

#Rezist 2017: Communicating Dissent in a Hypermedia Environment

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SUMMARY

Protest communication and campaigning plays a crucial role in democracy, and can bring about regime change, yet is treated as of secondary importance to electioneering activities. This paper counters the imbalance by focusing on the #Rezist protests in Romania 2017; triggered by an attempt by government to exonerate senior politicians who had been found guilty of corruption. Young Romanians took control of Victory Square, facing the government building, to demand the law be repealed and European law be respected. In order to counter the government narrative which dominated party supportive media, protesters quickly developed their own media channels to build support. The protests spread across Romania and the diaspora; the younger, entrepreneurial class gained the attention required to bring about short-term changes. Through interviews with some of the key activists and monitoring of developments in the anti-corruption campaign we chart the role social media plays in building the emotional mood and sense of solidarity required to meet short term goals. But equally our analysis shows that once short term objectives are attained the campaigns that bring together Internet-mediated issue generalists can become fragile. Hence this paper offers a more balanced perspective of Internet-mediated social movements than studies of Castells and others. Our study serves to highlight how protests can emerge through the emotional power of outrage, can mobilise citizens around narrow objectives, and can evolve to become a social

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movement, but then struggle to then develop a more transformatory socio-political agenda.

Keywords: social media, protest movements, social psychology, Romania, political protests

Introduction

On January 31st 2017 at 22:00 the newly elected Romanian coalition government headed by prime minister Sorin Grindeanu passed executive ordinance 13 (OUG13) (Baiaș, 2017). OUG13 decriminalised negligence on duty and conflicts of interests and set a threshold of 200,000 Romanian Lei (40,000 Euros) beyond which the material prejudice caused to a physical or juridical person became criminal. The law made corruption, except in the most serious cases, legal overnight. In addition, corruption charges levelled against a number of elite figures, including Liviu Dragnea, leader of the Social-Democrat Party and former Minister of Administration and Interior who President Iohannis had blocked from being appointed Prime Minister due to alleged corruption, would be dropped due to not meeting the threshold. Despite the late hour an estimated 4,000 people amassed in Piața Universității (University Square), the usual site of protest, they then marched to Piața Victoriei (Victory Square) directly facing the government buildings (Ciobanu & Light, 2017). As the protests continued into the month of February tens of thousands protested in the provinces: 50,000 in Cluj, 25,000 in Timisoara, 20,000 in Sibiu and 10,000 in Constanta. Later on, as 70,000 protesters in Bucharest were organizing to form and project the image of the Romanian flag, there were 30,000 in the provinces, 10,000 of them in Cluj alone (there were 2,000 protesters in Timisoara, 2,000 in Iasi, 1,500 in Brasov and 350 in Constanta – Ziare.com). There were other cities where smaller crowds gathered, for example in Oradea, Cugir or Tecuci and others where just one person would protest: this was for instance the case of Florin Branisteanu (see Adi, 2017a) in Bacau. The Romanian diaspora joined in, appropriating tourist attractions such as the Dome Plaza in Milan, Trafalgar Square in London, or the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, chanting outside of Romanian embassies, or simply taking photographs of themselves and sharing them to social media (Adi, 2017b). The protesters used the #rezist hashtag to publicise their opposition to corruption among senior Romanian politicians to the wider citizens and to the media and political leaders of the world.

Romania is no stranger to protest movements. It was protests opposing the house arrest of preacher Laslo Tokes in Timișoara that triggered the uprising against and then the fall of the Ceausescu regime, although the nationwide revolts were trig-

gered when fireworks in the background of a televised speech by Ceausescu were mistaken for gunfire and the assumption was made that the regime was using the army to suppress protestors (Adamson & Florean, 2016). Bucharest's Piața Universității was the site for the 1990 Mineriada protest (Miner's rage) and the first anti-corruption protest in 2015 following the fire in the Colectiv nightclub in which 64 young people died and the blame was levelled at the fact that safety regulations had been breached and overlooked in return for bribes.

