Social network services as tools for online and offline activism: the case of Egymillióan a Magyar Sajtószabadságért (One Million for the Freedom of Press in Hungary)

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate activism in an online environment, with a focus on assessing the social implications of the Internet, and especially the potential of the Internet for mobilization through social network sites. A major instance of collective action in Hungary 2010 was the 'One Million for the Freedom of Press in Hungary' (EMS), which played an exceptionally important role in how the citizenry reacted to the political changes the country has been going through since the inception of the Conservative government of Viktor Orbán (2010-present). In my study I ask the following questions: in what ways do social networking sites shape new forms of participation? How does EMS function as an arena for discussion and debate and as a tool for organizing protests? In addressing the questions, I primarily rely on content analysis.

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List of abbreviations

DDoS - Distributed denial of service

EMS - One Million for the Freedom of Press in Hungary
(Egymillióan a Magyar Sajtószabadságért, EMS)

ECD - Electronic Civil Disobedience

EFJ - The European Federation of Journalists

ICT - Information and communications technology

IMC - Independent media centre

SMO - Social movement organization

SNS - Social network sites

Introduction

On December 21, 2010, the Hungarian parliament passed a new Media Law. The piece of legislation had been previously criticized by multiple Hungarian and international actors as well, because of the possible detrimental effect it would have on press freedom, as it established a national media authority with unprecedented powers over print, broadcast and online news media. Nevertheless, the governing party of Hungary managed to push the law through, using its two-thirds majority. Just a few hours later, a group was created by a well-known Hungarian activist on the social media platform Facebook with the name 'One Million for the Freedom of Press in Hungary', urging people who do not agree with the current form of the law to show their support by joining the page.

It took forty minutes for the Facebook group to reach a hundred supporters, and after that, the word was spreading like fire: in a few hours, the headcount grew to the thousands, and in a couple of days, to the ten thousands. A community of concerned people was formed overnight, and the "wall" of the group was flooding with content. Blog posts, news articles, opinions and ideas about possible further actions to be taken popped up on the surface of the page, suggesting that something considerable and massive was happening. Cyber-pessimists might have thought that this was a classical instance of *slacktivism*[1], which so often happens during instances of digital activism where the act of joining the group happen to be the end by itself, rather than the beginning of something more substantial. By the time the group managed to organize a series of the biggest protests during the existence of democratic Hungary, these pessimist voices went silent, and gave their places to a set of questions. Could

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[1] Generally defined as an online activity that require little effort but at the same time produce little real-world impact, such as 'liking' a page or signing an online petition.

this have happened without the Internet? Who are these people? Can a group of people 'liking' a page on Facebook really have substantial impact in the offline environment as well?

My thesis intends to be a contribution to the literature on activism in an online environment, with a focus on assessing the social implications of the Internet, and especially the potential of the Internet for mobilization. In the center of my attention is a particular instance of collective action: ***'One Million for the Freedom of Press in Hungary'*** (Egymillióan a Magyar Sajtószabadságért in Hungarian, henceforth: EMS).

Presenting the EMS Facebook group as a hub for expressions of online activism, my research is concerned with the qualitative analysis of the activity that takes place on the online forum of EMS, and to see how it is related to offline activity. I intend to do this by examining the literature on online activism, looking for existing conceptualizations in order to place the activity of EMS can be placed, in relation with other types of online and offline collective action. I examine the online activity of the EMS on the social media platform not only because EMS was born on Facebook, but also because the bulk of its activity is being conducted on that platform.

The contribution of the Internet to the repertoire of various movements is twofold. In the first case, the role of the Internet can be seen as a facilitator that has the primary role of supporting traditional, offline collective action. The most straightforward example of this kind of role is when Internet has a role only in the organization part of the protest, meaning that the sole purpose of the Internet is reaching the potential protesters and providing information about the protest. In these cases, the added value of the Internet can be grasped as a faster, cheaper way of reaching out to a certain audience. In the second case, the Internet creates new types of collective action that often take place completely online, involving certain activities that could not be possible without the Internet. Examples for such activities are less obtrusive

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forms like online petitions, but they also include email bombings[2], virtual sit-ins[3] and hacking the websites[4] of large companies or governments (Van Laer, Van Aelst 2012). In my thesis, I intend to discover how EMS is utilizing these opportunities. In investigating EMS, the following set of questions guide my research:

Q1: In what ways do social networking sites shape new forms of participation?

Q2: How does EMS function as an arena for discussion and debate and as a tool for organizing collective action?

The answers for the questions above are being addressed through the methodological tool of qualitative content analysis, and participant observation in the EMS Facebook group. My intention is to acquire a thorough view on the online representation of the EMS group, in relation to its offline counterpart.

The outline of my thesis is the following: in the first chapter, I turn to the literature on the Internet and engagement in collective action. I devote my attention to both the more optimistic and the skeptical perspectives, critically assessing their validity. After that, I turn to the sub-field of research on social media, particularly social networking sites. I elaborate on the peculiar nature of these sites in contrast with other platforms on the Internet, looking at their specific features, and the implications for organizing and executing collective action.

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[2] An email bomb is a form of net abuse consisting of sending huge volumes of email to an address in an attempt to overflow the mailbox of the recipient.

[3] During a virtual sit-in, masses of activists attempt to access a target website simultaneously and repetitively. If performed correctly, this will cause the target website to run slowly or even collapse entirely, preventing anyone from accessing it.

[4] Hacking a website bypassing the security restrictions of a computer system, taking control over the website in question, giving the opportunity to alter the content of the website.

Specifically, I introduce the concept of "slacktivism", presenting different definitions in the literature, taking a critical look at actions that should or should not be categorized as slacktivism according to them, and address the question of why these acts are understood as having a detrimental effect.

In the second chapter I turn my attention to models of classification used for classifying online activism. I illustrate a set of aspects for categorization, and reflect on their potential for interpreting the activity of EMS. In chapter three, I introduce my case study of EMS, firstly by providing the background information about the issue that triggered its emergence, and then the brief history of the EMS activity to date. I continue the analysis by evaluating the online campaigns on the surface of the EMS group that preceded two of the mass demonstrations, and invoke a set of factors that can be seen as reasons that elevated the success of EMS. After that, I evaluate the EMS Facebook group as a tool for discussion and debate by assessing the success of deliberation that takes place within the group. Before an overall evaluation of the Internet use of EMS, I present the result of the content analysis that maps the range of calls for activism on behalf of the EMS organizers. I end my thesis with concluding remarks and suggestions for further research in the field.

1. Online activism

1.1   Advantages and disadvantages of the Internet in facilitating participation

Although scholars may debate on the specific ways and the degree to which the Internet transforms collective action, the fact that it can in fact do is seldom contested. Communication, organization and deliberation became easier for all kinds of movements regardless of size, purpose, or location. The instruments catalyzing this process were e-mail, web sites, bulletin boards and chat rooms, emerging in the beginning of the 90s (Bimber *et al.* 2005).

The first organizations to effectively use the Internet for facilitating participation on a large scale were social movement organizations (SMOs), the building blocks of social movements[5] (Kriesi 1996, p152). SMOs were taking advantage of the Internet from its early history on. Probably the most well-researched example is the 1994 Zapatista rebellion in Mexico (for example Bob, 2005; Cleaver 1998; Schulz 1998; Ronfeldt, Arquilla 1998; Martinez-Torres 2001; Cere 2003), where insurgents in a remote Mexican village managed to successfully circumvent and undermine the propaganda systems that had previously prevented large-scale peaceful movements from expressing essentially the same objectives to get more

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[5] Charles Tilly, in his popular definition grasps social movements as *"a sustained series of interactions between power-holders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly visible demands for change in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with public demonstrations of support"*.(1984, p306)

rights and greater autonomy. The movement, starting off as a local rebellion, quickly gained momentum as a result of a fast growing, global network of support that successfully linked the Zapatista rebellion with many other local and international struggles against neoliberal globalization. The capability of the Internet transformed a local rebellion into a global phenomenon, a diffused system of protest and solidarity which would never have been achieved without the Internet. Following the Zapatista example, and parallel to the growing reach of the Web, more and more cases of successful Internet use for activism were documented, but the Zapatista movement remained for a long time the most influential "prototype" for Internet use by movements (Cleaver 1999).

The Internet offers the users the possibility to avoid the distortions inherent in the mass media. Although activist news media existed long before the Internet, they now have dramatically reduced requirement for resources (Rucht 2004), and are facing a growing pressure to produce regular, reliable, issue-relevant content (Lebert 2003). The kind of information available on the Internet allows for escaping the mainstream discourses and the agenda-setting established by traditional elites (Cantijoch 2009). The first independent media centre (IMC), Indymedia was set up in the wake of the Seattle WTO protests in 1999, and soon after dozens of other IMCs were set up, creating a worldwide network of radical social movement publics for the circulation of alternative news and information (Kidd 2003; Juris 2005).

These processes are stimulating the engagement of citizens: scholars argued that the consumption of political information online does help the citizens in not only obtaining higher levels of political knowledge, but consequently resulting in a higher level of interest in politics, deliberation with fellow citizens about politics in general, and becoming more active citizens (Johnson, Kaye 2003). Via stimulating interest and fueling discussion, it raises the

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degree of engagement – an overall unarguably positive result for society (Mossberg, *et al.* 2003). The panel survey conducted by Kent Jennings and Vicki Zeitner (2003) over a period of fifteen years from 1982 to 1997 also concluded that Internet access had indeed positive effects on several indicators of civic engagement. In their research the authors used a longitudinal analysis to look at the differences of engagement before (1982) and after (1997) the introduction of the Internet. Also, the same researchers pointed out that the observed effect is much more significant in the case where the respondents were civically engaged before they started using the Internet. Unarguably, the Internet penetration, frequency and types of use changed since the period of time observed by Jennings and Zeitner, but more recent studies relying on survey data also conclude that the Internet has a facilitating effect on civic engagement, and political participation (Weber, *et al.* 2003; Wojcieszak 2009).

Contrasting the above findings which emphasize the role of the Internet in facilitating engagement, other survey results suggest that reliance on the Internet also has an individualizing effect on users, which may lead to decreased participation in political and civic activities (Nie, Erbring, 2000; Dahlgren 2001; Diani 2000). Postmes and Brunsting (2002) approached the field of online action from a social-psychological perspective, addressing the question of how a medium that isolates the individual can inspire the collective. Building upon findings of social identity and self-categorization theory (see Tajfel, Turner 1986; Turner 1987), the authors argue that the contradiction can be resolved if we take into consideration that social behavior does not just stem from the immediate proximity of other individuals, and thereby individuals' behavior and cognitions can be highly social despite the fact that they are isolated from the *direct* influence of others in their group (Postmes, Brunstig, 2002).

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The debate between optimistic and pessimistic views on the Internet in connection with citizen engagement has many aspects, and while scholars formed their opinion about the potentials of the Internet, the subject of their study by itself (and also in relation to its users) is changing in an extraordinarily fast manner. In the next chapter, I present the most prominent optimistic and pessimistic opinions, and the studies supporting them, while keeping in mind the dynamic changes of the Internet.

1.2 The optimistic and skeptical points of view

Throughout the history of the Internet, scholars were assessing its potentials for democratic processes, social movements and civic activities in general. Some influential voices suggested that the Internet use is restrained mainly to entertainment, having only a limited impact on the mentioned fields (Putnam 1995, 2000), or at least that there is a robust 'democratic divide' between those people who use the Internet for political aims and those who do not (Norris 2001). Since the time of these publications, a wide range of studies dealt with these questions of how people use the Internet and other digital media in their everyday lives and in particular, how differences in digital media uses may contribute to social inequality. One of the most structured examples of investigating the field is Eszter Hargittai's research group at Northwestern University, the Web Use Project[6], which addresses these questions systematically via a wide range of quantitative and qualitative methodological tools including surveys, focus groups and in-person observation. The numerous publications from

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[6]The Web Use Project - http://www.webuse.org/projects/index.html

the research group help building a much more nuanced picture about digital inequality (DiMaggio *et al.* 2004; Hargittai, Hinnant 2008; Hargittai 2008), the Internet use of older adults (Freese *et al.* 2006) and also the young 'digital natives' who have grown up with digital media (Hargittai 2010).

