategies. One can also use a suitable choice of 'contacts' to present one's achievements, share information about important events from one's life and create a first impression, all of which can be a PR tool.⁷⁴

In the age of modern technology, the exchange of information, resources, mutual support and opportunities, facilitated by a suitable network of contacts, is gaining in importance. The same is true of online activities aimed at combatting social problems. An online environment ensures an ideal platform for such activities, as it provides a space allowing individuals scattered over various locations to cooperate according to a centralized strategy. Moreover, it must be said that the art of contemporary networking depends on the correct identification of goals, the appropriate use of the knowledge of the 'crowd' (of which more will be said later in this work) and, crucially,

⁷¹ Cf. M. Tullier, *Networking. Jak znaleźć pracę i odnieść sukces zawodowy dzięki tworzeniu sieci kontaktów*, Warsaw 2006.

⁷² J. Dzwonczyk, 'Kapitał społeczny a rozwój społeczeństwa obywatelskiego w Polsce', [in:] *Samotność idei. Społeczeństwo obywatelskie we współczesnym świecie*, ed. B. Krauz-Mozer, P. Borowiec, Kraków 2007, p. 58.

⁷³ *Networking*, training material prepared by the Data Bank of Engineers, www.bdi.com.pl (24.08.2013).

⁷⁴ *O czym warto wiedzieć korzystając z networkingu*, <http://www.heuristic.pl/blog/spolecznosci-internetowe/180.html> (29.09.2013).

the correct application of available digital means in searching for partners, by maintaining the principles of reciprocity towards one's 'contacts'. There is no doubt that networking requires patience, but it can be learned. It needs planning, but also allows for change, original thinking and creativity in making connections.⁷⁵ Networking uses modern technology in a way that realizes Castell's vision of public space, in which this space is created by a communication network, and the process of social change requires the preprogramming of such networks regarding the cultural codes and hidden social and political values which they represent.⁷⁶ Today, the Internet should not be seen in isolation from other forms of communication. Large online networks, based on weak relations and impersonal online interaction, in reality favor collective activity.⁷⁷ The Internet is a medium which aids the formation of relatively weak ties, which, in specific contexts, are more valued than stronger ones (weaker ties can be more useful in achieving many goals of organizations or social movements). In this context 'hidden' goals are also important – those that are possible, but have not yet been triggered by social interaction. Individuals who are interconnected, for example through digital networking (mailing lists, profiles on social networking portals, databases), have 'hidden' ties which are accessible through communication structures, and which can be activated to become weak and at the same time potentially strong ties.⁷⁸

Returning to the topic of social networking services, it is clear that they are the focus of a great deal of interest, especially among young Internet users, which leads politicians and social activists to create their own profiles and fanpages. Such services share many features with other online platforms such as blogs, microblogs, discussion

⁷⁵ *Networking*, op. cit.

⁷⁶ M. Castells, *Communication Power*, Oxford–New York 2009, p. 300.

⁷⁷ L.A. Lievrouw, *Media alternatywne i zaangażowane społecznice*, Warsaw 2012, p. 199.

⁷⁸ J. Nowak, *Aktywność obywateli online. Teoria a praktyka*, Lublin 2011, p. 86.

forums and information services, which allow their content to be published and commented upon. An important role of these portals is the ability to recommend the contents of web material, by which they act as an information filter. In this way, Internet users receive information regarding recommended articles, events or multimedia materials published online. Social networking portals are an ideal medium of communication, as their greatest advantage is the ability to mobilize and organize via the web. Portals enable the observation of Internet users, the gathering of information about them, and the storing of this data in the context of political programs or the profile of a social organization.⁷⁹ Currently, the most popular networking sites are Facebook and Twitter.

There is no doubt that today the image has become the basic means of communication, and the language of cinema has, to a large extent, become the interface for all computer media,⁸⁰ especially in a time of near universal use of mobile phones with the option of film recording. One exceptionally important instrument for politicians and social activists, concerning the documentation of events and the spread of advertising content, is YouTube, which is becoming a medium for the democratization of contemporary audiovisual production, and is increasing the ongoing democratization of uploaded material and the free transmission of thoughts and ideas. It is a growing platform for the expression of opposition to various kinds of repressive practices.⁸¹ Owing to its simplicity, YouTube enables Internet users films even if they do not have any special skills or equipment. It is also significant that the content uploaded on YouTube can be made available on portals, websites, blogs, and even published by mainstream media.

⁷⁹ Sz. Książkiewicz, 'Wpływ Web 2.0 na procesy komunikacji politycznej', [in:] *Wokół mediów ery Web 2.0*, ed. B. Jung, Warsaw 2010, p. 151.

⁸⁰ L. Manovich, *Język nowych mediów*, Warsaw 2011, p. 466.

⁸¹ Cf. M. Majorek, 'Od kultury "tylko do odczytu" do kultury kreatywności. YouTube jako medium demokratyzujące przestrzeń współczesnej twórczości audiowizualnej', *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze*, 2013, No. 1 (213).

From a technical point of view, an important question regarding YouTube concerns the way in which a social problem or political program is portrayed. In this matter the only limit is the creativity of the individual uploader. They must decide what is the best way to present the problem that they intend to illustrate. They may decide to depict personal stories in documentary form (this can be seen as a type of independent film, the equivalent of journalism⁸²), such as a report (a filmed account of real events, perhaps the most objective of all the forms of presentation, with added commentary) a chronicle (a filmed account of important events, arranged in chronological order or according to some other pattern), and interview, or perhaps a cartoon (a film made using animation technology, involving a series of framed images of drawings, colored spots, puppets or silhouettes photographed in particular stages of movement, and which give the appearance of continuous movement when they are projected⁸³). Without doubt, specific individuals and specific problems strengthen the message and evoke a reaction. They are very often used in social campaigns. On the other hand, metaphoric images, such as animation, reach a wider, multilingual audience; they can be used to support universal issues.

A new medium which is very effective is digital storytelling, which can be defined as narration with the aid of digital content. A story developed in this way is not composed mainly of text, nor is it merely embellished by other media. All of its elements are essential features, and the whole resembles a short film. Digital storytelling is often filled with the emotion of its narrators. It may describe individual experiences, recount family stories or be a form of self-presentation. They are short, lasting only from a few to about ten minutes. The media used are often photographs (for example, using close-ups, which allows them

⁸² *O sztukach wszelakich – film dokumentalny*, <http://www.akademia-kultury.edu.pl/slownik/f/148.html> (25.08.2013).

⁸³ http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/definicje_PLK_HTML.htm?id=POJ-6295.htm (26.08.2013).

to replace film shots and is very effective), sound in the form of music or a reader's monologue, subtitles, short video scenes from stored film material (such as documentaries, favorite productions, scenes from home movies or mobile phone video recordings).⁸⁴

Posters are another form of presentation. These are examples of visual works of an artistic and practical nature. They have various functions – advertising, propaganda, but above all information. The characteristic feature of this form of presentation is economy of visual expression and the use of metaphor. Posters were and are universally placed in public locations (pasted, placed in windows), but the opportunities presented by new media have given this form of communication a whole new, virtual life. Thanks to the method of publishing, added sound effects and wider availability, today the information on a poster can reach a much greater audience. A category, which in a way had its origin in animation and posters, and which now has developed its own particular characteristics, is the meme, which has proved to be an excellent medium of information in the new social reality, seen rather as a space where certain processes take place independently, in an undetermined, uncoordinated manner. We will use the term 'meme' to describe a short, simple message, picture or symbol, memorable enough to make a lasting impression on the audience.⁸⁵ It is also worth remembering that a certain element of humor can be helpful, especially to reach a wider audience. A message presented in an amusing way may attract the attention of those who are not directly interested in the message but will nevertheless forward it.

An important tool for web users is what is known as a 'crowdmap'. This is a process involving the definition of problems and the ways of solving them by means of a map created by many users working

⁸⁴ <http://www.nina.gov.pl/digitalizacja/artyku%C5%82/2011/09/01/digital-storytelling---edukacja-multimedialna> (19.08.2013).

⁸⁵ M. Majorek, J. Wojniak, 'Memetyzacja komunikowania politycznego u progu XXI w.', *Państwo i Społeczeństwo*, 2012, No. 2, pp. 78, 81.

in cooperation with one another. Above all, crowdmapping needs the involvement of the widest possible cross-section of a given community. It differs from the concept of a map designed from above, from a distance, from the perspective of an uninvolved expert. Crowdmapping, using applications of various sophistication, can be the expression and the direct effect of the involvement of members of a community. The final result, the map, is in general a record of identified problems or areas where action needs to be taken. These maps enable the definition of local priorities and aspirations. They indicate possible ways of dealing with recognized threats. But, most importantly, they result from social engagement. The effect of mapping is to free and strengthen the potential for action within a given group.⁸⁶ The Internet provides suitable means for mapping, such as www.crowdmap.pl or Google Earth.

Today, in the age of two-way communication, there is a need to tap into 'collective wisdom and knowledge', i.e. to allow people to express their own opinions, arguments and propositions and to find the best solutions together. One should accept reports and information gathered from everyone who is ready to cooperate. The involvement of all interested parties in the decision-making process has a fundamental, positive influence on action. The phenomenon of relying on what has been called collective wisdom is not new. However, the development of modern technology has allowed it to be realized on a wide scale. Crowdsourcing, as this form of cooperation and activism is known, does not exclude anyone, and allows the presentation of opinions by everyone who so wishes. It is a tool permitting shared participation in the creation process and it encourages action.⁸⁷ It is worth briefly specifying that this is not a case of a group of individuals as is commonly understood. Crowdsourcing depends on an organized crowd, who in the psychological sense gain entirely new characteristics

⁸⁶ A. Uszok, *Mapowanie społeczne*, <http://www.nowagazetalaska.eu/index.php/spoleczenstwo/item/1903-mapowanie-spoeczne> (26.08.2013).

⁸⁷ M. du Vall, 'Obywatelski hacking...', op. cit., p. 119.

from those possessed by the individual members of the crowd in a particular event. In such a crowd the sense of separate identity is lost, and the thoughts and feelings of all individuals have only one aim. Today it is extremely easy to create an organized crowd, who, with the use of appropriate mechanisms, can easily become involved participants. And only the person who can motivate the crowd to act can draw on their knowledge.⁸⁸

Finally, it is worth noting a highly significant and wide-reaching social trend – gamification, affecting innovation, marketing, training, employee assessment, health, political campaigns and social change. The potential of gamification is irrefutable. It involves the use of the mechanics of computer games to change people's behavior in order to increase their level of engagement. It is a technique based on the principle of competition, cooperation, and the enjoyment provided by attaining achievable goals. Gamification enables people to be motivated to complete tasks that are required for a project, even if these tasks are repetitive and dull.⁸⁹ Today, the increasing popularity of the Internet and online games allows millions of players to compete for the highest place in the rankings. Good results and high classifications have become a way of improving social position and gaining recognition, while winning points and monitoring status is a constant feature of daily routine. The current generation of young people in their twenties and thirties are reaching positions of influence in many fields of life, but they still wish for easy and fast forms of competition – they still want to play.⁹⁰ *The Harvard Business Review* placed gamification at the head of the list of the most important trends to be observed in 2012. It was also highly rated by the global market research organization

⁸⁸ www.crowdsourcing.org.pl/tlum-zrodlo-wiedzy-i-pomyslow.html#sthash.7VZDu9mi.dpuf.

⁸⁹ S. Deterding, M. Sicart, L. Nacke, K. O'Hara, D. Dixon, *Gamification: Using Game Design Elements in Non-Gaming Contexts*, 2011, <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1979575> (31.02.2013).

⁹⁰ M. Kwilosz, *Grywalizacja – whitepaper*, 2013, <http://nowetecnologie.comarch.com/temat-numeru/grywalizacja-white-paper> (29.03.2013).

Millard Brown. By the end of 2014 more than 70% of the most important brands will have at least one application that involves game techniques. However, not all gamification solutions will enjoy success. The key to success is adapting the level of difficulty of the game to the ability and amount of free time of the users. The right combination of these factors will engage the players, while the wrong one can lead to boredom.⁹¹

It is universally accepted that the Internet is a democratic medium, where various types of information channels can be found, and consumers of digital content are sufficiently educated to react differently depending on what channel they use. When we are looking for a piece of information on Google, we are thinking of something different than when we make new contacts or update our profile on Facebook, or when we put our photographs on Instagram or Pinterest. Similarly, our attitude to media is completely different when we read news portals or when we form a new discussion group. Understanding the diverse effects of each of these channels, and what kind of message is most suited to the profile of the recipient is an indispensable element for a successful information campaign.⁹²

⁹¹ K. Antoniuk, *Grywalizacja, czyli element frajdy w codziennym życiu*, 2013, <http://www.naukaipostep.pl/wiadomosci/grywalizacja-czyli-element-frajdy-w-codziennym-zyciu> (28.03.2013).

⁹² Based on M. Joel, *2 terminy, którymi opiszesz świat mediów*, <http://www.hbrp.pl/news.php?id=1071&t=2-terminy-ktorymi-opiszesz-swiat-mediow> (12.07.2013).

Part 2

The Political Space

III. Political communication.

Basic concepts and definitions

There is no doubt that new media have permanently transformed the relations between politicians, citizens and also journalists. These changes have in turn led to many questions without any simple or unambiguous answers. However, an attempts will be made here to respond to a few select, fundamental questions, while a range of other issues, important though they may be, will simply be alluded to rather than be analyzed in detail. Firstly, we will look at the key aspect of political communication, and then we will examine the current and past influence of new media on dialogue between candidates and citizens, and what will be the relationship between new and traditional media in the future, with particular reference to their role in election campaigns. A rich source of material for our analysis can be found in American presidential campaigns, especially that of Barack Obama. An analysis of the basic elements of online campaigns of American politicians should be preceded by a theoretical outline of contemporary media communication, as this is one of the main instruments of American politics.¹

¹ C. Zachry, 'Political Campaigns and New Media: A Changing Landscape', *Journalism 416: Online Journalism Seminar*, Ohio University 2009.

Political communications are a relatively new field. The concept itself first appeared in the second half of the twentieth century and quickly became part of the academic and media lexicon. In the 1950s and 1960s many political figures were keen to use this phrase instead of the term 'propaganda'. G. Thoveron argues that there were ideological reasons for this. Advocates of 'new political communication' proclaimed that propaganda was a phenomenon typifying closed, authoritarian and totalitarian political systems. The essence of democracy, on the other hand, stems from the mutual understanding of political elites and citizens, which can be achieved through the process of communication.

In academic publications, various interpretations of the concept of 'political communication' can be found. It is a reciprocal process, occurring in a specific social, political, cultural and media context. In general, researchers studying this field highlight various elements, though they often stress the close link between two independent areas of human activity: communication and politics. While both of these activities are clearly defined and understood in communication studies and political science respectively, the relationship between the two and their mutual influence is still a subject of discussion, elaboration of ideas, and factual description. Some authors emphasize that politics could never have existed without communication, and a society without the ability to understand one another would be an unthinking object. Both phenomena belong to the social sphere, and therefore cannot be easily categorized, as they relate to various areas of society and are associated with various disciplines. Politics and communication have common, overlapping areas, and are a subject of interest for other academic fields such as political science, as mentioned above, sociology, economy, psychology, education, linguistics, history and integrated communication studies, the last of which absorbs the work and methods of the other disciplines. As a result, political communication, being a synthesis of politics and communication, is a discipline which is at an early stage of formation, and does not have

a completely developed methodology, system of classification, and field of research.² Other scholars go further in their deliberations and argue that politics cannot exist without communication and that the development of new forms of media has increased their importance as a participant in political life, as an interest or pressure group, and in the end can lead to their joining the political elite.³

Of great importance is empirical research broadening our knowledge of the discipline in question. R. Perloff indicates that political communication is a process of information exchange between political leaders, media and citizens concerning events and issues in the political sphere. He also indicates the participation of three agents in the communication process: politicians, media and society, and states that the exchange of information between them has a continuous nature. According to D. Wolton, the essential space is composed of political debates between three participants in the political arena, where judgments and opinions are expressed.⁴ He argues that the functioning of political communication involves the integration of political players and their activities. These definitions distinguish and separate two phenomena – action, and its externalization. The former is a political process, while the latter is a form of political communication. However, political communication is to some extent automatically part of political activity and may play an independent role in the political decision-making process in various ways, such as the introduction of new, original themes.

Political communication involves reciprocity and information flow between all relevant participants of the political process. It is therefore a two-way understanding within the framework of certain norms and principles. This form of communication is inextricably connected

² S. Michalczyk, *Komunikowanie polityczne. Teoretyczne aspekty procesu*, Katowice 2005, p. 16–17.

³ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, Warsaw 2007, p. 131.

⁴ S. Michalczyk, *Komunikowanie polityczne. Teoretyczne aspekty procesu*, op. cit., p. 17.

with democracy, where freedom of speech and of the press, free access to information and its free and unrestricted circulation, are all guaranteed, and where each individual may freely and openly express his opinions and needs, which is impossible in undemocratic systems. Democracy has created the public sphere, where citizens participate in political debates, organize, and express approval or disapproval of decisions and actions of political figures. The democratic system is a favorable environment for the creation of particular channels and paths of communication between citizens, distinguishing democracy from other political regimes. Admittedly, the flow of communication between political institutions and citizens exists in all political systems, whether democratic or undemocratic, yet the decisive role of citizens is what differs the former from the latter. Political parties and public institutions use all available technical means, especially the mass media, to transmit political information to citizens; this is an example of top-down communication. Examples of this are political speeches, official websites of institutions, press conferences, electoral debates, paid advertisements, appearances on radio and television, direct meetings with citizens, information releases to the media concerning the work of political institutions and the decisions made by them, public awareness, political, electoral and advertising campaigns. This wide range of methods of political communication enables the essential information requirements of citizens to be satisfied.

The development of communication has led to the absorption of new forms of the process of information transmission. From a historical perspective the oldest form is political propaganda, i.e. the long-term process of one-way communication of political institutions, aimed at realizing the author's goals through various marketing techniques. Using numerous means and methods, it has an influence on human awareness, psychology, and the intellectual and axiological basis of values and beliefs, so as to shape appropriate attitudes and behavior. Most often, propaganda is produced using the media, brochures, posters, leaflets, electoral slogans or with the help

of suitable marketing specialists. In political marketing, propaganda is an important method of distributing and promoting political 'goods' through its influence on potential 'buyers'.⁵ It is a typical process of presenting politics in closed systems, where it is an instrument of totalitarian power. This does not mean that propaganda is absent in a democracy, but in contrast to undemocratic regimes, there are milder forms of persuasion and influence on the public, and propaganda works in pluralist ways.⁶

The next stage of communication was advertising, which, according to theorists, has a twofold or even threefold nature. Advertising is a specific form of brief, one-way communication with limited feedback. The message of advertising is contained in its form and content, and transmitted via the media or some other form of communication. The source of advertising is always an institution wishing to use it to achieve its goals or satisfy its interests. As with propaganda, the recipient is treated as an object of influence and does not have a deciding role.

Advertising is one of the oldest marketing techniques and, together with public relations and direct marketing, it is part of the science of communicating. Political advertising is defined by many as 'news controlled by candidates who pay for it to reach a wide audience.' Another definition of political advertising stresses that it is a communicative process allowing the source (a political candidate or party) the opportunity to present a political message. It uses the mass media to influence the attitudes, beliefs and behavior of the public. Based on the means of transmission, there are three types of political advertisement: visual, audio, and audiovisual.⁷

Public relations is the most recent of all forms of marketing. The most general definition of PR describes it as a collection of attitudes

⁵ <http://ficu.salon24.pl/153379,propaganda-polityczna-i-segmentacja-rynku-wyborczego> (28.10.2013).

⁶ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, op. cit., p. 132.

⁷ <http://www.marketingpolityczny.eu/typy-reklamy-politycznej> (28.10.2013).

and opinions of broad sections of society relating to the activities of a given institution or organization, and one of the main goals of a planned propaganda and advertising campaign. The various definitions all include the idea of contact between an organization and its environment.⁸ In order to transmit their message effectively to voters, political parties also have begun to use the techniques of public relations in their electoral campaigns.

Media institutions involved in the transmission of political messages can benefit from three sources: structural, psychological and normative. The structural advantage results from the size of the audience that mass media can offer politicians. The psychological strongpoint of the media is to be found in the level of trust in them, which is significantly higher than in politicians and political institutions. The normative reasons for the power of the media is grounded in legislation ensuring formal and informal independence of the media, which is particularly important in a democracy, based on the competition of political figures, in a phase of conflict and hostility between them. These agents aim for legitimization through the mass media, but are faced with the independent role of media organizations in the political sphere and the tendency of the media to remain free of any political control or subordination.⁹

Brian Mc Nair's triple concept of political communication is one of the most important and best-known theories of the development of the phenomenon. The term 'political communication' refers to all forms of communication by politicians and other political agents in order to gain or maintain power. This communication is addressed to all political agents, and its authors include voters, columnists and others. It includes all forms of communication regarding political agents and their activities, programs, intentions and the results of their actions,

⁸ *Nowa encyklopedia powszechna PWN*. T. 7, Warsaw 2004, p. 82.

⁹ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, R. Wiszniowski *Teoria komunikowania publicznego i politycznego*, Wrocław 2007, p. 119.

which can be found in various forms of discussions in the media.¹⁰ The first element of this concept are political agents in the narrow and broad sense of the term. In the narrow sense, a political agent is an individual who aims to have an influence on decision making through organizational and institutional channels. In the broader sense, the term refers to parties, governments, public organizations, pressure groups and terrorist organizations. With the exception of terrorist groups, the common denominator of all of these political agents is that they make use of the mass media, political marketing and public relations.

The second element is represented by citizens, without whom there would be no political communication. They have a double role, as voters and as the audience of the media. They are the main targets of political persuasion aiming at influencing political behavior and opinions. Media organizations, i.e. the mass media, are the third and final component of political communication. Not only do the press and television stations transmit the messages of political agents, but journalists and publishers communicate political messages and are responsible for them. Particular attention is paid to the form and content of the media message as it is communicated by different participants in the media process. Political agents need mass media to enable their message to reach a wide audience. Great importance is attached to the mutual roles of political agents, voters and the authors of media content and media messages, as they enable the realization of political aims.¹¹ Important aspects of the threefold concept are international communication and the globalization of political communication. This phenomenon has become particularly important in the era of mediatization and the development of global communication networks, when traditional methods of diplomacy

¹⁰ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Porozumienie czy konflikt? Politycy, media i obywatele w komunikowaniu politycznym*, Warsaw–Bielsko-Biala 2009, p. 21.