Yet the legalisation of corruption mobilised Romanians like never before. The protests developed their own media channels using the affordances of social media (Pojoranu, 2017), countered attacks against them made by state media and so placed significant pressure on the government that on 5th of February OUG13 was repealed (digi24, 2017) and on June 21st Grindeanu's cabinet was forced to resign as a result of a vote of lack of confidence (stirileprotv, 2017). Yet the elite group responsible for OUG13 and who were involved in the corrupt practices that have consistently angered citizens retain power. President Iohannis, despite appearing among the protestors and being a staunch fighter against corruption, is unable to deliver the reforms required without backing of parliament. The protest movement is fragmented on most issues except that of anti-corruption. Their spirit is partly embodied in the newly formed 'Union for the Salvation of Romania' party (USR) who already have a minority voice in parliament. Rezistentă (Rezistampanalacapat), one of the main channels of the protest launched by Andrei Rosu, a protester himself, and the one with most members (currently more than 59,000), proved unable to develop a manifesto for reform they agree upon. However, other groups have also emerged including one rallying around the former technocrat Prime Minister Dacian Cioloș. Platforma Romania 100 (www.ro100.ro) is now on the way to establishing their own party (Hotnews, 2017). After many successes, which can tell us much about how protest movements can build momentum, mobilise support, counter mainstream narratives and gain credibility, these protests might translate into a vehicle for long term, far-reaching reform.

Our analysis seeks to explain this. Firstly, we focus on the composition of the protests, the strategies and tactics of the main protagonists and their use of media to build the movement within Romania and to earn the level of support required to bring down a government. Secondly, we focus on the emotional attachments to the protest and how emotions bound the protestors together but also led to the fragmentation of the protest movement having achieved their short-term goal. Cumulatively, going beyond studies that suggest that such movements can be seen as the pathway to greater democratization, we argue that the success of such movements is reliant upon the methods used for building that movement and the emotional bonds that are built between members and towards goals. This case study in how the Romanian #rezist protest movement utilise the affordances of social media to mobilise citi-

zens, and the subsequent trajectory of the organisation, offers indications about the potential and limitations broader protest movements face when transitioning from being goal oriented to becoming vehicles for wider reform.

Social movements in hypermedia environments

In the wake of the 2010 Arab Spring protests many commentators suggested the digital media environment offered the affordances that would allow protest movements to build momentum for real political and social reform (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). The capacity for protests to quickly grow, develop communication strategies, find an audience and so a voice, suggests the communicative conditions are in place for digital technologies to be utilised for the purposes of building an opposition to corrupt and authoritarian regimes (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011; Penney & Dadas, 2014). Independent of the goals of the movement, whether it be seeking to end authoritarian rule, as was the case in Tunisia and Egypt, to challenge austerity measures as in Spain and Greece, or to make the case for more progressive politics, the network that would support Obama's bid for the presidency, digital technology is argued to play a crucial role (Trere et al, 2017). In all these cases the more cosmopolitan, younger professionals tend to be instigators. Such movements rely on individuals with the skills to operate within the digital environment in order to transition from an isolated protest to a movement demanding change (Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016).

Karpp (2012), focusing on the US progressive movement formed around MoveOn, suggests that civic movements build social capital from the grassroots up as 'Internet-mediated organizations'. Those involved in creating the infrastructures utilised he describes as 'Internet-mediated issue generalists' (Karpp, 2012: 23). Individuals with a common aim, defined by the nature of the challenge they face, who exploit the affordances digital technologies offer in order to create spaces where motivated and like-minded citizens are given the opportunity to increase their political voice. In doing so, it is argued, the movement adopts a sense of identity, a 'we' and 'us' that defines them in opposition to a 'them' those they protest against. The development of a shared identity translates into 'voluntaristic collaboration' or 'organisation without an organisation' (Kreiss, 2012), this denotes the formation of a goal-oriented network reliant upon the free labour of committed supporters which can be empowering or disempowering depending on the context (Vesnić-Alujević & Murru, 2016). Movements tend, at least initially, to offer empowerment to those who feel disenfranchised, and it is through their communication, in particular Internet-mediated communication, that this is achieved (Tufekci, 2014).