Initially, the most optimistic scholars found the Internet to be an instrument able to change the whole functioning of democracy profoundly, by increasing mass participation to an unprecedented level (Barber, 1998). Although the technical features of the Internet, which appears in its easily accessible and non-hierarchical nature, indeed proves to have a strong potential for equalizing as well as boosting the level of participation (Schwartz 1995; Brants 2005; Gastil 2000), the main focus of the field gradually shifted to a more empirical direction, giving place to a rich body of research on cases of "cyberactivism" [7], and the ways how the variety of new kinds of action made possible by the Internet changes the nature of collective action. An example of a typical research interest turned to how effectively social movement organizations wanting to mobilize for a mass street demonstration make extensive use of the Internet and a broader range of digital ICTs to enhance coordination and mobilization efforts (Van Laer 2007).

One side of the early optimistic viewpoints emphasized the generalized positive role of the Internet in simplifying the ways for personal expressions in the public sphere and getting engaged in a wide range of civic activities on the Internet (Negroponte 1998; Valovic 2000; Rheingold 2001), supporting their claims with arguments about the ease of potential engagement via the Internet. More recently, supporters of this claim turned to the relevant

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[7] Social actors online have been called many names, for example: e-activists, online activists, or cyber-activists. Often they are not separated from their offline counterpart, therefore referred to simply as 'activists'. In my thesis I distinguish social actors online as cyber-activists, when a distinction is relevant.

sub-question of who the beneficiaries of this positive impact are. The two sides of the debate can be grasped as the dilemma between reinforcement and mobilization, as explained in a recent study by Taewoo Nam (2012). According to the first, the Internet's role in making engagement easier only works to reinforce the existing imbalances in participation, as instances of civic engagement such as participating in politics and accessing and using Internet are related to the same variables related to the socio-economic status, like education. (Cardenal 2011; Hill, Hughes 1998; Norris 2000; Weber *et al.* 2003; Curtice, Norris 2004). Opposed to this, the mobilization thesis holds that the Internet is effective in mobilizing groups which were under-represented or inactive before (Delli Carpini 2000; Ward *et al.* 2003; Tolbert, McNeal 2003; Stanley, Weare 2004; Cantijoch 2009). The supporting arguments include the positive effects such as the elevated chance of involuntary exposure to political information (Cantijoch 2009), or voluntary requests for participation (Borge, Cardenal 2011).

Apart from the skeptical viewpoints debating the mobilization potential of the Internet on previously inactive people, the sustainability of Internet-based collective action over time is also a debated question in the literature. Although it is clear that the Internet enables new grassroots movements to spring up quickly and operate for a while, it is unsure whether such Internet-based efforts can persist over time. Galston (2000), for example, was skeptical about online participation as he found the structures created and sustained on the Internet cannot be stable because such communities are so easy to exit, therefore the Internet is generally a platform that does not strengthen community and activism in the long run. Earl and Schussman (2003) noticed that in many forms of online activism 'members' become 'users', who after the particular action they supported is over often choose to move on and don't feel a need to get permanently engaged. While acknowledging this problem, Bimber (2001)

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suggests that perhaps a whole new model of SMOs is emerging mainly because of this feature. According to his suggestion, decentralized groups will spring up and remain active through a single political effort, and then fade away as soon as the issue ceases to be important in the particular setting. This should not be seen as a failure of the organization, but a natural process: participants will know that when the need arises, a similar group can quickly be built up again (Garrett 2006: p211).

In connection with traditional (offline) participation, the effect of the Internet is ambivalent in nature. Optimists argue that online participation is generally enhancing traditional participation by making the dissemination of information on activities and real-life events easier, as organizing activities becomes more effective and less costly, providing the opportunity to a broader public to mobilize (Ayres 1999; Bennett *et al.* 2008, Van Laer 2007). Multiple empirical studies were conducted to find out the extent of this effect, often coming to different conclusions. For example Scheufele and Nisbet (2002), in their study of the effect of web use on traditional participation, concluded that after controlling for other factors, the independent effect of Internet activity is practically non-existent. This finding points to the fact that early cyber-optimists often forgot: even if it becomes potentially easier to connect with broad publics online, it does not automatically mean that it becomes equally easy to convince them to participate in offline activities. On the other hand, a survey conducted in 2007 by Calenda and Meijer (2009) concluded that online participation indeed has a strong positive effect on offline participation among young people in Italy, Spain and the Netherlands.

Typically, scholars do not agree on the extent to which online action can even be compared to its offline counterpart. Van de Donk and Foederer (2001) stress this limitations of online activism, arguing that virtual demonstrations cannot satisfy the protesters desire for

the emotional thrill of real, physical action. Ramtin Amin (2010) is arguing for the opposite effect, pointing out that what threatens traditional activism is exactly the phenomenon when cyber protests replace real-life protests. According to him, the most prominent effect of activists going online to release their energy and frustration is that the emphases on real-life events become less apparent. The results of a survey of environmental activists and non-activists concluded seem to strengthen this view, because the respondents in the sample considered that online action an equivalent alternative to offline action (Postmes & Brunsting 2002).

Being critical of the overwhelmingly optimistic viewpoints, Sunstein (2001) argued that one of the often neglected negative effects that the Internet has on public discourse is that it limits the scope of information and discussion to individuals who have similar views in the first place, therefore excluding a range of views held by those who have different ideas. Sunstein contrasts this phenomenon that is said to be a characteristic feature of online communication with real-world interactions, broadcast and print media, arguing that in the latter cases the audience is potentially confronted with a larger array of opinions. These findings are quite the opposite of Rheingold's (2000), who observed that online communication is significantly more heterogeneous, facilitating communication between users of a wider range of factors including race, age and gender. Rogerson (2009) emphasizes a different viewpoint of Sunstein's observation: according to him, this structure likely streamlines the process of political mobilization because likeminded people can connect more easily.

The high potential for maintaining international communication is another aspect of modern ICTs that was being contested in the early years if the Internet, arguing that vital interpersonal networks cannot be adequately forged and maintained online. The argument that

online consumption of political information has no positive effect on civic engagement, but on the contrary, it actually diminishes it, thereby shedding a pessimistic light on the Internet originates from Robert Putnam (2000). In his book Bowling Alone, he concludes that *"respondents who say that they rely primarily on the Internet for news are less likely than other Americans to volunteer, to spend time with friends, to trust one another"* (2000, 479). On the other hand, it has to be pointed out that the data on which his conclusions rely are originated from the DDB Needham Life Style surveys between 1996 and 1998. This period of time can still be considered as one during which all Internet users can be considered early adopters, even in the United States, where Putnam's research took place. While the overall Internet penetration rate in the world had just exceeded 1% during the time of the aforementioned research, nowadays the same rate is rapidly approaching one third of the whole population, reaching 78.6% in North America, and 61.3% in Europe (IDC, Internet World Statistics 2011). If we look at the validity of Putnam's findings in the contemporary Internet in the context of social networking services, the difference is similarly huge. During the second part of the 1990s, social networking services did not exist in the forms we know them now. Although early SNSs aimed at building communities like theGlobe.com or Tripod.com already existed, their reach was immeasurably inferior to today's social networking sites such as Facebook, not to mention the differences in the structure and the different possibilities provided by the early social networking sites.

In the next section, after introducing and defining social networking sites, I focus on the issues detailed above in the context of SNSs: the reinforcement versus mobilization thesis, the changes in the reach of the Internet, the issue of comparing online and offline forms of action, the concern that the Internet is limiting the scope of information and discussion to individuals who have similar views in the first place, the question of whether Internet-based

efforts can persist over time, and the implications of the radically decreased efforts needed for participation.

1.3 Implications for social networking sites

A "social network site" is a category of website with profiles, semi-persistent public commentary on the profile, and a traversable publicly articulated social network displayed in relation to the profile (Boyd 2006: p12). Thereby, a site should be considered an SNS if it: (1) constructs a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulates a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) views and traverses its list of connections and those made by others within the system (boyd, Ellison, 2007). According to this definition, the first recognizable social network site was SixDegrees.com, launched in 1997 (boyd, Ellison 2007). This broad definition includes a wide range of web pages: sites such as Facebook that targets the general population, while other sites target a particular group of users. For instance, TakingITGlobal.org and YouthNoise.org offer social network services for users interested in addressing social issues such as poverty and human rights (Raynes-Goldie, Walker 2008). In my thesis, I focus on the biggest social network sites that target the general population, Facebook.

Facebook was founded in 2004 and originally was available only to university students in the United States. In September 2006 the site was made publicly available to any person (over the age of 13) with an email address. That triggered a rapid growth in members, reaching a staggering 901 million monthly active users, and 526 million daily active users, 154 million more than a year ago. Facebook is currently the second most popular site in the world according to the Alexa traffic rankings, with Google being the sole website that has more users. People spend 23 minutes on Facebook per day on average. In March 2012,

Hungary had 3.97 million Facebook users, which equals 39,7% of the whole population, and 64,2% of the on line population . In the United States, 50,4% of people have Facebook profiles. These figures justify my focus on Facebook in my analysis.

SNSs are inherently parts of the concept of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly 2005), which encapsulates websites built to facilitate interactivity and co-creation of content by website visitors in addition to original authors. While in the context of the original web participation was emphasized, Web 2.0 is all about emphasizing collaboration and collective action (Schäfer 2011). Shirky (2008) emphasizes that the emergence of easy-to-use platforms further strengthen this possibility, and the use of Facebook is a good example for that: after registration, no further requirements are needed for any kind of self-expression.

Hargittai stresses the importance of distinguishing between what is theoretically available on the Internet, and what is realistically within the reach of users, arguing that 'availability' means mere existence, 'accessibility' implies relative ease of reachability (Hargittai 2000: p2). A vivid illustration of the phenomenon in the case of social networking sites can be found in Eli Pariser's recent book, the Filter Bubble (2011). The self-identified liberal author explains how contents shared by his conservative friends had disappeared from his Facebook news feed, because he tended to click on the links and posts of his liberal friends more often. Facebook's algorithm for selecting which content appears on one's news feed builds upon our previous clicking habits, thereby creating a phenomenon that Pariser calls the filter bubble. The limitations stemming from these algorithms for the potential that activism on social network sites has to be kept in mind while drawing conclusions (for a detailed explanation of the ways these algorithms work and for an overview of content diversity online, see Hargittai (2007) and Pariser (2011)).

These concerns have implications for the reinforcement versus mobilization thesis in the context of social networking sites as well. Clicking on content concerning activism directly results in an elevated chance that next time, more similar content will appear on our news feed. Still, the algorithms do not exclude all the political information, so although to a smaller degree, but social networking sites may still have an effect on mobilization by facilitating voluntary and involuntary exposure to political information, and requests for participation (Gibson *et al.* 2005; Borge, Cardenal 2011).

There are clearly visible disadvantages of SNSs, and in this case particularly Facebook, in facilitating participation. For example, although being vastly popular, it still has a limited reach: although the number of active users worldwide is rapidly increasing, it still only reaches 10,3 percent of the world's population. While if we look at particular regions, the penetration becomes significantly higher (25,6% in the case of Europe),[8] it is still far from being an generally accessed platform (Internet World Stats 2011). Still, the ongoing rapid increase in the number of users – especially if we focus on the younger generation – suggests that it is indeed legitimate and useful to analyze the platform in organizing collective action, promoting participation and diffusing information in general. It has to be noted though, that with the current settings of Facebook, the groups and pages can be reached without a valid registration to the site, and the content posted in the group is being cached by Google, therefore the content can be searched from outside of Facebook.

A unique view on the effectiveness of SNSs and social media in mobilization was articulated by Shirky (2011). He points out that social media can help bring about political

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[8] Different countries have different popular SNSs. For example China is yet to be conquested by Facebook (The leading social networking site in China is renren.com), and Orkut was the most popular social networking site in Brazil until December 2011, when Facebook finally surpassed it.

change because people and governments think they can. If activists believe in the utility of these tools and take steps to use them accordingly, they will indeed matter, and trends show that they indeed do. Ethan Zuckerman articulated a similar opinion on a lecture he gave at CEU on January 16, 2012: if activists are using a particular tool on the Internet, it proves that it is a useful and usable tool for mobilization.

In assessing potential EMS impact, an important critique of SNSs and social media in general as tools for political action has to do with privacy. SNSs can be easily monitored by scholars, a good point from the aspect of research, but a real or percieved repressive political environment (if the ability to be monitored by the government is known by the users) can be a restricting force from joining a cause from an SNS, because offline identities can often be traced easily.

