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Romanian *Rezist* Protest. How Facebook Helps Fight Political Corruption

Monica PATRUT¹, Virgil STOICA²

Abstract

Immediately after the parliamentary elections in December 2016, the Social Democratic Party wants to amend the criminal legislation and pardon through an revolting ordinance, which caused a third wave of protests in post-December Romania. The core of the protests was made of social activists who held the position of network nodes, had previous experience and acted as rallying coagulant factors in the January-February 2017 events. In the present study, we focused our attention only on the online community: *Corruption kills* (in Romanian: *Coruptia ucide*), this being the oldest and most active in the Romanian social media. We wanted to show to what extent the representatives of this community managed to: a) increase the number of fans (involved) who supported the cause of the anti-corruption protests; and b) how Facebook was used as an interactive communication tool for users between January and February 2017. The *Corruption Kills* Community was perceived as a powerful tool of organization and rallying in the 2017 protest.

Keywords: social media, corruption, civic activism, online community, social problems, social networks, social movement,

Introduction

Activists around the world have come to use the alternative social media communication when access to the media to communicate with the public has been blocked or restricted (Rucht, 2004: 27). The activists have focused on developing and using their own online platforms to communicate and rally citizens to protest and become less dependent on the mainstream media (Atton, Hamilton, 2008). Research has shown that during the Arabic Spring revolutions, an extremely broad public could be contacted through Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Other recent

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protest movements from different regions of the world, from 15M / Indignados in Spain, Occupy Wall Street in the United States and Great Britain, the #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico, the Purple People movement in Italy and the Anonymous and Lulzsec hacker groups, have also shown the power of social media to influence the protests around the world. Social media circulates moods and specific messages instantly, potentially infinite in space and an unlimited virtual audience. Della Porta and Mosca (2005) consider that social media a) is a logistic resource available to some collective actors who no longer have other resources, b) allows the organization and expression of claims, c) informs and sensitizes the public, and d) facilitates the processes of identification in collective actions. Social media provides disintermediation, allowing direct addressing to the public and non-hierarchical networks. Using online platforms for planning, information and coordination, rallying costs are reduced to the lowest level. (Sava, 2014: 131).

In the network society, the protest also takes place in the online environment and on the streets of major cities, without a single command and control centre, without a leader, self-reflexive and eager to change social values and state, but without taking political power, continuously reconfiguring local and global network networks at the same time (Castells, 2013: 300-302). These online networks support informal user interactions. They are considered to be communication spaces which allow users to (a) form a (partially) public profile, (b) to form a list of users with which to have certain connections, and (c) to have access to the information and actions of the others in the network (Boyd, Ellison, 2008). Unlike face-to-face communication, these networks have an invisible audience, offer the opportunity to search for information, their content remains available online and can be multiplied by users. In addition, we are witnessing two vital developments in the contemporary social media outreach: accelerating and personalizing active communication (Poell & José van Dijck, 2015).

Participants can instantly upload instant images and recordings, can report in real-time the events they are involved in, a fact called by Papacharissi and Oliveira (2012: 273-74) 'instantaneity'. Obviously, these real-time transmissions should not distract the activist / protester from the essence of the problem to the elements of the show embedded in protest. Facebook users, Twitter or YouTube experience is personalized: we create our own personal networks through 'following' or 'friending' or our own communication spaces through hashtags or as groups and Facebook pages (Stoica, 2015). Our narratives or stories transmitted through 'connective action.' (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012) can also create, as with face-to-face protests, feelings of solidarity and camaraderie. Gerbaudo (2012:159) concludes that "social media have become emotional conduits for reconstructing a sense of togetherness among a spatially dispersed constituency, so as to facilitate its physical coming together.

Protests 2.0 (and) in Romania (2012- 2017) - brief overview

The street protests in the University Square (*Piața Universității*) (January 2012) against the reforms of the health system promoted by Emil Boc's government and backed by President Basescu are the first protests that the participants organized and rallied on social networks, especially Facebook (Momoc, 2014, p. 146). The pretext for triggering them was solidarity with the founder of the Emergency, Resuscitation and Descarceration Mobile Service, (Romanian abbreviation SMURD), Dr. Raed Arafat. Members of the online discussion groups scheduled Facebook protest hours in the public squares of major cities in the country. The most visible Facebook groups / pages that organized and coordinated their protests were in the *University Square*, and *Indignados of Romania*. The first message of solidarity was posted on Facebook on 11th January 2012 by the inhabitants of Cluj: "SMURD for us, we for SMURD! Stand by SMURD! The Emergency, Resuscitation and Descarceration Mobile Service is an obligation of the state towards its citizens. Come today, at 19, with a message of support in Union Square (Matei Corvin), to express our respect and solidarity with Raed Arafat!" (Goina, 2012: 204).

