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PROSYMO MAKSYMAL'NYI PEREPOST!
TACTICAL AND DISCURSIVE USES OF
SOCIAL MEDIA IN UKRAINE'S EUROMAIDAN*

Introduction

In the winter of 2013/2014, protesters occupied Kiev's Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) and the surrounding area, setting up a tent city and creating barricades, first from snow, and later from tires and debris, to secure their hold on this territory. This physical "Maidan" spawned widespread protest actions in other parts of Ukraine as well as intensive activity on related Web sites, social media groups, Twitter feeds, and "livestream" video feeds. While the actions of actors on the ground determined the direction and nature of the protests, scholars of Ukrainian media have pointed to the key role played by "virtual" resources before and during the protests. In particular, the online work of activists and independent journalists contributed significantly to creating the conditions for EuroMaidan in the nine years following the 2004 Orange Revolution.¹

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¹ See, for example, Serhii Leschenko. *The Media's Role* // *Journal of Democracy*. 2014. Vol. 25. Pp. 52-57; Joanna Szostek. *Media Battles of Ukraine's EuroMaidan* // *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media*. 2014. No. 11. Pp. 1-19.

With the launch of the protests through Facebook posts and the inaugural tweet using the #Euromaidan hashtag on November 21, 2014, social media quickly emerged as primary means for circulating information, commentary, creative work, and appeals to action.

While the importance of social media has been widely acknowledged in journalistic and academic commentary on the EuroMaidan protests, a systematic analysis of the diverse ways in which social media contributed to the protests has not yet appeared. This article offers such an overview, focusing on both tactical/organizational uses of social media and the discursive role of social media in establishing frameworks in which to interpret the protests. Drawing primarily on observations, informal interviews, and content analysis of EuroMaidan-related social media posts from this period, I argue that the “virtual Maidan” functioned as an important participatory space, contributing to enduring networks for social action.

Background

On November 21, 2013, Ukrainian journalist and activist Mustafa Nayyem posted the following on his Facebook page:

Okay, let's get serious. Who is ready to come out to the Maidan before midnight? “Likes” don't count, only comments below this post with the words “I am ready.” When we get more than a thousand people, we'll start organizing.²

That same day, head of the Batkivshchyna party, Arseniy Yatsenyuk launched a Facebook page for the EuroMaidan, calling people to a mass protest on Independence Square on Sunday, November 24, 2013,³ then tweeted “Everyone to the #Euromaidan! Yanukovich does not understand any language other than the Maidan. We have to show that WE are the government. Join us.”⁴

Initially sparked by Yanukovich's refusal to continue negotiations for a trade union deal between Ukraine and the Europe Union (EU), the protest

² “Ладно, давайте серьезно. Вот кто сегодня до полуночи готов выйти на Майдан? Лайки не считаются. Только комментарии под этим постом со словами “Я готов”. Как только наберется больше тысячи, будем организовываться.” Facebook post by Mustafa Nayyem, November 21, 2013.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/events/501502656623561>.

⁴ “Усі на #Євромайдан! Янукович не розуміє іншої мови, окрім Майдану. Тож маємо показати, що влада – це МИ! Приєднуйтеся.” Tweet from the Twitter account of Arseniy Yatsenyuk at 1:22 a.m. on November 21, 2013.

movement built on years of work on educational reform, anticorruption, and prodemocracy activities. While social media and online news spread information about the burgeoning protests, activists mobilized social networks to bring tens of thousands of protesters to the capital.⁵ However, as EuroMaidan gathered momentum, the scope of the protesters' goals quickly expanded beyond demands that Ukraine sign the trade association agreement with the EU. Polls conducted in December 2013 and January 2014 indicated that the use of force by the government to quell protests was the strongest motivation for people to attend protests or to become part of the Maidan encampment. Refusal to sign the EU association agreement was a secondary motivator, with the desire to see a new government in third place.⁶ Three months later, after increasingly violent clashes and a series of sniper attacks on protesters, Yanukovych fled to Russia unexpectedly, leaving opposition leaders to quickly form a new government.

As support for (and reactions against) the protests grew, so did the volume of material circulating on social media related to the protests, to the actions of members of the Yanukovych regime, and to clashes between riot police and protesters. Facebook feeds and streams of tweets offered links to recorded and livestreamed videos of breaking news, interviews, and commentary, interspersed with memes, jokes, paintings, photographs, and graphic art.

In this article, I explore how and why social media were a key component of the Maidan protests, with a focus on Facebook, Twitter, and the use of livestreamed video.⁷ I emphasize the diverse use of social media as

⁵ Olga Onuch. Who Were the Protesters? // *Journal of Democracy*. 2014. Vol. 25. No. 3. Pp. 44-51.