¹¹ Cf. R. Negrine, D. G. Lilleker, 'The Professionalization of Political Communication Continuities and Change in Media Practices', *European Journal of Communication*, 2002, Vol. 17, No. 305, p. 306–313.

are insufficient. Advances in global media have given rise to a global audience and international public opinion, whose views must be taken into consideration by governments, business organizations and even terrorist groups.

Political communication is defined as the process whereby political messages are exchanged and interpreted by national and political leaders, the mass media and citizens. The media can be compared to an arena for discussion and political rivalry. The mass media enable politicians to address citizens, and yet it is the media who are responsible for the form of the message transmitted, and who decide what political topics are discussed. The media also allow citizens to express their ideas to political elites. McNair characterizes the relations between political agents, the media and the public as 'the golden political triangle', within which political discussions take place, and where the participants exchange information and decide the importance of political messages.¹² According to Perloff, there is no doubt that national leaders are the strongest element of the triangle and can control social resources. However, they do not have control over the media and the public agenda, which gives the process of political communication a dynamic and changeable nature.¹³

The most comprehensive and most complete definition of political communication describes it as a process which is part of a broader field of natural communication between people. It exists in a specified communication space and involves a precisely defined group of people. Communication takes place on the micro-level, affecting individuals, on the meso-level, with institutions, and on the macro-level, affecting society as a whole. In so doing it uses all available media. Its aim is the public transmission and exchange of political messages between political agents, the creators of politics and citizens. It is a formal, two-way process of communication from agents to citizens and vice

¹² B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, op. cit., p. 153.

¹³ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Porozumienie czy konflikt? Politycy, media i obywatele w komunikowaniu politycznym*, op. cit., p. 25.

versa.¹⁴ It is a system where quite particular relations and networks are built between participants, which have a significant influence on the quality and effect of communication. The different positions of all the elements should nevertheless be highlighted. All though they are the most numerous, citizens are the weakest and least orientated of the three links of the political communication chain.

Therefore, there are three categories of participants in the political communication process: political agents, mass media and citizens, who together make up the 'golden triangle'. The communication between these three types of participant is not symmetric, and they are not all guaranteed the same rights, opportunities or means to act. The aim of political agents is to gain and maintain power. The function of citizens is to vote in elections and thus choose those in government, whereas mass media play an intermediary role between legislators and citizens. The lack of an level field in the reality of political communication is main reason for the division of its participants into strong and weak links of the process.

The group seen as the stronger link consists of political actors and the mass media. As they are active participants benefitting from the backing of institutions with a well-developed structure, professional organization and personnel, and cutting edge technical and specialist support, they have an almost unlimited ability to transmit their message to society. They also have the financial resources for their activities. The media are the best-positioned of the participants, as they benefit from a communication system. Political agents seek their support, or try to control them through methods that do not exceed the norms of the political system. An important role in party structures, institutions of public authority and non-governmental organizations is played by specialists hired to maintain contacts with the media and watch over the interests of political agents. The communication requirements of political institutions have encouraged the development of relevant

¹⁴ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, op. cit., p. 155.

professions, and increased the demand for public relations services.¹⁵

Citizens are the weaker link, and for a long time they were seen as a passive element of political communication. Before the Internet age, their position and influence was extremely limited. Politically knowledgeable audiences had a minimal effect on the content of political messages, nor did they have instruments for successful political communication comparable to those of the mass media or political agents. All attention in the political and electoral arena was focused on the strong links, the professionals, and the role of electors was restricted to that of viewers and observers. Originally, it was indicated that this problem of the limited position of the citizen would be solved by the development of a civic society, with an increase in the number of non-governmental organizations, associations and unions, which could represent the needs and opinions of their members, thus allowing them to find a voice in the media and exist in the public sphere.¹⁶ However, the key role in changing the status of the citizen can be played by new media, which without doubt create suitable conditions for a markedly greater participation and influence on the part of the public.

As the strong link in the process of political communication, political parties use strategies based on mass media. The communication strategy of a party involves the process of providing information regarding its program, the decisions taken, public relations activities, political advertising and direct communication. This strategy is implemented according to specific plans, indicating which elements of the external environment are aimed at (target groups, audience segmentation, methods of transmission, direct and mass communication). Marketing strategy, on the other hand, consists of electoral and coalition plans, and its priority is maintaining the party in the political arena, guaranteeing its continuous growth and ensuring its results surpass those of its competitors. It is based above

¹⁵ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Porozumienie czy konflikt? Porozumienie czy konflikt? Politycy, media i obywatele w komunikowaniu politycznym*, op. cit., p. 39.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

all on marketing planning involving research of the electoral market, creation and sale of a political product by means of advertising and public relations.¹⁷

There is no doubt that the language of political communication is seen as an essential element for the reconciliation of divergent opinions and positions. Through the exchange of information, individuals can obtain relevant data regarding the functioning of the political system, and at the same time see the option of participation in its formation or change. A satisfactory process of exchange of political information must be based on appropriate communication structures. The influence on an audience is dependent on the existence of a communication chain allowing the transmission of information about specific participants of the political process.

The Internet is a crucial element of this chain, as it is an extremely popular example of the media of what has become known as the third age of political communication.¹⁸ Equally popular is the term 'Web 2.0', which became current in the year 2004. This expression refers to technological innovations which can lead to a more collaborative form of the Internet, 'where people can contribute as much as they can consume'.¹⁹ It is worth noting that, in contrast to the second age of political communication, which saw the absolute predominance of television, this third age allows for the existence of acts of communication directed to various audience groups.

In this perspective the message ceases to be standardized for a mass audience, but is rather aimed at diverse entities, which leads to the individualization of the political message and its adaptation to the tastes of various recipients.²⁰ In fact, the best solution is the effective

¹⁷ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Porozumienie czy konflikt? Politycy, media i obywatele w komunikowaniu politycznym*, op. cit., p. 49.

¹⁸ J. G. Blumler, D. Kavanagh, 'The Third Age of Political Communication: Influence and Features', *Political Communication*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1999, p. 213.

¹⁹ Paul Anderson, 'What is Web 2.0? Ideas, technologies and implications for Education', *JISC Technology and Standards Watch*, February 2007, p. 4.

²⁰ J. Wojniak, *Globalne społeczeństwo sieciowe jako ponowoczesna przestrzeń socjotechniki politycznej*, doctoral thesis, Jagiellonian University 2010, p. 249.

use of media of both the second and third ages, availing of traditional mass media such as television, radio and the press, and, on the other hand, the Internet. The effectiveness of this approach depends not only on the attractiveness of the message in individual media, but on the considered use of both types of media, bearing in mind the need for them to complement one another. The result may be one of synergy, but, before this can be unequivocally stated, closer examination is needed of recent American political campaigns, and only then will an attempt be made to systematize the above reflections.

IV. New instruments and techniques of communication used in electoral campaigns

As has already been mentioned in the earlier part of the book, the broadest and at the same time the most interesting area of analysis is to be found in American media campaigns. America is undeniably preeminent in the use of new technology in elections. It is therefore worth examining the first attempts at using the Internet in political campaigns, beginning with is considered the pioneering campaign, and ending with those where new means of communication have been used with decidedly more professionalism and awareness.

The background for the analysis that follows was the crisis within the Democratic Party caused by the reelection of George W. Bush in 2004. Steps needed to be taken to rebuild the weakened strength of the Party. A group of activists, not belonging to the core of the Party, argued that the Democrats had narrowed their potential electorate by focusing excessively on groups of the elite who provided their basic source of funding. They emphasized the need to renew the potential

of groups of broader influence, think tanks, and institutions and groups with media backing. Such organizations, at least in the view of certain American political commentators, had contributed to the cycle of electoral successes of the Republican Party.²¹

It was therefore necessary to embark on a new course. In this enterprise, Democratic activists proved to be invaluable, offering a fresh perspective, new ideas and commitment needed to thoroughly carry out the enormous amount of work required.²² Most importantly, however, these groups were highly knowledgeable about new technology, which was surely the greatest cause for optimism. It turned out that these 'venture progressives' became a kind of online elite, and also enjoyed a high degree of social and cultural potential, which contributed greatly to the creation of a new form of communication with the electorate and the undertaking of new kinds of activity aimed at electors. The gradual success that ensued was possible not only thanks to the straightforward use of new media, but also as a result of the blending of roles which had hitherto remained absolutely separate. This blending involved simultaneously carrying out the tasks of a consultant, party activists, blogger, reformer, and online expert. Daniel Kreiss notes that the elections of 2003–2004 benefitted from social, cultural and financial sources which were tapped into by individuals who played a significant role in the organization of online communication and public initiatives.²³

Of particular importance is one of the first campaigns to involve the active use of the Internet, seen as both innovative and successful, namely that of Howard Dean, governor of the state of Vermont, and a candidate in the 2004 Democratic primaries. The crucial role of new

²¹ D. Kreiss, 'Institutional Contexts of Use of New Media in Electoral Politics: From Howard Dean to Barack Obama,' [in:] *Democracy 2.0? Participation and Politics in New Media*, San Francisco 2009, p.7.

²² Sometimes we can find the term *venture progressives* used to describe the group indicated here. Most often it refers to innovative, progressive and often risky enterprises undertaken by this group.

²³ D. Kreiss, 'Institutional Contexts...', op. cit., p. 7.

media was largely due to Dean's campaign manager, Joe Trippi. Trippi, without any doubt an experienced spin doctor, managed to combine his two main interests, politics and a fascination with new technologies. Thus he became the first campaign manager to decide to place great emphasis on innovative actions online. Trippi was convinced that the meagre campaign resources at his disposal (a staff of only seven, lack of financial backing, poor poll figures) meant that the only possible solution was a completely different type of campaign. He said that 'right away we could see that our only hope was to decentralize the campaign [...] stop trying to control the river... just open the flood gates and see where the current took us'.²⁴

It is likely that the need to run such a completely innovative campaign arose from the fact that Dean's views were in marked opposition to the centrist ideas expressed by the Democrats concentrated around the DLC.²⁵ Politicians who shared the views of the DLC realized that they were witnessing the renaissance of the hitherto forgotten and powerless left wing of the Democratic Party, and, although they had previously dismissed him, began to treat Dean's candidature seriously. Earlier opinions regarding Dean were changed by his surprisingly good results in Vermont, and by the use of innovative media methods in his campaign.²⁶

Although Joe Trippi was undoubtedly the initiator of this innovative media campaign, the main impetus came from grass-roots elements who came to the fore in the course of the election campaign. These elements began to appear spontaneously and naturally, often by diffusion, and grew until they became an inseparable part of Dean's campaign. Unexpectedly, the result was that with the help of the portal Meetup.com, the governor of a small state suddenly became

²⁴ A.P. Williams, J.C. Tedesco (eds.), *The internet election. Perspectives on the web in campaign 2004*, Lanham 2006, s. 113.

²⁵ Democratic Leadership Council – an American non-governmental organization supporting the Democratic Party, and in particular its centrist wing.

²⁶ J. Armstrong, S. Rosenberg, M.M. Zuniga, *Crashing the Gate: Netroots, Grass-roots, and the Rise of People-Powered Politics*, Vermont 2007, pp. 147–148.

a serious contender for the Democratic candidate in the race for the White House.²⁷

Until then, the portal Meetup.com had been a growing online social networking service. In creating his profile, it is unlikely that Dean could have imagined that in so doing he would gain thousands of supporters, still less that instead of a minor candidate he would become a political agent benefitting from hugely increasing support and funding. Indeed, he was to become the first politician in the history of the Democratic Party to raise funds so rapidly.²⁸ What is interesting is that his campaign themes did not support such demands as the absolute freedom of file-sharing, which were of great importance to Internet activists. In fact, Dean's views in this matter were highly conservative. It appears that the catalyst for his online popularity was his definite anti-war stance, and his clearly-defined political views in general.

Dean's new supporters began to bring in funds at a remarkable rate, which attracted the attention and interest of traditional media, which in turn led to increased numbers of sympathizers on the portal Meetup.com.²⁹ Here we see a clear example of the way in which traditional and new media complement each other. It is certain that the success achieved on Meetup.com would not have been so spectacular had it not been for the involvement of traditional media.

Without doubt Dean's campaign was based on a loose network of contacts, rather than a unified army of supporters. It has been noted that this type of network has been called 'the Stupid Network',³⁰ which, because of its uncertain and spontaneous nature, should not

²⁷ G. Wolf, *How the Internet invented Howard Dean*, http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.01/dean_pr.html (5.02.2010).

²⁸ N. Anstead, A. Chadwick, 'Parties, election campaigning, and the Internet. Toward a comparative institutional approach', [in:] *The Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics*, Routledge 2008, p. 60.

²⁹ G. Wolf, *How the Internet...*, op. cit.

³⁰ This term was introduced by D. Isenberg in his article *Rise of the Stupid Network*, <http://www.rageboy.com/stupidnet.html> (6.02.2010).

be labelled for predefined uses. In contrast to a programmed network, this kind should be as simplified as possible, which considerably increases its practicality. As a result, the diverse individuals and groups who made up Dean's campaign were able to organize even though they were completely independent of one another and without any control centers.³¹

This does not mean that the search for new supporters became an uncontrolled machine. Without definite influences, it is unlikely that this phenomenon would have lasted as long as it did. Apart from the natural process of the increase in supporters, the campaign profited from the active participation of blog authors. In addition to his online supporters Dean gained much more, in that he could rely on committed professionals who enthusiastically created political blogs.

These blogs were not simply alternatives to traditional media such as radio and the press. Blogs enabled various groups to spread information and coordinate their activities and efforts for the benefit of the community. Blogs are used to enhance the effectiveness of activities in various areas, in particular the political sphere that is of interest to us here.³² Obviously, electoral campaigns are an example of these activities, as can be seen in the case of Dean, and also Wesley Clarke and, later, Barack Obama. It is possible to distinguish several basic types of political blog, written by so-called 'digital citizens'.³³ Firstly, there are personal blogs, written by particular individuals to spread their ideas and in so doing become opinion leaders. Secondly, we can find blogs created collectively, sometimes by whole communities. In such cases blogs are a forum not only for the presentation of opinions but also for the exchange of views. The third category involves the

³¹ G. Wolf, *How the Internet...*, op. cit.

³² L. Casalo, M. Guinaliu, C. Flavian, 'The Role of Blogs on Successful political Branding Strategy', [in:] S. Bandyopadhyay, *Contemporary Research in E-Branding*, IGI Global 2008, p. 17.

³³ In the subject literature one can also find the term 'netizen'. Cf. J. Katz, *The Digital Citizen*, „Wired", October 2006, <http://faculty.washington.edu/pn-howard/teaching/newmedia/katz.pdf> (6.02.2010).

blogs of particular politicians or candidates for various positions. What is characteristic of these blogs is that potential voters can leave their comments, for example regarding the program expressed by the candidates.³⁴

Of the three type of blog mentioned above, certain bloggers who participated in Dean's pioneering campaign fall into the first category. Without doubt the first, most influential bloggers to support Dean, J. Armstrong and M. Zuniga, were examples of writers of personal blogs. No less important was the role played by collective blogs, such as blogs of the Latino and even the Mormon communities (www.latinosfordean.blogspot.com; www.mormonsfordean.blogspot.com) in favor of Dean. What can be seen as surprising in this instance is how active the blogosphere participants were. In fact, they analyzed Dean's manifesto very carefully, comparing it to the campaign pledges of his opponents. To a large extent they also included their own ideas and comments, and encouraged readers to buy various gadgets, with the proceeds of the sale benefitting Dean's campaign.³⁵

Regarding Wesley Clarke's campaign, its electoral blog could at first be placed in the third category. As well as the candidate himself, members of his campaign and even his family were involved in the blog (his son played a particularly active role). John Edwards' blog can also be included in this category, and differed from the ones mentioned above in that it also had many characteristics of a personal website.³⁶ However, it is worth noting that the online campaign of Clarke and his supporters began at one point to show more involvement of the larger community than even Dean's campaign. This resulted from the greater possibility of active participation: when an individual registered on the website, they were allowed to freely create their own blog, which

³⁴ L. Casalo, M. Guinaliu, C. Flavian, 'The Role of Blogs...', op. cit., s. 22.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁶ A. Rice, *The Use of Blogs In the 2004 Presidential Election*, Department of Communication In the Contemporary Society, John Hopkins University, campaign-online.org/reports/blog.pdf, October 2003, pp. 4–5. (7.02.2010).

in turn could be rated by the other members of the Net community, which in turn led to greater identification of the individual with that community.³⁷

With the development of online election campaigns, the role of professional blogger became an interesting occupation, which was also increasingly sought after. Bloggers went from being Internet enthusiasts to electoral campaign advisers.³⁸ As the influential political bloggers J. Armstrong and M. M. Zuniga show, in the electoral period of 2003–2004 payment for the services of the most popular online writers was not usual. However, in current campaigns it is highly common, and it is no longer surprising to see professional bloggers who are paid for writing and developing web pages, responding to political criticism and for performing an advisory role in the social aspects of the Internet. Thus bloggers are now the indispensable elements of almost every election campaign. The campaign of Barack Obama, the current President of the United States, was no exception.

It seems that in such a short time-span of merely four years no revolutionary changes should have taken place. Nevertheless, we can without any doubt observe in this period a unique expansion of new Internet technology. It has been largely adapted to mobile use, and hence users can almost everywhere participate in political events in real time.³⁹ With permanent access to the Internet, and with the possibility of simultaneously communicating and expressing their opinions, voters have become not only the audience of political messages, but also the natural shapers of campaigns.

We should also take into account the increasing number of social networking portals, which have reached the stage where they are often better known than blogs. Portals have become a simple way of creating

³⁷ L. Casalo, M. Guinaliu, C. Flavian, 'The Role of Blogs...', op. cit., p. 25.

³⁸ E. Skoland, *Blog Campaigning. Does blogging win votes?*, Griffith University in Australia, June 2007, p. 20.

³⁹ R. Underwood, A. Garret, L. Skladzinski, N. Gallagher, A. Vrabie, D. Smith, *New Media and the 2008 Campaign Season: Valuable Lessons for Business About Being First, Fast and Nimble*, Deloitte Consulting LLP 2008, p. 2.

one's own user profile with the possibility of maintaining constant contact with friends and acquaintances in the real world. This main advantage of portals such as Facebook and MySpace has also led to users making new, 'virtual' acquaintances with similar interests, focusing on related issues, and, what can be particularly important, sharing comparable political views. In 2006 it became possible for politicians to create their profile with a special option of extra space. This political profile, like its private equivalent, allowed for inclusion of information, the publication of photographs and short films and for the writing of various kinds of notes addressed to voters.⁴⁰

The advantages of running a campaign using Facebook and other portals this kind are clear. Firstly, the costs are low or even non-existent. Perhaps even more importantly, social networking services offer the possibility of reaching out to the so-called millennial generation, young voters aged between 18 and 25. It is worth emphasizing that the lack of interest and indifference to politics of this generation was a cause of serious concern in the American political milieu.⁴¹

Finally, an equally important element of a campaign using social networking services is that individuals can actively participate, rather than be a passive audience, as is the effect of traditional media. This highlights yet another key benefit, in that voters are more likely to actively support the candidate of their choice, for example as campaign volunteers. It was precisely in this way that Dean gained so many volunteers, as did other candidates both in the elections of 2004 and 2008.⁴² This activation is also due to the specific characteristics of online networking services, which allow not only constant communication

⁴⁰ T.A. Small, *The Facebook Effect? Online Campaigning in the 2008 Canadian and US Elections*, "Policy Options", November 2008, p. 86.

⁴¹ D.M. Shea, *Young Voters, the Obama Net-roots Campaign, and the Future of local Party Organizations*, Conference Paper – University of Akron, October 2009, p. 3.

⁴² C. Panagopoulos, 'Technology and the Transformation of Political Campaign Communications', *Social Science Computer Review*, 2007, Vol. 25, No. 4, p. 423.

between voters, but also the opportunity for direct interaction with the candidate.⁴³ In this way politicians become more 'human', closer to the voters, and more accessible.

It can be unequivocally stated that the most important Internet electoral campaign was that of the current president of the United States, Barack Obama. In the course of the campaign, in which Obama had his own Facebook profile, there were as many as five hundred unofficial groups supporting the Democratic candidate. Facebook, and other social networking portals facilitated the collection of funds, which enabled Obama to lead such an impressive campaign. Indeed, the Internet campaign accumulated funding of approximately 600 million dollars. This is evidence of the undoubted potential of online campaigns, since it was thanks to this medium that Obama succeeded in creating a stable and recognizable brand, which became known worldwide. The campaign momentum, the use of technology and the long-awaited message of change helped to convince voters that Obama was '...new, different and attractive', acceptable to older voters and at the same time extremely approachable to younger ones.⁴⁴

In contrast to his main rival within the Democratic Party, Hillary Clinton, and the Republican challenger, John McCain, Obama managed to engage large numbers of volunteers. Thanks to the involvement of young people such as these, recruited mainly among Internet users and the 'virtual friends' of the candidate, Obama's campaign visits to successive states were perfectly prepared and organized.⁴⁵ The campaign in the real world perfectly complemented the virtual one. The synergy of strengths was perfect, combining the outstanding communicative abilities of the future president, huge numbers of supporters and voters with access to new communication

⁴³ T.A. Small, *The Facebook Effect?...*, op. cit., p. 86.

⁴⁴ E. McGirt, 'The Brand Called Obama', *FastCompany.com*, <http://www.fast-company.com/magazine/124/the-brand-called-obama.html>, March 2008, p. 2 (9.02.2010).

⁴⁵ G. Norquay, 'Organizing Without an Organization: The Obama Networking Revolution', *Options Politiques* 2008, p. 60.

technology. Whereas in 2004 only 13 percent of Americans declared, in poll carried out by Pew Research Center, that they regularly used the Internet for information on the election campaign, in 2008 as many as 74% did so. What is even more striking is that more than half of those surveyed stated that the main reason for their interest was online video files, while the remainder took an active part in the election campaign.⁴⁶ This shows the extent to which the Obama campaign was affected by YouTube, which the campaigners of 2004 did not have at their disposal.⁴⁷ This portal, and others similar to it, provided an excellent medium for campaign spots, and, like blogs and networking services, was a perfect means of raising funds and involving new volunteers. The message on YouTube was equally engaging to younger voters and to those outside the 18–30 age bracket. Moreover, it was an ideal combination of traditional and new media, as it showed a television spot on the Internet. YouTube also could reach groups of people who were not in the Internet databases of voters who had already in some way joined the Obama camp.