Movements are described as operating in a post-media environment where there is a "technological appropriation of tools, technologies and mediums of participation

and communication” (Castells, 2015: 123). The movements begin with a single entity but quickly develop into a network through the use of hybrid communication forms, digital and face to face, which facilitate information sharing, community building and interpersonal interaction (Ibid: 179). But for Castells the ‘autonomous space of flows of Internet networks’ (Ibid: 181) are most important as they permit the movement to directly challenge the spaces where power flows. The protest becomes an alternative locus of power, with its own network where ideas and information are gathered and disseminated. Castells recognises that not all political movements are social movement networks, despite them resembling one another in terms of their communicative strategies and tactics, yet he is less clear what differentiates one from the other. Within a political movement is the potential to be a social movement network, it would seem it is the extent that the movement realises its potential that determines the transition to an entity that can create the conditions for significant change.

Yet reflecting on outcomes of the Arab Spring one can also see these movements can be as likely to fail as they are to succeed. The combination of hypermedia communication and street protest can lead to the collapse of a regime, but it is often incapable of filling the political void with a coherent alternative (ElSheikh, 2018). Confronting injustice or inequality in unison in the safety of public spaces, such as squares, presents opportunities to show solidarity and to develop shared emotions of anger as well as hope. Yet the interpersonal interaction can also expose rifts between competing visions for the future society, and where no leader emerges to capture the emotional mood and translate that into a manifesto the movement appears doomed to failure. Hence while it is important to consider the way a movement forms and develops a communicational strategy, it is also important to recognise how a movement is bound together by emotions and how those emotions can be mobilised to sustain a movement short-term but lack the conditions to press for more sustained social reform.

Emotional communication and mobilisation

At the centre of every highly mobilised social movement is what Durkheim (1995) describes as collective effervescence and high ritual density (Jasper, 2001). High ritual density elides neatly with Castells’ notion of the social movement network, as it forms around three main components: firstly, the physical meeting of people, so there is a mutual awareness of credence; secondly, a shared focus of attention, that which is being opposed and why; thirdly, the focus of attention becomes mutual and a shared rhetoric is developed. As a movement comes together around a particular focus we find the development of a “conscience collective, focusing cognitive and

moral unity” (Collins, 2001: 28). High ritual density leads to feelings of group unity, an emotional dynamism in individual participants, which in turn engenders confidence and enthusiasm within the movement. Symbolic communication sustains the memory of collective participation and maintains commitment among individuals who become detached from the protest. Movements are sustained particularly by a sense of morality, their own standards of right and wrong. Commitment and sacrifice of individual selfishness in service to the group becomes a virtuous act. For some movement, those outside of the group can be viewed as morally unworthy hence strong in-group and out-group identity perceptions can develop.

Durkheimian rituals operate through building a shared emotional attachment around emotions stimulated by a specific action that act as the motivating factor for a protest (Collins 2001). Following Durkheimian theory, there are two kinds of emotional transformation: amplification or transformation. If the initial emotion is moral outrage, for example, a protest can amplify the sense of outrage through its communication. Transformation takes place when initial outrage, through the process of participation in movement activities, makes way for feelings of solidarity and hope (Mauss 1902). Jasper (1998) argues that the emotions generated or reinforced during the course of a protest can help to explain social movements continuity and decline as at all stages of a protest “there are both pre-existing affects and shorter term emotional responses to events, discoveries and decisions” (Jasper, 1998: 405). Interactions between protestors, the communication from the protest, as well as the actions of those opposing or outside of the protest movement can each have emotional impacts upon the individual protestors. Jasper & Poulsen (1995) suggested activists attempt to manipulate affect in order to recruit members and sustain movements.

During the initial phase of the formation of a movement, emotions are stimulated through the framing of an event as a moral shock with a clear focus as to where blame can be attributed. There are similarities with theories of grievance developed by Walsh (1981), where a sense of outrage occurs when an event challenges a community’s basic values. Grievance has an emphasis on cognitive processes, whereas moral shock is an emotional reaction. Individual responses to moral shocks can vary. As noted by Jasper & Poulsen (1995) most people decide not to engage with political actions due to the belief that protesting will have little impact. However, some may channel their outrage and anger through participation in social movement activism (Gamson 1992). Emotions triggered by moral shock are most likely to focus people’s attention on the problem and find someone to blame for the existing situation or order. When there is a person or body to blame for causing a threat, anger and outrage are a common response. What is significant is that when a person or body can be clearly defined people are more likely to show outrage and opposition (Erickson 1994).