⁶ Fond Demokratichni initsiatiivi imeni Ilka Kucheriva. "Vid Maidanu-taboru do Maidanuschih: shcho zminilosia?" // <http://dif.org.ua/ua/events/vid-ma-zminilosj.htm>. In December 69.6 percent of those who attended the protests listed harsh treatment of protesters as a reason for their participation, while 69 percent of those living in the tent city did so, compared to numbers motivated by the refusal to sign the trade association agreement (53.5 percent and 40 percent, respectively), a desire to change the government (39.1 percent and 38.9 percent, respectively) and a desire to change life in the country (49.9 percent and 36.2 percent, respectively). Numbers for January, which focused only on the tent city, showed treatment of protesters to still be a primary motivator (61.1 percent), while a desire to change life in the country was 51.1 percent, refusal to sign the trade association agreement 47 percent, and desire to change the government 45.6 percent.

⁷ According to the Web site watcher.com.ua, the number of Ukrainian Facebook users has grown from 63,000 to 3,000,000 over the past five years. (<http://watcher.com.ua/2014/02/04/10-tsyfr-pro-ukrayinskyi-facebook-yakih-vy-mohly-ne-znaty/>). Although VKontakte remains ahead of Facebook in numbers of users, there is evidence that participants in the EuroMaidan protests relied more heavily on Facebook and online news

a tactical tool to mobilize varying degrees of participation in the protests. I also consider the effects of social media on the formation of interpretive frames⁸ for the representation of EuroMaidan activists, the movement and the community of the physical Maidan itself.

Social Media “Space” and the Maidan

There has been a recent flurry of publications on the role of the Internet in social movements, including the role of social networking sites.⁹ Much of this work attempts to gauge the actual impact of social media on the development and success of protest movements. In this section, I explore how insights from this scholarship can help us begin to understand the im-

sources than on VKontakte for information about the protests, and also that they found these sources of information more reliable than VKontakte (see Olga Onuch. Social Networks and Social Media in Ukrainian “Euromaidan” Protests // Washington Post. 2014. January 2. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/02/social-networks-and-social-media-in-ukrainian-euromaidan-protests-2/>). I would also argue that Facebook has had a larger impact on bringing the Maidan protests to the attention of an international audience outside the area of greatest participation in VKontakte. Facebook posts are also commonly listed as sources for political and other announcements, particularly from opposition figures, while VKontakte was usually mentioned in connection with Maidan activists who otherwise did not have a public profile, such as injured medical worker Olesja Zhukovs'ka. Watcher.com.ua also notes that the “Evromaidan” page is the most-liked Ukrainian page on Facebook, with over 250,000 “likes” in February 2014, and over 300,000 likes by August 2014. (<http://watcher.com.ua/2014/02/24/storinka-jevromaydanu-stala-naypopulyarnishoyu-ukrayinskoyu-storinkoyu-u-facebook/>). On March 3, 2014, the Russian authorities blocked thirteen Euromaidan sites on VKontakte, saying that they were promoting Ukrainian nationalism. (<http://www.indexonensorship.org/2014/03/vkontakt-blocked-russia/>).

⁸ See Merlyna Lim. Seeing Spatially: People, Networks and Movements in Digital and Urban Spaces // International Development Planning Review. 2014. Vol. 36. Pp. 51-72.

⁹ See, for example, Jeffrey Juris. Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: Social Media, Public Space, and Emerging Logics of Aggregation // American Ethnologist. 2012. Vol. 39. No. 2. Pp. 259-279; Gadi Wolfsfeld, Elad Segev, and Tamir Sheafer. Social Media and the Arab Spring: Politics Comes First // The International Journal of Press/Politics. 2013. Vol. 18. Pp. 115-137; Merlyna Lim. Many Clicks but Little Sticks: Social Media Activism in Indonesia // Journal of Contemporary Asia. 2013. Vol. 43. Pp. 636-657; Lim. Seeing Spatially; Tim Markham. Social Media, Protest Cultures and Political Subjectivities of the Arab Spring // Media, Culture & Society. 2014. Vol. 36. Pp. 89-104; Sebastian Valenzuela et al. The Social Media Basis of Youth Protest Behavior: The Case of Chile // Journal of Communication. 2012. Vol. 62. Pp. 299-314; Stephen White and Ian McAllister. Did Russia (Nearly) Have a Facebook Revolution in 2011? Social Media's Challenge to Authoritarianism // Politics. 2014. Vol. 34. Pp. 72-84.

portance and functions of social media, and in particular Facebook, Twitter, and livestreaming services like UStream and YouTube to the Maidan movement as it consolidated and extended its support in Ukraine and abroad.

Scholarly debates over the political effects of social media have explored the range from cyberutopianism, which Joshua Goldstein defines as “the notion that digital technology will necessarily lead to a more inclusive political future,”¹⁰ to studies that seem to show almost no increase in active political participation resulting solely from engagement in social media. In reporting on one such study, Gustafsson argues that researchers’ focus on measuring “manifest” participation in calculating the direct outcomes of social media engagement ignores a multitude of ways in which social media can have latent political effects.¹¹ J. Abbott further proposes that “ICTs (internet communication technologies) and tools: (a) provide increased access to information that before was both less readily accessible, and more easily circumscribed; and (b) provide increased political opportunity.”¹²

Danah Boyd uses the concept of “networked publics” to capture the dual elements of social networks as variably public or private *spaces*, and “the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology and practice.”¹³ Boyd focuses closely on how the structural affordances and limitations of social networks in turn enable or limit particular forms of action by means of those networks. She argues that features of social networks, such as the persistence of materials, the blurring between public and private spaces, and the strains on authorship in a system that permits and encourages easy replicability of materials all speak to a move toward networked publics becoming gradually less marked, and finally, simply “publics.”¹⁴

Stephen White and Ian McAllister considered contested elections and high levels of Internet use as common factors in various “color” revolutions of the 2000s, and use this and other characteristics to explore the role of

¹⁰ Joshua Goldstein. *The Role of Digital Networked Technologies in the Ukrainian Orange Revolution* / Research Publication No. 2007-14. The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School. 2007. P. 4.