A survey by the Pew research centre that was conducted in November 2010 among American citizens concluded findings that are highly supporting the thesis that the internet is indeed boosting political engagement, and that the use of social networking sites do so even more heavily: 10% of Americans reported that they had attended a political rally, 23% reported that they had tried to convince someone to vote for a specific candidate, and 66% reported that they had or intended to vote. Internet users in general were over twice as likely to attend a political meeting, 78% more likely to try and influence someone's vote, and 53% more likely to have voted or intended to vote. Compared with other Internet users, and users of other SNS platforms, a Facebook user who uses the site multiple times per day was an additional two and half times more likely to attend a political rally or meeting, 57% more likely to persuade someone on their vote, and an additional 43% more likely to have said they would vote (Hampton *et al.* 2011).

1.4   Slacktivism and Activism

The term 'slacktivism' was originally used with a positive connotation: Fred Clark and Dwight Ozard were using it in 1995, as a short version of slacker activism. In that original form, the term was used to describe bottom-up activities, aimed at affecting society in a small scale (Christensen 2011). By the time the phrase became more popular, it turned into something with much more of a pejorative sense, as the main difference between activism and slacktivism also shifted: in the popular discourse, slacktivism became a symbol of the lack of commitment on behalf of the slacktivist. More generally, Breuer and Farooq (2012) find that in popular discourse slacktivism is a general term describing civic or political activities that are preformed online. It has to be noted though, that if we stick to the definition that evaluates slacktivism as online activities that require little effort and at the same time produce little real-world impact, the boundaries between activism and slacktivism online become rather blurry: it is hardly debated that not all online activism should be considered slacktivism (Christensen 2011). For example, hacking websites is definitely in the former category, because of the amount of effort it needs, and also the greater impact it has (Jordan, Taylor 2004).

In other contexts, the term is often exclusively associated to the social media platforms. Rotman et al. (2011) for example define slacktivism as low-risk, low-cost activity via social media, whose purpose is to raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person, engaged in the activity. The authors distinguish slacktivism from practical activism, which is defined as the use of a direct, proactive and often confrontational action towards attaining a societal change. The grey zone between activism and slacktivism is visible even in detailed definitions like this one.

Building on this definition of slacktivism, I attempt to grasp the key features that distinguish slacktivist practices from activist ones. Is it primarily the platform of social network sites on which the action takes place, as Rotman *et al.* (2011) suggests? As Bimber and Copeland (2011) point out, people should be expected to employ the same set of communication channels in civic engagement that they are accustomed to using in other aspects of their lives. The outlined tendency of unprecedented growth of active Facebook users suggests that the social networking site is rapidly turning from being an *emerging tool* to a *mundane tool* like e-mails and newsletters for an ever larger proportion of the society (Nielsen 2011). This means that the distinction based upon the medium on which the act of activism/slacktivism takes place is losing ground. Also, there is only a minimal difference between making a statement by 'liking' a cause online and putting up a bumper sticker in that regard – neither of these actions accomplishes much.[9] Therefore, I argue that constraining slacktivism to social networking sites, and even to the broad category of Internet use is not justified. Svensson (2011) goes even further by arguing that in democracies where threats of retributions from authorities rarely occur, it is hard to see why classical measures of civic engagement such as signing a petition or even voting in real life should be seen as a great risk or effort, while in the online environment it is meaningless and effortless.

Making the distinction on the grounds of the motivation of slacktivists, Morozov (2011) argues that people engage in slacktivism for selfish and narcissistic purposes. The presumption underlying such accusations is that those who express concern about a social or political issue online pursue the selfish interest of gaining social prestige rather than the altruist intention to effectively contribute to the cause. Indeed, there is a widely held

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[9] However, for example in periods of extreme political polarization in Hungary, symbolic acts such as wearing the 'kokárda' (cocarde) around March 15th 2002 – may play a substantial role.

assumption, supported by content analyses, that suggests that profiles on social networking sites are used to create and communicate idealized selves, instead of their actual personalities (Manago et al. 2008). As a result of this, once the initial step was taken (i.e. 'liking' a cause), people might not find any reason to further engage in the given cause (Morozov 2011). There are empirical studies that confirm the existence of this procedure, identifying an interesting reason behind the phenomenon: a sociological study by Zhao et al. (2008) concludes that people indeed often use the acts of joining campaigns by "liking" pages as means for implicitly shaping their online identity, rather than explicitly. On a social networking site, explicit identity shaping would appear for example as a narrative description of oneself in the "about me" blurb. Instead, the authors find that people rely way more heavily on implicit ways of shaping their online identity, such as engaging in enumerative cultural self-description by listing their personal interests and hobbies, or – more importantly for this point – by publicly expressing their affiliation with a cause, whether it is part of their real self or idealized selves. In these cases, turning awareness into useful action is a problematic task.

Following a similar logic, Morozov (2011) explains how situations where there are no clear goals behind awareness raising, the likely outcomes of engaging in causes in a *slacktivist manner* are raising funds, or mere spam. Taking a somewhat radical stance, Morozov even argues that causes that are primarily set up to receive donations should also be seen as fertile grounds for slacktivism, because of the detrimental effect it might have on getting engaged in more meaningful real-life activities. The particular example that Morozov often uses in his arguments is the page set up on Facebook called Saving the Children of Africa, which has 1.7 million members, managing to raise a total of $12,000, less than one-hundredth of a penny per person (Morozov 2011, pp 190). At the same time, after the 2010 earthquake that devastated Haiti, the International Red Cross (IRC) launched a campaign asking people to donate money

towards relief efforts, via text message – an act that fits the definition of a low-risk and low-cost action that does not require a large sacrifice on behalf of the participants. Four days after the earthquake, $7 million dollars had been raised, which can hardly be seen as a pointless activity in total (Cashmore 2010). Morozov is not arguing that donating money is inherently a bad thing, but he rather articulates that it can undermine the efforts to engage group members in real-life activities which are more meaningful – this is why he calls slacktivism *"the more dangerous digital sibling"* of activism (Morozov 2011:189-190).

Consequently, I argue that slacktivism should be defined either in a broader sense that includes the offline world as well, or there is no sufficient ground for distinguishing a category for slacktivism. I join Christensen (2011) in arguing that offline activities such as putting up bumper stickers or fridge magnets, and wearing support bracelets should all be considered instances of slacktivism, and so is taking part in short–term boycotts such as Buy Nothing Day or Earth Hour. After all, regardless of digital slacktivism or activism should be seen as activism first, which happens to take place in the digital realm (Nielsen 2011).

However we define the boundaries between activism and slacktivism, it is important to look at the phenomenon of low-cost and low-risk involvement not only the micro-level of individuals, but also the meso-level of organizations, and also the macro-level of formal policy making (Breuer, Farooq 2012). Concerning the level of organizations, there is no reason to think that the *slacktivist* can not be motivated for further engagement. It is the task of the organization to find the most convenient way to try engage the passive citizens more actively, or at least to use the *power of slacktivism* from small individual contributions that are valuable on the aggregate level. It they fail to do so, than the blame should be partly on them, not only on the individual slacktivists.

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To look at what tools are available on the Internet for organizing and mobilizing citizens, in the next chapter I present four classification forms for online activism repertoires of action. This will bridge the theoretical part of my thesis with the third part, where I present my case study of EMS, to show how certain tools can be applied, in order to achieve "valuable slacktivism".

2. Classifications for online activism repertoires of action

We can find numerous classifications in the literature, each highlighting a different aspect of diverse forms of collective action. In some cases the separation of online and offline modes is a ground for distinction, while some put it in the same model (Bimber, 2000). In this chapter, I present four different classifications. Costanza-Chock (2003) builds upon a model used for offline action. The classifications of van Laer and van Aelst (2009), and Vegh (2003) deal exclusively with online forms of action, while Postmes and Brunstig (2002) present a classification that contains both online and offline forms in the same model.

2.1   Costanza-Chock's classification

Costanza-Chock (2003) classified electronic forms of contention, distinguishing between conventional, disruptive, and violent strategies, while pointing out the 'soft' nature of the boundaries between these categories. This classification mirrors Sidney Tarrow's (1998: 14) differentiation between the same types of contention in an offline environment. A distinct part of Costanza-Chock's research concentrates on categorizing various movement's conventional use of the Internet into the following subgroups: *representation, information distribution, research, cultural production, fundraising, lobbying,* and *tactical* uses. Costanza-Chock combines this categorization with the classification of movement outcomes, developed by Suzanne Staggenborg (1995), creating a framework in which activism on the Internet can be described in relation to their outcomes. Staggenborg proposes three categories of movement outcomes: *political and policy outcomes, mobilization outcomes,* and *cultural outcomes.* Under the first category are direct legislative or institutional impacts, which include

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social movement contributions to policy agenda setting, the passage or blockage of specific legislation, or the implementation of existing policies (Costanza-Chock, 2003). The second, *mobilization outcomes* refers to the mobilization of groups of people in collective action, while the third, *cultural outcomes* is a broader category including *"changes in social norms, behaviors, and ways of thinking among a public that extends beyond movement constituents or beneficiaries"* (Staggenborg 1995: p341). Building up a matrix of electronic contention tactics and outcomes, Constanza-Chock proposes a model in which various tactics are paired with various outcomes, and illustrated via case studies how empirical research on electronic contention might benefit by locating actions within a tactic/outcome matrix.

In analyzing EMS, I attempt to reveal the tactics used by EMS by using the categorization of conventional electronic contention described above, implementing the information distribution, research, cultural production, fundraising, lobbying, and tactical uses of the Internet.

2.2   Van Laer and Van Aelst's classification

In their study *Cyber-protest and civil society: the Internet and action repertoires in social movements*, Jeroen Van Laer and Peter Van Aelst (2009) argue that the Internet has shaped the collective action repertoire significantly. For this reason, they developed a typology of Internet activism, focusing on the 'new' repertoire of collective action, limiting the scope of these actions and tactics to those that are outside the realm of conventional or orthodox political participation (i.e. voting or being a member of a political party), but are also not instances of severe political crime (hijacking, terrorism, guerrilla warfare) (Van Laer and Van Aelst 2009:231). In this classification, the authors use a two-dimensional scale: the vertical axis represents the role of the Internet, ranging from Internet supported action, where

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Internet is merely a facilitator with a primary role of supporting traditional offline collective action, to Internet based action (Figure 1). The latter category contains the 'new' forms of activism, which exists solely because the capability of the Internet makes it possible The two instances should be seen as the two endpoints of a scale, rather than a dichotomic variable: there are no clear and stable divisions between the different forms of activism, but rather fluid lines that are permanently redefined by technological innovations and the creativity of activists.
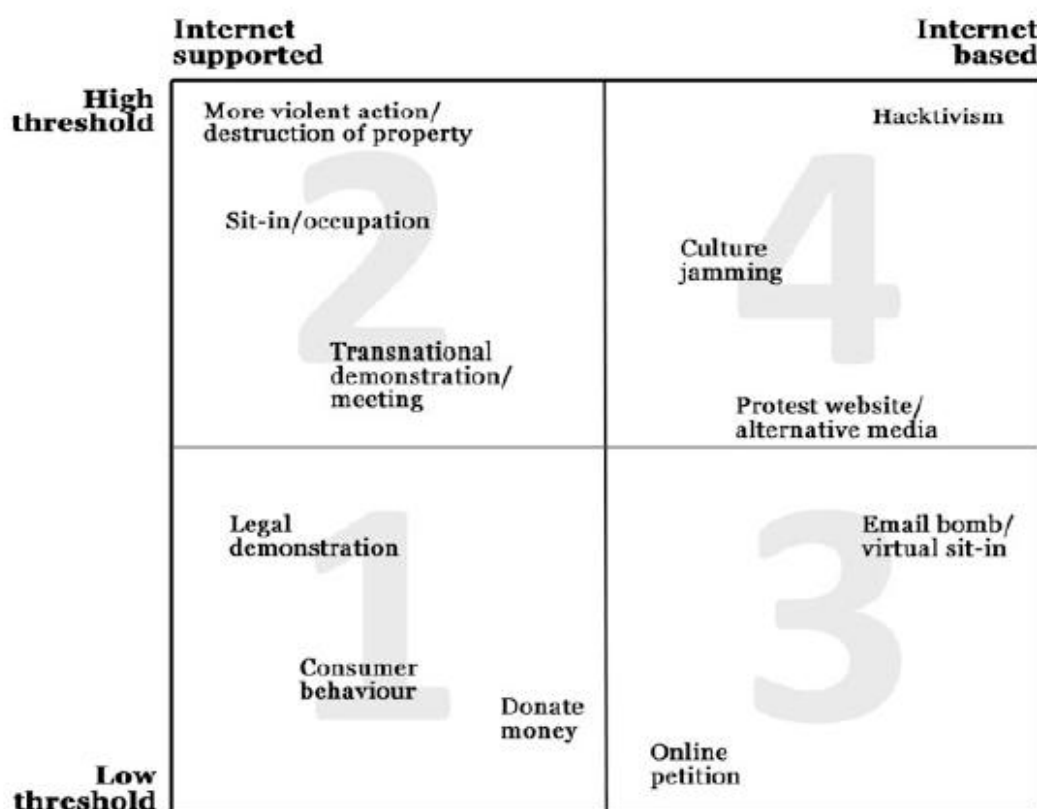

Figure 1: Overview of both Internet-supported and Internet-based types of action used by social movements. (Van Laer, Van Aelst 2009)

The idea behind the second axis, from low threshold to high threshold, is rooted in the fact that some forms of action require higher levels of commitments, and/or containing more risk than others. The result of this is the lower or higher thresholds for people to consider participation (McAdam 1986; Tarrow 1998). The distinction between action forms based on the effort needed for participation was previously used in an offline environment (Klandermans 1997; Marsh 1977; Collom 2003). The authors stress the connection between the online and offline realms, arguing that offline actions today are almost always accompanied with tactics online.