Emotional framing is defined as a “cognitive interpretation that movement participants use to achieve their goals” (Ruiz-Junco 2013, p.48). Snow and Benford (1992, p.137) define frames as “interpretive schemata” that simplify and condense interpretations of events as well as the in-group and out-group dynamics providing the frame is consistent with pre-existing values and beliefs (Turner & Killian, 1987). Thus frames provide a lens by which perceived injustices can be viewed as well as the “object” to blame (Gamson, 1992) both of which stimulate emotional involvement in the cause. Emotional involvement leads participants to pursue an outcome-focused primitive approach lacking of intellectual enquiry. The negative emotions caused by moral shock stir up primitive feelings of injustice and create a need to take action. In this situation “individual inhibitions fall away and all the cruel, brutal and destructive instincts, which lie dormant in individuals as relics of a primitive epoch are stirred up to find free gratification” (Freud, 1921, p.15). This view of protestors as noble savages has however been challenged. While primitive emotions can emerge, the mood can shift to a focus on delivering the structural conditions for changes in society (Castells 2014). While dissatisfaction with life opportunities is a trigger for participation in social movements (Offe, 1972), the potential for exploiting political opportunities brings people (Tilly, 1978; McAdams, 1987) and solidarity acts as the social glue that binds the movement (McAdams, 1982; Morris, 1984). However, whether acting out of primal, self-preservationist or communitarian motives, movements tend not to engage in analysis or discussion. Rational considerations of longer-term goals are overcome by the emotion of the moment and on reaching short-termist objectives. This however is dependent on the way the protest is framed by the organisers. If the focus is specific and participation is purely an act of solidarity in the face of moral outrage then the movement is likely to dissipate once a goal has been reached. If the framing is broader, focused on a wider range of socio-political issues and solidarity is framed as showing support for an alternative manifesto then there is greater likelihood of the protest movement transcending into the social movement network that can provide the conditions necessary to exact greater reforms.

Methodology

This article explores the reactions and reflections of fifteen participants in the protests. These reflections were captured through interviews, conducted in English or Romanian, either face-to-face, Skype-recorded conversations or structured interviews by email with an unstructured follow-up for further elaboration with each participant. Questions focused on the reasons, reactions and motivations of taking part in the protests, the participants’ use of media/social media to inform themselves or others and their previous involvement in other protests and civic activities.

The participant selection used purposeful sampling followed by a snowballing technique. First, protesters identified as very active or also mentioned in the Romanian media were approached and then they were asked to share the call for participants with other protesters. Reflecting on their own circumstances, participants decided whether to allow the researchers to use their full name, initials or a pseudonym. They also decided how much of their personal data to disclose (age, country/city of origin, country/city of residence, occupation, voting history and previous protest participation). The observations gathered will be compared with the insights drawn together in the report *#rezist – Romania's 2017 anti-corruption protests: causes, development and implications* (Adi & Lilleker, 2017) referring to the composition of the protestor crowds, the use of symbolic communication and the protest communication strategies and tactics.

Interviewees were aged between their late 20s and early 50s, living generally in urban areas and working in the private sector and generally with a limited history protest participation or civic activism prior to the #rezist protests, reflecting closely the broad characteristics of the people who joined the anti-corruption protests in January-March 2017 (DCnews.ro, 2017). Our interviewees include:

- Florin Branisteanu (37) from Bacau (RO) - accountant and a hearing-impaired entrepreneur
- Loredana Ivanov (40) from Balan (RO) living in London – business owner
- Catalin Lazar (46) from Bucharest (RO) living in Milan (IT) – Project Marketing Manager
- Vlad Lascoi (30) – marine officer serving on a cruise ship in Antarctica at the time
- Carmen Liebert (41) from Cluj-Napoca, living in Berlin (DE) - marketer
- Calin Puia (34) from Brasov (RO), living in London (UK) – Dementia and Enablement specialist
- Andrei Rosu (41) from Bucharest – inspirational speaker, former project manager and boy band member, the creator of the Rezistampanalacapat closed Facebook group
- Diana Carmen Rus (27) from Zalau (RO), living in Berlin (DE) – head of development and co-founder of a start-up called Bimarium, a platform that helps architects and interior designers deliver better, smarter designs
- Ramona Strugariu (37) living in Brussels (BE) – policy advisor to a Romanian Member of the European Parliament
- Raluca (33) from Bucharest (RO), living in Paris (FR) – engineer
- Valentina (28) from Satu Mare (RO) living in Vienna (AT) – architect
- Cristian (50) from Bucharest (RO) living in Toronto (CA) – IT specialist