¹¹ Nils Gustafsson. *The Subtle Nature of Facebook Politics: Swedish Social Network Site Users and Political Participation* // *New Media & Society*. 2012. Vol. 14. P. 1123.

¹² Jason Abbott. *Introduction: Assessing the Social and Political Impact of the Internet and New Social Media in Asia* // *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. 2013. Vol. 43. P. 588.

¹³ Danah Boyd. *Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications* // Zizi Papacharissi (Ed.). *A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*. New York, 2011. Pp. 39-58.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Pp. 53-55.

social media in Russia's "almost revolution" in the aftermath of the Duma elections in 2011.¹⁵ A key focus in their discussion is the perception of unfairness in the elections, which in turn provided a catalyst for the organization of protests in several major cities. The authors conclude that the Internet, and in particular the Russian social media sites VKontakte and Odnoklassniki, played a role in circulating information about instances of alleged voting fraud, contributing to public perceptions of the elections as unfair. However, they also note that support for the protesters' demands correlated only with Facebook use, which is considerably lower than that of Russian-owned and -managed sites. Whether or not the authors' claims that Facebook is less prone to monitoring and censorship than Russian-owned sites are true, this perception may have influenced which users were drawn to Facebook, and how openly people shared information and opinions through the site.

In Ukraine, where Facebook usage has doubled in the past two years, the dominance of Facebook in the Maidan movement evoked an explicitly public, international, and Western-oriented use of social media. While the largest Facebook sites associated with the movement, such as Yevromaidan, with over 300,000 followers at the time of this writing, post primarily in Ukrainian and Russian, a number of sites such as Euromaidanpr, EuroMaidan in English, and Euromaidan As It Is reposted and translated content in English and other languages with the goal of reaching foreign readers through direct membership and reposting by members into their own social networks. The movement also used Twitter extensively not only for on-the-ground support but for intensive campaigns of "Twitter storms" designed to push Ukraine and EuroMaidan to the top of lists of trending hashtags, increasing international publicity for the movement.¹⁶ The international reach of both Facebook and Twitter as well as the widespread availability of livestream feeds of violent clashes between Maidan protesters and government forces have proved central to the long-term viability of Maidan social networks. In particular, they have increased international exposure and interest in events in Ukraine, and through the dominating narratives of the Euromaidan transmitted abroad, garnering support for the EuroMaidan movement as representing democratic forces in Ukraine.

In a recent article, Lim posits that the online environment provides simply another "space" for the kind of civic engagement that previously happened in

¹⁵ White and McAllister. Did Russia (Nearly) Have a Facebook Revolution?

¹⁶ "Twitter storms" were credited within Maidan social media with prompting the mention of Ukraine in Obama's State of the Union speech, and the mention of Ukraine by Jared Leto in his Best Supporting Actor Oscar acceptance speech.

many places in public and semi-public spaces that have since been overtaken by commercial development in many cities.¹⁷ Certainly, in Ukraine the Maidan Nezalezhnosti, located in the center of the city and within walking distance of key government buildings retained the potential to be such a space after Ukrainian independence, thus making it an excellent choice for protests such as the ones that began in late November in Kyiv. However, the organization of the protests themselves and, to some extent, the social network that supported them, was created in an online space populated by the Hromadske.tv and SpilnoTv Ustream channels, Facebook groups, and Twitter networks.

Jeffrey Juris's work on the Occupy movement offers many parallels to the Maidan protests, as Juris outlines the challenge of defining the exact role social media played in extending the reach and power of the movement.¹⁸ While Juris was focused largely on the role of social media in expanding or altering organizational structures within social movements, he does note in his conclusions that one of the primary effects of social media may be to "create new discursive and political conditions" that must then be acted on by empowered political actors to be carried forward.

Contemporary protest movements such as Ukraine's EuroMaidan rely heavily on social networks in developing and expanding publics, which are in part distinguished by their use of common narrative frames to interpret and present new information. EuroMaidan proved to be remarkable not only for the rapid expansion of the public associated with it but also in the engagement of that public and the willingness of large numbers of people to take both virtual and real world actions in support of, or at the behest of, members of that public. Furthermore, the continuation of the socially networked EuroMaidan public in the form of a pro-Ukrainian/anti-Pro-Russian-separatist movement after the annexation of Crimea points to a level of "operationalization" to which few networked publics can lay claim.