From the viewpoint of my thesis, this classification is important from several aspects. Firstly, it points out the possible distinction between the *facilitating function* and the *creating function* of the Internet, an important aspect in which EMS will be assessed. Also, the authors argue that when threshold is measured, a combination of commitment and risk should be taken into account – a combination of points that has implications to the study of EMS.

2.3   Postmes and Brunsting's classification

In the process of examining how the Internet transforms collective action, Postmes and Brunsting (2002) developed another two-dimension scale on which the varying forms of collective action can be pictured. Types of offline collective action are pictured in the same matrix as are online forms. In their model, the first axis ranges from individualistic to collectivistic, capturing the distinction between actions that require the participation of many members of a group (i.e. labor disputes, demonstrations, and mass petitioning) versus actions that can be undertaken relatively solitary (i.e. sabotage, civil disobedience, and letter writing). The authors argue that the seemingly paradoxical way that individual acts are referred to as

collective action is not necessarily problematic, as individual forms of collective action can be thought of as collective in nature when they are intended as a means of achieving a collective outcome.
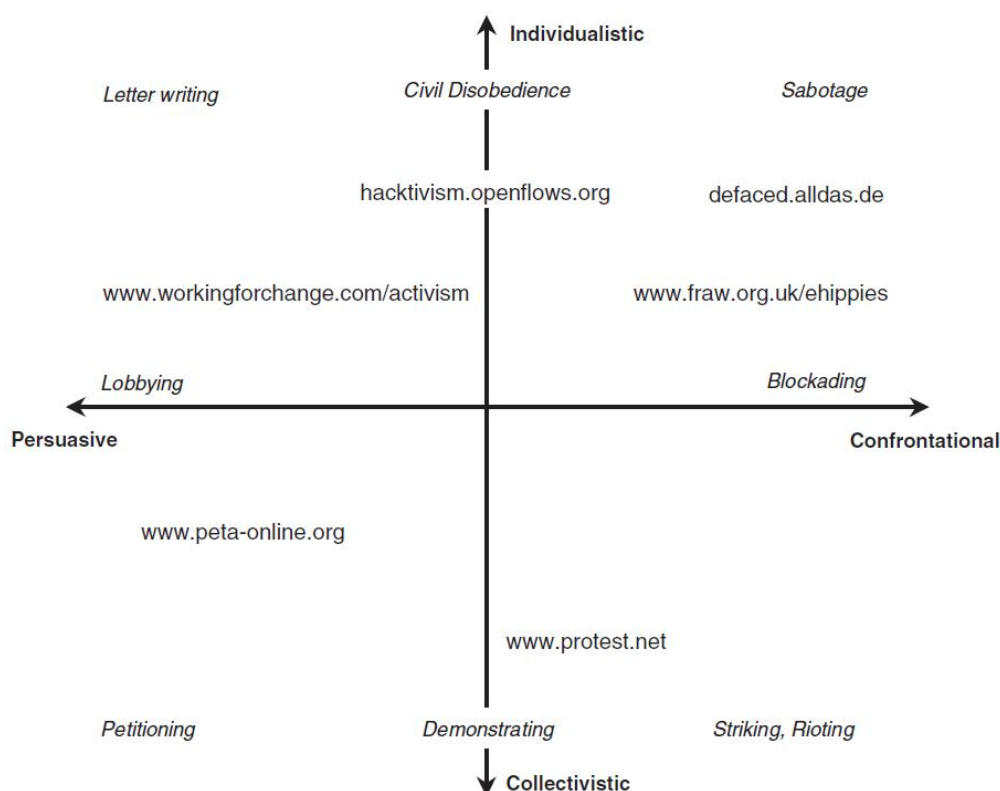
Figure 2: Examples of Offline Collective Actions and Dimensions Along Which They May Vary, Plus Examples of Comparable Forms of Action Online. (Postmes & Brunsting 2002)

The second axis ranges from persuasive (such as letter writing, lobbying, and petitioning) to confrontational (demonstration, blockade, or sabotage) forms. The authors argue the confrontational-individualistic corner in the model is largely overrepresented in the media, as activism in that sector tends to be the most newsworthy, while less confrontational actions, which make up the more dominant forms of online collective action in terms of

number of participants and number of actions, tend to be less prominently covered.[10] Postmes and Brunsting emphasize also the role of self-produced alternative online news by movements, influencing and mobilizing a potentially vast audience. The findings of their empirical study also point out that confrontational actions are considerably less popular than persuasive actions in both offline and online environments, and that people tend to find confrontational online action ineffective. Therefore, they emphasize the role of the Internet in the persuasive fields, the two quadrants on the left side of the matrix.

2.4 Vegh's Classification

Vegh (2003) identifies three areas of Internet activism: **Awareness/advocacy; organization/mobilization; and action/reaction**. The typology aims at emphasizing the *direction* of initiative, distinguishing between senders of information and receivers, calls for action from being called upon, and between initiating an action from reacting to one. I explain each general area, starting from **awareness/advocacy.**

There are cases when the traditional channels of information are not sufficient for distributing information concerning a cause: in this context, the Internet can be seen as a source of alternative information. In addition to that, Vegh points out that the same process of gathering and distributing alternative information can also be seen as a process of building distribution networks, which can be used for organization and mobilization purposes.

Online advocacy focuses on organizing the movement and carrying out action (Vegh, 2003). In some cases the actors are members of a strictly defined group (like an NGO), but the

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[10] This observation is extended to the offline forms of actions as well, pointing out that both offline and online activism is predominantly non violent and persuasive.

Internet makes it possible to connect more loosely defined groups as well, partly as an effect of the low threshold of input that is needed to be part of a group (McCaughey & Ayres 2003). The Zapatista activists are the classical example for loosely defined groups using the Internet for online advocacy. Lobbying on the Internet, which can be seen as a vital part of advocacy as well, can take three forms: it can be either aimed at the government's legislative body, an attempt to influence worldwide opinion, or it can be targeted at the government of oppressive regimes (Vegh, 2003).

The second area of Internet activism in Vegh's model is **organization/mobilization.** Mobilization is further broken down into three sub-categories: call for offline action, call for action that normally happens offline but can be done more efficiently in an online environment (for example a call for writing an e-mail for a stakeholder, instead of a traditional letter), and, thirdly, call for an online action that has no direct offline counterpart. (e.g. a spamming campaign where participants are asked to send unwanted messages *en masse* to the target in a coordinated manner).

The third category, **action/reaction** is the field of acts such as DDoS attacks, acts which are otherwise often categorized as hacktivism (Samuel, 2004). Vegh himself points out the problem with the popular understanding of this kind of Internet use, which he broadly defines as a '*...more proactive and aggressive use of the Internet to achieve a goal that can be both politically and financially motivated*'. (Vegh 2003: 75). He goes on demonstrating the diversity of online activism that falls into this category, touching upon the different self-definitions of groups of hackers and activists. In this field, the forms, methods and ideologies are highly diversified, causing most confusion in the instances where for example a hacker community's self-definition collides with that of the official, or general opinion. This is the reason why Vegh (2003) suggests a balanced approach that involves scrutinizing the actual

online activities to determine the proper boundaries for the categorization. This includes examining the identity of the perpetrators and the target, the method and frequency of the occurrence, the goal to be attained, and the damage caused. In an attempt to make a distinction between the categories of *hacktivism* and *Cyberwar,* Vegh focuses on the context: if the context is a response to an incident or condition, or a part of an existing conflict, the act in question should be considered *hacktivism*. If it is a part of an ongoing militaristic campaign or an ongoing conventional war, the label *cyberwar* should be used. In terms of individuals, Vegh makes a further distinction between "wired activists", who are adapting the Internet into their already existing strategy, and "politicized hackers" who are hackers adopting political causes as the justification of their actions. The author goes on to explain further distinctions between the sub-categories of offensive online action (cyberattack, cybercampaign, cyberwar), discussing defining principles and the apparent overlaps. As I am not encountering these categories in the context of my thesis, I restrain from going into further details.

3. Investigating EMS

The structure of this chapter is the following: first, I provide context for the emergence of EMS by explaining the ambivalent nature of the Hungarian media law in a chronological outline. I then present a brief history of the EMS group, with an emphasis on the parallel between its offline representation in the form of a series of protests, and the online activity focused on the EMS Facebook group. I continue the analysis by evaluating the online campaigns on the surface of the EMS group that preceded two of the mass demonstrations, and invoke a set of factors that can be seen as reasons that elevated the success of EMS. After that, I evaluate the EMS Facebook group as a tool for discussion and debate by assessing the success of deliberation that takes place within the group. Before an overall evaluation of the Internet use of EMS, I present the result of the content analysis that maps the range of calls for activism on behalf of the EMS organizers.

3.1 Hungarian Media Law – a target of criticism

In 2010 Hungary held parliamentary elections. The recession and anger at the incumbent Socialist government pushed the country to the political right: Hungary's right-wing conservative Fidesz party secured a two-thirds majority[11] in the national parliamentary elections held in April 25 2010, giving Fidesz, led by a former prime minister Viktor Orbán, the authority to pass legislation, including crucial economic changes, without having to form alliances with the opposition.

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[11] The party recieved 53 percent of the popular vote, which was transformed into a two-thirds majority by the processes of the Hungarian electoral system.

As a part of the process of restructuring the country, a new media bill was proposed to the parliament by Fidesz MPs on June 14.[12] The proposed legislation was heavily criticized by all Hungarian opposition parties, who submitted 44 amendments to the bill three days after the proposal, among which only one passed[13]. As an effect of the widespread criticism, the votes on the controversial parts of the legislative package that relate to the new, powerful media supervisory authority and a code laying out new content regulations are delayed to July and October, respectively. International media reacted immediately, for example The Washington Post published an editorial criticizing Hungary's new media legislation, calling it, "a phenomenon not seen in Central Europe since the collapse of Communist rule."[14]

Between July and December, the parliament passed a set of laws which were parts of the media law package. The last part of this package was the Media Act, which was passed on December 21, 2010. This law grants the Media Council powers to fine, suspend and shut down print, electronic and online media that does not provide "balanced coverage," infringes upon human dignity, offends public morality, or fails to report on events of public interest. Opponents pointed out that the legislation makes journalists vulnerable to intimidation from the governing party Fidesz, primarily because it empowers authorities to impose heavy fines on news outlets for vague infractions such as the above mentioned infringement on human

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[12] The Center for Media and Communication Studies (CMCS) at CEU compiled a comprehensive online archive containing a wide range information about the laws and their effects which can be found at https://cmcs.ceu.hu/node/26249/

[13] Opposition parties strongly criticize media bill in heated debate.(2010, June 6th) Retrieved January 7,2012 from Politics.hu
website: http://www.politics.hu/20100616/opposition-parties-strongly-criticize-media-bill-in-heated-debate/

[14] Hungary's strongest leader targets the media.(2010,July 19) Retrieved January 7, 2012 from The Washington Post
website: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/18/AR2010071802529.html

dignity. The authority responsible for imposing the fines is the Media Council, an independent organization placed under the new, converged media and telecommunications regulatory authority. The five board members are being elected for nine years by the parliament, with a two third majority, which under the circumstances described above, implies that the governing party Fidesz elects the members directly.