- A (49) from Romania, living south of Munich (DE) – sales specialist
- AI (29) from Bucharest (RO), living in Berlin (DE) – PhD Candidate
- W. (32) from Munich (DE) now living in Regensburg (DE) – historian

Emotional attachment: from frustration and anger to common purpose and action

For many, the decision to join the protests was personal, spontaneous and very much an emotional response to what they perceived as a major wrongdoing taking place. Their memories of the moment they decided to protest are equally emotional.

I remember the night when they passed the OUG, I was in bed online and my Facebook and phone started going crazy, I was talking to my brother who was in Bucharest because we both couldn't believe they had done something like this. I was angry and restless and for a minute it crossed my mind to go to the Embassy with four other angry people in Berlin. I didn't that night but I followed the protest at home and then joined the protest organized in Berlin the next day too (I think, not sure if it was exactly the next day). It wasn't that big a decision, I wanted to express my opinion on this and I just went. I remember there was a lot of adrenaline in the coming days with what was happening at home (AI)

“My heart rate suddenly jumped from 50 or 60 to 140” says Andrei Rosu adding that his thinking was that what was happening was going beyond politics and was an attack on people's values, his values. Going out to protest was thus a must for him. The focus on values is also shared by W:

I believe that the rule of law is seriously endangered by the politics of the current Romanian government.

And by Loredana Ivan:

I decided to be there and to become the engine of this movement (...) For many reasons: because it's my right to do it, a right that people before me died for, Democracy and to protect the Rule of Law. It is our respect for them, for my family back home in Romania, for all the Romanians that can't tell apart all the lies and the risks that this kind of Government plans are posing.

Anger, frustration, disappointment and a sense of disbelief are equally evoked by Calin Puia, AA, Catalin Lazar, Florin Branisteanu among others who described OUG13 as the trigger of the outrage that was channelled into extended participation and engagement with the protests, from every weekend during January – March to every day for a couple of hours during the same period (Gamson 1992). To some

like Raluca and those with whom she protested in Paris, the frustration was so great, it pushed her to join the protests despite poor health.

I was outraged by the impertinence of the government to promote such an emergency law that could harm the justice system in Romania. In France it was the flu virus period, most of us were ill, but we went to Trocadero anyway, it didn't matter.

Interviewees identified specific targets for their feelings of frustration and disappointment. For Carmen Liebert the culprits were "our political class who focus mainly on personal interests rather than fighting for broader national values". A similar target was identified by Vlad Lascoi, whose photo protest from Antarctica, an image of him in uniform, shirt slightly untucked, tie not quite centred, with ice floating in the background, holding a sign saying "Antarctica is protesting; PSD = Thievery Shamelessness The Red Plague" an image frequently shared on social media (Adi 2017a; Lascoi - Facebook 2017).

Also common among interviewees is a strong sense of duty as citizens, of speaking against decisions that they feel do not represent them or that they deem to be against the rule of law, suggesting an emerging call for broader socio-political change (Castells 2014). Speaking about joining the protests, Valentina says "[It] Felt like I was in the right place, at the right moment, I felt like I was fighting for something". Ramona also speaks about protesting as "the right thing to do", she too participated while being unwell and Loredana Ivan speaks about exercising "her right" to protest. References to protecting the rule of law and to the events of 1989 are also made by others including W from Germany and Cristian from Toronto.

Especially for members of the Romanian diaspora, two shared features also emerge: first solidarity with the protests in Romania and a sense of pride in being Romanian, second a sense of positive surprise and relief in the discovery of not being alone (both physically at the protest and in their convictions). Calin Puia, who so angered by the news cycled in the middle of the night to the Romanian Cultural Institute in London only to find another man protesting there, Calin captioned their selfie: "now and here, we are protesting alongside with you!" (Adi, 2017a; Puia - Facebook, 2017). Solidarity was thus of particular importance and connected progressive Romanians independent of their physical location (McAdams, 1982):

Marching on the streets of Berlin amongst other Romanians, I felt we had a voice and the power to change something, to make a difference. I also felt connected and proud of my country fellows. (Carmen Liebert)

For others, it is the comfort of finding and connecting with like-minded people which gave them hope and strength. They captured the solidarity in many of the photos shared on Facebook (Romanian's top social network, 93% of online Roma-

nians have an account – Statista, 2017), many featuring groups of people holding signs (Adi, 2017b).