In the course of the campaign Obama's supporters uploaded more than 1800 video clips on YouTube alone. In this way they managed to avoid the middlemen and directly and freely shape their message, which was accessible to a mass audience thanks to this new portal. An example of a message which reached millions of viewers via YouTube was a declaration by Obama condemning the racist comments of an American pastor. Even more striking was the unexpected success of a considerably lengthier video clip, lasting as long as 37 minutes, of Obama's speech. Within only a few days, this clip had become the most watched on all of YouTube, and links to its source were circulated through various channels and shared by friends and acquaintances.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the possibilities offered by the Internet which enabled

⁴⁶ E. Hall, *Politics In the YouTube Age: Transforming The Political and Media Culture?*, Oxford: Trinity Term 2009, p. 13.

⁴⁷ The portal YouTube was created in 2005.

⁴⁸ E. Hall, *Politics In the YouTube Age...*, op. cit., p. 21.

the Democratic candidate to reach a much greater audience did not lead him to neglect traditional media. Obama's campaign spots were shown at peak viewing times simultaneously on several of the most popular television channels.

Despite the vast audience of Internet portals, there is little evidence for the frequent argument that Obama's campaign demonstrated the supremacy of new media over their traditional counterparts. To a great extent we can see the complementary nature of old and new means of communication. An example of an ideal combination of old and new technology was an element that had already been observed in Dean's campaign, where, thanks to the Internet, the candidate gained online supporters who then proceeded to write letters to potential voters and visited homes in order to raise money for the campaign. The rapid increase in funding for Dean attracted the attention of traditional media. Many popular stations became interested in the spectacular success of the candidate, which in turn led to a further rise in the numbers of online supporters of his campaign. However, it cannot be denied that the Internet, in contrast to traditional means of communication, is more adaptable as a result of the activity of its users, as mentioned earlier. It can be concluded that the new medium provides ideal conditions for members of society to exert an influence. It is extremely flexible and is free from any hierarchical structure, thus enabling the creation of new forms of political involvement, such as those seen in the campaigns described above. It does not seem to be the case that new media simply lead to more economical communication process, without creating any new value.⁴⁹ This viewpoint is valid only with regard to stable, numerous and established political organizations. Analysis of the examples of Dean and Obama clearly shows that new political movements or candidates can, in spite of limited funding, exist in the real world of politics thanks to the Internet.

⁴⁹ J. Wojniak, *Globalne społeczeństwo sieciowe...*, op. cit., p. 252.

V. Contemporary political drama

It is an indisputable fact that politics is present in our lives. It seems however, that today the phenomenon is stronger than it ever was. More than one person would surely say that politicians are ubiquitous, and this observation would be correct. We watch them on television, hear them on the radio, see their photographs in newspapers, and currently encounter them more and more often online. Today, the political theater has moved from a narrow environment to a much wider world, where the actors can be seen by all of society via different means of communication.

The aim of this chapter is to indicate the changes that have taken place in contemporary politics. It will focus on issues of politics as a form of entertainment and the increased tabloidization and memeticization of political communication. We intend to show how these modern phenomena have become significantly more common in politics at both the national and international levels.

The role of politics is now that of protection, order, discussion and symbolism, and definite emphasis is placed on its conservative nature, which maintains and renews existing standards of social and political rights. It appears that an omnipresent trait of politics is its continuing

mediatization, particularly noticeable in election campaigns. It is recognized that the media are now one of the milieus where politics is conducted. As one of the main sources of information, they have become a fundamental element of the shaping of political opinion and behavior. It would be inconceivable for political parties or candidates for political office to distance themselves from the media, thus deliberately depriving themselves of the opportunity to communicate with the public.⁵⁰

An essential fact to bear in mind is that, as Peter Dahlgren rightly notes, “politics is no longer exists as a reality taking place outside the media, to be ‘covered’ by journalists. Rather, politics is increasingly organized as a media phenomenon, planned and executed for and with the co-operation of the media”.⁵¹

At the same time, the traditional view of the media as the so-called fourth estate is not entirely justified. They should rather be seen in the context of a political battlefield – an environment where there is a contest for power. This is connected with the personalization of politics, which some researchers see as a spectacle recalling a soap opera. The atmosphere of scandal that often surrounds certain political activities frequently becomes a weapon in the permanent rivalry that exists in the politics of the information age. The emphasis on the role of the media in contemporary society is without doubt connected with the concept of culture within the categories of a communication system. This leads to the conclusion that contemporary society has increasingly begun to focus on the processes associated with the production, distribution and manipulation of symbols, and that the borders between the real and symbolic worlds no longer exist.⁵²

⁵⁰ M. Majorek, J. Wojniak, ‘Memetyzacja komunikowania politycznego u progu XXI w’, op. cit., p. 79.

⁵¹ P. Dahlgren, ‘The transformation of democracy?’, [in:] B. Axford, R. Huggins, *New media and politics*, Sage, Thousand Oaks–London 2001, p. 25, [Cf.:] T. Olczyk, *Politrozrywka i popperswazja. Reklama telewizyjna w polskich kampaniach wyborczych XXI wieku*, Warsaw 2009, p. 96.

⁵² M. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Malden MA, 2004, p. 403.

With regard to the increasingly frequent criticisms of trivialization and emotionalization that are levelled against the media, it is worth asking to what extent these opinions are justified. Today we can see the use of increasingly diverse and complex instruments of political communication. One sign of this that has been observed is the proliferation of groups of entities acting as both transmitters and recipients of political content, and in such conditions the distinction between political and non-political messages begins to be blurred. The political nature of an act of communication can be seen as subjective.

It is also becoming common to see politics in an instrumental way, with an eye to what benefits can be gained from it. In effect citizens see themselves in the role of consumers rather than 'advocates' of particular opinions. Politicians are in turn compelled to increase their efforts to maintain the interest and support of society. One should also note the phenomenon of the secularization of politics, which was previously seen as a form of sacred space. This is confirmed by the diminished status of political figures, and the resulting low level of social trust and the increased influence, of interest groups, sometimes created on an *ad hoc* basis, on the decision-making process.

There is also the reproach that as a result of the media, public debate involves rivalry based not on rational arguments and logical conclusions but rather on a competition where the participants concentrate exclusively on the creation of their own image and on conducting token politics. This argument can be confirmed by N. Postman's conviction that political culture is in a state of decline, and as a result we are 'amusing ourselves to death'. The subordination of political activity to the demands of media spectacle and the replacement of party democracy with the rules of public relations represents a kind of colonization of politics by the media system. As a result of these tendencies, democracy is evolving towards 'mediocracy'. A symptom of this is the fact that 19th century ideologies have lost their force of attraction and have been supplanted by simple messages that do not require deeper reflection. Politics in its conventional form, focusing

on governments and electors, is losing its significance, and is being replaced by politics in the postmodernist sense, often defined as lifestyle politics.⁵³

This is an ideal basis for the creation of a reality where, instead of politics, information and entertainment located on the fringes of the media landscape, the fundamental form of information is infotainment (information entertainment), and political reality is transformed into politainment (i.e. the political entertainment industry).

The phenomenon of politainment is a sign of two wider processes, namely the mediatization and tabloidization of politics. In this context, mediatization refers to the transformation of the behavior of the participants of political communication due to the influence of the media.⁵⁴ The concept of tabloidization, on the other hand, first appeared in media studies in the 1980s and was associated with technological and economic changes in the media.⁵⁵ Howard Kurtz defines tabloidization as the appearance of three tendencies:

- A universal decline in standards of journalism;
- A decrease in the quantity of hard information (economics, politics) and an increase in soft information, such as scandal, sensation, entertainment and pap;
- A significantly broader definition by the media of what they think the voter should know, in order to assess whether a particular individual should be part of political life.⁵⁶

This transformation is particularly visible in the mass media, where hard news is losing peak viewing time to soft news.⁵⁷

⁵³ M. Majorek, J. Wojniak, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

⁵⁴ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Komunikowanie polityczne i publiczne*, Warsaw 2006, p. 158.

⁵⁵ D. Piontek, *Komunikowanie polityczne i kultura popularna. Tabloidyżacja informacji o polityce*, Poznań 2011, p. 187.

⁵⁶ H. Kurtz, *Media Circus – The Trouble with America's Newspapers*, New York 1993, s. 143–147, [in:] D. Piontek, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

It is increasingly apparent that it is the media itself that creates the demand for tabloidization, since instead of exposing audiences to a higher level of journalism, they deliberately lower the tone. Writing in *Polityka*, Mariusz Janicki aptly described the this phenomenon: “The tabloid mentality has appeared. The media flatter it and fawn on it. It is addicted to pap and wants more and more. A new brand of democracy had taken over: low demands available for everyone.”⁵⁸

At this stage it is necessary to indicate some symptoms (the list is not exhaustive) of the tabloidization of politics in the context of the development of ‘politainment’.

Firstly, politicians have assumed the role of ‘pop idols’ or celebrities, which is to say that, according to the definition coined by ‘the father of public relations’, they are famous for being famous.⁵⁹ They benefit from media popularity rather than effectiveness or perspicacity. It must also be emphasized that increasing numbers of politicians are making use of PR and marketing techniques.⁶⁰ This operation is carefully crafted by both politicians in Poland and journalists whose goal is to ensure that high readership or viewing.

The second symptom of the trend is the role of created news. This an example of what can be called political public relations aimed at creating and shaping, as described by Daniel J. Boorstin, pseudo-events. This is characterized by four traits:

- It is planned and unspontaneous;
- It is ready-made for media use (it meets the criteria of interest recognized by mass media);

⁵⁸ M. Janicki, ‘Prawdoidy z tabloidów’, *Polityka*, 10.10–16.10.2012, No. 41, p. 23.

⁵⁹ D.J. Boorstin, *The image: a guide to pseudo-events in America*, New York 1964, [in:] T. Olczyk, *Politrozrywka i popperswazja. Reklama telewizyjna w polskich kampaniach wyborczych XXI wieku*, Warsaw 2009, p. 113.

⁶⁰ J. Street, *Celebrity politicians. Popular culture and Political Representation*, The British Journal of Politics & International Relations Volume 6, Issue 4, Article first published online: 22 OCT 2004, s. 437–438, text available: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2004.00149.x/pdf> (September 2012).

- It does not have a clear connection to the reconstruction of a real event (it is more akin to an author's version of events loosely based on reality;
- It has the elements of a self-fulfilling prophecy in that it inspires and creates further pseudo-events.⁶¹

In this way politics is viewed as a form of entertainment. Tomasz Olczyk argues that this is probably as a result of the 'media' filtering of the public sphere.⁶² According to John Street's definition, this process requires two specific filters: the first defines what is newsworthy, i.e. the way in which news should be selected, while the second relates to the presentation of information and events (what means should be used to enhance the dramatic effect of a given event, and hence the interest of the public.⁶³ Olczyk expands on this concept, noting that the media show a particular interest in pseudo-events.

The third aspect of this phenomenon is what can be described as the communicative symbiosis between politicians and journalists. It is evident in the lack of distance between them.⁶⁴ It appears that journalists and politicians are one media group, benefitting from an all-encompassing information monopoly that includes the audience of serious opinion-forming media as well as of tabloids. As Jędrzej Napieralski notes: "It is no wonder that politicians, whose career depends on the support of voters, strive to gain media approval for their activity".⁶⁵ Polish journalist Janina Paradowska, who writes for *Polityka*, described the trend in a similar light, commenting that there is a 'terrible old boys' network' among journalists and politicians.

⁶¹ W. Jabłoński, *Kreowanie informacji. Media Relations*, Warsaw 2007, p. 75–76.

⁶² T. Olczyk, op. cit., p. 97.

⁶³ J. Street, *Politics Lost, Politics Transformed, Politics Colonised? Theories of the Impact of Mass Media*, "Political Studies Review" 2005, Vol. 3, No. 17–33, p. 26. The text of the article is available on: <http://iksz.fsv.cuni.cz/IKSZ-16-version1-pkc.pdf> (September 2012). Cf. T. Olczyk, op. cit., p. 97–98.

⁶⁴ D. Piontek, *Komunikowanie*, op. cit., p. 203.

⁶⁵ J. Napieralski, op. cit.

They always talk to each other like old buddies. The effect is that journalists often write what politicians tell them. Paradowska is frank in her account of how politicians manipulate journalists, especially the younger ones.⁶⁶ She argues that contemporary television news is devoid of intellectual analysis, and it is: ‘cynical manipulation by politicians. They are ready to provide any journalist with a soundbite on whatever topic, no matter how stupid, so long as they can be on television. The best thing for the media is for political rivals to provoke and attack each other. This has nothing to do with the portrayal of real politics. This kind of activity on the part of the media means that people are more and more convinced that politicians are idiots and that politics is one long row.’⁶⁷

The next aspect of our analysis of the issue is the case of so-called ‘new journalism’ and a new type of journalist – the star or celebrity. As Wojciech Jabłoński notes, in the world of ‘post-politics’, journalists act not as presenters of information but also as pseudo-experts, expressing an opinion on specific political and media events.⁶⁸ Examples of this can be:

- Lack of contact between the journalist and the reality being described;
- Generalization without any reference to the changing reality of a given situation;
- One-sidedness;
- Focus on the popularity and telegenic qualities of the journalist, who is transformed into a star so as to increase the numbers of viewers.⁶⁹

Jabłoński argues that this trend towards the creation of a specific ‘new journalism’ is characterized by the creation of pseudo-events,

⁶⁶ *A chciałam zostać aktorką. Z Janiną Paradowską rozmawia Marta Stremecka*, Warsaw 2011, p. 103–104.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 148–149.

⁶⁸ W. Jabłoński, *Kreowanie informacji. Media relations*, Warsaw 2007, p. 77.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77–78.

Journalists no longer simply report events; rather, they choose them, give them a reason to exist, and thus to interest and influence viewers.⁷⁰ If we add to this the ease with which television can produce superficial discussions involving pseudo-experts and pseudo-journalists concerning pseudo-events, we see the true meaning of political entertainment.

Nobody would be surprised by the argument that politics has become a kind of comic, where the dominant form of expression is pictures and speech bubbles, i.e. image info. Citizens receive a packet of information, so in theory they are informed, but the message is shorter and memeticized into meaninglessness.⁷¹ Politicians communicate with the public by means of songs, pictures or film. A distinct sign is created and one waits until it starts to exist independently, without a sender, without a specific recipient. The modern phenomenon of expressing political messages through images has been called political memeticization.⁷² Politics, as we have seen, has been transformed into a carefully rehearsed show, a form of 'everyday theater' with a huge audience of powerless citizens.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 93–94.

⁷¹ M. Janicki, W. Władyka, 'Rozmemłanie', *Polityka*, 23.04.2011, No. 17, p. 26.

⁷² Memetics is the study of the laws and norms of the functioning of memes in human intellectual life. By memes we mean replicating units of culture, which determine the processes whereby individual and collective forms of human awareness are inherited and develop, and their intellectual transmission. Cf. M. Biedrzycki, *Genetyka kultury*, Warsaw 1998, p. 81–100, [in:] I. Fiut, *Filozoficzne konsekwencje memetyki. Ku znaturalizowanej koncepcji umysłu*, text available: www.racjonalista.pl (September 2011). The concept of the meme (from the Greek word *mimesis*, meaning imitation) was introduced into political discourse by Richard Dawkins in 1976 in his book *The Selfish Gene*, and further developed in his later works, such as *Viruses of the Mind* (1993) and *Mind Viruses* (1996). These ideas have also been discussed by other thinkers such as Richard Brody, Matt Ridley, John Maynard Smith and Susan Blackmore.

⁷³ B. Blachnicki, 'Obywatele na scenie życia politycznego – ewolucja czy rewolucja', [in:] *Współczesna przestrzeń polityczna. Ewolucja czy rewolucja*, ed. M. du Vall, M. Majorek, A. Walecka-Rynduch, Kraków 2011, p. 38 and passim.

The process of the memeticization of political life can be compared to an infection by a viral idea. This phenomenon is well portrayed by Richard Dawkins, who notes the parallel between cultural evolution and its genetic counterpart.⁷⁴ The determining factor of this process is the replication of ideas.⁷⁵ Just as the gene has a replicating function in biology, so there are other forms of replicators in a different kind of evolution, namely cultural evolution.⁷⁶

In the area of culture, it can be said that there has appeared a new kind of replicator, one that has become the unit of cultural transmission and imitation:⁷⁷

“Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. If a scientist hears, or reads about, a good idea, he passes it on to his colleagues and students. He mentions it in his articles and his lectures. If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain.”⁷⁸

The meaning of the term *meme* is very aptly described by N.K. Humphrey, quoted by Dawkins. He notes the similarity between memes and living structures in the literal sense. He compares the meme to a parasite placed in the brain, which makes use of it in the

⁷⁴ R. Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford 1976, p. 234–267.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 244.

⁷⁶ S. Blackmore, *Memetics Does Provide a Useful Way of Understanding Cultural Evolution*, [in:] F. Ayala, R. Arp, *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Biology*, Chichester 2010, p. 255.

⁷⁷ Richard Dawkins suggests calling this unit the *mimem*, since the term has a Greek origin. He shortens the term to *meme*, admitting that he needed a word that rhymes with *gene*. He argues that the word also is also related to the word *memory*, or the French word *même*, meaning *same*. R. Dawkins, op. cit.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 244.

same way that 'a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell'.⁷⁹

An interesting question is whether all memes seen as units of cultural information replicate themselves equally effectively. As it turns out, just as with genes, we can see a kind of natural selection of memes, with the result that it is their particular characteristics that determine their capacity to survive. Among these traits, Dawkins lists three fundamental ones: longevity, fecundity and copying-fidelity.⁸⁰

In the case of memes, the least common attribute is copying-fidelity. This is because an idea is rarely transmitted in an unchanged form. The knowledge and experience of the recipient have an influence, as does their original interpretation, which can even subconsciously adapt the idea as it is passed on. It must therefore be recognized that memes undergo a permanent state of modification and mutation, while their core stays the same.⁸¹

In this context it is worth recalling S. Blackmore's contrast between the way in which meme's are copied when they are imitated and their reconstruction by the imitator.⁸² D. Sperber argues that the overwhelming majority of cultural elements are 're-produced'. This means that they are created and processed many times by their transmitters. Here it must be stressed that Sperber's use of the term 're-produced' does not imply mere thoughtless copying and multiplication, but rather something quite different.⁸³

Certain scholars have argued that the theory of the meme, as presented by Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*, is an oversimplification, and that the very existence of memes remains to be proved.⁸⁴ These doubts arise due to the fact that, in contrast to the replicating behavior of

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 246.

⁸¹ M. Majorek, J. Wojniak, op. cit., p. 77.

⁸² S. Blackmore, op. cit. p. 262.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 263.

⁸⁴ R. Aunger (red.), *Darwinizing Culture: The Status of Memetics as a Science*, Oxford 2000, p. 7.

genes, relatively little is known about the role played by memes in the sphere of culture. Certain analogies do present themselves, but they may lead to erroneous conclusions, and it is advisable to maintain a degree of caution.⁸⁵

Although researchers debate the precise nature of memes, there is no unambiguous definition of the concept or a coherent terminology describing the phenomenon. Certain theorists strongly support an approach involving focus on forms of behavior, yet this omits analysis of states of awareness associated with memes. Others emphasize that cultural inheritance is synonymous with the existence of cultural replicators, and natural selection may favor the transmission of information and the social learning process.

The danger associated with basing culture solely on memes can lead to atomization of thought and of human achievement.⁸⁶ On the other hand, the new reality undoubtedly requires new strategies of action and new instruments, which in turn leads to the necessity of rejecting certain habits of thinking and patterns.⁸⁷ Some researchers interpret social reality rather as an area where certain processes occur in an undetermined, uncoordinated, spontaneous way. The key words here are fragmentation and deconstruction, often identified with radically understood destabilization.⁸⁸

It is worth asking how memes function as units of cultural information in the political domain. As a result of conditions of increased globalization, the distinctions between politics and other human activity are blurred.⁸⁹ Politics loses its focus and becomes generalized, and loses its central role as the area where decisions are

⁸⁵ S. Blackmore, op. cit., p. 261.

⁸⁶ M. Midgley, 'Why memes?', [in:] H. Rose, S. Rose (ed.), *Alas, Poor Darwin*, London, p. 67.

⁸⁷ S.K. White, *Political Theory and Postmodernism*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 23–24.

⁸⁸ R. Rorty, 'Dekonstrukcja', [in:] T. Komendziński, A. Szahaj (ed.), *Filozofia amerykańska dziś*, Toruń 1999, p. 189.

⁸⁹ U. Beck, *Spółczesność ryzyka*, Warsaw 2004, p. 341–343.

made regarding the future of society. More attention is given to forms of subpolitics, with leading roles played by economics or education.

In this situation the meme, understood as a short, clear message, picture or symbol, memorable enough to capture the audience's imagination, is perfectly suitable for the methods of communication favored by modern politicians. Supreme importance is attached to an attractive image and the effective use of slogans and symbols, which gives modern political discourse its characteristic superficiality and the primacy of form over content. Political language is also typified by aggressive persuasion, apparent ambiguity and a skewed portrayal of reality, as well as a level of emotion that excludes rational debate.

If the very nature of the Internet is an ideal environment for the spread of memes, then YouTube is a mine of information for researchers wishing to analyze both the phenomenon of memes and their mutation into videomemes. On the one hand, it is no surprise that YouTube resembles a center for the propagation of memes, yet what is decidedly more interesting is the way that they are diffused and modified. This is much more transparent and easier to identify, than is the case with the spread of memes throughout the Internet as a whole.⁹⁰

Similarly to other Internet portals, we are dealing with the successive gathering of data in such fields as users' viewing habits, choices and comments. YouTube enables us to examine such data, which are divided fairly clearly into various categories according to popularity. The basic criteria here will be 'most watched', or 'most often commented'. The accumulation in one place of so many video clips together with above categories makes YouTube an excellent subject for the analysis of Internet memes.