Generated by solidarity with the SMURD, spontaneous, temporarily violent, with participants from a multitude of socio-economic categories, the protests in January 2012 showed the "state of the nation" and the many problems of the country (Stoica, 2012 : 72-75). Making a very good presentation of the protesters' messages related to the problems in the Romanian political environment, Presada (2012) groups them as follows: (1) messages that send to Public goods and services ("The money for culture are spent on drinking; We want hospitals, not cathedrals; A guy of neutral gender destroyed our education; Go and bring back our ship fleet"); (2) Anti-corruption messages ("You took a big bribe from Rosia Montana; We don't want governments run by corporations anymore; Please excuse us, we do not produce as much as you steal!"); (3) messages about political parties and politicians (The socialists, liberals and democrats - the same filth; I want to vote for a free man!); (4) Democracy and change (Fatal error 404: Democracy not found!, Another revolution for the constitution, We want earlier elections, not elections run at the same time! People who jump want a change; Whoever is sad is a former political police officer!) (5) Awakening (I am/we are the new civil society; civil society player; Thank you, Basescu, for waking me up!; I came by myself, I was not brought here by bus!).

For students and most of the participants, the Internet and Facebook played an important role. There were hundreds of blogs and sites such as *indignati-va.ro*, *voxpública.ro* or *criticatac.ro* as well as Facebook events that called people to protest (Burean & Badescu, 2013: 2). However, on the one hand, based on the quantitative research data of the CeRe organization and cited by Presada (2012), at the national level it is considered that only 1% used the internet to get information about the protests in 2012 and 1% Facebook as a source of information during

the protests. On the other hand, the interactions created on the University Square page created multiple network connections with activists, journalists and policy makers nationwide. The University Square has turned into a force of pressure on Romanian politicians and managed to influence public opinion at (inter)national level. (Grigorasi, 2017: 158). Citizens organized themselves on Facebook and offered the Romanian political class the first lesson of civic engagement and involvement.

Organized horizontally on social networks, protesters rallied offline and online also in early September 2013 to block the mining project of the Canadian mining company, Gold Corporation, in Rosia Montana; the right-wing groups rallied against the exploitation of Romania's natural resources, of the "Romanian gold", by the foreign company Rosia Montana Gold Corporation; left-wing groups have rallied against the local authorities' abuses of the local community and the environmental risks caused by cyanide-based exploitation technology. (Momoc, 2014: 146). In order to attract the public's attention to the case, opponents were forced to be creative in the online environment, as traditional media kept silent on the subject (Gotiu, 2013: 362-363).

The protests dedicated to the Rosia Montana Project benefited from the support of some online communities (*United We Save, United We Change, United We Save Rosia Montana*) created on the Facebook platform. These were the most important channels of communication in which various messages and information supporting the protest was broadcast. The protesters were active online and offline (Adalbert Klein, 2013), spawned a type of hybrid behaviour that combined online viral activity with street demonstrations. The organization and rallying of protesters was made on Facebook through the pages promoting street demonstrations, by viralisation of information brochures, promotional materials, open letters and online petitions, use of hashtags, creation of cultural events. These included offline activities: concerts, cinema screenings, handicraft workshops, and flashmobs. Facebook offered experienced protesters a solid support to participate in these collective actions (Mercea, 2014). The next protest triggering factor was to obtain the building permit for the location of the first shale gas exploration probe in Romania at Pungesti, Vaslui county by Chevron. On 14th October 2013, locals protested because Chevron had brought the prospecting logistics and specialists to start the works of landscaping, research and then extraction of shale gas. The local people were helped by experts in the geology from Barlad and Greenpeace, the religious community and the clergy in the Vaslui area, active members of NGOs with national visibility, the Group of the Greens in the European Parliament (Colonescu, 2016: 65). On Facebook, the protest was visible after creating the two virtual communities: Pungesti-TV and Pungesti-Resistance. Through them, many photos and video files were sent to villagers and protesters coming from the country to support them against gendarmes, local authorities and Chevron's representatives. These virtual communities produced a strong emotional impact and contributed to the rallying of those who protested in the University Square in

Bucharest, succeeding in supporting the local protest action and giving it (national) visibility (Cmeciu & Coman, 2016: 22-23).