The EuroMaidan Movement as a "Networked Public"

The EuroMaidan movement was, of course, not the first Ukrainian revolution to use digital tools for networking and even tactical purposes. Goldstein's analysis of digital tools in Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution offers an interesting case study for comparison to the social media-fueled Maidan.¹⁹ Ukraine in 2004 was significantly less connected than it is ten

¹⁷ Lim. *Seeing Spatially*.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Juris. *Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere*.

¹⁹ Goldstein. *The Role of Digital Networked Technologies*.

years later; many Ukrainians still had no Internet access and cell phone access had only recently spread to some parts of the country.²⁰ Before social media tools, the Orange Revolution relied on less “viral” digital networking technologies. Mobile phones and text messaging allowed activists to share information and engage in nimble tactical maneuvering. Updates to Web pages and digital photographs shared through listservs (e-mail lists) provided pathways to circumvent state-run media and to foster discussion and debate that could carry over into real-life conversations with less-connected friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Activists further used the nature of digital media to replicate and share images and text along personal and professional networks to reach an international audience.

While some aspects of these experiences were replicated by the tools available nine years later during the EuroMaidan,²¹ the addition of smart-phone technology and new forms of information and communication technology (ICT) such as social network sites and livestreamed video enabled faster access to and dissemination of information and slogans. Due to the nature of social networking sites, participants were also able to easily expand their individual social networks by searching through the networks of friends, to store content in a public or semipublic way, and allow extensive commenting without the direct server access required for Web site updates.

The Orange Revolution, focused as it was on a clear and concrete political aim of new, free, and fair run-off elections between Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich, lasted only a couple of weeks and was relatively peaceful. The recent occupation of Independence Square, which began in November 2013 and ended only with the physical removal of the last barricades in August 2014, endured for many reasons beyond the use of social media. First and foremost among these were the violent engagements with and deaths of activists related to the EuroMaidan movement, which fueled antigovernment sentiment and also fostered demands for high levels of accountability for the interim government. A secondary factor was the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the subsequent seizure by separatists of several cities and towns in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. However, these social networks have proved to be remarkably durable and flexible, moving

²⁰ A recent poll showed that 87 percent of Ukrainians access the Internet every day, and that 20 percent of Internet users live in rural areas, a radical change from 2004. <http://watcher.com.ua/2014/08/19/audytoriya-ukrayinskoho-internetu-spovilnyla-sviy-rist-zarik-zrosla-lyshe-na-12/>.

²¹ Onuch in *Social Networks and Social Media*, in particular discusses the importance of personal networks in motivating people to come to the physical Maidan space.

from gathering support for protests (November through March), to monitoring the actions of the interim government (March through May), to sharing geolocation analyses for videos uploaded to VKontakte by Russian soldiers suspected of firing into Ukrainian territory,²² and crowdsourcing clothing and supplies for the Ukrainian army (May to the time of this writing).

Below, I summarize and offer examples of different ways that social media were used within the broad, and as many have pointed out, loosely politically organized EuroMaidan movement, creating a networked public with varying levels of participation in the physical protests. These include *tactical uses* of social media for organization and deployment of physical and virtual resources related to EuroMaidan; *appeals* to action; and the circulation of solidarity-building materials, included memes, profile pictures, and graphic art that supported the consolidation of narratives and interpretations of ambiguous materials. My analysis points out that while some of these uses were oriented toward those taking concrete actions in support of the protests, all types of posts had a broader reach beyond those taking direct action (either physically or virtually). Thus in some ways the social media success of EuroMaidan activities can be measured in the establishment of a large community with broadly shared interpretive frameworks, which have continued to function and expand in the period after the Russian annexation of Crimea.

TACTICAL USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

First and foremost, from the initial Facebook posts, Facebook and Twitter have been used as tactical tools to communicate with and organize the actions of activists, a phenomenon common to many more recent social mobilizations.²³ For example, the “#gettomaidan” hashtag was widely used to organize civilian transport to the Maidan during times when public transportation was halted by the government. People with cars, including taxi drivers, regularly made public offers of rides to the Maidan including their cell phone numbers, which were disseminated on sites like Yevromaidan SOS.²⁴ Yevromaidan SOS, a Facebook page that in part served to disseminate

²² An example of one such analysis is available here: <http://ukraineatwar.blogspot.nl/2014/06/video-showing-firing-of-grads-by.html>.

²³ See Jeffrey Juris. Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere.

²⁴ An anonymous reviewer points out that Yevromaidan SOS describes itself as a legal assistance site, and while that does remain a core element of its mission, the group frequently disseminated calls for supplies and assistance and information about the tactical situation on the ground as well.

requests for supplies and to give tactical information during engagements, offers a good example of this use of social media. The tactical functions performed by Yevromaidan SOS included publishing calls for help from self-defense units at particular locations and posting lists of urgently needed supplies such as bandages and water. The use of Facebook groups and Twitter feeds for the communication of immediate needs is an excellent example of how social media provided new levels of communication that were not possible through text messaging, e-mail, and Web sites alone. Each request for supplies or communication of tactical information could be reposted by many of a page's followers, perhaps reaching people who would not have responded to an e-mail attachment containing the same image or information.