The videomeme, in other words a memetic video, is distinguished by a completely different structure of participation. The best example

⁹⁰ L. Shifman, 'An anatomy of a YouTube meme', *New Media Society*, 2012, Vol. 14, p. 190.

is a popular clip, involving extensive and at the same time creative engagement on the part of the viewer/user. This creative participation can have many forms, such as the creation of parody, pastiche, mashup or other forms of creative/derivative activity. These forms of transformation use two fundamental mechanisms associated with processing original content that is the basis for a series of memes. Firstly there is imitation (repeating specific elements from a given video), and secondly we encounter remixes (re-editing video material by using available technology). In this event, the memetic aspect will require an act of participation through imitation, which is obviously a basic element of this type of video. In a simple way it is possible to recognize involvement in communication in activities ranging from naïve, almost coarse imitation to the addition of new, often highly contemptuous meanings, and ending with an interesting storyline which frequently contains a degree of highly sophisticated irony.

In this category an excellent source of videomemes can be found in electoral videoclips, often of dubious quality. They are frequently parodied in an intelligent and humorous way and become a form of entertainment for both the makers and the audience. A good example is the work of the Polish artist V.J. Dominion, who has become popular by mixing the images and voices of politicians through the use of simple animation and well-chosen, easily adaptable soundtracks. A good example of such clips are *Tuscotronic*⁹¹ and *Manipulation Song*⁹².

In this context the question arises whether the increasing memeticization of the political space and its transformation into a form of entertainment have an influence on voters' trust in politicians and politics. Proponent of the theory of so-called hybrid democracy (among them John Keane) argue that the weaker a democracy is, the stronger is the degree of tabloidization of the media message, with

⁹¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbg8Qv0gU4U>.

⁹² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBzN3IcRFys>.

a subsequent fall in trust of citizens in politicians, and a loss of interest in national politics.⁹³

It is therefore worth examining the level of interest in politics and politicians among Poles. Is there a Politician of the Year in Poland? Does any political figure enjoy the trust and affection of Polish citizens? Every year in December, the Center for Public Opinion Research (CBOS, *Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej*) conducts a poll and asks the following question:

“In your opinion, which politician most deserves the title ‘Politician of the Year’? Who has done most for the country, society, and people like you?”⁹⁴

The results of the research do not inspire optimism. In 2010 half of those surveyed did not name any politician, a year later this figure reached 52% of respondents. Of these, slightly more said that they could not think of anyone (answers: ‘I don’t know’, ‘I’m not interested in politics’, or simply ‘it’s difficult to say’ were at 27%, the same percentage in 2010 and 2011), than those who stated that no politician who they thought of deserved that title (answers: ‘there is no such person’, ‘none’, or other ways of expressing negative opinions were 23% in 2010 and 25% in 2011). The remainder of the respondents named several dozen politicians, but only a few gained more than 2% of the votes (in 2010 there were nine names and in 2011 only six individuals) while the rest were individuals with 1%. It must be said that the results of 2010 and 2011 were somewhat better than those of 2009. Then as many as 59% of Poles did not choose any politician for this title. The majority of those (34% of all respondents) could not answer the question because ‘they were not interested in politics’, ‘they did not know of any politicians’ etc. One respondent in four (25%) did not suggest any candidate because in their opinion nobody deserved

⁹³ A. Krzemiński, ‘Władza ludu, władza ludzi’, *Polityka*, 08.08.2012, No. 32/33, p. 24.

⁹⁴ *Polityk roku 2010 w Polsce i na świecie*, BS/2/2011. Research results CBOS, Warsaw, January 2011, p. 1. and *Polityk roku 2011 w Polsce i na świecie*, BS/166/2011, Research Results CBOS, Warsaw, December 2011, p. 1.

such a title.⁹⁵ In subsequent years (2012⁹⁶ and 2013⁹⁷) surveys using the same methodology did not show any difference, with minimal variations, although there is a noticeable trend showing a continuing fall in interest in politics. In 2013 as many as 63% could not identify any politician.⁹⁸

Looking at the Polish political scene (and based on the indications mentioned above regarding the increasing tabloidization of the media message and the growth in political entertainment) we can conclude that in order to function and work normally, politicians need to earn the goodwill of voters. However, this is not simple personal goodwill. Bearing in mind that voters are bored, discouraged and increasingly uninterested in the important aspect of political rivalry, politicians must develop this support using simple, sometimes even vulgar messages.

A symptom of media-political entertainment is currently to be found in election campaigns. They share many elements with recreation, entertainment, events or musical concerts, through the use of spotlights, claquees and popular music bands that appear at electoral conventions. It must be stressed that the spectacles associated with election campaigns shown in the mass media reveal yet again the symbiosis that exists between the media and politics through the promotion of politics as entertainment. According to the paradigm suggested by Ulrich Sarcinelli, one can perceive that this symbiosis represents a share in power, which in turn is defined by the degree of economic power of the media.⁹⁹ Sometimes this is seen as a form of

⁹⁵ *Polityk roku 2009 w Polsce i na świecie*, Research results, BS/174/2009, Warsaw, December 2009, p. 1.

⁹⁶ *Polityk roku 2012 w Polsce i na świecie*, BS/176/2012, http://cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2012/K_176_12.PDF p. 1.

⁹⁷ *Polityk roku 2013 w Polsce i na świecie*, BS/2/2014 http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2014/K_002_14.PDF.

⁹⁸ *Polityk roku 2009 w Polsce i na świecie*, op. cit., p. 1.

⁹⁹ S. Michalczyk, *Komunikowanie polityczne. Teoretyczne aspekty procesu*, Katowice 2005, p. 20.

political economics, which exerts an influence on both the media and politics.¹⁰⁰

Today, politics clearly shows that politicians need to be actors. This spectacle usually leads to poor performances for the benefit of the media and the next elections.¹⁰¹ As the journalist Tomasz Lis notes, today we see ‘a particular kind of symbiosis between idiotized politicians and an idiotized media serving the basic needs of an idiotized public. Since the media show politicians making fools of themselves, this means that people really want to see fools, which means that voters don’t understand the issues relating to real elections in a normal democracy’.¹⁰²

It seems that it is difficult for the citizen to distinguish between entertainment and fact while watching television. The form and content of a message have long ceased to define its aim. Currently only the broadcasting time informs us whether we are watching a news program or an entertainment show.¹⁰³ The American sociologist Neil Postman is surely right when he notes that every new medium of communication changes the meaning of the vocabulary that has preceded it, and so television has transformed the significance of public debate, news and public opinion.¹⁰⁴ It should therefore not surprise us that both politicians and their advisers are beginning to seek more direct methods of communicating with potential voters. In order to achieve this, and attract the attention of the public, advertisements, appearances on entertainment programs, and, in particular, a strong presence online can become extremely effective tools. Despite using these less conventional procedures associated

¹⁰⁰ T. Olczyk, op. cit., p. 89.

¹⁰¹ M. Środa, ‘Jak sobie radzić bez państwa?’, *Wprost*, 2011, No. 4.

¹⁰² T. Lis, ‘Ustawka 2011’, *Wprost*, 2011, No. 35, s. 4.

¹⁰³ L. Marmon, ‘Infotainment rządzi, czyli schylek ery informacji’, http://www.wiadomosci24.pl/artykul/infotainment_rzadzi_czyli_schylek_ery_informacji_111713.html (April 2011).

¹⁰⁴ J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Infotainment. Fragment książki Antropologia*, http://czytelnia.onet.pl/0,1319162,do_czytania.html (April 2011).

with the more democratic space that is the Internet, the activity of both government and opposition still remains part of the political-media complex.¹⁰⁵ This can give rise to the danger of subordinating politics to the mechanisms of a permanent campaign and to pressure from the mass media.

Technological progress has led to changes which are so extreme and significant that they were impossible to predict even at the end of the 20th century. Even in the late 1990s, e-mail use was not so common and still evoked amazement and reluctance, especially among the older generation, who were used to traditional methods of communication. Within only a few years the Internet became a medium not only for communication but above all for ubiquitous entertainment, and thus began to provide serious competition for other industries providing recreation and amusement.

Already in the late 1990s, the futurist G. Gilders pictured a post-television world.¹⁰⁶ Such imaginings are rarely treated seriously, and are viewed as a topic for discussion and reflection, rather than as a realistic scenario. However, it has been noted that today Internet users state that they spend less and less time watching television and more and more time online. Could it be true that the political show will to a large extent be transferred from the television screen to the Internet? Perhaps this theory exaggerates the potential of the Web; however, in the course of only one year, the time that Internet users spent in front of the television decreased by more than an hour.¹⁰⁷ Research also shows that individuals who spend time online watch five hours less television than those who do not use the Internet. Almost one third of children surveyed have significantly reduced the time spent watching television since they began to have access to the Internet

¹⁰⁵ D.L. Swanson, P. Mancini (ed.), *Politics...*, op. cit., p. 252.

¹⁰⁶ G. Gilder, *Life after television*, 1994, <http://www.seas.upenn.edu/~gaj1/tvvgg.html> (3.01.2013).

¹⁰⁷ As this research refers to the period 2001–2003, it is of course not current, but due to the lack of more solid data it can be used as an example.

at home. It has also been observed that the fall in television viewing is proportional to the growth in Internet skills. Experienced users of online services declare that they spend almost half as much time in front of the television than those who are beginning to discover the Internet.¹⁰⁸

We can notice a gradual growth of the audience of online video portals, affecting all age groups. 62% of all adult Internet users watch films on YouTube, while the figure for the 18–29 age bracket reaches 89%, which means that this is a universal activity for young adults. Moreover, as many as 36% of young adults state that this is an everyday pursuit. These statistics confirm that watching online video has to all extents and purposes become an integral part of the daily lives of individuals and has begun to replace traditional television viewing. Overall, in 2009 19% of Internet users reported that they watched YouTube daily, which is a marked increase compared to the 2006 figure of 8%.¹⁰⁹

Unfortunately, the results of this research illustrating the fall in television viewing by Internet users do not sufficiently indicate the content of the online material viewed. Therefore we still do not know how much time was spent watching films and television programs online.

Given the absence of quantifiable data in this regard, we can only make some assumptions. It is highly probable that there is a constant, direct, multi-faceted connection between television and YouTube. As Stranglove indicates, it is enough to examine the list of the most watched films on the portal. Here we will refer to data from the spring of 2014, when the most popular films on YouTube were the

¹⁰⁸ J. Cole, *Internet Peaks...*, op. cit.

¹⁰⁹ M. Madden, *The Audience for Online Video-Sharing Sites Shoots Up. As the audience for online video continues to grow, a leading edge of internet users are migrating their viewing from their computer screens to their TV screens*, Pew Internet & American Life Project An initiative of the Pew Research Center, Washington 2009, p. 4. <http://fe01.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/13--The-Audience-for-Online-Video-Sharing-Sites-Shoots-Up.aspx> (5.01.2014).

advertisement for *Call of Duty* and the trailer for Michael Jackson's new album. Of particular importance for our analysis is the fact that in the hundred most watched films there regularly appeared clips showing well-known politicians.¹¹⁰

It is therefore not surprising that aspects of the Polish entertainment industry can be found in the so-called YouTubization of politics.¹¹¹ This phenomenon involves the introduction of political dialogue on the Internet via films and electoral spots and interactive chats with candidates for public office. This online trend included films, trailers and interactive games. The first well known example was shown in 2007, four days before the parliamentary elections; this was a mock trailer for the 'film' *The 4th Polish Republic Reloaded*, a parody of the popular film title *The Matrix Reloaded*. Only 2 minutes and 59 seconds long, the film enjoyed record-breaking popularity for two successive days¹¹² and gave rise in the same year to the 'Games Factory', in which the images of politicians are used in video games, with opposition leader and subsequent Prime Minister Donald Tusk at the forefront.

The next stage of the YouTubization of politics was the use of this portal by the election committees of political parties. It is enough to mention clips from 2011 such as *The Empty Fridge*, *Party with Tusk*, *Seeing the Joy in a Child's Eyes – Priceless*, to understand that their role in the Internet was only as a catalyst for serious political discussion. By means of 'entertaining' messages such as the above, political public relations specialists attempt to win over younger voters, who are a very valuable target of their electoral strategy. In fact, this strategy was successful in 2007, when the 'Committee of 21 October', aiming to win over the votes of the least involved section of the electorate, namely the 18–24 and 25 to 34 age brackets, emitted a series of online spots and clips. Young adults were encouraged to vote by online films

¹¹⁰ https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLrEnWoR732-BHrPp_Pm8_VleD68f9s14- (3.05.2014).

¹¹¹ Cf. T. Olczyk, op. cit., p. 157.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 513 and passim.

such as ‘Don’t be stupid – go and vote’, ‘Parliament – do it yourself’, and ‘Move your a** and vote’. There was also a great deal of discussion resulting from an e-mail and text message action, where the following exhortation was spread around: “Yes, my friends, it’s election time. There’s no denying it – we have to save this country. That’s the reason for the campaign ‘Hide your grandma’s ID’”¹¹³

The concept of memeticization, which we have analyzed in this chapter, viewed in particular in the context of politics presented as a form of entertainment, is certainly a fascinating area of research. It perfectly reflects the postmodern realities of political communication, where fragmentation, focus on image and a race for the highest possible poll figures leave no room for the kind of thought and reflection that should accompany political decisions by both government and voters.

Contemporary democracy seems to be developing in an interesting direction, but the question remains whether the reduction of political debate to the colorful exchange of simplified emotions represents a danger for civic society. The loss of interest among citizens in the political sphere and a continuous fall in participation in public life in the traditional sense are causes for justifiable concern. However, it is worth noting that in the ‘new’, globalized society, sometimes called an information or knowledge society, new ties and forms of interaction are being created. It is therefore necessary to look for methods of conducting politics and of civic involvement that are appropriate for the new conditions of our society.

¹¹³ M. Wawrzyn, Schowaj babci dowód, 30.09.2007, http://www.pardon.pl/artykul/2636/schowaj_babci_dowod (August 2012).

Part 3

The Social Space

VI. The Internet as an instrument of participation

In the considerable quantity of research dealing with the issue of the relations between the use of new technology, especially the Internet, and the level of involvement, knowledge and real participation in public life, two main, but opposing, approaches can be distinguished.¹ On the one hand, there are those who contend that there is no connection between new technology and the phenomenon of social participation. They argue that the a significant majority of individuals who use the Internet as a source of political information are already politically active, or are at least sufficiently interested in politics for the Internet not to influence their level of participation. They add that it is unlikely that individuals without any previous interest in politics will use the Internet to search for information in this area. This would suggest that the degree of political awareness and participation in a given society will not increase despite better online access. An extreme version of this argument warns that the Internet can present

¹ K. Kenski, N.J. Stround, 'Connections between Internet Use and Political Efficacy, Knowledge, and Participation', *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 2006, Vol. 50.

a danger for social participation, as it can lead individuals to isolate themselves in their private affairs and limit their interaction with others to social contact.²

On the other hand, the 'optimistic' view is held by a relatively large group of specialists who claim that the use of technological innovation can have a direct, positive effect on the degree of engagement in public life. In their opinion, the Internet increases political effectiveness and raises the level of knowledge of current affairs, which has a beneficial influence on the level of individual participation. Apart from its role as source of information regarding politics, society, and electoral candidates and government members, the Internet is undoubtedly a medium that enables contact with politicians and gives citizens a sense that they can monitor political activities. There is no doubt that thanks to the Web, individuals no longer need to feel embarrassed by their lack of knowledge.³ It is true that increased access to a medium such as the Internet and improved levels of education (including but not exclusively concerning technology) increase civic participation. It is also noteworthy that the Internet offers new possibilities of benefitting from personal and political freedoms. Those who argue that the information technology has a beneficial effect on democracy are convinced that it can guard against potential dictatorships and the creation of closed societies. It is possible to say that democracy in the information society means above all the possibility of making an informed choice. It allows for the opportunity to make a decision in accordance with one's own convictions.⁴

This section of the work will chiefly concentrate on questions of communication which are of cardinal importance for all activists and protestors for whom information, communication technology

² J. Wojniak, *Globalne społeczeństwo sieciowe jako ponowoczesna przestrzeń socjotechniki politycznej*, Kraków 2009.

³ Ibid.

⁴ M. du Vall, 'Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD) jako jedna ze współczesnych form obywatelskiego nieposłuszeństwa', *Państwo i Społeczeństwo*, ed. S. Kilian, 2010, No. 1.

and their own programming knowledge are the main instruments for social transformation. We intend to present some of the practical ways in which the Internet is used in a range of activist groups in order to achieve social and political changes. In the subject literature, there are two main propositions. Firstly, access to the Internet helps groups of activists to organize, mobilize their resources and communicate their ideas to a worldwide audience. Secondly, it creates new forms of collective action, new forms of online protest, ranging from Internet petitions, e-mails and virtual blocking to hacking the websites of large corporations and governments. There are two aspects to the online activities of activists and social protest movements: one the one hand, they act in the real world with the support of the Internet, while on the other hand certain activities are conducted exclusively in the virtual world. Both forms of activism avail of a range of digital resources for collective activities, whether ‘traditional’ or completely new.

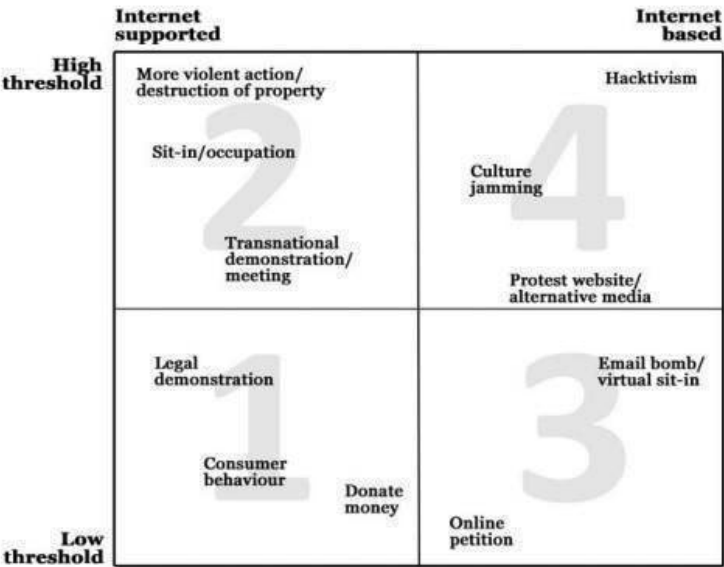


Diagram 1. Types of Internet activism

Source: Van Laer J, Van Aelst P. (2010), ‘Cyber-protest and civil society: the Internet and action repertoires in social movements,’ [in:] *Handbook of Internet Crime*, Jewkes Y., Yar M. (ed.), p. 233.

The subject of our analysis will be selected examples of online movements and revolutions. We will closely examine the essence and distinctness of the functioning of activist movements in the new media age. It must be noted that it is difficult to measure the effects of the activities of cyber-activists in the literal sense, such as by displaying data on graphs. For these kinds of activists, the most important thing is to reach their audience and lead them to consider the issues involved. Increased interest on the part of the target group of a given campaign is one of the main indicators of success, which can be measured through the number of times a website has been visited, the number of fans on social networking portals, the uploading of new materials or positive comments concerning the content.

According to those who argue in favor of the theory of the mass society, one of the characteristics of contemporary life has been the intensive development of large social structures and considerable groups paralleled by the loss in significance of smaller ones. This process has affected small and intermediate structures which are particularly important in traditional societies and are closely associated with social control mechanisms. Removed from his environment, man becomes simply an individual – one of many, isolated and alienated. An individual in this situation readily yields to the attractions of collective action, since this can provide him with social support.⁵ Since the beginning of the 21st century certain trends have been noticed, indicating structural changes in the organization of social life. A new social order is appearing, which is putting an end to many certainties of earlier times and presenting mankind with new challenges. The development of new communication technology has led to a postmodern age with a new kind of society, called the cyber-society, the internet or the electronic society etc. Over the course of the last quarter century this society has created and is continuing to create new methods of human functioning. Given, on the one hand,

⁵ M. Nowosielski, 'Socjologiczna refleksja na temat ruchów społecznych,' *Przegląd Zachodni*, 2011, No. 4.

the dynamic development of the information technology sector and the growth in protest actions of various social groupings, there is an impression that we are living in a time of a widespread social revolution.

Commentators and critics of globalization and postmodernism give a range of parameters and criteria which characterize the new social reality (*inter alia* Bauman 1996, Beck 2002, Castells 2009, Giddens 2001, Wallerstein 2007). Firstly, changes in social ties (large-scale transformation of bonds lead to the disintegration of communities, uprooting and loss of a feeling of cultural belonging, instability, and impermanence in contact with people and places. Because of changes in interpersonal communication, which has become shallow, superficial and devoid of emotional sensitivity, people contact each other through the increasing use of intermediaries. Changes in the group result in people abandoning forms of collective action based on belonging, rules, regulations and fixed principles. Due to changes in the system of social organization, the role and significance of social organizations, whether educational, religious or political, have weakened, as has the degree of trust in their leaders. Finally, changes in the very structure of society and the mobility of individuals have meant that that that social structure is no longer clear and comprehensible, with the disappearance of traditional, known hierarchies. There is greater spatial and social mobility among individuals, leading to the shrinking of groups of friends, acquaintances, family and colleagues.⁶

However, in spite of the above pessimistic view focusing on the negative effects of social changes, it must be clearly stated that in modern society large online networks based on weak ties and access to impersonal forms of online interaction can benefit collective action.⁷ Despite what its critics say, the digital revolution has strengthened the

⁶ T. Paleczny, *Nowe ruchy społeczne w warunkach globalizacji*, [in:] *Współczesna przestrzeń polityczna. Ewolucja czy rewolucja?*, ed. M. du Vall, M. Majorek, A. Walecka-Rynduch, Kraków 2011, p. 11.

⁷ L.A. Lievrouw, *Media alternatywne i zaangażowane społecznie*, Warsaw 2012, p. 199.

phenomenon of individuals organizing themselves into groups which shape their own culture and define their own 'normality'. It has given rise to millions of more or less closed groups whose members respect, admire and support decisions which outsiders might see as strange, but which they view as right.⁸

Today, technological progress is, to a great extent, causing social and civic activism to shift from the real to the virtual. This does not imply that use of technological innovation weakens social and political effectiveness. On the contrary, ease of access to online content can raise the level of knowledge and give citizens a feeling of being able to scrutinize the actions of political elites. The information society constitutes a type of extension and expansion of the categories of civic society, and can be considered to be its post-modern form, one that is more suitable for its advocates.⁹ What we see today is cyber-democracy, where the democratic potential of the Internet and other information and communication technologies and of a new type of virtual society are transforming hitherto centralized structures. Cyber-democracy is revitalizing the concept of 'society' and changing its character and intellectual horizon.¹⁰ In the information society, democracy is above all the possibility of an informed choice. It is an opportunity for making a personal decision in accordance with what one thinks. In cyberspace there are no instruments which can force people to cooperate, but at the same time it is true that online cooperation, to a much greater degree than contacts in the real world, can realize the principle of freedom and equality of individuals.¹¹

⁸ S. Godin, *Wszyscy jesteśmy dziwni. O micie masowości i końcu posłuszeństwa*, Warsaw 2013, p. 11.