I think that Romanians don't really have the sense of organising and creating something together, as a community, they are not united. I mean here, big groups, of different people not small ones. That's why I was impressed when I saw them [the protesters in Vienna] communicating, doing things together – like the badges – some people donated money, some created the *#rezist* concept and donated, even in Vienna. (Valentina)

They [participants at the protests in Munich] were surprised to see the magnitude of the movement in Romania and because they did not believe in this kind of national unity in the name of the rule of law. Many also expressed the feeling that they were participating in the “revolution of their generation” and were therefore fulfilling a generational duty. (W.)

However, feelings are mixed: while there is joy in finding support, there is also heightened scepticism in their ability to facilitate change. These foresee how the ‘collective effervescence’ (Jasper 2001) can evaporate from a movement.

I was nervous regarding the outcome and my state varied generally from optimism to scepticism and concern. I was nervous and concerned that the OUG would still come into force, that they will find a way to go around withdrawing it or that there is some other legislative loophole that we're not aware about that could make it valid. (AI)

My feelings were mixed. I knew that we had to stand up and show our discontent, yet I also knew that there was little that we could actually do, as Romanians living in Berlin to change anything. [later, on joining the protests] I felt hopeful because I realized that we have what it takes to change the current paradigm if only we would start getting involved on a regular basis. Of course, a feeling of dismay also hit me because I realized that these people had left Romania and this would make everything harder. It was really a turning point for me because I understood that protests bring all kinds of people together including those that feel very strongly that they'd like to help and change their country but don't know how to and where to start. (Diana Carmen Rus)

Many of the diaspora interviewed thus started to see themselves as representatives of Romania abroad. AI, Carmen Liebert and Diana Carmen Rus, W. all speak about reaching out to and beyond their local networks in Germany and Italy, or even joining other protests as they were travelling as well as being moral supporters of Romanians in Romania, whose protests and actions should lead to the desired change happening.

Together with fellow protesters we created flyers in English and German that we could share with people passing by, I also engaged in explaining to foreigners what we were protesting about during the protests, I also explained to many of my foreign friends the situation in Romania and tried to gain their support. (AI)

Solidarity goes both ways. Andrei Rosu who joined the protests in Bucharest speaks about solidarity with those in Piata Victoriei but also makes references to those protesting in the country and abroad. But talking to Florin Viorel Branisteanu, who has been protesting alone in his home city, fear and concern were mentioned yet these were assuaged due to the bonds of solidarity, the connective glue (Morris 1984):

“At first I was a bit afraid because the square was empty and I was unsure whether the protests continue or are already over. But when I took a selfie with #rezist and made it public, I saw all the supportive messages such as: you are not alone, we support you, do not give up!, don’t forget you’re not alone. I have loads of Facebook messages from people all over the country and diaspora.”

Solidarity went beyond the protests opposing OUG13 and advocating for its repeal. The movement advocated reinstating political activism, and reforming politics and political participation. In this sense, all interviewees regardless of their prior political interest and participation in protests, declare a strong desire to continue to be involved because they felt it would be necessary and because they feel that the political class will continue to pursue their projects. Collective commitment changed the #rezist protests (and their framing) into a social movement to catalyse broader change (Castells 2014).

I keep watching, keep being active in the community and trying to help as much I can here in London and back home in Romania. The protest is not finished, not yet. And we should not allow any kind of abuse, we should take notice each time a wrong decision is taken. I cannot move onto the street, but I do my best to contribute as much as I can to make a change in the future on this matter, and already I feel like I did a bit as lots of people around me now are more interested in Romanian politics and they put questions and they are willing to vote next time (Loredana Ivan).