3.2 The brief history of the EMS group

The EMS Facebook group was founded on December 22 2010, the day after the parliament passed the new media law. The exceptionally rapid increase in the number of supporters resulted in 40 000 members on the 3rd day, and by the 10th day of the Facebook group's existence, the number of supporters reached 50 000. Such rapidly growing online group is not unprecedented, but definitely a new phenomenon in the context of Hungary: the initiative called *"Use the money that had been put aside for the August 22nd fireworks to support the victims of the flood",* organized on the same social network site, gathered 100 000 supporters within two days, reaching 250 000 supporters to date.[15] In the following part of the chapter, I focus on the offline, protest activity that had been organized by the EMS group.

A short chronology of events reveals the dynamics related to EMS evolution. From the beginning of their activity, the 50-70 protest organizers of EMS emphasized their independence from every politically affiliated organization and political party. "The emerging questions about the organization are being decided around a table, by raising hands; there are no leaders, but neither does everyone comment on everything. The content on the message

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[15] The initiative indeed had some degree of impact: although the fireworks did happen in Budapest, but with a lesser budget, and multiple cities decided to cancel the whole show, and spend the money on the victims of the flood.

board is being published by a team of five people, all professionals; there is an editor by trade among them"[16] (interview with Péter Juhász, founder and spokesman for the EMS group, Heti Válasz) .

The first live protest took place in front of the Hungarian Parliament on the January 14 2011. Around ten thousand people showed up to support the freedom of press[17], calling for the **modification** of the media law, and for setting up an independent media authority. The protest went down in a peaceful manner, and at the end the organizers announced that the next demonstration would take place in less than two weeks, on the 27th of January. The second protest attracted a smaller crowd, as an estimated eight thousand showed up at the demonstration[18]. The non-political nature of the protest had been emphasized several times, underlining that no political party is affiliated with the initiative.

On 15 March, the anniversary of the 1848 revolution and a national holiday in Hungary, EMS organized another protest for the same cause. Tens of thousands showed up for EMS's biggest demonstration up to that point. The most optimistic estimates talk about almost 50 000 participants[19]. Although officially the protest was still explicitly addressing the issue of press freedom, speakers elaborated on the perceived problems with the government in

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[16] Borbás, B.(2011,October). Variációk millióra – Ellenzéki Facebook-csoportok és a függetlenség. *Heti Válasz*, No.43,pp.17-18

[17] Tízezren a médiatörvény ellen. (2011, January 14) Retrieved January 7, 2012, from Hírszerző website: http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20110114_tuntettek_a_mediatorveny_ellen

[18] Megint a civileké volt a Kossuth tér. (2011, January 28) Retrieved April 2, 2012, from 168óraonline website: http://www.168ora.hu/itthon/megint-a-civileke-volt-a-kossuth-ter-69092.html

[19]Szervezők-1989 óta a legnagyobb civil tüntetés.(2011,Márch 15) Retrieved January 7, 2012, from Galamus website:
http://galamus.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=58598:marcius-15-mediatoerveny-szervezk-1989-ota-a-legnagyobb-civil-tuentetes&catid=76:hazai-vonatkozasu-hirek&Itemid=113

more general terms and also addressed other issues. For example András Istvánffy, coordinator for the movement "4K!"[20], emphasized that denying a referendum regarding the new constitution was a problematic issue, whereas János Kulka talked of a coordinated attack against the democratic institutions of Hungary by the government.

The protest on April 15 was organized in Alkotmány utca (Constitution street), with the particular cause mentioned earlier by Istvánffy. This was the point where EMS broke the pattern of organizing protests in the name of the single cause of press freedom, and openly became a hub for the civic opposition. This change is also represented on the online surface, as the official blog of the protest moved from "sajtoszabadsagert" (for the freedom of press) to "egymillioan" (one million) in the beginning of April, and finally to "nemtetszikarendszer" (I don't like the system) in June. According to the official statement on the Facebook event, everyone who *"would like to have a constitution that every member of the Hungarian Republic can relate to, regardless of political affiliation, world view, age, nationality, gender, sexual orientation or religion"* was asked to join. Unlike the previous protests, this time broader range of civic organizations joined the cause, including the Association of Roma Political Scientists and Experts (Cigány Politológusok és Szakértők Szövetsége), the Coalition for Gay Rights (Meleg Egyenjogúságért Koalíció), and many others. The organizers asked anyone who attended not to carry symbols of political parties. On April 21, a smaller protest entitled "Don't sign it, Mister Paul!" (Ne írd alá, Pali bácsi!) was organized in front of the office of Pál Schmitt, the President of Hungary against the new constitution. Again,

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[20] "4K!" is an organization in Hungary that was active mostly in organizing flashmobs and non-political civic events. During the time when EMS emerged, it turned towards political activity, and more recently it became an official party to run on the 2014 elections.

numerous civic organizations joined, but the turnout remained low, as only around two hundred people attended the demonstration.[21]

A long period of passivity followed that last protest during the summer. In August, EMS had announced both to the authorities and to the public the date of the next demonstration under the name of 'Don't like the system'. In the Facebook group, it was published that the protest *"(...)wants to show the power of opposition against Orbán's regime. This is why the organizers expect the supporters of all democratic political parties and movements to come to our rally."*[22] The date was October 23, a national holiday, the anniversary of the breakout of the 1956 revolution. Tens of thousands showed up, at least as many people as on the previous, March 15 demonstration[23].

The last mass demonstration organized by EMS to date was held on March 15 2012, on the same place as the previous ones. During the protest, the organizers announced the new symbolic Alternative Head of State, and presented their program, the 'National Minimum +'. The program included propositions about the direction in which policies should be changed, raising concerns about the electoral law, an independent jurisdiction, democratic legislation, achieving a higher degree of transparency, and a solid stance with the fundamental ideas behind the values of the European Union.

The main mobilization channel through which EMS reached out to the potential protesters was the same channel on which EMS itself sprung up: the Facebook group. In the next section, I am providing a narrative description of the online activity that was aimed at

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[21] Ne írd alá Pali bácsi. (2011, April 21) Retrieved April 7, 2012, from Népszava Online website: http://nepszava.com/2011/04/magyarorszag/ne-ird-ala-pali-bacsi-a-tuntetes-kepei.html
[22] From the public Facebook event of the 23 October protest. http://www.facebook.com/events/229820553736978/ Retrieved: 2012 05 22

[23]Tízezrek a szabad sajtó útján. (2011,Ocober 23) Retrieved April 7, 2012, from NOL website: http://nol.hu/belfold/tizezrek_a_szabad_sajto_utjan__ne_csak_lajkolj__szervezodj_

bringing the masses of *slacktivists* who had already 'liked' the page to give voice to their concerns by attending the real life protests as well.

3.3   An overview of two online protest campaigns

In this section, I describe the online campaign of EMS for the two mass demonstrations in 2011: March 15 ('Protest for the Freedom of Press'), and October 23 ('I don't like the system'). This description intends to be an empirical example of how the toolkit offered by the online surface of the Facebook can be used to mobilize for offline activities, spread information and even ask for further contributions from the targeted audience.

During the two weeks before the March 15 protest, the wall of the EMS Facebook group was dominated by brief interviews in the form of video messages from a wide range of writers, musicians, scholars, celebrities and other well-known figures and 'common people' from Hungary, discussing the freedom of press and the media law. A total of 52 videos were uploaded by a profile connected to the Facebook group, containing a uniform intro and outro, with logos of EMS, details about the date, time and venue of the protest event. The videos were typically 1-5 minutes long. In most of the cases, links to the transcripts of the videos were also uploaded and linked in the Facebook group posts. The videos appeared on the surface of the EMS blog, on the Youtube channel of EMS, and in the Facebook page, but the vast majority of comments about the videos were posted on the Facebook page.

On the day of the protest, the group activity elevated: a call to take pictures and shoot videos was sent out to the members, asking them to send the material to the organizers. The last calls to join included pictures of the construction process of the stage. The planned live streaming of the demonstration could not be done, because Ustream, a Hungarian site through

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which the protest would have been broadcasted online was under maintenance. A few hours after the end of the protest, the organizers posted a note on the Facebook group, thanking all the participants for showing up. The post received the biggest amount of 'likes' in the history of the page by that time.

The project of the October 23 protest ended the relatively passive period of the EMS group in the offline world, which took place in the summer. During August, EMS had announced both to the authorities and to the public the date of the next demonstration under the name of 'Don't like the system'. In the Facebook group, it was announced that the protest *"(…)wants to show the power of opposition against Orbán's regime. This is why the organizers expect the supporters of all democratic political parties and movements to come to our rally."*[24]

The two weeks before the protest were in many respects similar to that of the previous one. Similar video messages were posted to the group. The most iconic element of the campaign was the campaign song that was released it on October 10. In an attempt to try to involve the members in the co-production of the video clip for the song, a call for participation which was released the next day. The organizers asked people to give their own faces to the clip, using web cameras to record themselves as they sing the refrain of the song[25]. This two-week period was also a time when EMS put an elevated effort in addressing an international audience by lessening the language barriers in the form of English language subtitles added to the campaign videos on Youtube. Also, a message to the supporters of EMS

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[24] From the public Facebook event of the 23 October protest. http://www.facebook.com/events/229820553736978/ Retrieved: 2012 05 22

[25] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSP81Che1X0

from Occupy Wall Street Press Team organizer Patric Bruner was posted, linking the agenda of OWS with that of EMS.

The posts that were propagating the protest itself were being posted from as early as the end of September, and as the time of the protest got closer, they became more frequent. A shift in the way of trying to reach the participants could be observed, as all but one call for protest included a picture or a video.

In many respects, October was the busiest month in the history of the Facebook group so far. More than a hundred separate posts were posted to the page by the organizers, the number of supporters who were joining the page soared, reaching the peek on the day of the protest. According to the official Facebook statistics, the week of October 23 was the week that was most active in the history of the EMS Facebook group to date.

3.4   The factors behind the EMS success

In this part, I illustrate the diverse reasons behind the potential mobilization outcomes of EMS. I present factors that are results of conscious activities on behalf of the EMS activists, and events that fall under the category of external factors which fueled the increase in the group's popularity. An attempt to map the innumerable local factors and global attributes of the social system that facilitate or constrain movement activity is beyond the scope of my thesis, but I find that this kind of illustration can to some extent balance the more dominant focus on the online realm in this work.
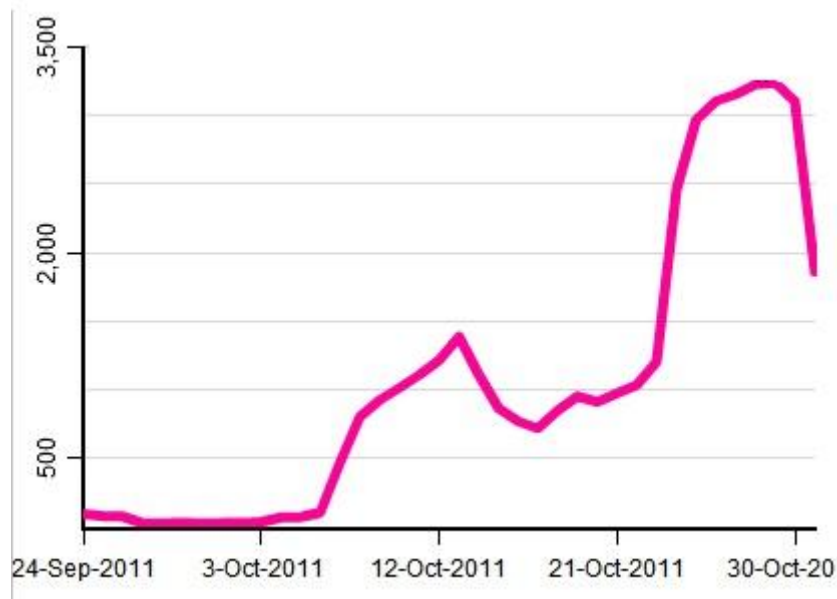
Figure 3 – number of new fans of the EMS Facebook group during the weeks before the protest on the 23rd (Source: socialbakers.com)

The first factor that I look at is the result of a conscious activity: on the 10th of October, EMS released the song titled "Nem tetszik a rendszer" ("I don't like the system") on YouTube. Within the first 12 hours, 3397 people shared the video on Facebook (source: EMS page), giving a massive boost of publicity to EMS. Although the effect would be hard to measure, such publicity must have been an organic part of the sudden increase in the number of new members. This version of the song did not include a video clip, solely an animation of the Hungarian flag with an orange (the symbol of the governing party Fidesz) in the middle, and a scissor that slowly cuts out the orange from the flag. During the second part of the song, information about the details of the real life protest and the Facebook group and event were being displayed, with additional direct hyperlinks embedded in the description of the video. An indicator of the video reaching a broader public is that while 5 600 times the viewer had

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been redirected from Facebook, 14 000 times the search engine of YouTube had been used to find the song (Source: YouTube).