⁹ J. Wojniak, 'Obywatel w społeczeństwie informacji. Koncepcja społeczeństwa obywatelskiego w kontekście globalizacji i ekspansji nowych technologii Samotność idei', [in:] *Spółeczeństwo obywatelskie we współczesnym świecie*, ed. B. Krauz-Mozer, P. Borowiec, Kraków 2007, p. 184.

¹⁰ M. du Vall, 'Obywatelski hacking...', op. cit., p. 110.

¹¹ J. Bierówka, *Zasada wzajemności w społeczeństwie informacyjnym*, Kraków 2009, p. 123–125.

Movements of social protest stem from contestation of the established order and of dominant relations imposed by the state, the workplace and cultural norms. As Teresa Świąćkowska notes, such movements 'arise together with the creation and spread of an alternative view of social relations, which is often associated with challenges to ruling power relations. A new space of the public sphere is being created around movements of social activism'.¹² Most often this space is called, in its initial stage, the alternative sphere, which can be found at the fringe of the system, making sure that it always has the instruments and possibilities to influence the system. Social activist movements usually appear when new ideas are diffused and gain sympathizers among a significant segment of society. A key role is played by communication, which, according to Świąćkowska, 'is a crucial element of every stage of a given movement – its origin, continuation and legitimization. They also mean the success or failure of the movement in such areas as its influence on national politics, the highlighting of its public discourse, the creation of new cultural identities and its internal democratization. Social movements are without doubt an area where new forms of communication and new ways of understanding communication originate'.¹³

Contemporary activists use information and communication technology as their main resource in the attempt to create social change. In this way the new media are today becoming the natural environment for all members of local, regional and global communities. As has indicated earlier, a mass view of society and the media has been replaced by a more complex, dynamic understanding of society as an entity created by a constantly changing interconnected networks of points, links, and information flows.¹⁴ People do not identify with one group alone but instead they interact with a whole range of other

¹² T. Świąćkowska, *Public relations a demokracja*, Warsaw 2008, p. 242.

¹³ M. du Vall, A. Walecka-Rynduch, 'Wyzwania komunikacyjne polityki protestu', [in:] *Public relations wobec wyzwań współczesności*, ed. Piechota G., Kraków 2012, p. 47.

¹⁴ L.A. Lievrouw, op. cit., p. 191.

people. Their professional and social networks are scattered and loosely coherent, and the social and spatial boundaries between these networks are blurred and overlapping.¹⁵ Contemporary social capital arising in heterogeneous groups of this nature leads to more positive behavior for social and economic development, and hence for society.¹⁶ According to Benkler, in such a system progress is made incrementally through the accumulation of small-scale actions of many people, who decide independently what the object of their interest and actions should be.¹⁷

The development of the Internet and direct access to technology has allowed newly formed groups of activists to offer the public huge amounts of information, which would have been impossible via traditional media. It is also crucial that the Internet enables two-way communication for sympathizers. The interactive nature of the Web is a huge factor in the growth in popularity and effectiveness of new media compared to previously existing mass media.¹⁸ Having become participants in the media, Internet users cooperate in creating the media message, which at a later stage allows them to become broadcasters. The communicative dimension of the Web stems from the fact that it enables and even encourages individuals to personally contribute to the collective medium. As a result, both information processes and the forms of social organizations that appear in their wake assume a character that is simultaneously collective and individual.¹⁹ It must be remembered that there is a correlation between the current unlimited potential of information creation and the

¹⁵ P. Mason, *Skąd ten bunt? Nowe światowe rewolucje*, Warsaw 2013, p. 183.

¹⁶ K. Sierocińska, 'Kapitał społeczny. Definiowanie, pomiar i typy', *Studia Ekonomiczne/ Economic Studies*, 2011, No. 1 (LXVIII).

¹⁷ Y. Benkler, *Bogactwo sieci. Jak produkcja społeczna zmienia rynki i wolność*, Warsaw 2008, p. 78–79.

¹⁸ S.F. Kreimer, 'Technologies of Protest: Insurgent Social Movements and the First Amendment in the Era of the Internet', *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 2001, Vol. 150, No. 1.

¹⁹ M. Majorek, M. du Vall, 'Nowe media w służbie sieciowych aktywistów', [in:] *Człowiek zalogowany. Od mowy nienawiści do integracji w sieci*, ed. B. Świeży, M. Wysocka-Pelczyk Kraków 2012, p. 27.

decline of traditional mass media. It is estimated that today as much information is processed on earth in the course of two days as was produced as a result of human activity over the course of the twenty thousand years preceding the year 2003.²⁰ As certain scholars declare, contemporary countries resemble vast multimedia laboratories where scattered groups and organizations of social activists using traditional and digital media strive to effect changes or resist the social order that is imposed on them. Thus every nation is the location of a particular kind of experiment which is the result of media politics, sociopolitical practice and access to technology.²¹

Despite these different sociopolitical trajectories, it is possible to indicate simple principles and methods which should be considered when analyzing activity or when engaging in social activism or protest movements. Above all, it must be remembered that mobilization for a cause that is considered important requires a strong message, clear goals and effective planning. Therefore, in order for the message to reach its target audience, appropriate communication tools should be used. It is necessary to illustrate a problem with the appropriate documentation, by showing an event, providing witness reports and other material. Today most of us use mobile phones with applications for recording films and taking photographs, which can immediately be uploaded on portals, websites and blogs. Important factors include the form in which problem is illustrated and transmitted, which depends above all on the creativity of activists. For a public awareness campaign to achieve its aims, it is crucial to make good use of a network of contacts, using groups, mailing lists, text messaging etc.,²² and 'collective knowledge and wisdom'. Including all participants in the decision-making process has an influence on the effectiveness

²⁰ S. Godin, op. cit., p. 22.

²¹ J. Postill, 'A critical history of internet activism and social protest in Malaysia, 1998–2013', 2013, <http://rmit.academia.edu/JohnPostill/Papers>.

²² M. du Vall, *Digital Networking jako narzędzie budowy społeczeństwa obywatelskiego*, [in:] *(KO)media. Konteksty dyskursu medialnego*, eds. J. Gołuchowski, D. Konieczna, K. Zdanowicz-Cyganiak, Warszawa 2014, pp. 377–386

of the action. People must be allowed to ask questions – clarify and explain. If the mainstream message is inappropriate, or limited, then our ‘communicators’ become our only source of information and knowledge. They give a different perspective, broaden our minds and break down prejudice. They encourage critical thinking.²³

Not only does the Internet facilitate mobilization and involvement in activism, but it also gives an international aspect to many campaigns and social protests, playing a decisive role in their diffusion on a global scale. One of the best known examples of the way in which the Internet influences the tactics and activities of social campaigns was the protest against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle at the end of 1999. At that time, using an open online network, various groups of activists, organizations and social protest movements scattered over the whole world joined their efforts and coordinated their activities against a global organization. The Internet was used to plan such actions as blocking streets, thereby attracting the attention of the mainstream media on a worldwide scale. During the blockades, activists with laptops connected to the Internet sent out information about the situation on the streets in real time, giving details regarding the actions of the police. These events led to the creation of the Independent Media Center (Indymedia), which enabled the distribution of video footage, sound, text and photographs in real time.²⁴

In an opinion expressed on the portal *CN Opinion*, we can find a metaphor comparing social campaigns from the television age to the book, and those of the postmodern age to the Internet.²⁵ It is worth examining this analogy more closely. The book is something permanent, and once printed it will not undergo any change.

²³ M. du Vall, ‘Info-aktywizm. Strategie komunikacyjne społeczników ery cyfrowej’, [in:] *Haktywizm*, ed. M. Marczevska-Rytko, Lublin 2014.

²⁴ J. Van Laer, P. Van Aelst, ‘Cyber-protest and civil society: the Internet and action repertoires in social movements’, [in:] *Handbook of Internet Crime*, ed. Y. Jewkes, M. Yar, 2010, p. 230–254.

²⁵ D. Rushkoff, *Think Occupy Wall St. is a phase? You don’t get it*, 2011, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/05/opinion/rushkoff-occupy-wall-street> (May 2014).

Others may read it, but only the authors may modify its content in subsequent editions. In contrast, every piece of information on the Internet can be modified, improved and made more accessible by users. Of key importance is McKenzie's statement that in every form that knowledge is created, whether art, science, philosophy or culture, and wherever data can be stored and information gathered, presenting new opportunities for the world, there will always be hackers hacking new things from old.²⁶

By comparison, despite a wide range of possible forms of action, social movements had fairly static goals and rules for functioning, and eventual changes resulting from their actions required long periods of time and a great deal of patience. Cyber-activists, on the other hand, embody the basic values of the Internet age – passion, freedom, openness, activeness, care and creativity, all of which have proved effective in a fast-changing world which demands a high degree of adaptive skill.²⁷

All the trends described above allow us to observe the growth in numbers and activity of groups who have chosen the Internet as their fundamental instrument and at the same time their main field of activity. The potential offered by new technologies is also used by organizations outside the sphere of legal politics and by those from mainstream political life. In this regard we can notice crucial modifications in forms of political participation by citizens. Individuals are offered new possibilities of involvement, and the concept of citizen gains a new dimension – instead of the *user and chooser* i.e. the individual, who limits their involvement to making choices regarding the political sphere and benefitting from them, citizens are beginning to be seen as those who create and shape politics. However, there are not always institutions and processes which can, in a generally accepted way, allow such activity, and then there is a space for activities which go beyond these limits, even though it cannot be denied that they are a form of

²⁶ T. Jordan, *Hakerstwo*, Warsaw 2011, p. 23.

²⁷ M. du Vall, *Obywatelski hacking...*, op. cit., p. 112.

political participation. In this context the Internet is an instrument which does not distinguish between ideologies, political groups or institutions. As was noted above, the Web offers many opportunities in many areas of political activity,²⁸ in that it provides a means for the expression of civil disobedience. There is an increasing trend of various acts of protest against the actions of institutions and state organs; the medium for this protest is the Internet.

The reason for acts of civil disobedience is the belief that people's freedom has been unreasonably curtailed. Freedom here is understood in the broadest sense – freedom to make choices, freedom of personal development, freedom to make decisions, independence. Freedom is innate, inalienable, indivisible. It is a universal and sacred value. Freedom is the foundation of the liberal theory of the state based on the conviction that the individual and their development are more important and also more powerful than governments and state institutions. Here we recall Locke's theory of the horizontal social contract, where only after having made a previous agreement among each other and created a society do individuals make a contract with those who govern them. Governments, sometimes forget that they receive power from citizens. Civil disobedience is justified when there is a reasonable conviction that the state has broken its contract or significantly exceeded its authority. The goal of civil disobedience is to awaken the interest of public opinion and present the views of the protesters to society.²⁹

The idea of civil disobedience can be understood as a form of contestation, in other words questioning, casting doubt, and a demonstration of opposition and protest. The protestor is someone who does not accept the usual pattern of behavior, or even deliberately

²⁸ L. Porębski, *Elektroniczne oblicze polityki. Demokracja, państwo, instytucje polityczne w okresie rewolucji informacyjnej*, Kraków 2001.

²⁹ R. Pankowski, 'O obywatelskim nieposłuszeństwie i demokracji bezpośredniej. Uwagi teoretyczne', [in:] *Między lobbingiem a akcją bezpośrednią*, <http://zb.eco.pl/bzb/21/uwagi.htm> (01.2011).

rejects them, following his own rules according to a declared hierarchy of values.³⁰

In the modern period civil disobedience is a relatively new phenomenon. It is generally accepted that the concept first appeared in the United States in the first half of the 19th century. Originally it was a form of unorganized social protest rather than a clearly defined doctrine. Its first exponent was Henry David Thoreau who in 1846 publicly refused to pay one dollar in tax, which led to his imprisonment. Three years later, in his essay entitled *Civil Disobedience*, he expressed his opposition to the methods of the United States government, in particular its taxation policy and the war with Mexico. Thoreau argued that the citizen is above all a human being, and only secondly is he subject to politics and the law. The one duty of every individual is to do what they consider to be morally right in a given set of circumstances.³¹ According to his view, following the dictates of one's own conscience is the highest form of public service. If the law of the state is unjust, then the citizen can refuse to obey the state, and break the law. He does so in the name of 'a majority of one', valuing his conscience above all else.³² Thoreau argues that the individual should seek out higher laws and live in accordance with them. He must nevertheless comply with the laws that are typical for a democracy. This leads to conflict between morality and political obligations. Since, in a democracy, the majority are stronger only in a physical sense, then decisions taken by the government according to the rule of the majority cannot always be just.³³ As a result, injustice is sometimes part of a democratic system.

³⁰ M. Majorek, 'Pomiędzy społeczeństwem obywatelskim, a obywatelskim nieposłuszeństwem. Kontestacja społeczna jako forma współczesnej postawy obywatelskiej,' [in:] *Samotność idei?*, op. cit., p. 49, 50.

³¹ M. du Vall, 'Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD) jako jedna ze współczesnych form obywatelskiego nieposłuszeństwa', *Państwo i Społeczeństwo*, ed. S. Kilian, 2010, No. 1, p. 124.

³² www.scribd.com/doc/34838431/Thoreau-Obywatelskie-niepos%C5%82usze%C5%84stwo [I.2011], p. 8.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Citizens are treated as voting machines – they do not serve the state with their consciences, their greatest value. Those who do follow their consciences are sometimes treated by the state as enemies.³⁴

In the 20th century, an important role in the development of the idea of civil disobedience was played by Hannah Arendt and John Rawls. According to Arendt, civil disobedience owed its origin to a particular combination of morality, legality, conscience and the dual legal system (State and Federal) in the United States. At the same time she noticed that in what she called times of confusion, such as during the period of anti-war protest, the difference between actions characterized by breaking the law for a higher cause and ordinary offences becomes very fluid.³⁵ Arendt goes on to state that civil disobedience has a chance of success only when it is practiced by a group of people. A single individual who acts alone without his goals being shared by others will be viewed as an eccentric.³⁶ This is in accordance with the common understanding of political participation as effective only when it involves the cooperation of interested citizens. These participants must know how to organize, gather essential information and means, choose the appropriate strategy and tactics and finally apply their resources skillfully, which requires certain abilities. In principle all members of local, professional or interest groups can participate in the life of the community in this way.

In his work *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls defines civil disobedience as ‘a public, nonviolent, conscientious yet political act contrary to law usually done with the aim of bringing about a change in the law or politics of the government.’³⁷ According to Rawls, there are three essential conditions for civil disobedience. Firstly, the protest must be directed against particular instances of injustice. Secondly, all legal courses of action have been exhausted. Thirdly, acts of civil

³⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

³⁵ H. Arendt, *O przemocy. Nieposłuszeństwo obywatelskie*, Warsaw 1999, p. 144.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 145.

³⁷ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard 1999, p. 320.

disobedience cannot assume a scale that will threaten the functioning of constitutional order. Rawls states that the phenomenon of civil disobedience only arises in a democratic state and society. It is associated with citizens who respect the 'constitution'. The key issue, as in Thoreau's essay, is the conflict of obligations, on the one hand the obligation to comply with norms established by the majority, but on the other hand, the right to self-defense and the duty of resistance to injustice, which outweigh the first obligation.

The practice of civil disobedience became more common in the 20th century, together with the widespread growth of social awareness and the development of civic societies. Two classic examples of this are the actions of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Despite the fact that their attitude towards the system of government in which they lived was not positive, neither Gandhi nor King aimed to create a state of anarchy. Instead, they interpreted civil disobedience as active non-compliance with certain selected regulations, rather than a questioning of the whole sociopolitical order. Following the example of such great individuals, protest movements must bear in mind that, in accordance with its basic principles, civil disobedience must be free from all acts of violence towards any person or thing, regardless of the issues involved and the level of the wrong that is opposed. On the contrary, they must follow the principles of mutual responsibility and aim to achieve their aims through dialogue.³⁸

A particularly interesting example of the use of new technology to achieve social and political change is hacktivism. This term is a portmanteau of the words *hacker* and *activist*. While the term *activist* is not particularly difficult to define, *hacker* is a more complex concept. An *activist* is passionately involved member of an organization or community, a socially or ideologically motivated volunteer. According to the dictionary definition, an activist is a member of an organization who is extremely committed to the activity of that organization.³⁹

³⁸ M. du Vall, 'Electronic civil...', op. cit., p. 127.

³⁹ <http://www.sjp.pl/aktywista> (2010).

Regarding the second term, in everyday language the term *hacker* has become synonymous with a computer burglar and cyber-criminal, an electronic vandal who, using available means, breaks into information systems for recreation or for some other purpose.⁴⁰

Hackers describe themselves above all as specialists who break into computer systems merely to demonstrate the flaws in their protection and inform the owners of this. The basic aim of hackers is not to destroy but above all to perfect their computer knowledge and programming abilities. Hacking is a subculture that has developed strong elitist traits, at first because of limited access to computers and now rather through the avoidance of all forms of commercial activity. The distinction between acting in a good cause and simple curiosity and the wish to show one's knowledge is a very fluid one. The cornerstone of hacking ethics is the unlimited right to information, even it is to be found in someone else's computer. It can be said that it was hackers who created the Internet, as without them and their anarchist ideology this medium would never have been created so quickly nor spread over the whole world. As faithful devotees of this subculture stress, they did this in the name of the eternal human dream to create a community of people who, instead of fighting, exchange information, experience, and propagate knowledge for free.⁴¹ One can generalize and say that everything that other users of the Web accept is permitted, and what does not have general agreement is forbidden. It must be stressed that contemporary hacking is a complex phenomenon, and one of its aspects is hacktivism.

It is worth considering the motives of 'Internet activists'. As a rule, the inspiration for their activities is social or political. In the 21st century hacktivism is part of the struggle against a given political order, the domestic or foreign policy of the state, the existing economic situation in a given state or certain legal institutions. It is a manifestation of civil

⁴⁰ J. Erickson, *Hacking: the art of exploitation*, San Francisco 2008.

⁴¹ <http://mediologia.salon24.pl/383917,hakerzy-pawdziwi-wlasciciele-internetu> (2012).

disobedience. As was said earlier, the idea of civil disobedience can be understood as a form of contestation, in other words questioning, casting doubt, and a demonstration of opposition and protest. The protestor is someone who does not accept the usual pattern of behavior, or even deliberately rejects them, following his own rules according to a declared hierarchy of values.⁴² Arendt writes that civil disobedience occurs when a significant number of citizens become convinced that normal channels of achieving changes no longer function, and that petitions will not be listened to or taken into consideration, but that on the contrary the government intends to act as it has planned and has decided to do so regardless of what citizens say.⁴³

When citizens are treated as automatons without free will, they have the right to feel that their freedom has been excessively restricted and so they protest, deliberately breaking social and legal norms. Supporters of civil disobedience emphasize that their actions have been thought out, are free from violence and are specifically aimed at initiating particular changes. They reject the accusation that their activity is simply undemocratic political tactics, closely associated with other types of resistance relying on violence. It is not possible to accept either of these judgments simply and definitively, and therefore it is worth considering the issue in somewhat more detail.

The accusations that are levelled against the justification of such actions are usually of the following nature. Firstly, an obvious issue is the illegality of such acts, which challenges the obligation of respecting the laws of a given state, incumbent on all citizens of the democratic community.⁴⁴ The democratic system ensures government according to the letter of the law and the existence of democratic procedures, which strengthens the conviction that the citizen must comply with existing norms. Legal theorists dealing with this problem state that

⁴² M. Majorek, *Samotność idei?*, op. cit., p. 49, 50. Cf. *Supra*, p. 58.

⁴³ H Arendt, *O przemocy. Nieposłuszeństwo obywatelskie*, Warsaw 1999.

⁴⁴ M. Majorek, 'Zobowiązanie: wolność czy zniewolenie? Moralny i polityczny wymiar zobowiązań', *Episteme* 2010, No. 10, Vol. I, p. 225.

we can seek ways of changing an existing law but never by breaking it.⁴⁵ This is certainly an important argument. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that many democratic procedures do not function properly in practice, which may lead to the partial or complete exclusion of certain groups, notably minorities. Therefore a justification of civil disobedience would require proof that the obligation to obey existing rules can be overruled. The second objection is that if the democratic system guarantees a range of legal means which can be used in political activity, civil disobedience is not one of them, and so it cannot be justified.⁴⁶ However, it may still be maintained that every citizen of a democratic state has the right, and even the obligation, to oppose certain laws that clearly violate the essence of freedom or broadly understood human rights. On the other hand, acts of civil disobedience can be considered unjustified if they are used for tactical reasons in order to change laws or the current policies of democratic authorities. Here we can see the fundamental problem of contemporary acts of political participation involving civil disobedience, as those who carry them out say that they are justified, indicating that the authorities have disregarded basic rights and freedoms. Hackers use precisely this argument, emphasizing that their activities are a form of non-violent protest against institutions or individuals who act unethically or illegally. They argue that the aim of electronic civil disobedience is the spread of information for the benefit of people rather than institutions.

In acts of civil disobedience, a crucial role is played by the free flow of information. Activists communicate with each other in such a way that they are no longer isolated individuals but a visible force. In so doing they prove that even minorities can, if they join together and become more numerous, weaken the moral authority of the majority.

⁴⁵ E. A. Stettner, 'Political Obligation and Civil Disobedience', *Polity*, 1971, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 113.

⁴⁶ E. V. Rostow, 'The Rightful Limits of Freedom in a Liberal Democratic State: of Civil Disobedience', [in:] ed. E.V. Rostow, *Is Law Dead?*, New York 1971.