On 30th October 2015, at the “Colectiv” Nightclub in Bucharest, there was a fire which resulted in the death of 64 people. The public opinion considered that the “Colectiv” club tragedy was caused by the incompetence and corruption of the Romanian political system and, under the slogan “Corruption kills!”, The Romanians gathered by thousands in the street both in the country and in the diaspora. The main dissatisfaction of the protesters was the way the authorities granted the licenses for the functioning of the public places, then targeting the whole political class they accused of corruption and making it directly responsible for the social problems facing the Romanian society (Sultanescu, 2016). The protestors demanded respect, fairness and protection for the political class and, as a result of the extensive social movements; a new government formed by technocrats and led by Dacian Ciolos (Grigoriu, 2016) was invested in Romania.

A few days after the “Colectiv Club”, several pages or communities appeared on Facebook that provided information about the tragedy, its causes and its consequences: Corruption kills - #Colectiv, Colectiv Aid, R.I.P. - Colectiv, Together we resist, Colectiv Silence March, Col(l)ectiv(e) For The Future, #Colectiv Revolution, Solidarity with Romania #Colectiv. (Patrut, 2017). All these pages or communities created on Facebook facilitated the construction of an alternative communication space and a critical discourse, anti-system supported by a more and more consolidated civil society. These pages and virtual communities on Facebook were the main source of information for those who wanted to find real-time details about the tragedy and its victims and the main rallying tool for organizing volunteer centres and street protests (Patrut, 2017).

The role of the Corruption kills community in organizing and rallying anti-government protests in January-February 2017

Presentation of the socio-political context

The parliamentary elections on 11th December 2016 were won by the Social Democratic Party (Romanian abbreviation PSD). Two weeks after the investment, the Government met to issue an Emergency Ordinance aimed at amending the criminal law. Despite the warning of the country’s president who attended the government meeting on 18th January and the negative opinion received from the Superior Council of Magistracy, on 31st January, in the evening, the emergency ordinance amending the Criminal Codes (OUG 13/2017) was voted. At the first protest, on 18th January, 4,000 people came out on the streets of the capital. This was the beginning of what became known to the inter(national) public opinion as *the #rezist protest(s)*, the hashtag became the symbol of these protest movements. (Cozmei a, 2017).

The protests spread to many other cities in the country and the diaspora, people well-known to the public, or simply citizens participating in them. On 22nd January, with more than 30,000 people in Bucharest alone, President Klaus Iohannis came to express his solidarity with the demonstrators. “*A gang of politicians with criminal issues wants to change the Romanian law, wants to weaken the state law, but something like this cannot be admitted*”, Iohannis told journalists (Baiaș, 2017). Although on 29th January 2017, 100,000 people around the country went out on the streets to defend justice and the state law on 31st January, around 12 o’clock, the Minister of Justice, Florin Iordache, announced that an emergency ordinance was adopted to amend the Criminal Codes. The announcement was received with the president’s message posted on Facebook (it is “a mourning day for the state law”) and 15,000 people gathered in front of the government asking for its resignation (Ursu, 2017).

Although on 5th February, the Government adopted an emergency ordinance abrogating OUG 13 (2017) and the Romanian Parliament voted for its rejection on 21st February, the daily protests continued throughout this time. They were spectacular, especially those on 12th February, when in Bucharest the protesters formed a giant tricoloured flag by lighting the lanterns of their phones under red, yellow and blue-coloured sheets (Cozmei b, 2017) and that on 26th February, when in front of the headquarters of the Government, paper protesters and illuminated panels formed the flag of the European Union (Deutsche Welle).

#Corruption kills- online infrastructure for the # rezist protest

Facebook was the most accessible, free and fastest means of communication for the Romanian protesters. Appalled by the way in which those who had been sent to the Parliament and the Government in less than a month were preparing to step up the fragile Romanian democracy, to strangle the state law, immediately to organize Facebook. The most prominent groups during the protests were *#Resistance*, *Corruption Kills*, *600,000 for Resistance*, *Geeks for Democracy*, *Together We Resist*. The first group, *#Rezist (Romania Resists)*, was set up on 8th February with the stated purpose of supporting the street protests in Bucharest against the OUG 13(2017) and the popularity of the group among the protesters came from the fact that they launched the famous slogan (Boicu, 2017). The second group, the largest and the most active of all, *# Corruption kills* began its activity much earlier in 2015 after the fire from the “Colectiv” Club and the fall of the government Victor Ponta (Patrut, 2017) and joined the protests in January, consistently contributing to the coherence of the anti-government movement.