The second version of the song, that included a music video made an impact of an even larger scale. It had been released on the October 17, which can be seen on the chart as a local minimum after which another wave of increase in new members can be observed. People who had already been members of the group shared the original version more intensely (329 shares directly from the EMS page) than the newer version with the video clip (231 shares). The underlying reason is probably that essentially the two versions carried the same message, as the audio stream had not been modified for the second version, and the idea of sharing very similar content twice is probably retentive for most people. Concerning publicity, the difference was far more visible: while in the case of the former video it took all the 11 days between the release of the two versions to reach 20 000 hits, it took around a day for the newer version to reach the same amount of hits, and by the third day it had crossed the threshold of 100 000 hits. Clearly, the video reached a much wider audience and was highly efficient in raising awareness of the group and the real life protest.

The second example is a situation that emerged as an external factor, but the effect it had was connected to the reaction on behalf of the organizers. On the evening of the 6th of October the government announced a rally for the same day as the forthcoming EMS mass demonstration (October 23), to a location very close to the protest of EMS. This announcement provoked an immediate reaction from the organizers, who had announced their intention of protesting on that day back in the summer. The conflict got wide publicity not only from the side of EMS, but in the mainstream media as well – the example for what Postmes and Brunstig explained about how more conflictual collective action becomes more represented in the media. EMS protest organizers published a document in which they

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requested Fidesz to find a different venue for their commemoration, as keeping the two events so close to each other according to them means a "lethal hazard". The negotiation between Fidesz and EMS did not end in a fruitful agreement. The organizers of the latter ended up postponing the event, in order to avoid the complications inherent in holding two mass events at the same time and place, knowing that the two events attract very different crowds. The additional publicity of the event and therefore the group as well, combined with the inflexible approach of the government and the civilized way through which the conflict had been resolved by EMS made the movement more known to the public and more appealing to some.

The third example is also connected to an external factor. On the 4th of October the exchange rate between currencies spiked above a level not seen since January 2009 - 300 Forints to the Euro. This is a symbolic barrier, and the event received wide publicity and had been discussed in the mainstream media extensively. The organizers took the opportunity to post a quote from Tibor Navracsics (who was the fraction leader of Fidesz, the main opposition party at that time), held a press conference shortly after the previous instance when the Euro reached the 300 Forint barrier in 2009. During the press conference he explained that getting to this point is unambiguously the fault of the government, demonstrating its lack of competence. The same issue was held against Fidesz this time, and it definitely did contribute to the decline in the party's popularity, therefore the strengthening of the EMS agenda.

The fourth example is also an unplanned event, altering the course of the events on October 23. On October 11, President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy announced that the Eurozone Summit that would have taken place between the 17th and the 18th in Brussels is to be postponed to October 23, the very day of the planned commemoration. Orbán had to make a decision: he could either go to Brussels to the summit, or stay at home to make a speech on the commemoration. He decided that the summit was

more important, which was somewhat contradicting his emphasis on the relative independence of Hungary from the European Union. Also, instead of delegating the role of making the speech to one of the other charismatic leaders of the party, he decided to call off the whole commemoration. Looking at this act solely from the viewpoint of the success of the EMS demonstration, it probably had a positive effect on the overall turnout. People who were still concerned about the vicinity of the opposing event regarding both time and space could now be assured that it is safe to attend the event – multiple commenters expressed their worries about the Fidesz commemoration on the on-line surface of the demonstration. Regarding the number of supporters within the EMS Facebook group, this event probably did not make a significant impact. If it did, it is because of the additional publicity that had been mentioned before: the EMS group had been mentioned several times in the media in connection with the postponed Eurozone summit.

3.5 Distinguishing content on the EMS Facebook page: user generated and centrally published posts

The interface of a Facebook group typically consists of posts by the owner of the group and posts by individual members to the same surface, the "Wall". When setting up a group, the editor has a variety of options to fine-tune the accessibility, visibility and general structure of the page. Examining such options and the way they are being used can lead to a more thorough picture which can be helpful in the attempt to understand EMS as an instance of collective action, namely on the scale from traditional movement structured to the new, de-centralized variation.

EMS is set up in a way so that by default visitors see solely the posts by the page administrator, and by an additional click one can reach the content posted by users. The layout and the availability to post are the same for every user, regardless of whether one has "liked"

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the page before or not. This consequently means that the official posts have priority over the crowd sourced content, but in principle the latter can still be accessed rather easily. Additionally, it is important to point out that generally most pages, especially after reaching the membership threshold after which administrator posts would disappear in the plethora of content submitted by other users, have hardly any other choice but to distinguish their posts from those of the public. Consequently, the settings used by EMS can be interpreted as open, as there are hardly any obstacles for visitors to access and post additional content for the general public to see.

In this part I present the data I have gathered with regard to the way the two kinds of posts (the ones posted by EMS administrators and the ones posted by the public) are being displayed and reacted upon. Firstly, I look at data that I gathered on the content posted by users other than the administrators of the group, and then I turn to the data on the posts of the administrators. I move from the general hypothesis that currently the "Wall" is not an effective way of spreading information and promoting public debate in the case of user-generated posts. The reason for assuming this is that the large amount of content that appears on the platform introduces the risk of information overload, when there are no active and effective gatekeepers constantly present (Garrett 2006). Secondly, I turn to the posts by administrators, where the same mechanism should not appear, as the information flow can be controlled in a centralized way. Thirdly, I compare the results of the two analyses, explaining the appearing differences and similarities.

I monitored the EMS Facebook group on an hourly basis, on December 20 from 7am to 22pm. The reason for choosing this particular date was the lack of relevant events or breaking news in the immediate vicinity of the period, thereby the activity of the page should be considered 'normal'. I considered the possibility that the vicinity of the Christmas holidays

affect the data in this case, hence the next data set I coded on December 30. However, according to the traffic statistics for Hungary available at Alexa.com, neither the daily reach, nor the number of page views per user, nor the average time spent on Facebook changed considerably during those periods of time. In order to gain a comparative view, I have also monitored the amount of user generated posts during a ten day period of time five months later during May 2012, to be able to compare the results with the findings from December. I will present the results after introducing the findings of the first wave of analysis.
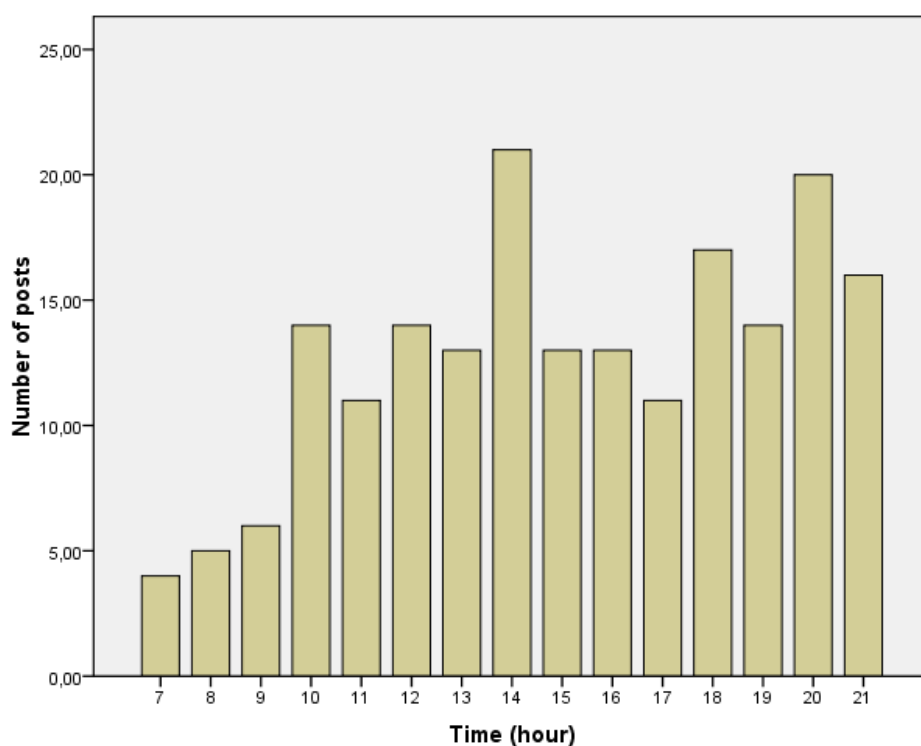

Figure 4: posts submitted to the EMS page (excluding posts by the group administrators)

As it can be seen on **Figure 4**, there were 192 posts during the monitored day in total, which makes up an average of 13 posts per hour**.** The distribution can be seen on the chart:

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during least popular hours there were 4 posts, while during the busiest hours there was new content posted every three minutes. It is reasonable to conclude that it would be problematic for the vast majority of visitors to deal with this amount of content, meaning that the threat of information overload is indeed present on the page. This must have also been noticed by the users who were posting the content: some of them used the method of re-posting their content several times during the course of the day in an unchanged format, in order to keep their content relatively close to the top of the page, hence making it more likely to be read by the audience. The spread of this behavior triggered a self-reinforcing process through which the amount of content had elevated to the level shown by **Figure 4**.

There is no feasible method to determine the number of views these posts get through the EMS page without having administrator rights in the group. Still, there are three indicators that can be examined: all posts can be liked, shared and commented on by other users, and the quantities - in the case of comments also the content - of these three indicators are publicly available. Comments are especially important as they indicate the exchange of ideas, views, reflections and it points to the general direction of public debate which is a significant, desirable aspect. Also they indicate the movement from personal to impersonal on the collective action space (Flanagin *et al*. 2006). Looking at these data for a series of posts can indicate the amount of activity the posts have stirred. If we consider the EMS page as a hub for spreading information like it is proclaimed by the creators of the group themselves, the 'Share' indicator is the most prominent number: the average amount of shares can give us an idea about the effectiveness of this channel for non-official supporters to spread messages. The other reason why the 'share' indicator should be seen as a relevant sign to be considered lies in the "social filter" effect (Stelter 2008). The "social filter" is what more and more people, especially amongst the younger generation, rely on in their consumption of

information including news and knowledge about civic issues. The audience is now being assembled not by the traditional media outlets, but by other members of the audience (2011). As the "social filter" partly takes the place of the traditional "professional filter" of editorial work, the system of information distribution changes in nature, and Facebook is one of the most prominent examples for this process. Thirdly, 'Likes' indicate support, and are also tools for pre-selecting the content that is more relevant for the people: as a result of Facebook's reputation algorithms briefly discussed in Chapter 3.3, the content is not strictly listed in a chronological order, but high level of attention (large amount of likes, shares and comments) pushes it further towards the top of the page, making it more likely to be noticed by the potential audience.

	Likes	Shares	Comments
Mean	1,0782	,0838	1,9330
Median	0	0	0
Minimum	0	0	0
Maximum	9,00	2,00	22,00
Sum	193,00	15,00	346,00

Table 1 – Like, share, and comment frequencies of contents shared by the public

(N=179)

Table 1 shows the like, comment and share frequencies on posts that had been published from 8am to 10pm on December 30 2011. The median value of 0 in all three cases indicates that the majority of posts did not attract any feedback whatsoever. Although this does not indicate that the posts are not viewed by any individual, the lack of 'likes', shares and communication between the one posting and the audience points to the general conclusion that this kind of communication of information and ideas have significant drawbacks in distributing information.

To put it into a comparative perspective and to get a more thorough look of the online activity of EMS, I have gathered similar data about the posts that had been posted by the EMS administrators. As these posts are significantly rarer, I looked at all the posts from the course of November and December 2011, to get a sufficient amount of data for analysis. **Table 2** shows the same frequencies for the 116 posts that had been posted by EMS administrators directly.

	Likes	Comments	Shares
Mean	311,8	57,4	86,8
Median	226,5	48	63
Minimum	53	3	1
Maximum	1727,00	208,00	426,00
Sum	36200,00	6659,00	10065,00

Table 2 - Like, share, and comment frequencies of contents shared by EMS (N=116)

The striking difference between the number of likes, shares and comments are not surprising not only because of the higher visibility of the EMS posts, but more importantly because while the EMS posts had been collected from 2 months, while the public ones had been posted during the course of one single day. If we look at the daily average, it turns out that 603 likes, 110 comments and 167 shares are being made every day to the EMS posts. In the case of public posts, the numbers are 193, 346 and 15 respectively. This leads to two conclusions that I find surprising and of which both needs further explanation.