As it is an electronic traffic hub, the Internet is viewed by activists not only as a space for communication and information, allowing content to be transmitted and accessed quickly and easily, but above all as an instrument for the expression of strong convictions and discontent. It is seen as a medium exerting an influence on social awareness and also on government politics. Therefore it must be said that firstly, the Internet, as an 'information highway', acts as a mirror where we can see the needs, pathologies and weaknesses of contemporary society. Secondly, and in our view crucially, it is an instrument that enhances political effectiveness, raises the level of sociopolitical awareness, encourages civil activism and provides citizens with the sentiment that they can control the actions of political elites.⁴⁷

The recent protests in the Arab world are an example of this 'Revolution 2.0'. They redefined the role of Internet networking portals such as Facebook and Twitter. During the 'Arab Spring', online activists saw what was called 'Internet mobility' as an absolute priority. Groups of bloggers appeared worldwide whose aim was to ensure free and uncensored Internet access. Activity on online portals was an essential factor in allowing the free exchange of views and discussion, and this incited people to move on from virtual action to direct action on the city streets. Online networking services were the fundamental impetus behind the protests, and young Internet users were the messengers of the democratization process in the region, beginning with the outbreak of the 2010 Tunisian revolution that overthrew the government of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, followed by the Egyptian revolution on 25th January 2011, and ending with the Libyan revolution and protests in Egypt, Yemen, Jordan and Syria. Groups and Facebook profiles urged citizens to participate in peaceful protest gatherings.⁴⁸

It is worth recalling the international group Telecomix, established in 2008, which acted mainly as an information agency during the

⁴⁷ J. Wojniak, *Globalne społeczeństwo sieciowe jako ponowoczesna przestrzeń socjotechniki politycznej*, op. cit.

⁴⁸ M. du Vall, A. Walecka-Rynduch, 'Wyzwania komunikacyjne...', op. cit.

Iranian protests of 2009 and the 'Jasmin Revolution' in Tunisia in 2011. Telecomix, whose online motto, referring to the reconstruction of broken connections, is 'we rebuild', also was engaged in other events, helping to break the Egyptian Internet blockade.

What is especially striking is the pace at which these protests were internationalized. Thanks to modern communication technology, information was freely diffused over international borders. Activists in Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and France clicked on links connecting to websites created by dissidents and protesting bloggers in the Middle East. A crucial element was the speed with which information was transmitted and its political and ideological content. We can clearly see the enormous influence of new media on social awareness.

A further example of sociopolitical activities harnessing the potential of new media is the activism of 'the Indignant'. Since their foundation, their method of organization and activity has been characterized by an egalitarian and completely democratic structure. A huge role is played by communication using websites, networking portals and mailing lists. This facilitates organization and contacting ideological allies. As can be seen, these are excellent tools for the mobilization of social resources. Following the theory of social movements it must be stressed that communication is an essential element at every stage of their activities – their birth, continuation and finally their legitimization. Furthermore it is communication that signifies the success or failure of activism in such areas as influence on government policies, the highlighting of its public discourse, the creation of new cultural identities and internal democratization. Social movements are without doubt an area where new forms of communication and new ways of understanding communication originate.⁴⁹

Another illustration of a sociopolitical movement of the Internet age is Occupy Wall Street. In contrast to earlier civil rights movements or trade union protest marches, Occupy Wall Street does

⁴⁹ Ibid.

not have charismatic leaders or a coherent ideology. As a creation of the Internet age it is decentralized and its focus is not victory but rather action and permanence. It does not have one precisely defined goal, and inclusiveness is the movement's rule. Occupy Wall Street has a wide range of calls, demands and goal concerning, *inter alia*, the environment, work standards, unemployment, housing policy, government corruption, the lending practices of the World Bank, worsening inequality etc. They declare that various individuals and groups of activists have been affected by different aspects of the same system, and believe that it is possible (by trial and error, as some say) to find a way to reach a consensus.

The trends described above can be defined as hacktivism in the broad sense of the term. However, there are many problems of interpretation associated with the analysis of the activity of certain activists who qualify as hackers in the strict sense of the term. The group Anonymous example of an organization that uses hacking on a large scale. Its members are connected by a shared goal and a common idea. The group consists of volunteers and is governed by the principles of egalitarian democracy. It connects people who have the same aims and who can at any moment join the group or leave it. If an individual wishes to become a member of Anonymous than he can do so without any restrictions. The leadership structure is also interesting in that Anonymous do not have any leaders, and so the group cannot be governed; one can only present or suggest possible solutions and plans of action. They are not 'dangerous hackers', as they are described by the media, but simply people whose ideology has its source in anarchist hacking. Their concern is for the respect of freedom in the broadest possible sense; they oppose online censorship, surveillance, the sale of information and personal data, totalitarian regimes and the Church of Scientology.⁵⁰ Simplifying somewhat, it can be said that in general Anonymous are against organizations which do not treat their customers in accordance with accepted ethical norms, in that

⁵⁰ <http://www.anon.ssl2.pl> (2012).

they restrict freedom, impose censorship or treat confidential data in a cavalier way.⁵¹ In order to achieve their aims, they choose peaceful protest, mainly through information campaigns making people aware who they are and what they are fighting for. The nature of the organization and their *modus operandi* are perfectly expressed by the phrases 'We are legion. We will not forget. We will not forgive. Expect us' or 'You cannot hide. We are everywhere'.⁵² When these threatening slogans appear on the servers of numerous companies, it is no surprise that they inspire understandable unease.

As we can read on their website, Anonymous have made huge progress. A few years ago they were merely a small group of Internet forum devotees without any concrete plans for the future. Today their online community numbers more than a million members and is capable of disabling large portals and accessing confidential data from them. What is particularly important is that they can gather outside the virtual world and protest on the streets of major cities.⁵³ It is worth noting that communication and information flow, through the use of new media, is flawlessly organized by Anonymous. They produce films and gather, connect and disseminate information. Their area of interest especially includes what authorities and companies want to eliminate from the Internet with the use of censorship.⁵⁴ Furthermore, what makes this movement unique is that information about every 'action' sooner or later finds itself on the major websites, often appearing on television and in the press as well. In this way, the mass media have become Anonymous' ally. By informing the average citizen they help to understand the reasons for an attack, and allow readers to express

⁵¹ J. Łabuda., O. Pursche, 'Anonymous – dlaczego atakowali Sony, MasterCard i innych?' 2012, <http://www.komputerswiat.pl/blogi/blog-redakcyjny/2011/06/nowe-zagrozenia,3.aspx#content>.

⁵² These words appear in the famous film made by Anonymous concerning the Church of Scientology, which can be seen at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCbKv9yiLiQ> (March 2012).

⁵³ <http://www.anonyops.ssl2.pl> (2012).

⁵⁴ Łabuda, Pursche, op. cit., 2012.

their opinions by posting comments on forums and finally change their opinion regarding the organization and add to their numbers.⁵⁵

The activity of Anonymous is viewed as hacktivism, since it is extremely clear that it is inspired by the political or social views of 'angry' Internet users, who thanks to simple suggestions and force of numbers can topple the infrastructure of even the most powerful company. Since 2010 the activity of hackers has included serious attacks on the websites of Visa, MasterCard and PayPal, aimed at punishing these firms for ceasing to allow payments to the portal Wikileaks. Subsequently their targets were companies and institutions such as NASA, Nintendo, the International Monetary Fund and Sony (the first attack affected Playstation Store, and the second, SonyPictures.com, mocking the corporation by revealing that all user data was stored in an ordinary, completely uncoded text). It is therefore unsurprising that Anonymous also targeted the governments of many countries, and even the CIA. Most of these attacks were carried out by individuals, but with the help of anonymous Internet users worldwide, who volunteered their cooperation in the organization of mass-scale cyber-attacks.

For their attacks, activists use the program LOIC (Low Orbit Ion Cannon). This is a humorous allusion to the name of a weapon used in the cult 1990s video game *Command & Conquer*. The simultaneous use of this program by thousands of computers that are interconnected via the Web combines their performance and overloads the servers of the attack target websites with unnecessary data until they freeze. After an successful attack hacktivists display their own information on the site, most often admitting responsibility for the action.⁵⁶ Another weapon in Anonymous' digital arsenal is Distributed Denial of Service, or DDoS. This systematic attack involves redirecting users to specially constructed websites which use JavaScript to 'send' them to the website that is the attack target. The program continuously tries

⁵⁵ <http://www.anonyops.ssl2.pl> (March 2012).

⁵⁶ Łabuda, Pursche, op. cit., 2012.

to gain access to the attacked website until it overloads completely. This is a safer method for the attackers, since only the IP addresses of random users can be seen. This program was used in attacking the website of Universal Music, which was blocked by redirecting all those who were visiting CBS.com.⁵⁷

Spectacular hacktivism attacks have taken place since the end 2011, and one of the victims was Stratfor (Strategic Forecasting), a valued supplier of defense and geopolitical analysis used by the United States Army and even the White House. Online activists gained unauthorized access to information regarding the bank accounts of Stratfor's subscribers. The database contained the details of 850 thousand people using Statfor's services; in the majority of cases, these were email addresses or encrypted passwords, recorded in spreadsheets. After the attack the hackers revealed the credit card details of 75 thousand subscribers, including 462 users in the United Kingdom, including the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Office, Scotland Yard, the Joint Intelligence Organisation (responsible for intelligence, including the famous spies of MI6) and Members of Parliament. Hackers informed the press about the attack wearing Guy Fawkes masks and, like cyber-age Robin Hoods, announced that the payments from the credit cards of Stratfor's clients would be donated to charity.

At the beginning of February 2012 the world was informed of another action by Anonymous. This time the targets were the Federal Investigation Bureau and Scotland Yard. On YouTube, activists published a recording of a confidential teleconference with representatives of both intelligence agencies concerning the fight against cyber-crime.⁵⁸ In addition to the recording, Anonymous revealed an intercepted email that had been sent by an FBI agent,

⁵⁷ J. Jabłoński, 'Anonymous atakuje za pomocą DDoS', 2012, <http://magazynt3.pl/anonymous-atakuje-za-pomoca-ddos> (March 2012).

⁵⁸ This recording can be listened to at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=pl3spwzUZfQ (March 2012).

containing details of the teleconference agenda, including passwords enabling participation in it. The teleconference took place on 20th January 2012, lasted 15 minutes and focused mainly on ways of coordinating the battle against Anonymous and other groups of hackers. The agents exchanged information regarding planned arrests and actions that were being prepared against important activists of the movement.⁵⁹

A subsequent large-scale action was an attack directed by Anonymous with the aim of disabling online services associated with copyright protection. The victims were the American Justice Department, Universal Music Group, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) and the Motion Picture Association of America. The attack could be seen as the hackers' revenge for the closure of the service Megaupload.⁶⁰ This website was one of the main Internet file-hosting services. It was shut down by the American authorities early in 2012 and the website owners were arrested. The service had more than 50 million online visitors daily and more than 150 million users. Obviously, this was not a charitable organization – the creators of Megaupload had developed a complex system for collecting payments from users, while also rewarding the most active ones. There are many similar services on the Internet allowing the storage of files that can be downloaded in a simple way. This does not seem to be a great threat until we examine the matter more closely. An essential factor is that the vast majority of these files contain films, music and programs uploaded illegally.⁶¹ This does not change the fact that, just as was the case with the media noise and popular uproar

⁵⁹ J. Jabłoński, 'FBI podsłuchiwane przez Anonimowych', 2012, <http://magazynt3.pl/fbi-podsluchiwane-przez-anonimowych> (March 2012).

⁶⁰ Megaupload is practically synonymous with online copyright piracy, though obviously many people used it for legal purposes. Its smaller, Polish equivalent could be the service Chomikuj.pl.

⁶¹ J. Jabłoński, 'Grupa hakerska Anonymous atakuje w odwecie za zamknięcie Megaupload', 2012, <http://magazynt3.pl/grupa-hakerska-anonymous-atakuje-w-odwecie-za-zamkniecie-megaupload> (March 2012).

over ACTA,⁶² hacktivists see their activities in ideological terms, as a libertarian struggle against a system which wants to have power over the access to information, knowledge and culture.

Concerning the Internet in Poland, January 2012 was an interesting time. The signing of ACTA led to a huge outcry and a great deal of discussion. There was also a series of attacks on the website of the Polish Government.

Anonymous mainly targeted websites in the government domain gov.pl – the Internal Security Agency, the Ministry of National Defense, the Ministry of Economy, the Parliament and the Ministry of Justice. The Government Reaction Force for Computer Incidents prepared an interesting analysis summarizing the actions of Anonymous over the period from 21st January to 25th January. It informed the reader that ‘above all, the attacks observed involved the disabling of services by DDoS and were directed against Internet servers for websites of major government administration institutions.’ The aim of the attacks was to saturate Internet connections, thus rendering the websites inaccessible. At peak times government services noted approximately 23,000 online visitors every minute.⁶³ Due to the enormous popular interest in ACTA, the government servers were helpless faced with the scale of Anonymous’ actions.

A notable example of Anonymous’ activities in Poland was the operation MailStorm in 2011. Its main theme was ‘freedom of speech’ and opposition to censorship, particularly in relation to the case of Fr. Adam Boniecki. As part of this action, the email accounts of the

⁶² The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) involves the protection of intellectual property. Its most controversial section dealt with the distribution of copyrighted material via the Internet. Work on ACTA began in 2005. It was accepted by the Council of the European Union in 2011, while the Presidency of the Council was held by Poland. Poland signed ACTA on 26th January, 2012.

⁶³ M. Kamiński, ‘Podsumowanie styczniowych ataków na strony rządowe. Premier chce odrzucenia ACTA!’, 2012, <http://antyweb.pl/podsumowanie-styczniowych-atakow-na-strony-rzadowe-premier-chce-odrzucenia-acta> (March 2012).

Congregation of Marian Fathers were bombarded with emails aimed at drawing attention to Fr. Boniecki's situation.⁶⁴

Other examples of hacking in Poland, not necessarily by members of Anonymous, include a case which made headlines in late 2010. A cyber-activist attacked the websites of the Refugee Council and the State Hydrogeological Services. Earlier, the same individual had been responsible for hacking into the website of the Central Examination Commission. All three websites were paralyzed for several hours. Despite the legal sanctions that such acts entail, the 'culprit' was never punished, for the simple reason that the injured parties never pressed charges.⁶⁵ A further incident showing the distinctive traits of protest in the new, technological age, was an attack on the first day of the school year (1st September) by Internet activists who broke into several hundred local authority websites in Poland.⁶⁶

After people clicked on the Public Information Bulletin link, instead of the information that they were looking for, there appeared a school bus and a note to the effect that schools in Poland teach 'how to consume large quantities of alcohol'. Hackers using the *noms de guerre* 'punkG' and 'hardstyle77' wrote that 'instead of educating young people, Polish schools turn us into something that you could call zombies... At school, you won't learn the allotropes of elements, hydrolysis and other topics in your textbook'. The hackers went on to comment that in Polish schools 'you'll learn to consume large doses of alcohol, smoke weed and use other drugs'. Despite the fact that

⁶⁴ <http://www.anonyops.ssl2.pl/operacje.html>, 2012 (March 2012).

⁶⁵ M. du Vall, 'Nieposłuszeństwo obywatelskie w XXI wieku,' [in:] *Dylematy polskiej demokracji*, ed. Ł. Danel, J. Kornaś, Krakow 2012, p. 200.

⁶⁶ The targets of the attacks were the websites of local authorities, including the county of Żyrardów; the administrative districts (gminy) of Włocławek, Jedlińsk and the towns of Radzymin and Sulejówek. Other victims of the hackers were portals including the Chamber of Nurses and Midwives, the ambulance station in Radom, and the Municipal Library and Cultural Center in Głogów Małopolski. Cf. http://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/artykuly/543645,wielki_atak_hakerow_na_portale_samorzadowe_kilkaset_stron_nie_dziala.html (October 2011).

government and local authority websites are specifically protected by law,⁶⁷ the minimal harm caused by this 'stunt' makes it a classic example of the expression of discontent and protest against the system of education in Poland.⁶⁸

The above examples demonstrate that Poland too has its share of acts of protest, whose authors require access to modern communication technology, sufficient technological and legal knowledge and a level of political awareness. Leaving aside the form that this activism takes, the very fact that it exists can be viewed as a positive sign, which might be a harbinger of a dramatic and permanent growth in political participation in Polish society.

⁶⁷ Information systems essential for national defense, communication security, government and local authority administration and other state bodies are under particular protection. Sabotage of such information is defined as the destruction, damage, or removal of information or the introduction of changes to information relating to command systems, systems essential for the control and supervision of rail and air transport, or other essential information systems of state administration. http://prawo.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/451930,hakerzy_beda_scigani_z_urzedu.html (10.2011).

⁶⁸ M. du Vall, 'Nieposłuszeństwo obywatelskie...', op. cit.

VII. Slacktivists or Activists?

Without doubt, the Internet has changed the nature of people's involvement in various issues. It has allowed activists to express their voice in a way that was impossible until now. The development of social networking sites has meant that the average Internet user can easily participate in various forms of social and civic activism. This can include such actions as signing petitions, uploading information and photographs, recommending content on Facebook etc. Therefore, at a minimal cost of participation they can show their support for social initiatives. This form of support is often mockingly described as 'slacktivism' (a portmanteau of 'slacker' and 'activism'), clicktivism or armchair activism. One click on Facebook or tweet on Twitter and one can feel that one have played a role in an important cause. The logic of such activity is very simple – changing one's avatar to a photograph supporting a particular issue, one tweet or Facebook uploading of a campaign message, or 'like' of a fanpage is considerably easier than real involvement of one's time, money, or practical help.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ D. Basulto (2013), 'Jason Collins and the slacktivism snare', <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/innovations/wp/2013/05/03/jason-collins-and-the-slacktivism-snare> (5.05.2014).

It is worth asking whether it is fair to say that dealing with important questions through the medium of the Internet is a sign of apathy. If this is true, then what can we say of those who do not even do so little? It must be said that many people show indifference to everything in both the real and the virtual world. At least armchair activists do something, spreading information about worthwhile causes, ideas or suggestions. It appears that the activity of slacktivists is not to be totally condemned. In reality, this is a new and powerful form of activism, all the more so as it combines the efforts of many people on the local, regional and even the global scale.

Social media have become an integral part of our life today, and the number of people involved in 'small-scale' actions, such as sharing films on YouTube, renewing their status, or making small contributions of a few dollars by PayPal, is constantly growing. This cannot be seen as a negative trend. The majority of people are not inclined to help a cause unless they can use easily accessible tools – it is more convenient to click a button on a digital puppet for charity than to look for the websites of charitable organizations in order to find their bank details. Internet Users cannot be blamed for becoming involved when a message from the organizers of an event for charity appears on their computer, tablet or smartphone screens. This follows a simple rule of human nature – we do what we can with the resources available. And so, benefitting from easy access to online support, and without the necessity of changing our daily routine, we take up 'challenges.' It seems unjustified to complain and criticize Internet users for this kind of activity, it is unfair that those who seek out and use convenient methods of action should be accused of idleness. It seems more appropriate to focus on ways of creating still more user-friendly and effective methods of promoting online social activism.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ E. Bailyn (2012), 'The Difference Between Slacktivism And Activism: How 'Kony 2012' Is Narrowing The Gap', http://www.huffingtonpost.com/evan-bailyn/kony-2012-activism_b_1361791.html (03.05.2014).

An example of this is the application PandaLajka,⁷¹ created by volunteers to help make charity work more effective by facilitating the management of the profiles of nongovernmental organizations. Using the Internet, they wanted to find the resources to create a new application, but they lacked support, and the campaign, conducted using a crowdfunding service,⁷² did not produce the required results. The problem led to a range of ideas for other more effective forms of promotion which would encourage people to participate. One suggestion seemed to contradict the received idea that the simpler an idea is, the better. What was proposed was that the website should have a link, which would automatically redirect the user to PayPal. This would be nothing new were it not for the fact that the creators of this idea will go to various charities, tablet in hand, and after a brief presentation will encourage people to click on the link on the tablet screen, thus helping lazier individuals by offering them direct support.

As was mentioned earlier, those reaching adulthood today are known as ‘digital natives’, or ‘new generation users’, and are understandably convinced that new technology and permanent access to the Internet can lead to social awareness and confidence that people have the power to influence and change the world around them. Perhaps they exaggerate the potential of technology, considering it to be more effective than traditional street protests. However, today it can be unequivocally stated that for activism to succeed in the real world it needs to be paralleled in the virtual. It cannot be denied that the Internet allows us to discover and learn about social problems which are not to be found in mainstream media. Websites and online social networking services are not only a way of transmitting information, but they also enable direct involvement in world events. Not only is it possible to read and learn about important issues, but we can also

⁷¹ <http://www.pandalajka.pl> (27.05.2014).

⁷² <https://wspieram.to> (27.05.2014).

sign petitions, make donations, register as volunteers by publishing support etc.

Many researchers today are critical of so-called armchair activism. They argue that clicktivism leads to a 'feelgood factor' and a sense of having fulfilled our obligations, whereas in fact our online actions have had no social influence. They claim that the extremely low cost of joining a new Facebook group or clicking like without batting an eyelid can actually prevent us from helping in a more productive way. Many declare that the very action of joining a group or recommending a post or event is often the end, rather than the beginning, of our involvement in an issue. It leads to the conclusion that, in general, online activism is of minor significance.⁷³ In 2008, the website *kampaniespoleczne.pl* published a strong criticism of the trend: "In slacktivism there is more image than action, more laziness than activity and a great deal more self-satisfaction than real results for those in need."⁷⁴

The above shows on the one hand the theoretical views of researchers on the question of online activism, and also the dynamic changes that have taken place in the field of social marketing tools, which were unheard of only a few years ago. Contemporary social activists and members of nongovernmental organizations do not measure the effectiveness of their campaigns by methods and criteria used in commercial marketing. In online actions what is important is reaching the target group, ensuring that the message is remembered, increasing awareness, influencing opinions and encouraging involvement in a given issue, but even the smallest changes, and not necessarily spectacular 'commercial results', are seen as a success. 'Armchair' activists involved in a campaign and spreading information regarding it (forwarding emails, signing petitions, placing information

⁷³ E. Morozov, 'From slacktivism to activism', http://neteffect.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/09/05/from_slacktivism_to_activism (10.05.2014).