Florin Badita, the creator of the online community *#Corruption kills*, underlines that this community intends to inform and make citizens accountable about their rights and freedoms, to signal all their violations by the state. The members of this community want a Romania that respects their citizens and engages in anti-government protests after OUG 13 (2017). The purpose of the community is to

provide an online space for debates, create events, flashmobs, funny banners and slogans for protesters. Meanwhile, the group became a militant for the citizens' rights, and published a Joint Proclamation (Boicu, 2017). As in other cases, the Romanian online communities active during the January-February 2017 protests stimulated "moments of digital enthusiasm", when users experienced a "collective sense of possibility" (Poell & van Dijck, 2018). True connective leaders (Della Ratta and Valeriani, 2014) focused on connecting people and information, the administrators of these pages stimulated the users' enthusiasm, together producing and consolidating "hopeful collective narratives" (Gerbaudo, 2015: 254). The central points of these rallying narratives were the messages synthesized in the hashtag form of #rezist (*resist*), #coruptiaucide (*corruption kills*), #democracy, #romanianprotests, #RuleOfLaw, #neamsaturat (*we had enough*), #rezistentă (*the resistance*). The moral battle between the government and the protesters was conducted on Facebook by the administrators of these communities, the true "soft leaders or choreographers" (Gerbaudo, 2012: 5) who was always into the background, but managed to create the emotional space necessary for the deployment of the collective action.

Methodology

For this article, we collected the data / posts from the *Corruption kills* community from 18th January 2017, the day of the first anti-government march in Bucharest, to 28th February 2017, shortly after the protesters formed the flag of the European Union. All the quantitative data related to the activity of the *Corruption Kills* community used in the article were generously offered by the Facebrands.ro representatives, the only service for monitoring the Facebook pages in Romania. For the year of the anti-governmental protest analysis in this article, Facebrands.ro (2017) provided the following data about the 9,600,000 Facebook account holders: 50% were women and 50% men, 9.24% were 13-17 years of age, 21.47% were between 18-24 years, 26.83% between 25-34 years, 21.15% between 35-44 years, 12.63% between 45-54 years, 6.16% between 55-64 years and 2.53% over the age of 65. Facebook Account Holders account for 49% of the country's population and 66.7% of Romanian Internet users.

For our case study, we used the quantitative data provided by Facebrand.ro to show that social networks or virtual communities can also make a significant contribution to rallying protesters in the Romanian virtual space. We have taken the example of the largest virtual community on the most popular social network in Romania, Facebook. The *Corruption Kills* community was one of the most visible actors in civil society, an actor who has publicly assumed the role of online protest organizer. (Boicu, 2017). The population included in our survey is made up of the 68.915 members of the online community, members who have made at least the minimum effort to 'like' the community page.

The data presented will show the intersection between the online rallying and the offline participation in the Rezișt protest within the analyzed period. By comparing the demographics of the members of the analyzed community with the participants of the protests (Chis, Nicolescu & Bujdei-Tebeica, 2017), we will observe a generational model of rallying and participation for the 20-45-year-olds. Because the study focuses on collecting and analyzing some numerical data, the data provided by the activity of the *Corruption kills* community, we consider that the generalization of the study results should be avoided. Our pilot study can be complemented by qualitative research.

Research questions:

RQ 1 - To what extent was Facebook used by the administrators of the *Corruption kills* to increase the number of fans involved, as possible participants in the protests?

RQ 2- Was Facebook used as an interactive communication tool with those interested in organizing and conducting protests in January-February 2017?

Results

Once created, the Facebook page has to offer valuable, interesting and current information to those interested in protest issues. The number of new and / or involved fans of the page obliges and honours administrators, online content providers, this number also representing a key indicator showing the health or vitality of the page (Ernault, 2013). Facebook fans are those users who liked a page and who chose to receive updates from the liked page’s administrator. Engaged users are the fans involved, they are the unique people who interact with the content of the page over a certain amount of time either by clicking on an individual post or by creating stories (Carpenter, 2017). Engaged users generate more exposure among fans for the messages they have been interacting with.

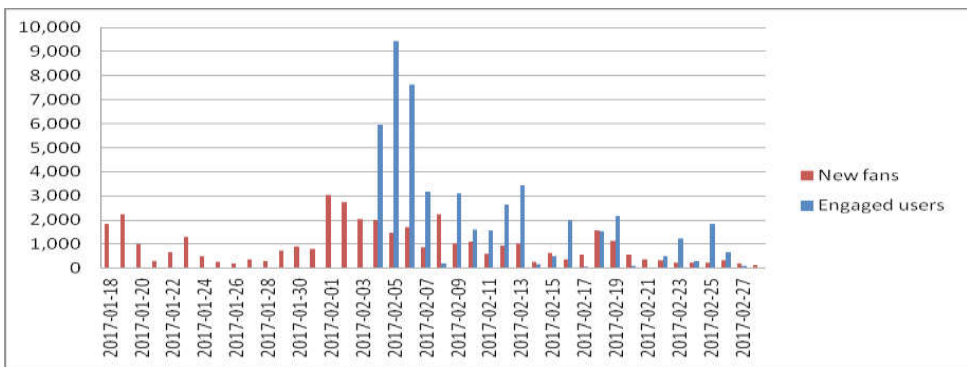


Figure 1: Corruption kills - new fans involved during the anti-corruption protests (January-February 2017)