Firstly, it is visible that although individual posts by EMS are vastly more popular among visitors regarding activity, still, in sum the daily total shows that the differences are not that great after all. In fact, the amounts of daily comments, which are the supposed indicators of public debate, are three times as high in the case of public posts. A closer look on the other hand reveals that in 80 percent of the cases there are less than 3 comments on posts and only in 5 percent of the cases are there more than 10. This means that although the activity connected to other peoples posts is in total not as small as it seems at a first glance, the huge quantity of posts limit the rise of any substantial interactions and debates. In more than half of the cases there is not even a single 'like' connected to the post, which is the gesture that needs the smallest amount of effort.

Secondly, there are striking differences in the proportions of shares, likes and comments on posts that are published by EMS administrators, and those by the public.
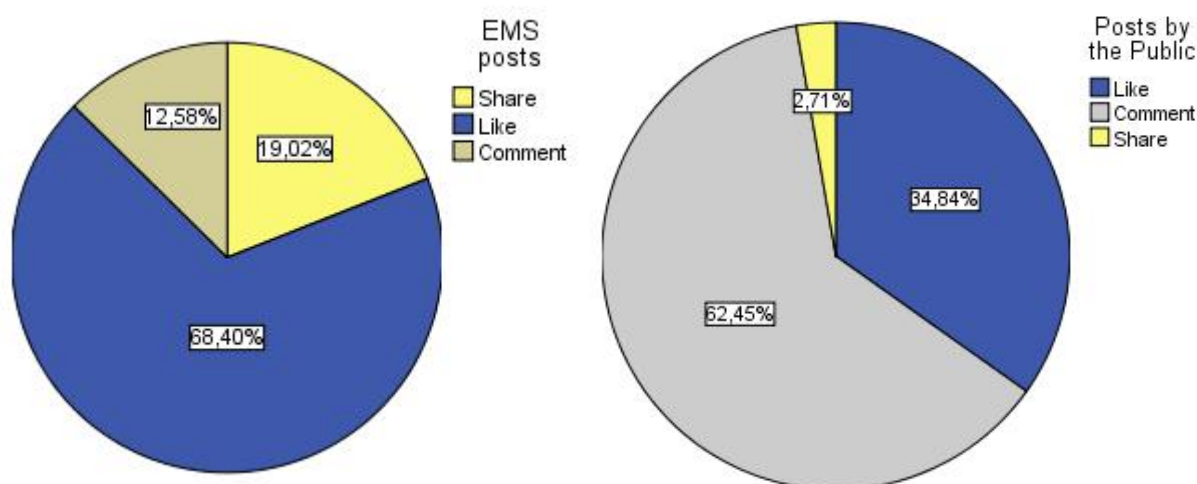
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Figure 5 – Proportions of reaction types in the case of EMS and public posts.

Figure 5 shows a graphic illustration of the phenomenon represented by the data above. It is clearly visible how differently each type of content had been reacted to. Two thirds of the gestures cast to EMS posts are 'likes', and sharing represents a steady 19 percent while the smallest proportion is that of commenting. Public posts show a very different picture: comments make up almost two thirds of the gestures while sharing is almost nonexistent. Moreover, as I have explained above, the comments in the case of the public posts are almost always limited to a single comment to a given post.

As this part of my analysis is not dealing with the content of either the posts or the comments, it would not be legitimate to draw far-fetched conclusions. Still, the analysis highlighted the differences between the two kinds of posts, strengthening the idea that the public posts do not attract much attention and debate, but only with limitations. The posting and reacting habits sketch a cardinally different picture for the two authoring forms, and further analysis is needed to determine the exact nature of the differences. Most importantly,

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qualitative data regarding the content of the posts and comments has to be used and additional quantitative research is needed to verify the tendencies discovered so far.

3.6   Content analysis – the "calls for activism"

The findings from the analysis so far assured me that the adequate way of selecting cases for the analysis of posts that are specifically aimed at engaging the members of the group in an activity (I call these posts "calls") should be the ones posted by the EMS group administrators. This way, I attempt to get a more thorough picture on the methods used to convert the most basic kind of slacktivism (which is the act of 'liking' the EMS page) into a broader category of activities. These instances should be seen as attempts to invoke acts from the category of **organization/mobilization**. Because the boundaries between the categories are hard to grasp, the coded units often carry the characteristics of the categories of **awareness/advocacy** and **action/reaction** as well (Vegh 2003).

My sampling units are individual posts appearing on the "wall" of the Facebook group. Posts might contain embedded media content from within Facebook or from other sources. I chose to consider these contents parts of the post as well, so the sampling units may contain content outside Facebook, connected via hyperlinks. The total range of content is all posts posted by the EMS administrators from the beginning of January 2011 to the end of March 2012. During the course of these 15 months, a total of 1094 posts had been made by EMS administrators, among which I considered 264 instances where the authors were calling for online or offline activism.

My categorization is based on the scheme suggested by Vegh (2003): I distinguished between call for offline action, call for online action that normally happens offline, but can be done more efficiently in an online environment, and call for an online action that has no direct

offline counterpart. Additionally, I added three separate categories to quantify the amount of three other, particular instances: calls for offline protests, calls for donations, and a category of Facebook 'Notes' that were summarizing a set of news pieces concerning the civil society. The latter category is a short lived initiative that was announced on the EMS Facebook page on May 3, the International World Press Freedom Day, and lasted for less than two months, until June 31 2011. During the course of this period, ten issues were distributed in the Facebook group. Secondly, I made the separate category for calls for donations to grasp the reliance on the members of the group financially: the close observation of the calls in relation to the actual amount of money that was gathered indicates whether the case of joining the EMS group is more similar to the example of slacktivism observed by Morozov (2011) in the case of Saving the Children of Africa, or a more effective way of gathering financial support to organize the protests. Thirdly, the reason behind separating the calls for offline protest was the realization during the coding process that the EMS calls for offline protesting represent the vast majority of all the calls for activism. Putting the calls in a separate category helps observing the extent to which the calls go *beyond* this primary goal, keeping in mind that the category is inherently a part of the calls for offline action. Although the act of making such categories violates the rules of quantitative content analysis (Weare and Lin 2000), this analysis does not include statistical procedures requiring mutually exclusive categories, therefore the violation can be justified.

In the process of coding, I encountered several occasions where applying a category was not a straightforward choice. For example calls for events that fit the definition of protest were instead referred to as flashmobs: an activity where a group of people mobilized by social media meet in a public place for the purpose of doing an unusual or entertaining activity of short duration. Investigating the question revealed that the reason on behalf of the organizers

to call such events flashmobs was that although Hungarian law does not allow for protests which were not announced in advance, flashmobs are in a legislative grey zone. There is no law for banning flashmobs, so it lets the organizers gather a mass of people without infringing any law. In these cases, I used the code for offline protest, as these events classify for protests from every other viewpoint apart from the name. Some other issues were harder to resolve. The most common ones were cases where a single post contained calls for actions of different categories. In those cases I used the somewhat subjective method of choosing the most dominant type among the ones apparent, and coded accordingly. To each post I also wrote a summary of what exact activity it calls for, which I used as a guideline for the overall assessment of each category.
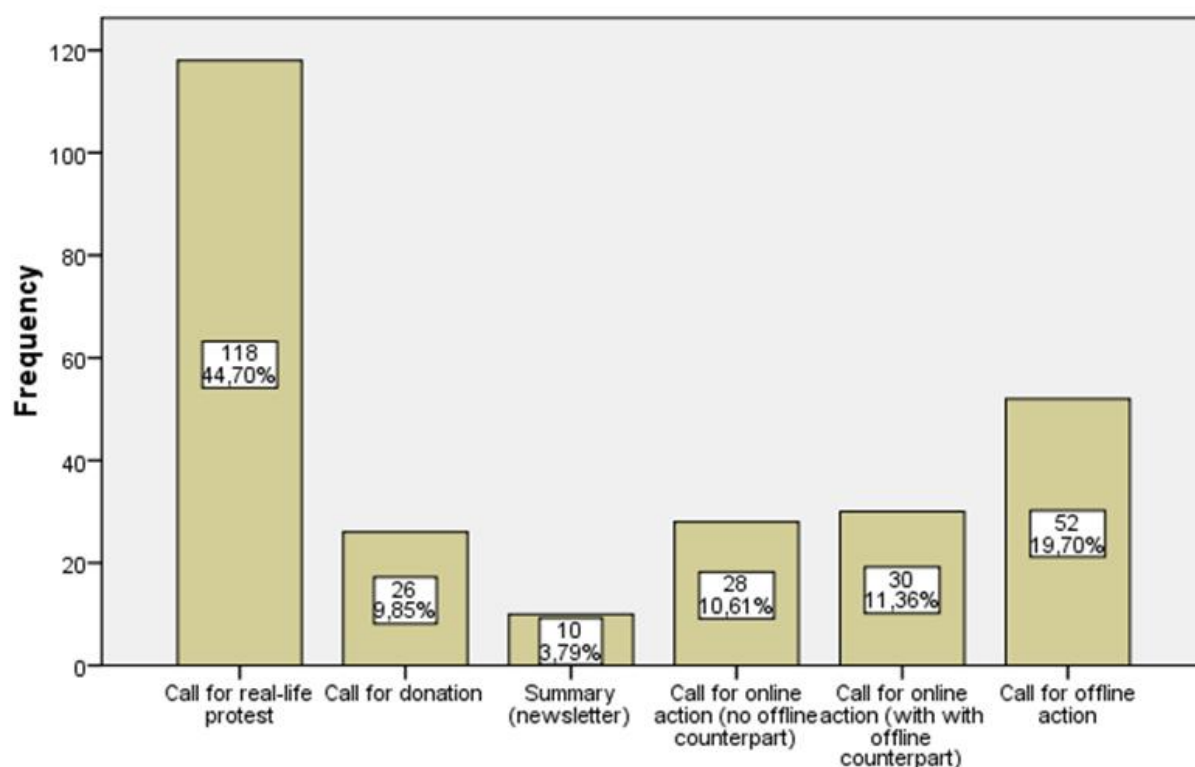

Figure 6: Calls for activism on the EMS Facebook page between January 2011 and March 2012 – Distribution by categories (N=264)

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As Figure 6 shows, almost half of the calls were calling the group members to join offline protests. If we take into consideration that the second most populous category is call for offline action, it can be concluded that in more than two thirds of the cases, the EMS administrators are urging the members to leave the online environment, and get engaged in an activity that is not merely a digital representation of offline activities. The calls for online participation - whether or not they have a direct offline counterpart - represent less populous categories, but the sum of these two latter categories make up a larger minority of the posts than the calls for offline participation, excluding protest events. It is also visible on the chart that although there were 26 instances when the organizers were asking directly for donations, but it is also not the dominant method of trying to engage the members. The short-lived project of Facebook group newsletters represents the smallest category among the six. In the next part of this section, I will discuss the qualitative results of the content analysis.

The calls for donations were generally guided by the principle of transparency: the organizers posted details about their expenses that were all connected to organizing the protests and other events connected to EMS. Among the 26 calls for donation there were five instances when the organizers were asking members to support other Hungarian NGOs. The success in the case of the 2011 March 15 demonstration was obvious: the calls for donations started weeks before the protest, and just two days after the event, on March 17 the organizers asked people to stop sending money, as all the expenses were already covered by the donations. On the other hand, the expenses for the most recent, 2012 March 15 mass protest are still partly uncovered by the donations. This suggests that some of the initial enthusiasm of the members had faded. Multiple factors can be accounted for this phenomenon. For example, it is highly possible that there are many people who became disappointed by EMS,

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seeing that there were no tangible results of their activity. Another possible mechanism is the one suggested by Morozov: people who donated once became satisfied by their first charity act, and thereby they no longer felt the urge for further engagement.