APPEALS TO ACTION

The second, related use of social media has been to spread what I am terming "appeals." Appeals are requests issued through social media urging people to take a particular action, ranging from participating in a protest or boycotting Russian-made products, to reposting and disseminating information. The popularity of phrases like "PROSYMO MAKSYMAL'NYJ PEREPOST!" (We ask that you repost widely!) illustrates the expectation that people will distribute the information further along their own networks. It is important to note that some of the actions targeted by these appeals involved physical spaces, such as a request to join a protest rally, to distribute flyers to help locate the relatives of an injured protester, or to refuse to give bribes to traffic police or state workers as part of an anticorruption "action." At the same time, many of the appeals that circulated in social media involved actions in the online environment. These include requests to "repost" "watch" "tweet," "change your profile picture," or "join a Twitter storm." Appeals explicitly tied a range of varied actions to support for the ideals of the EuroMaidan movement, exhorting people to draw domestic and international attention to protests and to support EuroMaidan ideals, such as anticorruption and reliance on volunteer, not government resources. These appeals were often followed up with social media posts demonstrating the appeal's success, for example, linking a Twitter storm to a subsequent mention of Ukraine in President Obama's State of the Union address, or a post profiling the Maidan medical team that referred to a successful appeal to supply an expensive piece of medical equipment to their facility.

A particular genre of Maidan post also fits into this category, and consisted of written or, more often, videotaped "appeals" from various people including political figures, administrators of a particular Facebook page or

a Maidan “Sector” (tactical subgroup, such as the “Civil Sector” and the “IT Sector”), and even “the Ukrainian people” as a group. Personal narratives of protesters form a category unto themselves within social media representations of the EuroMaidan, including via the “Maidaners” page, which presents idealized portraits of EuroMaidan activists based on interviews with people “nominated” by fellow Maidaners.

One common theme within these narratives is the role of media, either social media or conventional media, usually television, in prompting them to become involved in the EuroMaidan. Videos of Berkut special forces police beating protesters, or calls to participate in a Sunday “viche” (gathering), some of which attracted several hundred thousand people, were examples of media prompts that activists profiled on Maidaners cited as important elements in their decision to take physical action. Many of the actions that cross the social media threshold into “real life” include simple acts such as donating money, bringing firewood or tires to the barricades, or sending food. For example, a friend in Zakarpattia who felt unable to openly support the EuroMaidan in January due to the dependency of her position on local government officials loyal to Yanukovich’s party told me she surreptitiously sent jars of preserved food to the Maidan kitchen when a group of people from her village drove to Kyiv to join the protests.

CIRCULATION OF SOLIDARITY-BUILDING MATERIALS

The third use of social media I will discuss had by far the widest reach: the circulation of a range of information and materials in ways that build solidarity with broadly defined ideas and ideals among members of the social media network. While I will discuss examples more specifically in the next section, here I will note that a range of content themes supported this solidarity building, including commentary posts by prominent or eyewitness EuroMaidan supporters, graphic art, comedy and jokes, iconography and symbols of Ukrainian culture, the Ukrainian state, and the unity of Ukraine, and finally, posts containing shocking or emotionally wrenching content related to the protests. In some cases, specific Facebook sites were created to disseminate types of content, the most prolific perhaps being Euromaidan Art and Graphics, which served as an online collection and redistribution point for artwork, graphics, and infographics related to the EuroMaidan.

Finally, I must mention the “livestream” in the context of building solidarity and participation in the broadly defined EuroMaidan Community. The livestream encompassed a series of feeds ranging from broadcasts from a single cameraman, to unmanned cameras mounted above the square of-

fering twenty-four-hour coverage, to work by Espresso TV, Hromadske.tv, and others to provide livestreaming of the Maidan stage and later of the clashes on or near the square in January and February. During the violent events of February 20, the livestream from Espresso TV had over 200,000 participants, a number that does not include those watching rebroadcasts of Espresso via other channels such as Channel 5. This livestream was often accompanied by a live Twitter feed and could be embedded in a Facebook page to allow viewing while posting. In addition to building solidarity among those already involved in the real or virtual Maidan community, the tire fires, sniper retorts, and impacts from stun grenades excited the interest of international media and news watchers with little understanding of the origins of the conflict or even which side was which. Thus images from the livestream both gave the impression of “unvarnished truth” and were also clipped out and circulated widely to support views on all sides of the conflict. So what impact did the circulation of all these different types of content have? In the next two sections I discuss the role of social media in the perpetuation and growth of the EuroMaidan movement.