The *Corruption Kills* page began immediately after the first Bucharest protest to increase its number of new fans, the highest increases being recorded on 19th January (+2,225 fans), 1st February (+3053 fans), 2nd February (+2751 fans), 3rd February (+2028 fans) and 8th February 8 (+2224 fans). These impressive increases in the number of fans answer the need for information felt by the protesters, on the analyzed page there is information about the new forms of law, about the cities in the country and the world where the Romanians will protest, the opinions of some specialists on the legislative changes initiated by the government, the most important political actors, reactions from the (national) media, the methods by which violent protests can be avoided.

The engaged fans began to appear after 5th February, following the Prime Minister’s announcement that OUG 13(2017) would be abrogated, ruled out with utmost distrust by public opinion and followed by a continuation of protests. According to the data provided by Facebrand.ro, the biggest increases in the number of fans involved were recorded on 4th February (+ 5943 engaged users), 5th February 5 (+9451 engaged users), 6th February (+7614 engaged users), and 13th February (+ 3452). If we carefully look at Figure 1, we find that this community has had a remarkable growth, which it has contributed to a constant and exemplary rallying in the Romanian online environment. These data can also be related to those in Figure 2 showing the number of protest participants in the street. Thus, we can see a correlation between the online activity on *Corruption kills* and the increase in the number of participants in street protests in the country. If we extend the comparison in demographic terms, comparing the age of the new or engaged fans of the Corruption Communion, it is the age of the protesters in the major cities of the country (Chis, Nicolescu & Bujdei-Tebeica, 2017) that they overlap with the dominant segment ranging from 20 to 45 years.

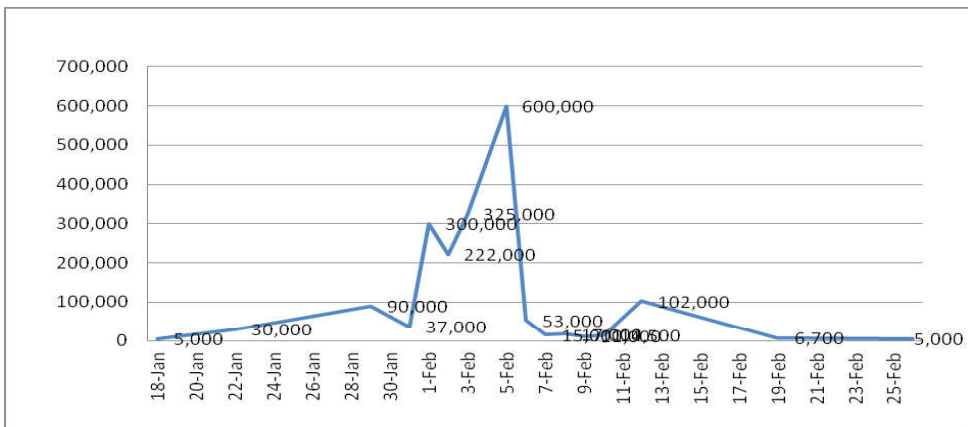


Figure 2: Participation in protests from 18th January to 25th February 2017 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017%E2%80%932018_Romanian_protests)

In order to answer the second question of our study, we are going to remind that interactivity is a feature specific to the web 2.0 era and is the key to genuine symmetrical bilateral communication between a political or organizational actor present in social media and its fans. On Facebook, we can measure interactivity in two ways: user-to-user and user-to-document (Tedesco, 2007: 1187). While the first form of interactivity involves distributing different posts from one member of the social network to another, the second involves assessing and commenting on the available posts / documents on the network. Both types of interactivity are able to show the involvement or commitment of virtual friends in communicating with the political or organizational actor. Interactivity or engagement rate provides a more nuanced and realistic picture of the political actor presence on Facebook. Engagement is “the number of people who clicked anywhere in your post. This includes liking, commenting and sharing and people who’ve viewed your video or clicked on your links and photos. And it also includes people who have clicked on a commenter’s name, liked a comment, clicked on your page name and even gave negative feedback by reporting your post” (Ernoul, 2013).