⁷⁴ O. Figurska, P. Prochenko (2008), 'Pasywny aktywizm', http://www.kampaniespoleczne.pl/kontrowersje,589,pasywny_aktywizm (12.05.2014).

on their Facebook pages) increase awareness of an action and create the impression that everyone is talking about and participating in it.⁷⁵

The effective actions of Internet activists are intended to attract attention, provoke, and inspire particular target elements of society. They may be organized by small groups of people, but they influence a much greater number of addressees. It seems that attracting attention is not in itself difficult. However, changing fleeting interest into genuine involvement, holding an 'audience' and transforming them into active supporters of change requires much more effort and well-developed communication strategies. In these new forms of social activism, contact, interaction and community are the basic characteristics of the information production process. The dichotomy between information senders and recipients disappears. Nevertheless, the mobilization of people for the sake of an important issue needs a strong message, clear goals and a good plan. Only in this way can online media encourage favorable opinions and behavior.⁷⁶

As they are a reaction of society to existing or newly appeared social problems, information campaigns must, in spite of technological changes, meet three conditions of effectiveness formulated by Lazarsfeld and Merton:⁷⁷ monopolization of information and persuasion (minimalizing counter-propaganda); unchanged basic foundations of the campaign; and the complementing of media information with interpersonal communication, which today uses the Internet as an intermediary. Social awareness campaigns must inform

⁷⁵ N. Hatałska (2011), *Slacktivism – nowy termin, który wchodzi do mojego słownika*, <http://hatalska.com/2011/05/26/slacktivism-nowy-termin-ktory-wchodzi-do-slownika> (10.12.2013).

⁷⁶ M. du Vall, 'Info-aktywizm. Strategie komunikacyjne społecznościów ery cyfrowej', [in:] *Haktywizm. (Cyberterroryzm, haking, protest obywatelski, cyberaktywizm, e-mobilizacja)*, ed. M. Marczeńska-Rytko, Lublin 2014.

⁷⁷ P.F. Lazarsfeld, R.K. Merton, 'Mass communication, popular taste and organized social action', [in:] *The communication of ideas: a series of addresses*, ed. L. Bryson, New York 1948, p. 95–118.

people about the existence of a problem and draw their attention to its scale, awaken their interest in the problem and the threat that it represents (they should be aware that the problem can affect them personally) and inspire particular feelings which will make people undertake certain actions. In the practical sense these aims recall those of the advertising campaign model known as AIDA:

- Attention,
- Interest,
- Desire,
- Action.

Obviously, the effect inspired by a message depends precisely on the addressees. If they are rational and thoughtful, as many Internet users can be considered to be, the campaign should bring about the desired results. It is widely known that the Internet is a democratic medium, where many different information channels can be found, and the digital audience are sufficiently well-educated to vary their behavior depending on which channel they use. An understanding of the different effects of each channel and which kind of message is best suited to particular addressees is an essential factor for the creation of a successful information campaign.⁷⁸

It is worth examining the opinions of critics of online activism, who claim that new technology and the introduction of the rules of commercial marketing into social initiatives is dangerous and threatens the values at the heart of social and civic activism. They argue that this new approach leads to increased cynicism concerning politics and distracts attention from truly important, real problems and radical movements. According to this view, current apathy regarding politics is the result of the replacement of real political criticism and real action with the logic of advertising.⁷⁹ It is difficult to deny that 'clicktivism' is

⁷⁸ M. Joel, *2 terminy, którymi opiszesz świat mediów*, <http://www.hbrp.pl/news.php?id=1071&ct=2-terminy-ktorymi-opiszesz-swiat-mediow> (09.09.2013).

⁷⁹ M. White (2010), 'Clicktivism is ruining leftist activism', <http://www.theguard->

an excellent advertising medium. Nevertheless, it is important to look at the phenomenon from another perspective – out of every hundred people who click on a link out of boredom there is surely at least one who goes on to become involved in an action. Thus it must be said that Internet activism is a healthy trend: it helps to build social capital and encourages cooperation. The Internet and related new technology can allow individuals and whole societies to function in the world economy, from which they have until now been excluded.⁸⁰

New research shows that slacktivism can lead to more active involvement as long as three conditions are fulfilled. Personal opinions and values of Internet users are of cardinal importance. If the actions of organizations or social initiatives reflect the private beliefs of Internet users, then their involvement is likely to increase. Therefore activists wishing to persuade more slacktivists to become more involved should precisely identify the target groups of their communication campaigns. It has also been seen that those whose first act of support was made in private (for example by sending an email to a member of parliament) are more inclined to more serious and demanding forms of later involvement. On the other hand, those whose first support was 'public' (such as a post on Facebook or Twitter) are less likely to become more involved. Among the motives that lead social activists to act on behalf of others, a crucial role is played by psychological factors and internalized values and social norms. It is also worth noting that, as has been seen in numerous psychological studies, initial, seemingly insignificant gestures are often a indication of greater involvement in the future. People like to be consistent, and the majority need steps to go higher.⁸¹

ian.com/commentisfree/2010/aug/12/clicktivism-ruining-leftist-activism (11.05.2014).

⁸⁰ N. Ćwik (2011), 'Knapowi aktywiści', <http://www.proto.pl/artykuly/info?itemId=91748> (10.01.2014).

⁸¹ D. Gzyra (2014), *W świecie, w którym zło jest wszechobecne, widać wyraźnie, ile jest możliwości czynienia dobra*, <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/en/artykuly/opinie/20140515/gzyra-maly-aktywizm-wielu-jest-wielki> (20.05.2014).

The success of every social movement largely depends on its numbers, and nongovernmental organizations need the support of volunteers and donors. In the modern technology age the required scale can be achieved as a result of slacktivists, whom critics accuse of doing nothing, but who provide activists with the momentum for many initiatives. Therefore modern social awareness information campaigns are created in such a way as to attract slacktivists, aiming to provoke, inspire and above all attract attention, often with the result of receiving 'likes' or making content available. More fans, participants in virtual events or recommendations mean a better reputation, more trust and the ability to attract further supporters, and therefore have more influence on decision makers.⁸² Therefore we cannot agree with the definition of slacktivism proposed by UrbanDictionary.com, according to which the phenomenon is the 'act of participating in obviously pointless activities as an expedient alternative to actually expending effort to fix a problem.'⁸³ The activities of armchair activists have an essential influence on changes that are taking place in the contemporary world.

It would be worth reminding the creators of online social awareness campaigns of the 'problem' of slacktivism. They should specify their goals, bearing in mind that social awareness marketing should be adapted to suit the different stages in behavior of the target audience.⁸⁴ At the creation stage of a communication strategy they should carry out a preliminary analysis of the market, and pretest specific elements of the campaign (e.g. visual signs, slogans) and then constantly monitor and evaluate the finished material.

An increasing number of aspects of our lives are being transferred online, and, naturally, actions intended to help others and improve our

⁸² M. du Vall (2014), 'Protest i zmiana w erze nowych mediów', [in:] *Kultury kontestacji – dziedzictwo kontrkultury i nowe ruchy społecznego sprzeciwu*, ed. T. Maślanka, R. Wiśniewski, Warszawa 2014.

⁸³ <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=slacktivism> (28.05.2014).

⁸⁴ In accordance with the psychology of the transtheoretical model of behavior changes.

lives are also frequently occurring in the virtual world. It is important to remember however that social activism on the Internet and via the Internet is not a simple matter. Nevertheless, we should recall the words of Vaclav Havel in the preface to the book by Steve Crashaw and John Jackson, *Small acts of resistance*:

“All my life I have seen many times that small acts of resistance had an incomparably greater influence on reality than anyone had thought at any given moment.”⁸⁵

According to research carried out by the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) in 2012, more than two thirds of adults in Poland (68%) did not participate in groups associated with social or civic activism. More or less one sixth of respondents (17%) declared that they devoted their free time to activities in organizations of this nature.⁸⁶ In total, social activists made up two fifths of all adult citizens.⁸⁷

Similar conclusions can be drawn from a research report entitled *Social involvement in Poland – volunteering, philanthropy, 1% and the image of nongovernmental organizations*, commissioned by the Stowarzyszenie Klon/Javor. The results show that the level of volunteering in Poland has remained at a similar level for several years: approximately one third of the population is in some way active, while the level of ‘formal’ volunteering was 18% in 2013, with 27% declaring that they were involved in offering help to people outside the circle of family and friends. There is a positive correlation between social activism and philanthropic activity, trust of others, belief in cooperation and readiness to rely on the help of others.⁸⁸

However, it must unfortunately be said that formal membership does not always imply active involvement in the activities of an organization.

⁸⁵ <http://www.smallactsofresistance.com/authors> (17.05.2014).

⁸⁶ *Aktywność społeczna w organizacjach obywatelskich*, Komunikat z Badań CBOS BS/18/2012, Warsaw 2012, p. 4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸⁸ *Zaangażowanie społeczne Polek i Polaków – raport 2013*, Stowarzyszenie Klon/Javor, 2014, p. 7.

While one person in eight in Poland declares membership of some organization, often this is merely on paper. Representatives of such organizations declare that, on average, one third are 'virtual' members: despite formal membership, they do not come to meetings, do not pay their dues and have practically no contact with the organization.⁸⁹

Statistics show that low levels of involvement in activities aimed at helping the local community, or of participation in civic organizations, are more common among workers, annuitants, the retired, people dissatisfied with their material situation, the elderly, and those with only primary education.⁹⁰ It is also worth referring to the results of the CBOS report *Internauci 2013* (*Internet Users 2013*), which can see a degree of correlation. According to statistics, the majority of Polish Internet users are to be found among people with secondary or higher education, and less frequent Internet use is reported by workers, especially the unskilled, and farmers. At the same time, relatively often Internet users are individuals with higher incomes, whereas a worse financial situation makes isolation from the Internet more probable.⁹¹

The data mentioned above has remained at a similar level for several years, clearly showing that the level of engagement of contemporary society does not significantly depend on direct actions, as online projects can be equally effective. New technologies and the media can benefit both the needs of organizations and charities, and ordinary Internet users, who prefer convenient forms of action. In this way, the phenomenon that has been called slacktivism should be seen as a natural reflection of trends in the real world, where alongside real activists and supporters there are increasing numbers of 'free riders' who sympathize with movements or organizations but 'at a distance'. In both the real and virtual worlds social and civic activism can be

⁸⁹ J. Przewłocka (2011), 'Kto angażuje się w działania trzeciego sektora', <http://wiadomosci.ngo.pl/wiadomosci/668210.html> (27.05.2014).

⁹⁰ *Aktywność społeczna w organizacjach obywatelskich*, op. cit., p. 4.

⁹¹ *Internauci 2013*, CBOS research report, BS/75/2013, Warsaw 2013, p. 1–3.

found in similar social groups, and involvement fluctuates at about 30% both online and in the physical world. Just as actions in the real world do not mobilize large crowds, so too the basic role of online events is to generate small scale effects, expressed through the number of recommendations and uploads. Thanks to such online advertising the message has a greater possibility of reaching those who are truly interested in the issues raised and are looking for a community where there is the possibility of becoming involved in concrete action. In this process we can see a chain reaction.

The results of the above analysis are basically unambiguous. Firstly, it is clear that the development of new media and modern communication technology are opening hitherto unknown and unimagined possibilities for social and also political participation. There is no doubt that one of the positive features of this expansion is the growth of individual political awareness, which in turn leads to increased activity in areas which until recently were the interest of a small minority. In particular, new technology has led to a positive change in the participation of young people, whose previous attitude to current affairs was observed to be one of apathy and lack of interest. It is worth noting that this change is taking place at this very moment; as we speak, passivity is being transformed into activeness, with a definite role being played by new technology. Furthermore, this trend is not limited to rich countries such as those of the so-called 'Old European Union', or other wealthy Western democracies. It is also to be seen in countries which until recently were democracies in name only, and where the level of wealth of the societies would not have suggested widespread access to new technology.

VIII. We all are hackers

Progressive technical solutions are the momentum for modern, constantly developing societies which benefit from the almost unlimited potential offered by participation in the global Internet community. The revolutionary spark of the Internet is to be found in its particularly open structure, which allows for the inclusion of increasing numbers of new elements.⁹² The rapid pace of technological change and the exponential growth of Internet use are creating a 'new reality' where we can pool our knowledge, computer performance, channel capacity and other resources, thus enabling the creation of a wide range of free goods and services based on the open-source model, allowing free use and modification by everyone.⁹³

As social life in to some extent being transferred to the Internet, we can see the appearance of more and more examples of online group activities. This chapter will show and briefly describe some selected positive examples of the possibilities offered by the virtual world to

⁹² W. Musiał, 'Społeczeństwo obywatelskie – nowe technologie, rewolucja cyfrowa, Internet', [in:] *Samotność idei?...*, p. 198.

⁹³ D. Tapscott, A.D. Williams, *Wikinomia. O globalnej współpracy, która zmienia wszystko*, Warsaw 2008, p. 29.

create new things, make a difference, and offer advice and support, on the premise that the Internet offers a domain for interested and sometimes completely disinterested actions for the benefit of other users and for the common good.

As was indicated in the previous chapter, hacking, understood in the strict sense, is a material practice which changes technology. Thus hackers are intensively involved in the changes that technology makes in society and the influence of society on technology. Their methods and actions, often involving an element of risk, constantly change the Internet environment. In this sense, hacking should be defined as a series of interactions and material practices which create the techniques of hacking and are part of them, resulting in a community of scattered individuals.⁹⁴

Today the term 'hacking' needs clarification, if only because it is mostly evokes negative associations which distort its true nature. The most common perception of a hacker is that of a person who uses their high level of programming skills and exceptional understanding of the Internet to break the rules of online etiquette or 'netiquette'. According to Erickson, hacking is often associated with 'electronic vandalism' or spying, and hackers are usually seen as breaking the law, as criminals.⁹⁵ In addition, contemporary hacking is no longer the exclusive domain of programmers, and we have seen the appearance of hacking methods and ethics in an environment that Jordan describes as 'non-hacking'.⁹⁶

It can be said that hacking is nothing other than creating something new or perfecting what already exists. This understanding of hacking does not necessarily refer to computers and the Internet, nor does hacking require cutting-edge technology.⁹⁷ A hacker can be a carpenter or a practitioner of DIY, e.g. changing old toys, an old radio or a broken

⁹⁴ T. Jordan, *Hakerstwo*, Warsaw 2011, p. 57, p. 87.

⁹⁵ J. Erickson, *Hacking: the art of exploitation*, San Francisco 2008, p. 15.

⁹⁶ T. Jordan, op. cit.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 21–22.

Walkman into a new electronic musical instrument.⁹⁸ Therefore it must be said that the definition in the encyclopedia *Gazeta Prawna*, which states that a hacker is 'a person with a very high level of practical information technology skills, distinguished by a knowledge of many programming languages, excellent knowledge of operating systems and a very good understanding of the Internet'⁹⁹ is not adequate and does not describe the scale and form of the trend known as hacking.

Today the term hacking should be used to describe a phenomenon which embodies the fundamental values of the online community: passion, freedom, social awareness, openness, activeness, care and creativity.¹⁰⁰ It may be said that in the course of the creation of any kind of knowledge (in art, science, philosophy, culture etc.), wherever data can be stored and information gathered, presenting new opportunities for the world, there will always be hackers hacking new things from old.¹⁰¹

The development of new technology and increased (or even unlimited) access to the Internet have led to significantly greater possibilities of using the tactics and ideas associated with hacking.¹⁰² It has been noticed that they can be adapted for more than computers and the Internet. This fact has profound social consequences, and is relevant to the core questions of information societies. The online environment provides a perfect platform for the activities of all agents, whether charitable organizations, people with hobbies, business groups etc. It also ensures a space for new mechanisms offering

⁹⁸ An example might be classes/ workshops for children called *DIY 2.0. Let's hack electronic toys* (*Majsterkowanie 2.0. Hackujemy zabawki elektroniczne*). More on: http://lovekrakow.pl/wydarzenie/majsterkowanie-2.0-hackujemy-zabawki-elektroniczne_1446.html (20.08.2012).

⁹⁹ <http://www.gazetaprawna.pl/encyklopedia/prawo/hasla/332774,haker.html> (20.08.2012).

¹⁰⁰ T. Jordan, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁰¹ W. McKenzie, *A Hacker Manifesto*, Cambridge 2004, p. 3–4; T. Jordan, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁰² The ethical aspects of hacking are discussed at length in A. Harper, *Gray hat hacking: the ethical hacker's handbook*, New York, 2011, p. 693.

scattered individuals the possibility of centralized cooperation strategies. In such a system success is achieved incrementally, through the accumulation of often small acts performed by many people, who independently decide what interests them.¹⁰³ Crucially, it is possible to join this 'digital community' at relatively low cost (it is enough to have a computer connected to the internet and a little initiative and creativity) making such activity even more of an attraction.¹⁰⁴ Castells declares that the components of this kind of network are both autonomous and dependent on the network, and can be the elements of other networks, and so of other systems with different goals. The actual functioning of the network depends on two basic attributes: its ability to connect and its coherence, i.e. the degree to which the goals of the network and its particular elements interlock.¹⁰⁵

Observing the interaction between Internet users, we can notice that in situations, where the relations are casual and short-term, and also in long-term, relatively stable connections, there is a strong tendency to demonstrate behavior that can be described as altruistic, reciprocal and cooperative. Reciprocal relations of this sort have a connecting role in the Internet.¹⁰⁶ The effectiveness of following the principle of reciprocity online stems above all from the ability to postpone an eventual profit. This people offer help in situations where they do not expect the favor to be returned (or at least this is not of cardinal importance for them). Not only does such behavior have a positive effect on the self-esteem of the 'giver' but at the same time it allows him to accumulate social capital consisting of recognition, prestige, a favorable position in the community and a feeling of security resulting from the conviction that in helping others we can rely on their help when we need it. On the basis of these reciprocal relations

¹⁰³ Y. Benkler, *Bogactwo sieci. Jak produkcja społeczna zmienia rynki i wolność*, Warsaw 2008, p. 78–79.

¹⁰⁴ D. Tapscott, A.D. Williams, op. cit., p. 29–30.

¹⁰⁵ M. Castells, *Spółczesność sieci*, Warsaw 2008, p. 179.

¹⁰⁶ J. Bierówka, *Zasada wzajemności w społeczeństwie informacyjnym*, Kraków 2009, p. 123–124.

individuals acting online create personalized networks based on trust, solidarity, belief in equality, community and mutual obligations, but without a formal organization.¹⁰⁷

It is a fact that today the Internet resembles a self-help tool. It gives citizens the possibility to act for the benefit of their communities or to organize around important issues. As is the case in the real world, virtual communities are founded by and composed of people who are connected by common interests, goals or problems.¹⁰⁸ The issues which are at the center of the activities of online communities are extremely varied and in a state of constant development. They give people the opportunity to contact others to ask for information, advice or help. Internet technology is perfect for facilitating communication between people. Based on the principle of reciprocity, it is possible to assume that if someone has had to deal with a problem, they will wish to help others and propose ready solutions which others will be able to improve further.¹⁰⁹

It must be born in mind that our changing world requires those functioning in it to possess a high degree of adaptability. The pace of change and the demands relating to reaction time are increasing rapidly. Thanks to 'Internet time' and 'Internet speed', transformations which used to take whole years now happen in months. However, rapid technological changes increase the need to initiate new ways of learning for individuals, organizations and society as a whole. In such conditions new meaning is attached to reciprocal relations and associations based on cooperation and mutual benefits.¹¹⁰ On the other hand we must be aware that now, at the beginning of the 21st century, there is a new generation of young adults for whom reaping

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 125.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁰⁹ P. Wyszomirski, *iStypendium.pl, jako przykład hackingu obywatelskiego?*, [http://blog.istypendium.pl/2010/10/istypendiumpl-jako-przykad-hackingu.html](http://blog.istypendium.pl/2010/10/istypendiumpl-jako-przyklad-hackingu.html) (21.08.2012).

¹¹⁰ *Co to jest wiedza 3G*, <http://www.wiedza3g.pl/arttykul/pokaz/34///2.html> (21.08.2012).

the benefits of modern technology is entirely natural, as we have seen in the earlier part of the book.

Our everyday hacking is nothing other than the facilitating of social and economic progress. It has long been known that grass-roots, interconnected actions have the power to change the world and have an influence on the lives of others, thanks to such factors as direct contact between givers and receivers of help and support, based on the principle of reciprocity. Today we can see increasing interaction and continuous development in communication, associated with the growth of the Internet society. This multitude of mutual relations diminishes the risk of isolation and fear, and can help overcome individual egoism. Increased contact between people leads to a greater number of shared initiatives, and greater mutual trust. Changing the world around us and exerting an influence on it is a liberating action for the individual, giving free rein to their potential. It combines two natural human needs: on the one hand freedom of individual action, and, on the other, the freedom to join our efforts with the efforts of others and work together with them. We will examine the ways in which the Internet is used for improving one's personal situation, solving problems (of various magnitude) and finding business partners, donors and sponsors.

In everyday life the majority of people face various problems. These are not problems of national importance or caused by the ineffectiveness of governments, etc. We are thinking of minor, sometimes seemingly trivial questions, such as filling in our tax forms, finding a good school for our child, using a new telephone, choosing a career or starting a new business (and lacking capital and sufficient knowledge). These are mundane problems, obstacles to overcome. The best way of solving these problems is to find someone who has already done so and persuade them to help. In such a situation the Internet is a perfect instrument for finding solutions and help. It is the greatest collection of knowledge that has ever existed. It enables the accumulation of scattered information and makes it available for

everyone who has a little ability and access to the Web. It facilitates ways of harnessing its communicative advantages so as to help individuals to overcome their personal challenges.¹¹¹

One of the most common and rapidly developing online trends is that of social shopping, in which people look for comments on the Internet regarding products which they intend to buy. A decision is made whether or not to buy based on the opinion of the online community. Social shopping represents a natural stage in the evolution of two rapidly developing aspects of the Internet: e-shopping and online community activities. On portals designed for social shopping there are product reviews written by people who are not anonymous and with whom we can compare ourselves using tags specifying the shopper's age, address and, above all, interests; taken together, these details describe a person's lifestyle. This situation recalls one where our best friend recommends a good face cream: here, an online acquaintance suggests the best choice of mobile phone.¹¹²

The same principle underpins the way many online communities 'meet', for example on internet forums, where members look for solutions to everyday problems, such as advice on how to fill in a tax form, discuss problems at home, advise each other on the best choice of afterschool lessons and activities for their children etc. It is important to indicate that not every kind of 'activity' can be viewed positively. There are very many controversies regarding online forums offering medical advice. Everyone must at some time have looked for information regarding diseases, symptoms and treatment on the Internet. What shocks specialists, especially in the medical profession, is that this trend can lead to a situation where those suffering from an illness diagnose and often treat themselves, following the advice of well-intentioned people on an online forum or workers from

¹¹¹ J. Crabtree, 'Civic hacking: a new agenda for e-democracy', http://www.open-democracy.net/media-edemocracy/article_1025.jsp (23.08.2012).