I will continue my work with Diaspora Civica Berlin and I will also try to engage more with organizations and journalists in Romania that I like and appreciate and I think are doing important work following the values and the broad goals of #rezist. I will take part in the #rezist 2.0. protests that are possibly starting again this fall and in general I’ll try to contribute as much as I can to improving things in Romania. (AI)

Strategies and tactics

Individually, none of the interviewees had a protest strategy. In fact, with the exception of those based in Berlin, the people interviewed had not previously met one another. However, their actions regardless of their location are similar. All interviewees used Facebook – and from there media, activist, other protesters’ and individual accounts – to inform themselves, stay up to date and inform others. In this sense, they ended up being in the same “virtual” network, something that both Kreiss (2012) and Collins (2001) found crucial. Hotnews, Digi24, Vice, Adevarul, are also mentioned and often referred to as being independent. This preference for some media outlets is telling, as it helps form an identify among the protester groups, in opposition to those following other media platforms. Feher (2017) speaks at large about this disconnect visible in the media:

When the #rezist protests started in Bucharest, the television stations like *Antena3*, *Romania TV* and *BITV* issued a wave of reports grossly misrepresenting the protests and misinforming their audience. Their headlines made references to an attempted coup d’etat and linked the protests with those from #colectiv in 2014 (p. 123)

Activist groups like Geeks4Democracy or protester groups like RezistDiaspora or Rezistampanalacapat are also mentioned as environments that offer empowerment and encouragement (Tufeci 2014). These groups’ activities bolstered the resolve of Florin Viorel Braniesteanu and Vlad Lascoi who protested alone, as well as Andrei Rosu who set up the Rezistampanalacapat Facebook group inviting his friends and fans to a discussion about the protests and their goals, resulting probably in one of Romania’s biggest closed yet currently active account. These groups and their shared images also provided at first inspiration to each other and then guidance. This is for instance how the literary protest (sit-ins in public spaces where people were reading books or carried books with rewritten covers to display protest messages from Sibiu was replicated in Paris, London and Milan or how some of the slogans seen in Piata Victoriei re-emerged in other cities: We see you (Va vedem), In the night as thieves (Noaptea ca hotii), Corruption Kills (Coruptia Ucide).

The use of a common hashtag is also indicative of the coalescence of a social movement where participants share similar goals and values (Vesnić-Alujević & Murru 2016). Loredana Ivan remembers the decision to adopt the hashtag like a moment of synergy:

It is strange. It was like the same thought was flying in the air; like people have the same ideas at the same time so it happened out of blue when a friend said about the #Rezist symbol as the word was repeated constantly on Social Networks and in the Media.... And then we realized that the idea had

already been used in Bucharest so we started wearing banderoles at first (from the first week or second of the protest).

Discussion and conclusions

For the people interviewed for this paper, their participation in the protest was emotional and spontaneous. The passing of OUG13, late at night, caused widespread outrage at the corruption and attempt at passing the law as the nation readied itself for bed. The protests were a means for demonstrating their primitive, emotional outrage (Gamson 1992). There were immediate targets, the Grineanu administration and intended outcome, the repeal of the law. But broader goals emerged as many protestors began to call for broader socio-political reforms, leading the protest to resemble a social movement (Castells 2014). Activists describe a disconnect from (generally) current Romanian political institutions and soon refer to themselves in oppositional terms to them: ‘us’ the protesters, ‘us’ Romanians, ‘them’ politicians. Hence the movement was framed as ‘of the people’ against the institutions. This interpretive schema (Snow & Benford 1992) acted as a force that sustained the movement beyond the repeal of OUG13.

For many, the role they saw themselves having was amplificatory: to show solidarity and support for something they considered wrong; and their first actions were to demonstrate the emotional impact the passing of OUG13 had on them personally (Jasper 1998). The act of protesting however became transformatory, after physically joining the protests, often more than once, connecting with others and identifying common values and common goals.

To send a message that, we, the people, are aware of the stuff that goes on, we want a normal Romania, like the rest of Europe (the western one) (Valentina).

The transformation translated into continued engagement and participation in civic activities: this is the case of the Diaspora Civica Berlin and a similar group in Munich so creating a renewed impetus for political participation. However, with short term goals being partially realised, but longer term goals appearing unattainable, the effervescence began to subside and the glue weaken.