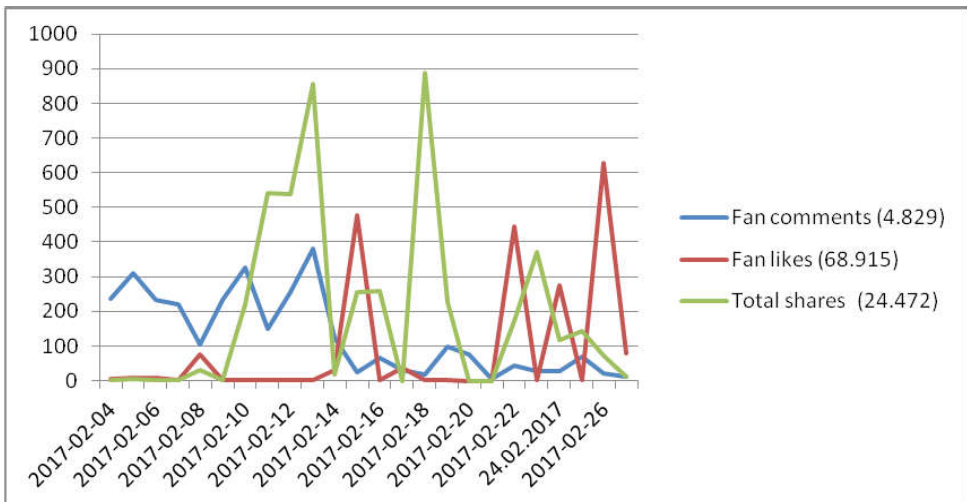


Figure 3: Interactivity of the page Corruption kills (February 2017)

As it can be seen in Figure 3, *Corruption Kills* has been a community of fans that have become very active since 2nd February: They offered the page analyzed 68,915 likes, left 4,829 comments, and shared to other friends on the network 24,472 contents . The posting that brought the greatest visibility to the page is on 7th February 2017 and is drafted in the form of a protest rallying, an invitation addressed to both Romanian and European citizens: “Let’s celebrate Romania in the Revolution of Light! Come and join me in Romania! City-break in Bucharest, Romania, the city where democracy was born again, for you and me! Come to Romania from any European city, and join me for the celebration of democracy

and light in Bucharest! It is a once in a life-time chance to celebrate democracy in a peaceful, but joyful way! We grant accommodation and joy! Together we stay united, united we stay stronger! For democracy and people!” This rallying urge received 1865 likes, 72 comments and 2014 shares from fans. The second post in the top of the visibility is on 5th February 2017, after the Government had adopted an emergency ordinance on the abolition of the OUG 13 on the amendment of the Criminal Codes and the protestors from Victoria’s Square in Bucharest lit at 9:00 p.m. the lanterns of their mobile phones, which will also be repeated to future protests. It’s a short post that dedicates the success of that day (“I was speechless in those minutes. #Suntemmainulti”), which received 2,873 likes, 68 comments and 973 shares.

The *Corruption Kill* Community was a genuine forum for discussion and debates, the place where information was exchanged, photos and videos were posted and shared by the protest participants in order to show their support for the movement and rally other acquaintances on the network. It was also here where (re) posted articles from the (inter) national press offered coverage of the anti-government protest. In fact, *Corruption kills* was a network node whose message was taken over by thousands of other users. Nien (2017) argues that social media can create “weak links” that attract together protesters with different identities that are allied against a common enemy, and facilitate networking and large interpersonal coalitions which allow personalized sharing of information resources to protest

Facebook also measures the interactivity and involvement in the activity of a page and with another indicator called *People talking about this*, an indicator that provides a snapshot of how fans engage in activity, events, and posts on the page under review. This number is especially about those people who return to that page and also after they liked it. To be precise, *People talking about this* is the number of unique users who created a “story” about a page over a seven-day period. Users create stories when they like your page and become fans, share, like and comment on posts on your page, answer a question or an event you create, mention the page or tag it in a photo, check or recommend page or claim an offer (Darwell, 2012).

The *Corruption kills* community, as it can be seen in *Figure 4*, had an activity that caused constant reactions during the anti-government protests in January-February 2017. The higher figures obtained for this indicator compared to *Figure no. 2* show that the page has gained a lot in the engagement rate and thanks to users who have registered their intention to participate in future events, in fact, the offline protest announcements have labelled the community and virtual friends either during live broadcasts or in posted photos, returned to the page with suggestions for better organization or rallying of the target audience.