Framing: Demonstrating Europeanness

Lim²⁵ connects contemporary studies of social movements in social media contexts to other work on social movements that invokes Goffmanian notions of frames as sets of cues that invoke shared context for the interpretation of events.²⁶ Thus participants in social movements must frame, and/or have framed for them, online content in ways that make this content comprehensible within the belief system of the movement. Lim further argues that across a range of recent political movements that relied heavily on social media, for example, in Egypt and Indonesia, the presentation of simplified narratives that explicitly align events or experiences with values of the group were an essential rallying point in creating virtual group identities that then translated into mobilization in physical spaces.²⁷ In an earlier paper focused specifically on Indonesia, she argued that the commercial structure of Facebook, which is designed “to make you look,” leverages both voluntary and involuntary acts of participating in the social network:

In the blogosphere, for example, an interaction between bloggers and their readers requires a voluntary act of reading and commenting.

²⁵ Lim. Many Clicks but Little Sticks; Lim. Seeing Spatially.

²⁶ Irving Goffman. *Frame Analysis*. New York, 1974.

²⁷ Lim. *Seeing Spatially*.

On Facebook, such an act of reading or “glancing” is not always voluntary. When everything is thrown at you on your Facebook wall the possibility of cross-reading, cross-listening and crosshatching, which might lead to cross-communication between strangers (you and your second-degree network), is high.²⁸

Another important aspect of Facebook is the control given to page owners and administrators to block users and erase comments, allowing for the maintenance of a level of visible conflict and discussion while not giving credence to opinions or evidence that challenge or disrupt the narratives and solidarity that the page is invested in building.²⁹

The main focus of the protests became, over time, to achieve a democratic (noncorrupt) government and furthermore to gain justice for those who had been harmed by government actions during the protests or in the larger society. Here, I discuss how this notion of social justice became tied to abstract notions of European-style democracy. I am not arguing that this demonstrates a concrete desire among all protesters for Ukraine to become an EU member, but rather that the interpretive frameworks invoked in the materials that circulated and helped build the Maidan social networks presented Europe as an idealized, socially just space shown in contrast to contemporary Ukraine, and often in contrast to Russia as well.

A number of different frames were invoked in creating an image of the Maidan as, essentially, a tiny European society functioning inside the corrupt structures of a wider Ukraine. These included images and stories of Maidan groups in Kyiv and elsewhere using shaming tactics and other forms of restorative justice to maintain order on the Maidan. Descriptions of the kitchens and medical facilities emphasized hard work, productivity, and high quality as well as selflessness and generosity. The Maidan, in comparison to Europe, was shown to be multinational, multilingual, “civilized,” and most of all, inclusive. While anti-Maidan critiques poked fun at unemployed and homeless people who moved to the tent city in November through February, the EuroMaidan movement profiled such people deliberately, focusing

²⁸ Lim. *Many Clicks but Little Sticks*. P. 682.

²⁹ Further data collection and research in this area are needed to determine to what extent negative and provocative (“troll,” *troll*’ in Russian and Ukrainian) comments are engaged with in popular posts, and to what extent they are ignored. Some page administrators make direct comments about dealing with trolls as well as anti-Maidan or commentary deemed “unacceptable” in posts on their pages, but an initial review of comments on posts also reveals that these comments are sometimes engaged with directly by site users, and at other times ignored completely but left undeleted.

in particular on old men and others who had few financial resources and seemingly little to contribute, but who offered what they could to the encampment's "society" and in exchange, were taken care of.

This inclusiveness took many forms. For example, while Phillips notes that during the Orange Revolution, "few wheelchair users participated in protests on Independence Square (which drew hundreds of thousands), citing the dangers of being in a large crowd in a wheelchair. Others reported feeling alienated from the euphoria of the 'revolution,'" ³⁰ a number of disabled participants, some in wheelchairs, were featured in highly circulated images of the EuroMaidan. These included one photograph of a person in a wheelchair clearing a path in the snow with a scrap of wood, accompanied by text that valorized the ideal that everyone can contribute.

Another framing technique involved the use of contrasting "side-by-side" photos of EuroMaidan and anti-Maidan protesters, or examples from Europe, Ukraine, and Russia that explicitly contrasted the countries and made Europe the clearly preferred choice. For example, one popular image showed EuroMaidan participants genteelly taking sandwiches from a tray held by a young woman; while in the contrasting anti-Maidan protest photograph, a crowd of anti-Maidan protesters wearing old-fashioned dark wool coats have overwhelmed an invisible person holding up a tray of bacon sandwiches as they crush together to reach the food.³¹ Another cartoon uses symbols to create a visual comparison of the purported results of oppression in the two countries. In it, parallel equations contrast Ukraine and Russia. In the first equation, the Russian two-headed eagle precedes a "minus" sign followed by the scales of justice, then an "equals" sign precedes pictures of a syringe and a bottle of alcohol. Beneath this equation, a second visual equation reads "Ukrainian trident" minus "scales of justice" equals "Molotov cocktail" and "pitchfork," implying that while Russians turn to drug and alcohol addiction, Ukrainians will fight back to achieve justice.

The movement played with memes as much as any other community, in ways that have reflected shifting themes and topics of interest over time. In December, graphics and artwork focused on the representation of Ukraine

³⁰ Sarah Phillips. *Disability and Mobile Citizenship in Postsocialist Ukraine*. Bloomington, 2011. P. 100.