After some time however (especially after the withdrawal of the disputed Executive Order by the government) many felt that they had done their part and did not participate again in the protests. Others were disillusioned that the government did not fall and saw their protest as “useless”. A small minority (including myself) see the protests as a constructive act. It is a chance to better organize the Romanian civil society... We do not wish so much to protest as to do some constructive work within our and other communities. (W.)

What started as a protest against an executive order perceived as legalizing corruption particularly transformed into a social movement seeking greater reforms in Romania. The transformation is evidenced by the creation of the ‘Union for the Salvation of Romania’ protest party and the clarification of the political manifesto of Platforma Romania 100. The closed Facebook group Rezistampanalacapat continues as a platform for opposition as well. The physical and virtual connections, which created solidarity, acted as the vehicle for the transformation from protest to movement, with digital technology playing a key role (Kreiss 2012; Trere et al. 2017). Similar to other movements, the Romanian #rezist movement brought together, online and offline, voices and individuals that felt disenfranchised and disconnected from current political institutions (Karpf 2012). Unlike other movements, the Romanian #rezist managed to keep momentum and engagement, seen in the continuation of protests against more recent legislative and political measures as well as seen in increasing support to opposition parties. Yet the shape of the structural change required remains one of significant debate and division, suggesting that in times of political instability, and with short-term goals reached, the solidarity which bound together protesters now connects groups of hardcore activists rather than a wider milieu. Here we find the flaw in the organisation without organisations model (Kreiss, 2012). As a fluid protest movement develops organisations the goals evolve and fragment, divisions appear and the common sense of purpose that creates solidarity is eroded. Government actions have caused further moments of outrage, leading to calls for complete reform yet the nature of those reforms divides activists and broader society. The younger, mobile, higher skilled Romanians look to the western model, some PSD supporters see siding with Russia and abandoning EU constraints offering the better future. With #rezist unable to evolve into a coherent movement with a platform Romania remains divided and unstable. Thus #rezist demonstrates how protests can transform into social movements as well as how a movement can wither and fragment as their *raison d’être* becomes less clearly defined and the moment of emotionally-charged connective effervescence is lost.

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Rezist 2017: Komuniciranje nezadovoljstva u hipermedijskom okruženju

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SAŽETAK

Načini komunikacije i provođenja kampanje tijekom prosvjeda igraju ključnu ulogu u demokraciji i mogu dovesti do promjene režima, no na prosvjede se gleda kao na sekundarne izborne aktivnosti. Ovaj se rad bavi tom neravnotežom usredotočujući se na prosvjede #Rezist u Rumunjskoj 2017. godine. Potaknuli su ih pokušaji Vlade da pomiluje političare koji su osuđeni za korupciju. Mladi Rumunji zauzeli su Trg pobjede ispred zgrade Vlade te zahtijevali odbacivanje zakona i poštivanje europskog prava. Kako bi se suprotstavili porukama Vlade koje su dominirale u provladinim medijima, prosvjednici su brzo razvili vlastite medijske kanale kako bi osigurali potporu. Prosvjedi su se širili diljem Rumunjske i dijaspora, a mlađa, poduzetnička klasa dobila je pozornost koja im je bila potrebna kako bi središte interesa stavili raspravu o kratkoročnim promjenama. Kroz intervju s nekim od ključnih aktivista iz Rumunjske i dijaspora, kao i praćenjem razvoja antikorupcijske kampanje, prikazujemo ulogu društvenih medija u stvaranju emocionalnog naboja i osjećaja solidarnosti potrebnih za postizanje kratkoročnih ciljeva. Isto tako, naša analiza pokazuje, da kada se postignu kratkoročni ciljevi, kampanje koje okupljaju „univerzalce koji probleme rješavaju na internetu“ mogu postati slabije. Stoga ovaj rad nudi uravnoteženu perspektivu internetski posredovanih društvenih pokreta. Naša studija služi kako bi istaknulo da prosvjedi mogu proisteći iz emocionalne snage bijesa, kako se građani mogu mobilizirati oko jasno postavljenih ciljeva koji mogu pre-rasti u društveni pokret, ali se zatim bore kako bi stvorili mnogo razvijeniji društveno-politički program.

Ključne riječi: društveni mediji, prosvjedi, socijalna psihologija, Rumunjska, politički prosvjedi