¹¹² http://technoblog.gazeta.pl/blog/1,84942,5811091,Social_shopping_po_polsku.html (24.08.2012).

a medical website. Of course, this approach may be helpful, but it is equally probable that it can seriously harm the patient.¹¹³

However, let us return to the positive aspects of hacking in the online community. When we lack ideas, for instance in business or for a social, advertising or political campaign, we can avail of the information on internet forums or social networking sites, and look for inspiration from ‘the crowd’, i.e. the suggestions of ordinary people using the Internet. Crowdsourcing does not limit anyone and allows everyone to present their views. It is a means of allowing cooperation in the process of creating and encouraging action, and so it is a further example of hacking. This method is used by many marketing and public relations firms, corporations and politicians. There are many interesting examples of this in Poland. In particular, there are two campaigns involving banks, the first being Bank Zachodni WBK and the second, Bank Millennium. The first project, using an ‘idea bank’ and working together with four bloggers, enabled clients to cooperate in designing the brand by being commenters, initiators and innovators. The second idea involved choosing the best advertisement for Bank Millennium, created and assessed by clients via YouTube. In both cases the banks truly benefitted from coming into contact with their clients, while also making significant savings and gaining a valuable source of ideas.¹¹⁴

There is a particular example of the creation of a special market of ideas – ideagoras.¹¹⁵ According to Tapscott, they should be considered virtual stalls in a new global market hall where ideas are exchanged. In this way, one virtual space (somewhat resembling an eBay of innovative

¹¹³ M. Majorek, ‘Jakość informacji medycznej w internetowych portalach tematycznych’, paper delivered at the academic conference *Człowiek Zalogowany*, Kraków 13–15 January 2012. The conference program is available at: <http://www.czlowiekszalogowany.pl/?page=plan> (2.09.2012).

¹¹⁴ *Czym jest crowdsourcing*, <http://manager.wieszjak.pl/zarzadzanie-zespolem/305965,Czym-jest-crowdsourcing.html> (25.08.2012).

¹¹⁵ The term refers to the tradition of the Greek agora, where people met to have discussions, buy and sell, and make decisions together.

solutions) contains huge collections of talents. We can find genuine innovators much more easily, which in turn has a revolutionary influence on research and development processes. Ideagoras reduce the costs of communication, cooperation and transactions.¹¹⁶ With the help of internet platforms, scientists can present the results of their work and research, share their knowledge and ideas, and even find partners or investors for their projects.

If on the other hand we have an idea for an interesting cultural, social or business project, but cannot afford to realize it, we can use other forms of civic hacking, namely crowdfunding. This involves raising money for charity where the capital is ensured by both a wide online community and also our friends and acquaintances, who all wish to support a creative idea. Many small donations can make up a large sum, which can enable someone to fulfil their dreams, start a business, organize interesting events, or help those in need. The funds raised in this way can vary from a few hundred zloty to even several million. In exchange, donors are offered unique prizes (tickets, meetings, gadgets), products, services, or also a stake in the business.¹¹⁷ There are several crowdfunding portals in Poland,¹¹⁸ with various aims and results. Until now, the development of this method of online support has been limited by legislation. Firstly, there is the law on public collections which forbids certain entities to raise funds via the Internet, and secondly the regulation of the capital market, which does not permit shares and other such assets to be sold online.¹¹⁹ Websites, blogs and fanpages on social portals created by the parents of sick children, foundations and associations, are a particular example of crowdfunding. Thanks to the use of internet technology, individuals and organizations can reach large numbers of people and interact

¹¹⁶ D. Tapscott, A. D. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 148–149, 179.

¹¹⁷ <http://crowdfunding.pl/crowdfunding-faq/#.UDvrKmTtR4> (25.08.2012).

¹¹⁸ For example: polakpotrafi.pl (creative projects), siepomaga.pl (charity projects).

¹¹⁹ <http://crowdfunding.pl/crowdfunding-w-polsce/#.UDgJ5MGtR5> (25.08.2012).

with them, so that funds for therapy etc. can be transferred to the bank accounts of those institutions that care for those in need. This type of activity is closely related to e-charity, i.e. making donations using the Internet. Sometimes this involves making payments to help organizations or initiatives (such as the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity), whereas in other cases no financial contribution is required – it is enough to click on an icon on a website (e.g. the Puppet of the Polish Humanitarian Action).¹²⁰

The appearance of new possibilities for creativity and entrepreneurship in modern society is the result of a type of combination in one person of the roles of producer and consumer. This combination leads to the prosumer, who is aware of their needs, interested in novelty, and demanding. This compels producers active on the market to enter into dialogue with the consumer and change their brand. Today every organization or company must be flexible and adapt quickly to a changing environment, and anticipate trends rather than simply follow them. Furthermore, regarding business, we must remember that today the life cycle of a product has been considerably reduced, which means that there is less time to find innovative solutions with a gap in the market. Traditionally, decisions concerning the form of a new product were made by groups of hired specialists. In the 21st century it is becoming increasingly obvious that it is more effective to ask consumers about their needs and observe their behavior, and on this basis create, change or perfect a product.¹²¹ One Polish example of the use of prosumers' attitudes can be seen in the campaign by the fruit juice company Tybark, which used the memorable slogan 'open your imagination'.¹²² Offering numerous

¹²⁰ Further examples of e-charity actions can be found at: <http://www.e-volunteering.eu/5-Edobroczynnosc> (2.09.2012).

¹²¹ *Prosument – konsument przyszłości*, <http://www.egospodarka.pl/38121,Prosument-konsument-przyszlosci,1,20,2.html> (2.09.2012); Cf: D. Tapscott, A.D. Williams, op. cit., s. 183–218.

¹²² A film promoting the Tybark campaign is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUS0JmN-qUo> (2.09.2012).

prizes, Tymbark encouraged customers to create an advertising slogan, make a short film, design a label and a poster, and also develop a new flavor. It could be said that customers were recruited to create almost all aspects of the brand.¹²³

An example of the non-commercial use of the idea of civic hacking was the initiative of the Central Office of the Lesser Poland Voivodeship in 2012, entitled 'My idea for Lesser Poland. The initiative attracted the interest of tens of thousands of people all over the country, who shared their ideas for developing the strategy of the Lesser Poland Voivodeship up to 2020.¹²⁴

There is a further example of civic hacking – startups. These can be in support of entrepreneurs who are setting up a business, or they can help social enterprises which are the initiatives of public benefit organizations.

New technologies facilitate a hitherto unseen degree of cooperation for every kind of company, regardless of its size, and also for public benefit organizations looking for people with special qualifications and who can solve particular problems. The Internet is also an excellent instrument enabling companies to communicate with employees and other companies with appropriate knowledge and support.

There is a lack of consensus in the subject literature regarding the definition of a startup. In the section of his webpage dealing with the topic, Maciej Oleksy lists the four most popular explanations of this concept:¹²⁵

1. A startup is a business enterprise set up by people in a high-risk sector of the market. The degree of risk is related to the fact that the company creates unusual products or services.
2. A startup is a new Internet service launched by a group of IT enthusiasts (so-called 'geeks'). Its value is mainly in its idea.

¹²³ <http://crowdfunding.pl/2010/10/05/odkapsluj-wyobraznie-crowdsourcing-w-tymbarku/#.UDkF6cGTtR4> (24.08.2012).

¹²⁴ The project website is: <http://www.pomyslnamalopolske.pl> (2.09.2012).

¹²⁵ <http://wrocamp.com>. Wszystko o startupach (2.09.2012).

3. A startup is a young company, which has only recently entered the market and has yet to win clients and achieve profitability. The difference in relation to the previous definition is that such firms are not necessarily in the area of information technology.
4. A startup is a group of people who work with the help of business incubators and financial investors.

Using knowledge associated with hacking, we can accept a simple definition of a startup and describe it as a new company, which has the potential to succeed because of its innovative character, but at first it needs financial or intellectual support from experienced, wealthier firms. For this purpose, internal networks and cooperative relations are created online, which quickly enable new ideas to be verified, tested and implemented, with the help of the experience of others. In general, it can be said that this process involves connecting creative innovators with experienced private investors. There are many online portals¹²⁶ that specialize in offering support to innovative enterprises in Poland, containing lists of mentors and databases of startups, organizing events,¹²⁷ and publishing reviews of new companies.

A public benefit startup, on the other hand, focuses on increasing the activism and involvement of citizens, and in order to do so, it avails of the support of 'donors', i.e. external partners, who provide financial and other backing. The primary aim is usually to create an Internet portal dealing with social problems, containing information regarding decisions that have been taken, facilitating fundraising etc. What is particularly important is technological support, which is readily provided by companies from the information technology

¹²⁶ E.g. <http://mamstartup.pl>, <http://labstar.wp.pl>, <http://www.brainville.pl/startupy>, <http://startuplab.pl> et al.

¹²⁷ An example of this is Startup Fest (which was organized for the third time in 2012) – a one-day event, where the most innovative startup entrepreneurs present their projects to mentors. They can receive advice regarding their ideas from experts in the field. The best startup wins an award worth 50 thousand zloty and an advertising campaign in the web service of the group Gazeta.pl.

sector, creating services and administering websites. It may be said that a public benefit startup is an enterprise which uses new technology to help those who are suffering or excluded, and to create a civic society of the information age. More broadly, public benefit startups offer a platform combining the influence of companies and nongovernmental organizations with the aim of creating shared value – important for society, beneficial to the organizations that are helped, and at the same time ensuring companies considerable advantages, going beyond public relations and advertising. For companies this form of cooperation provides an opportunity to reach new groups of consumers, who have so far been excluded from ‘normal’ markets, while for these excluded groups, they can fulfil their expectations and benefit from services which were not previously offered to them.¹²⁸

An account of Internet social activism cannot omit an essential theme, namely online volunteering. This form of volunteering involves carrying out actions in part or entirely outside the premises of a public benefit organization, using the Internet at home, at school, in an Internet café, or at work, or via other devices connected to the Internet. Virtual volunteering resembles teleworking, the difference being that instead of online employees, duties are performed by online volunteers who do not receive remuneration from profit-making organizations, but who work for charities, schools, as part of government programs or for public benefit organizations.¹²⁹

The above examples of the harnessing of new technology and hacking ideas in order to influence the behavior of individuals and communities are only some of the possibilities that are now available to the active member of the information society. Modern technology offers a feeling of freedom of choice (for example, the ability to change employment, choose a career, or express oneself) through practically unlimited access to information and free communication. What

¹²⁸ J. Przewłocka, K. Piłat, ‘NGO i biznes: przełamać dystans’, <http://wiadomosci.ngo.pl/wiadomosci/777935.html> (2.09.2012).

¹²⁹ More on this at: <http://www.e-wolontariat.pl> (2.09.2012).

is also a crucial matter is the adaptation of our surroundings to our needs, through the personalization of products; today, we can change our whole media environment – the icons on our desktop, our home page, ringtone, nick,¹³⁰ screensaver, news source and entertainment. Millions of people worldwide constantly change their websites by modifying their content (this is true for the whole digital world, from our own e-mail accounts to government websites). A further issue is that of the transparency associated with access to information on every issue, whether social, economic or political. People in the Internet society are aware of their powerful influence and know that they can demand more from producers, employers and also from the political elites of their countries. Increasingly often, their decisions depend on the trustworthiness and openness of the ‘messenger’.¹³¹

Considering hacking, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of cooperation and gaining contacts. The Internet naturally complements human interaction. The communicative dimension of the Web enables and even encourages individuals to contribute personally to the collective medium. As a result, information processes and the social organization that is formed around them are both collective and individualistic. The openness of the Internet allows people to connect with the global flow of information, while at the same time introducing new content in real time. Today most of us cooperate with each other on social portals, play computer games designed for many participants, send endless text messages, upload files and enjoy social shopping (as shown by the popularity of such services as Allegro.pl). Internet users influence one another through websites where they express their opinions, such as forums and also chatrooms where ideas are exchanged in real time. It is well known that the flow of information today through networks spanning huge distances takes place at enormous speed, and so communication with friends and colleagues is now at a dizzying pace. It is also for this reason, as we have

¹³⁰ ‘Nick’, or ‘nickname’, refers to the pseudonym or user name of Internet users.

¹³¹ A.D. Tapscott, *op. cit.*, p. 84–86.

mentioned earlier, that the pace of change and the need to react quickly are rapidly increasing. 'Internet time' and 'internet speed' mean that changes that in the past would take whole years can occur in months. This affects the rate of innovation and it is becoming the norm to look for new possibilities of cooperation, of spending leisure time, of broadening our knowledge or organizing our work.¹³² It is therefore certain that as a result of the possibilities offered by new technology, and in particular the Internet, social interaction and traditional understood ties between individuals are changing fundamentally. The role of the state is being weakened, and there are significantly more possibilities for greater and more varied involvement on the part of citizens in social, economic and political matters.¹³³

The Internet is a place where everyone can find something for themselves. We can surf¹³⁴ online for many reasons: to look for information, entertainment, friends, love, work or goods. The Internet is an unlimited source of information, created by all users and for all users. The Internet itself, like the resources it contains, follows non-linear rules : "This means that it was not created to complete one particular task. It is not switched on and off like other devices, but functions permanently, constantly reacting to the influences of the environment, or the input of new users."¹³⁵ However, we can browse online material in fragments, unlike films shown in the cinema or on television. Viewers decide for themselves how they wish to absorb the content.

There is no doubt that hacking represents a force for progress for modern societies, and hacking is something natural for almost all of us, even though we are often unaware of this. Using the possibilities offered by modern technology, we can perfect many everyday devices, look for solutions for many issues, both those which are insignificant

¹³² Ibid., p. 87–88.

¹³³ J. Wojniak, *Obywatel w społeczeństwie informacji...*, p. 186–187.

¹³⁴ Surf – spend time looking at websites.

¹³⁵ P. Górecki, 'Jak www życiu', *Newsweek* 2008, No. 29, p. 64–65.

and those which are truly important. Passion, freedom, social values, openness, activeness, care and creativity are natural characteristics of the Internet society of today. These traits are crucial for understanding the changes which are taking place in the contemporary world and are essential for the development of the civic society of the 21st century.

Instead of the end

New technologies are in every nook and cranny of society and politics, and are an important factor influencing civic participation in public life. We live in times when it is not possible to avoid technological innovations, and information has become the center of social life and the determinant of all social activity. The conclusions to be drawn from this are basically unambiguous. Firstly, it is clear that the development of new media and modern forms of communication has opened up hitherto unknown areas for social and political participation. There is no doubt that one of the positive characteristics of this expansion is greater political awareness of individuals, which leads to their increased activity in areas which until now were of interest to only a small minority. This change has been observed among young people in particular: earlier, their typical attitude to current affairs was one of apathy and lack of interest, but this has undergone a positive change because of the influence of technology. It is worth noting that this change is taking place at this very moment; as we speak, we see passivity changing into activeness, with an undeniable role being played by new information technology.

The new type of communication system leads to the creation of what is called 'real virtuality'. This means that everything that exists is also a creation, since it is seen through the prism of symbols whose meaning avoids literal interpretation and logical, formal understanding. Real virtuality can be defined as a system where human existence has been immersed in a world of artificially created images. What is more, such images are not merely an illustration of real human experiences, but rather become an essential element of them.

Castells notes the integrating role of the system created by the media, with the Internet decidedly at the forefront. The new dimension of the functioning of the media is significantly different to what society was accustomed to as a result of the limited number of channels with one message offered by 'traditional' mass media. The current increase in the variety of media, addressed to specified recipients and adapted to the needs of a particular audience, would not be possible without new technology. As a result, despite the existence of influential media corporations, media market segmentation is still possible. Furthermore, interactive broadcasting is becoming increasingly common, with the subsequent elimination of uniform standards of the sort that were predominant in the mass media in previous decades.¹

The significance of the media is also to be seen in the political sphere, and has been analyzed in the second part of this work. The media are an essential space for conducting politics in the information age. As one of the main sources of information, they are a fundamental element in forming political opinions and behavior. It would be unimaginable for political parties or candidates to distance themselves from the media, thus consciously dismissing a possibility of communicating with society. The increasing popularity of new technology in this area is associated to a great extent with the appearance of alternative sources of information, in addition to the mass media. Their weakness may be the sometimes shallow nature of their content. It cannot be

¹ J. Borja, M. Castells, *Local and Global: The Management of Cities in the Information Age*, London 1997.

denied however, that the unique quality of new media, especially the Internet, is that they limit, and sometimes completely eliminate (often to the discomfort of certain governments) any possibility of control over the flow of information.²

In addition, as has been shown in the third part of this book, the development of information technology has led to the medium being used on a large scale by various activists in order to transmit their message to a wide audience and to popularize their ideas. Since the Internet is an electronic highway, it is not only seen as a space for communication and information but also as an instrument of expression for a large section of society.³ The use of new technology greatly increases the level of civic involvement. It improves political effectiveness, raises the level of social and political awareness and gives citizens a sense of control over the activities of political elites.⁴

Today, it can be said that new communication technologies are the momentum behind the development of modern society. Nevertheless, analyzing the nature and scale of the use of new media in social and political activism presents certain difficulties, which result from the workings of the contemporary political sphere. This leads to the question as to whether today's media still play the role of the 'fourth estate'. In other words, are they an element of society's regulation of political power, or have they now become part of that power?⁵ The concept of a 'fourth estate' implies that it is 'a self-regulated system serving the public good',⁶ which above all requires journalistic independence. However 'democracy needs something more. It needs public debate

² M. Castells, 'Grassrooting the Space of flows', [in:] J.O. Wheeler, B. Warf, *Cities in the telecommunications age: the fracturing of geographies*, New York 2000.

³ M. Majorek, J. Wojniak, 'Partia Piratów jako egzemplifikacja ewolucji ruchów społeczno-politycznych', [in:] *Współczesna przestrzeń polityczna. Ewolucja czy rewolucja?*, ed. M. du Vall, M. Majorek, A. Walecka-Rynduch, Kraków 2011.

⁴ J. Wojniak, *Globalizacja...*, op. cit.

⁵ S. Mocek, 'Media a społeczeństwo obywatelskie: od teorii do praktyki', *Global Media Journal – Polish Edition*, 2007, No. 1 (3).

⁶ P. Legutko, D. Rodziewicz, *Mity czwartej władzy. Dla widzów, słuchaczy i czytaczy*, Warsaw 2011, p. 8.

conducted in a language that is comprehensible for most citizens with various opinions and various levels of education?⁷ Such constructive debate exist if several basic conditions are met. "Firstly, the majority of participants and spectators of this debate must recognize the same fundamental values, which public, and especially political activity must promote. Secondly, there must be a common language (at least partly) for frank discussion of public issues. Thirdly, all parties must be able to know the same facts, data, events, and opinions which are essential for understanding the subjects of political debate, the actions of the government, and the what the issue is about in general."⁸

The above considerations clearly suggest that we are living in an information revolution, characterized by impressive growth of various forms of interactive participation. There is no doubt that this phenomenon is facilitated by the development of the Internet, which has significantly changed the media landscape and is giving rise to the creation of new communication strategies and areas of social dialogue.

The information revolution age is characterized by the phenomenon of indirect, mediatized communication leading to the creation of a mediated society. This term implies both the concept of an information society (with regard to content) and an Internet society concerning its form.⁹ The form is highly emphasized here, but both aspects, information and network, i.e. form and content, are equally important and intricately connected by a chain of mutual relations.

The revolution taking place in the domain of information is basically considered to be a desirable trend, because of the possibilities of development offered to the individual, wider groups of people, and society as a whole. The positive elements of the information revolution include less hierarchy in society, decentralization, globalization, and

⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Goban-Klass, op. cit.

new development possibilities.¹⁰ The dawn of the information society was greeted with considerable enthusiasm in academic circles, among the leaders of the world economy and by key political figures, and it was viewed as a vector for progress in various areas of social life. New information and communication technologies were seen as a force for the transformation of political life and the world economy, helping to lay the foundations for more balanced development. There were and still are today many enthusiasts who place technology on a pedestal and dismiss any reservations others might have regarding the future of technology. Arguments such as these are based on acceptance of the principle of the neutrality of technology, and on the conviction that the dynamic spread of information and communication technology leads to profound social, political and economic transformation with generally positive consequences.

This view of the information revolution is not limited to the sphere of technology and therefore other aspects should also be considered. While the communication process in principle has a place in specified parameters of time and space, the expansion of new technology somewhat modifies these parameters. Despite this, new technologies have not displaced traditionally understood physical or temporal distance. On the contrary, it seems that temporal and spatial determinants offer greater, hitherto unconsidered possibilities for new information and communication technologies. Moreover, new media can provide a unique bridge between two forms of communication, on the one hand communicating face to face, and on the other, using a particular medium.¹¹ The innovative potential of technology does not lie exclusively in the replacement of direct, face-to-face communication with its online equivalent, but rather in the prospects and opportunities that appear at the point of contact of these two forms, and above all in the possibilities of choosing between them, in order to undertake and realize different forms of social activity.

¹⁰ N. Negroponte, *Essere digitali*, Milan 1999.

¹¹ J. van Dijk, *The Network Society: Social Aspects of New Media*, London 1999.

New information technologies, described in this book, have had an undeniable influence on the growth of individual participation in the public sphere. This participation and the opportunities and space offered it by new information and communication technologies have been the subject of the discussion in this work.

Online communities functioning today allow considerable possibilities for initiatives of a collective nature, and their increasing availability and low participation cost help so-called ordinary citizens to find information regarding the most important political questions. In this way, the Internet is an instrument of political socialization. On the other hand, the existence of opinion forums of this kind is an attractive development from the perspective of political elites. Governments, political leaders and opinion makers can monitor social moods and undertake initiatives meeting the expectations of society, while the issues raised by members of the electronic society can be incorporated into the campaign programs of rival candidates.

It can therefore be concluded that increased access to new information and communication technologies will continue to raise the level of civic activism. The Internet creates new possibilities for civic and political freedom. The development of new instruments and communication technologies leads to the concept of e-democracy, which arises from the notion of greater online civic awareness. The aim of e-democracy is the highest possible degree of emancipation of citizens and increasing their awareness of their potential. Electronic democracy can strengthen citizen participation in the broader political decision-making process, making it more direct and transparent. Enthusiasts of the influence of information technology on democracy are convinced that it will protect the world from future dictatorships, the creation of closed societies.

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