Turning to the EMS initiative of publishing a newsletter, I found that each issue contained six different categories, each of them containing a set of links. The categories were *breaking news, civil voices, offline, online, videos/movies,* and *articles.* For eight consecutive weeks, in each category the authors collected information about what is happening in the civil society in Hungary. The idea was that people could send information that was missing from the newsletter via email, and the editors complemented the issues with the additional articles, news pieces and calls for action. The initiative had a great potential in overcoming the flaw of the group regarding the information overload on the part of the page where everyone could post, leading to a vast amount of posts that I have described in the previous chapter. Furthermore, the amount of feedback the newsletters received in terms of comments and 'likes' is also larger: although the newsletters received exactly the same amount of 'likes' as the calls for action on average (mean=274), they attracted significantly more comments (mean=102) than the average calls for action (mean=72). In the light of these findings, it is hard to understand why the initiative stopped after the tenth issue.

The calls for offline participation were aimed at facilitating deeper engagement, paving the potential way from slacktivism to activism. The posts in this category included calls for volunteers for the protests to do minor tasks to ensure that the events run swiftly, for example reporting to the main organizers if anything potentially dangerous happens during the protests. The instances where people were needed for more specific tasks (for example a reliable translator or someone who knows sign language) were mostly successful: an appropriate volunteer was found very fast in the majority of cases. The bulk of the calls for

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offline participation included invites to various events, workshops, and conferences organized by EMS and other actors of the civil society.

In order to broaden the reach of EMS, organizers often asked members to spread information about the protests to a broader audience online. In an attempt to make members contribute without raising the amount of efforts needed only slightly, a "sharing flashmob" was organized: users of various social media sites were asked to post information and pictures about the January 14 2011 protest during a given period of time to all the online surfaces they could reach. A link with downloadable pictures and banners of the protest was included in the call. This kind of action not only makes the act of sharing information change from individualistic to collectivistic, but it is potentially useful in helping to build a collective identity.

In September 2011, EMS launched the *volunteer propagandist competition*, where supporters could post a picture or a short video, which *'urges every dissatisfied Hungarian citizen to make his/her voice heard, show him/herself, and take part in the demonstration opposing the political power'*. The organizers made an empty template containing the details about the demonstration and the address of the Facebook group available, the volunteers just had to put the desired image in the middle. Everyone could view the pictures on an album posted in the Facebook group, and vote by 'liking' the pictures. Another, similar competition was launched also in September 2011, where people could modify a picture on which Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is shown with his hand held out. The competitors were urged to edit the picture, putting various objects under Orbán's hand. The satirical competition was highly successful, as apparently the fantasy of a lot of participants was moved by the project. Some pictures went viral, carrying the address of EMS with them. This kind of advertisement for the group allowed for reaching out to a wider audience.

This, second part of the section intended to be a snapshot on the range of different calls for activism that were posted by the EMS group. Clearly, the latter case can hardly be seen as a valuable addition to civil society, but it fits the category of *cultural prodiction*, an important part of the repertoire of electronic contention (Costanza-Choc 2003).

3.7 An overall evaluation of the Internet use of EMS

In the light of the findings described so far, it is possible to provide an overall evaluation of the Internet use of EMS. In the classification of Vegh (2003), the bulk of the EMS online activity falls into the *awareness/advocacy* category. What started up as a slacktivist act through which people could effortlessly express their dissatisfaction with the media law became a hub for gathering and distributing alternative news and information. This kind of distribution network is used effectively for organization and mobilization purposes as well, but unlike a in the case of pure, centrally distributed content on a mailing list, EMS directly provides a surface for individuals to share their opinions by posting their own content, or commenting on that of the EMS administrators. At the same time, especially in the former case, there is a high risk that the content disappears in the masses of competing posts. I could not find clear instances where EMS used the remaining area of Internet activism according to Vegh: *action/reaction*. These violent instances of Internet activism are consciously omitted from the toolkit of EMS. The group consciously restrains itself from violence, in the offline and the online worlds as well. Still, if one of the campaigns directed at sending uniform emails to a certain politician happens to go really well, than it might qualify as email bombing.

From Costanza-Chocks (2003) classification, the whole range of tactics is being used by EMS. The EMS Facebook group itself can be seen as an act of *representation*, as it

establishes an ongoing presence for EMS. *Information distribution* is in the main profile of EMS, and the video clip, or the results of the *volunteer propagandist competition* are good examples for *cultural production.* I elaborated on the issue of *fund-raising*, arguing that EMS uses its online representation for collecting donations successfully, but with limitations. The category of *lobbying* includes the online petitions that are also used as a tool by EMS. Similarly, the diversity of sources from which the news pieces were selected for distribution indicates that the EMS administrators use the Internet for *research* purposes extensively.

Evaluating the EMS according to the classification of Van Laer and Van Aelst (2009) reveals that the group provides opportunities to get engaged in activities that mostly require a lower level of commitment, thereby putting the bulk of the EMS activity in the lower part of the matrix (see Figure 1). At the same time, there is no data about the degree to which participants find engaging in activities which does not require a lot of effort dangerous, because of the potentially inherent risks. Particularly, if one uses his or her real name on a social network site, publicly expressing the support for a group that is openly opposing the government might be perceived as a rather risky behavior in a repressive environment. Regarding the other axis, in the organization of EMS protests the Internet mostly has a *facilitating function*, but in the case of other activities, a broader way of Internet use is present. For example the whole concept of 'liking' pages and content are typically Internet based activities, but to some extent so are the above mentioned online petitions and donations. Consequently, I find that apart from activities that represent the highest level of threshold (i.e. destruction of property or hacktivism), the EMS group covers the whole matrix of Internet-supported and Internet-based types of action.

Regarding Postmes and Brunsting's classification criteria (2002), two conclusions can be made for EMS. Firstly, EMS propagates more collectivistic forms of action, even though

somewhat paradoxically the online actions can be done solitarily. Still, for example the online petitions, and the 'sharing flashmobs' are both categorized as collectivistic action, and so is the real-life protests or attending one of the other events. The second scale that ranges from persuasive to confrontational mostly mirrors the threshold axis of Van Laer and Van Aelst, so the conclusions are very similar: the EMS activities are taking place mostly on the persuasive side of the scale. The limitations concerning the risks of engagement are not represented in Postmes and Brunsting's classification, which points to the conclusion that in such cases, the classification of Van Laer and Van Aelst proves to be more useful.

Looking at the EMS Facebook group as a flexible information environment reveals its several advantages. From a range of material provided, the participant can choose the specific content, depending on his or her interest, time available and intended depth of involvement. If on the same surface various contents are available and opportunities for different levels of participation are offered, there is less chance that participation is avoided solely because the presented option does not suit the potential participant. In the case of EMS for example, a new member can act various ways. If the individual is looking for information, a range of options are offered. A quick overview of the agenda can be read by clicking on the 'Info' page. There are links provided there to the official blog, through which the 12 most objected attributes of the system according to the movement can be read, all of which can be reviewed in depth by another click. More cryptic content ranging from the music video to celebrities briefly explaining their personal view about the problems with the system are embedded in the news stream, so is a variety of more extensive, critical articles. For the purpose of participating, options are similarly diversified. The most basic gestures include 'liking' the page (it is not a precondition for accessing any of the content) or the individual posts and sharing them. More costly involvements include donations via PayPal, or participating by uploading a caricature.

The elevated efficiency of mobilization achieved by rapid communication had been observed by numerous scholars including Bimber (2000) and Myers (1994). On the other hand, certain risks are also involved in the same process. Because of the ability to effectively diffuse information without putting in a lot of effort, individuals might not concentrate enough on articulating properly, or checking the validity of the information that is being circulated. This can result in an overall deteriorated quality of the information regarding the movement that is circulated on line, which carries the threat of unintentionally transforming the movement – for example via distorting the message that a protest is intended to carry (Ayres 1999). At the same time Elin (2003) points out that it is similarly easy to verify information using the same ICTs, lessening the risk of misinformation.

In the case of EMS, which started out as a single purpose organization, the process is somewhat different. Instead of it being only one of many among the causes that are loosely connected, it became a central hub. By doing so, EMS turned into an organization which has an internal hierarchy, publishing statements and organizing events but at the same time acting as a surface for sharing information including calls for various related activities by any participant. Thereby, EMS works as a combination of top down and bottom up structures.

The history of EMS and the use of technology by its organizers resemble the story of MoveOn. MoveOn was initially a website that contained an online petition requesting US Congress to pass a simple censure motion rather than go through impeachment hearings, and "move on" to more pressing policy issues (Chadwick 2007). The petition successfully collected over a quarter of a million signatures within a month, and managed to mobilize thousands of volunteers, who took the online action to the offline world, distributing hard copies of the petition to representatives (Brown 1998). After this initial success, MoveOn engaged in a rapid repertoire switch, diversifying operations and transforming itself into a

transnational anti-war movement, a narrowly focused U.S. domestic lobby group, and engaged in U.S. electoral politics. What started off as a single purpose website set up to host an online petition, became a hybrid mobilization movement (Chadwick 2007).

The case of EMS is in many ways similar to the story of MoveOn. It also started off as a site for people to express discontent with a single issue – the new media law in Hungary. Similarly, the group managed to take its cause from the Internet to the streets, organizing a set of protests. The EMS Facebook group soon was supplemented with the interlinked EMS blog, and Youtube channel. Apart from the changing repertoire, the agenda of EMS also broadened significantly, as it could be seen from the analysis of the content the group posted on its online site. Although the Hungarian news media refer to EMS as the "EMS Facebook group", in reality, day by day it becomes less and less accurate – like calling MoveOn an online petition site.

The Facebook group itself is indeed a valuable medium through which information about EMS can be efficiently distributed, and is well suited for the kind of content that is entertaining and informative at the same time, not requiring a lot of effort on behalf of the users, but which can be a first step in engaging with activities of EMS, as described in the 'stepping-stone theory' of participation (Verhulst and Van Laer 2008). Still, in the case of EMS, the next step is somewhat unclear. The most prominent ways in which the Facebook group can work as a facilitator of collective action is as a distribution hub of alternative information. In this regard, the group is centralized to some degree. Although truly everyone can post their ideas on the page, thereby having the potential ability to be seen by the over 100 000 members of the group, the most direct mechanism of simply posting the content on the page is rarely causing the desired spread. The distinction Hargittai (2000) makes between 'availability' and 'reachability' of content on the Internet applies in this context. These

limitations on the other hand are inherent in every environment where a vast array of content

is present, seeking for attention.

Conclusion

In my thesis, I attempted to grasp the complex relationship between the Internet and collective action. By paying attention to both the more optimistic and the skeptical viewpoints, my aim was to provide a balanced overview of this complex relationship, keeping in mind that the validity of both empirical findings and theoretical conclusions might not be fully applicable in the contemporary environment. Narrowing down my focus on social network sites, I elaborated on the advantages and disadvantages that these kinds of sites have in facilitating forms of collective action, highlighting the potential for civic groups with little resources to mobilize support and public attention.

Related to that, I introduced the recently emerged concept of slacktivism, presenting and evaluating different definitions in the literature, taking a critical look at the ground on which actions are categorized as acts of slacktivism. I argued against both discarding low-cost and low-risk activities as useless forms of collective action, and the limitation of slacktivism to the online environment. To specify and contextualize the contribution of the Internet to the repertoire for collective action, I presented four different classifications for online activism repertoires of action, each highlighting a different aspect of diverse forms of collective action.

In the third part of my thesis, I introduced my case study of EMS, providing context for its activity by briefly introducing the debate around the Hungarian media law, and the way EMS emerged as a reaction to the perceived infringement of press freedom. Collecting data from the EMS Facebook page and using the method of content analysis, I grasped EMS as a facilitator of collective action and as a distribution hub for information.

Regarding my research questions, through my case study I revealed the strong potential of social network sites in rapidly mobilizing masses of people for participating in collective action, effectively transferring the online presence to the offline world as well as broadening the activity online. By providing a wide variety of options for further engagement, the EMS group successfully managed to inform, involve, connect, and mobilize a growing amount of people. Therefore, my findings challenge the negative assessment of online civic engagement as a *slacktivist* activity, carrying little societal benefit.

The proposed directions for further research can be split into two categories: further investigation of the case study, and more research on the connection between social network sites and mobilization. Regarding the case study, an analysis of EMS from a distance in time would reveal whether and if yes to what direction is the action repertoire of EMS will change. In a more general aspect, the relation between social networking sites and movements should be further investigated: how are attitudes towards movements impacted by social media activism? In what ways are the process and outcomes of activist movements impacted by social media? Is there evidence of the "filter bubble" in action, and what are the consequences? In my case study, I did not test the reinforcement versus mobilization thesis, either. The real success of EMS would be apparent if survey data could confirm that the group managed to mobilize a substantial amount of people who were not civically engaged before.

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