³¹ Another example of this was a video report of the anti-Maidan protest at Mariinsky Park that contrasted not only the sobriety of the participants at the Maidan and anti-Maidan protests but also the food, juxtaposing footage of piles of sausages, salads, and sandwiches with the buckwheat porridge and "strictly enforced" limit of two slices of bread per person at the anti-Maidan protests.

and the EU as joined together.³² By the middle of December, increased attacks on activists and journalists had shifted the primary focus on the EuroMaidan from the question of EU political and economic integration to striving to achieve European-style civil rights and civil society within a reinvigorated Ukrainian state and society. In addition to photos of people beaten by Berkut special forces, videos of people singing the National anthem in various locations began to circulate with greater frequency. The “spontaneous” singing of the national anthem continued to be a feature commented on and circulated on Facebook and Twitter, as well as various creative images of the Ukrainian *tryzub* (trident) state symbol. Profile pictures also shifted from those representing individuals to those dominated by mourning images (black, black with Ukrainian flag ribbon), candles, and Ukrainian symbols such as the flag, trident, and so forth. The adoption of state symbols by activists created an interesting contrast between the state and the opposition, wherein state use and treatment of symbols such as the Ukrainian flag were framed as disrespectful, and the protesters’ use of the flags, both on the ground and virtually on Facebook, were framed as representing authentic patriotism.

By January, infographics and in particular maps of Ukraine noting rapidly changing situations were heavily circulated, often updated several times a day. These were joined by “missing” posters that typically used phrasing like “Went to the Maidan and since then has not answered his phone.” After Yanukovich’s disappearance, a spoof of these posters featuring his picture appeared; the text of the poster evokes language used on these “missing” notices, highlighting both their ubiquity at the Maidan, and the unexpected disappearance of the president. An increasing focus on not only violations of civil rights but also shared interpretations of social justice, expressed in anger over corruption and violations of trust by government officials, reached a peak after several high-ranking members of the government fled, leaving their houses unguarded and open to the journalists (and in some cases the public). Anticorruption memes often linked pictures of these houses or references to Mezhyhir’ja, Yanukovich’s estate outside of Kyiv, to everyday corruption, with one poster making this explicit: “Remember Ukrainian: When you give a bribe, you are building a new Mezhyhir’ja.”

Starting with the first attempt to disperse Maidan protesters with the beating of activists on November 30, themes not only of civil rights and legal justice but also of social justice emerged strongly. Underscoring dif-

³² See also Anna Fournier’s commentary on representations of Ukraine and the EU as a romantic or newlywed couple. Anna Fournier. *EU Protests in Ukraine // Anthropology News*. 2013. Vol. 54. Pp. e25-e35.

ferences between the political tactics of the Yanukovych government and the protesters, the Maidan camp was often represented as an idealized social space of cooperation, caring, equality, and justice. While the EU trade union agreement faded as a primary motivator for protesters, “Europeanness” increasingly emerged as a discursive tool, both aligning Maidan activists with European forms of democracy and creating starkly contrastive images of the Maidan and anti-Maidan protests, or of Europe and Russia. An underlying emphasis on the “Europeanness” of Ukrainians and of the EuroMaidan movement itself remained a key element in the images and information about the EuroMaidan that circulated on social media. Among the themes emphasized in different ways across social media were Ukrainians’ expectation and desire to live in a European-style democracy with limited corruption and a strong civil society protected, and not curtailed by the actions of the government.

Lim does not discuss the importance of framing to the spread of false information; however, this way of thinking about why narratives circulate within a social movement helps to explain the tenacious appeal of rumors and false narratives. While their content varies, these false reports have in common an alignment with frames such as selfless action, victimization, and martyrdom that characterize the most widely circulated Maidaner narratives. For example, a compelling picture of medical worker Oles’ja Zhukovs’ka wearing a white jacket with a large red cross on it and bleeding from a gunshot wound to the neck circulated during the storming of the Maidan encampment. It was soon followed by information that she had posted “I am dying” to her VKontakte page and subsequent false reports that she had died. Attempts to correct this false report were not as widely circulated, despite multiple repostings, and even follow-up reports on her recovery. I argue that it is not only the compelling nature of this narrative – a medical worker killed by sniper fire – but also the narrative framing of her story – selfless, young, noncombatant, and furthermore female – that both links her story to those of others who died at the Maidan and creates an indelible narrative. Thus the extent to which the narrative, and its supposed tragic end, fit with ideals developed within the broader pro-Maidan social media sphere, including the activist’s youth, selflessness, bravery, and noncombatant status made it highly suitable for reposting.