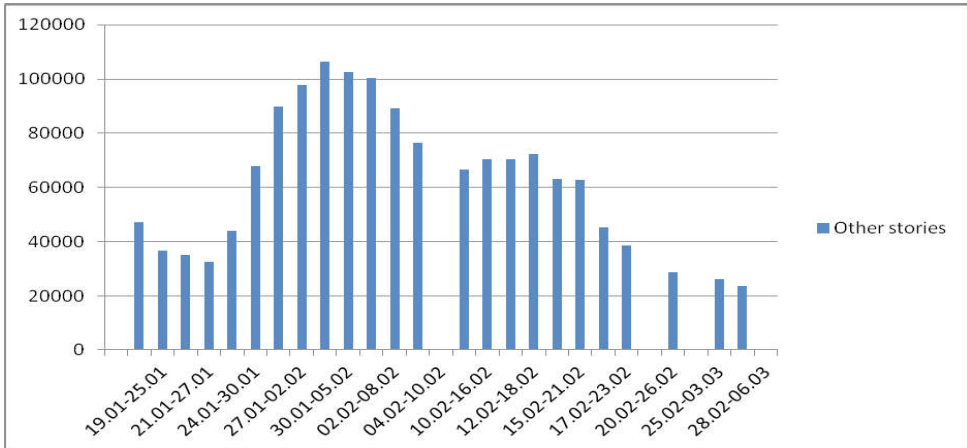


Figure 4: People talking about # Coruptia ucide

Getting the biggest figures at *People talking about this* indicator reminds us that the dynamics of the online activism has been changed by social media. Bennett & Segerberg (2012) showed that the new protest movements are driven by self-motivation of participants who distribute to others their own ideas, plans, images, resources. Sharing the content that supports the civic-political activism becomes, thus, a form of personal expression and self-validation of one's beliefs.

The most successful shared content on the network were stories created by users or organizers who showed proof of involvement and / or organization of events before the protests. Transparency of the social media platform enabled, by capitalizing on the principle of mass collaboration (Leadbeater, 2010), drawing up lists of all the events announcing protests in 238 localities in Romania or abroad (Dîrtu, 2017), which allowed the organizers to talk about an anti-corruption protest that crossed the country's borders. In addition, online registration as a future participant in the protest could be seen by all users and could be a challenge to action for other supporters of the cause.

The constant and high engagement rate during the social media campaign has shown the ability of the community administrator to get the daily attention of the citizens / users, to send as many fans as possible to their posts and to increase their own network visibility (Smitha, 2013, p. 6) to enable citizens to critically monitor government actions and increase their disruptive capacity for traditional political practices and institutions.

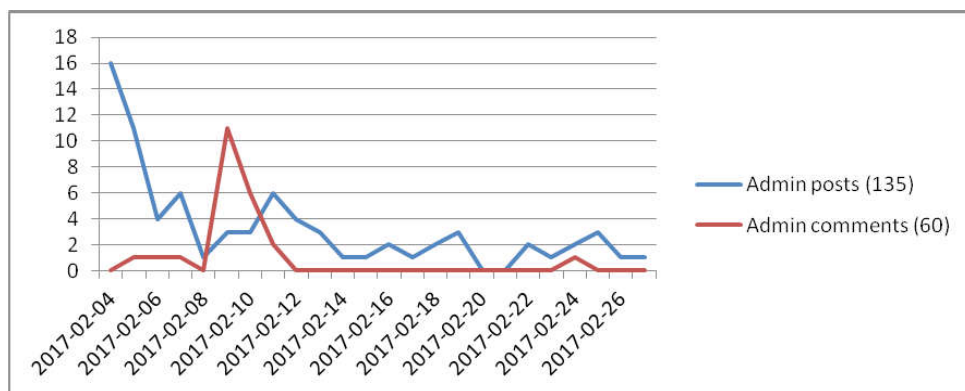


Figure 5: The activity of the administrator of the Corruption kills page during the protests of 2017

As it can be seen in Figure 4, the administrator's activity resulted in the writing of more than 135 posts (out of which 71 with photos, 30 with links to various articles in the (national) press or law, 25 with video to protests in the country or abroad and 9 statuses) and 60 comments. Through them, *Corruption kills*, together with other online communities that have the same purpose, collected, synthesised and made accessible the information in the political-judicial area, information directly related to the protests, read the users' comments and gave the expected feedback. In addition, the administrator managed to create events that announced future protests and to organize space-scattered actions, to coordinate people who joined to exchange ideas and plan different offline events without face-to-face meeting.

The online meetings and protests have turned into opportunities for mutual knowledge, communication and negotiation between the Administrator of *Corruption kills* and the users. The dialogue that seemed to illustrate the importance of Facebook pages / groups as unique to providing "safe spaces" for protesters' meetings and free expression is rendered below (Mundt, Ross, & Burnett, 2018). *Corruption Kills*: We are 51.000 members in *Coruptia Uicide* page. However, there are only a couple of thousands left in the streets. We would like to know from you why you haven't been in the streets lately. It is not a critique, but we consider that it would be helpful for us to know each of your reasons in order to understand why this [referring to the protests] is not happening anymore. We encourage you to leave a message on our page.