Maidan social networks have relied in part on trustworthiness and reliability of information for their success. When news accounts were unreliable or unavailable, or livestreamed video difficult to interpret, the “crowdsourcing” effect of posts by multiple users on the ground across social networks often provided a more complete picture of events. Perhaps in an effort to

maintain trust in the information being offered, beginning in mid-February, many Facebook pages began to post source information or to request substantiation of news items from readers. Several posts even circulated reminding readers not to repost information from untrustworthy sources, or to qualify new information as “unsubstantiated” until confirmed by reliable sources. Users also began to police each other. For example, during a day of mourning on the Maidan, one site reported tear gas and bombs going off on the Maidan, to which a reader immediately responded “I am watching the live feed now and nothing is going on – where are you seeing this?” This exchange highlights some of the ways that social media, combining the rapid updatability of a Web page with the interactivity of a texting or chat group, also provided for the negotiation of information validity and its meaning. The curation of trust in reported information among members of EuroMaidan’s broad social networks contributed to the continued relevance of these networks, as media through which to disseminate information about rapidly evolving situations in Donbas and the Ukrainian south during the Ukrainian government’s Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO).

Conclusions: Social Networks and the Enduring EuroMaidan Public

On August 8, 2014, after a clash with residents of the tent city remaining on Kyiv’s Independence Square, sanitation crews cleared away the last barricades from the EuroMaidan protests. The following day, a “subotnyk” or cleanup day was called for the Maidan, and Kyiv residents came, this time bearing work gloves just as they had come bearing food, firewood, and tires for the barricades six months before. One tweeted photo of cleanup on the Maidan was accompanied by the words “We’re creating order in the city. Come join us. But bring your gloves. Lots of gloves.”³³ The clearing of these last remnants of the protests marked a definitive end to the physical occupation of public space in downtown Kyiv. At the same time, the removal of barricades and tents from the square also underscored how “virtual” the effects of the protests had grown to be over time. The physical Maidan, many opined, had already lost its relevance, replaced by a virtual Maidan in which millions could participate locally or internationally. To what extent, then, was this virtual Maidan defined by its social media tools?

The EuroMaidan movement succeeded in essentially overthrowing the government in part due to very active support among Kyiv residents, groups

³³ Tweet by Oleksandr Arhat: <https://twitter.com/olarhat/status/498000155996856321/photo/1>.

in other Ukrainian cities, and people abroad. However, many have pointed out that there is not necessarily a great deal of homogeneity of belief among these supporters. Some are more moderate, seeking a change to more pro-Europe, liberal politicians and policies. Others, many of them in control of the social media outlets that continue to circulate information about events in the country, have a more revolutionary agenda that involves wholesale restructuring of the Ukrainian government and society to move them into line with the ideals of social and political justice that emerged as the defining pro-Maidan narratives of life in the encampment.

While some of the topics that originally dominated Maidan social networks have faded into the background, others have been successfully repurposed by groups of activists to support Ukrainian autonomy from Russia after the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, and the Anti-Terrorist Operation against Russian-backed separatist groups in the East. Key Facebook pages and Twitter streams from the Maidan protests, including Yevromaidan SOS, Yevromaidan-Euromaidan, Euromaidanpr, DigitalMaidan, and others have not only continued operating, but have been transformed into aggregators disseminating information about the Ukrainian government's ATO in Donbas, in addition to addressing topics more closely related to EuroMaidan activism, including the recent passage of a higher education reform bill long sought by student activists, discussions of lustration, and the continued need for both private citizens and elected officials to combat instances of corruption.

To return to an example given of the tactical use of Facebook pages, on August 28, 2014, Yevromaidan SOS put out a call for participants in a Google Doc to brainstorm ideas to help supply and support military personnel on the front lines fighting against Russian-backed separatist groups in Donbas. At the time, the page had 116,000 followers, and the post garnered over 2,000 likes over the next few days and was shared over 1,200 times. Discursive and practical connections between EuroMaidan activism and volunteer actions in support of the Ukrainian military do exist, but these social networking groups do not generally make the claim that supporting Ukrainian military action in Donbas is a direct extension of the EuroMaidan protests. Instead, these social networks are being repurposed for uses seen as morally congruent with the purported activist patriotic stance developed as an overriding interpretive framework for the EuroMaidan protests. The continued relevance of the narratives, images, and actions that defined and expanded participation, physical and virtual, in the networked EuroMaidan public presents an example of how a social movement can continue to shape actions and expectations long after protests have ended.

SUMMARY

This article explores the varied uses of social media during Ukraine's EuroMaidan protests, focusing on the influence of social media in bridging virtual and physical participation in the protests. Arguing that social media extended active participation in the protests in both tactical and discursive ways, the author analyzes specific examples of how social media tools provided organizational models and promoted the shared interpretive frameworks of actors, actions, identities, and idealized social relations. The author concludes that the continued viability of many of the social networks formed during the EuroMaidan protests derives from the success of these organizational models and interpretive frameworks.

РЕЗЮМЕ

В статье рассматривается функционирование социальных медиа в ходе протестного Евромайдана в Украине, и прежде всего обеспечение социальными медиа виртуального и физического участия людей в протестах. Автор показывает, что массмедиа расширили тактические и дискурсивные возможности протеста. В статье разбираются отдельные примеры использования инструментов массмедиа в качестве организационных моделей протеста. Эти же инструменты позволяли формировать консенсусные интерпретации протестных действий, идентичностей участников протеста и идеализированных социальных отношений. Автор делает вывод, что эти организационные и интерпретационные модели обеспечили жизнеспособность сетей, сформированных в ходе Евромайдана.