Doru Nadoleanu: Is it really not clear that we cannot spend 4 years in the streets? Is it not clear that we need a decisive political and social action?

Ion Stanciulescu: We stayed in the streets almost our entire life... and we have hopes in these beautiful and smart children, and us behind them, for a clean and fair country.

The *Corruption Kills* community contributed, together with other communities created in social media, to organizing and coordinating the protests in January-February 2017, launched many persuasive calls to action and provided external visibility to the protests. Protesters used Facebook (75%) and the phone (76%), WhatsApp (36%) as the main means of communication about protest. More than 78% of protesters used TV and Facebook to get information about protests. Participants in the protests were predominantly young people and 50-year-olds in urban areas with medium (30%) and upper (40%), students (11%) or employees in the private environment. Most of the demonstrators had the experience of participating in other protests organized and coordinated through social media (Jurcan, 2017).

Conclusion

Triggered by a government normative act, a stealthy decision *at night, as the thieves*, OUG 13 (2017) provoked the third wave of protests in post-December Romania. As it referred to amnesty and changes related to service abuse aimed at saving political leaders sentenced for corruption or abuse of power, this normative act generated a wave of collective emotion, an unprecedented social strike. In an opinion poll conducted by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (IRES) on 1st February 2017, 72% of the respondents declared that the government was doing bad, 65% declared themselves on behalf of the demonstrators and only 21% on the part of the government, 57 % considered it problematic that the ordinance was given without public consultation (Dancu, 2017). The protesters called for the integrity of the politicians, being convinced especially after the fire in the “Colectiv Club”, that the origin of all the dysfunctions in the economy and society is the phenomenon of corruption. This belief was shouted in various forms, with anger and humour in all the frozen centres of the big cities and invaded the Romanian social media.

The new forms of protest have transformed the virtual space into a public space of objection and signal the rupture between citizens and politicians, the WE/THEY dichotomy. This rupture was highlighted by the most popular slogans that have been heard all over the country: “Romania, wake up!”, “In democracy, thieves stay in jail”, “Social Democratic Party, red plague!”, “Marsh out, country traitor!”, “We want lustration”, “No penal men”, “Early elections”, “I am a thug, so I resist!”, “Justice, not corruption”, “We don’t want a nation of thieves”, “Down with the Government”, “Thieves, thieves!”, “A Parliament of thieves and mobsters”.

In relation to the recent social movements, social media is not just a technology, but also a space for expanding and supporting the social networks that these movements depend on. Valorising a logic of aggregation, individuals not only

interact with each other through the social media platforms, but also create a “collective subjectivity” (Juris, 2012: 266) that can easily disintegrate if offline interaction is also doubled. The *Corruption Kills* community has succeeded, together with other communities mentioned, to double social media collective subjectivity with concrete actions in the offline environment, to turn the mobilization of rebellious people on Facebook into street protests.

In the last few years, we can speak up in the Romanian space, we can talk about a rediscovery of the civic spirit that has caused an impressive number of people to leave the computer to vote or protest. The victory of Klaus Iohannis, Facebook President of Romania (Patrut, 2017 b), is the most representative example of how the online environment influences offline actions, but it is not the only one or the most recent (Patrut, M & Patrut, B., 2013 , Patrut, 2013a, Patrut, 2013b, Patrut, 2014, Patrut, 2015, Patrut, 2016). On Facebook, there were created event-pages whereby Romanians from the country and the diaspora are invited to go out on the streets to support the constitutional right to vote. There are electoral campaigning for rallying to vote and ideological motivation (Muresan, 2018).

With an almost absent civil society, it was concluded that Romania is far from developing a participatory culture (Badescu, Sum, & Uslaner 2004). Recently, however, young people aged between 25 and 40 have formed the new generation of protesters that have appeared in the public space and organized the three waves of protests in Romania: Rosia Montana & Pungesti (2013), Colectiv (2015) and OUG 13 (2017). This new type of activism with roots in the urban movements (Sava 2015) is considered to be a new type of commitment and is called by Gubernat & Rammelt (2017) recreative activism. This recreative activism is less influenced by political ideologies and is associated with unconventional political involvement, disappointment with the post-communist politics, rallying through social media and certain cultural models. In recent years, the political class has been strongly challenged in the street. Protests that spread in major urban centers were associated with the social media rallying and organization and with the expression of dissatisfaction with the political class. The success of these protests has shown that rallying in social media can work and that political power is receptive to street messages and civic actions of challenge. Civic consciousness seems to reinvent itself and is helped by facilitating communication through social media.

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