INTRODUCTION: REDISCOVERING SOCIETY IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Not very long ago, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) announced that "Today, everything is about Social Media". The meaning of this statement is straightforward – if you do not have an account on social media platform, you are out of online domain. Nowadays, this claim appears to be soft or even out of date. It is more likely that if you do not have an account on social media, you are absent both online and offline. Whether we like it or not, the explosive growth of social media has changed the ways modern society is conceptualized, diagnosed, and examined. By sharing, liking, commenting, tweeting, rating, following up etc. users have established new communicational practices spreading beyond social media into a wider social context. Television viewers use Twitter to express live their emotions evoked by presidential candidates debating on controversial issues. Tourists take 'selfies' and put them on Instagram to share a wonderful holiday they have. Headhunters use LinkedIn to find candidates with relevant work experience and professional skills. Newspapers adopt Facebook to present latest news, and consequently, to engage users into dialogue with journalists. Last but not least, politicians use social media to connect with voters in order to sway them to cast their ballot for a given partisan option.

In the age of social media the boundaries between online and offline domains have become blurred. Despite desperate attempts to defend privacy, it is difficult to recognize what is private and what is public, what could be shared online and what is supposed to be kept offline. Social actions started offline end up online, and vice versa. Individuals continually switch between virtual and real worlds through mobile devices such as smart phones, tablets, or WiFi kiosks (e.g. LinkNYC). In such a context, social media are communication platforms enhancing fluidity between online and offline domains. They form a new communication space in which people connect and exchange diverse resources. Consequently, the ubiquity of social media has encouraged users to move many of their private and public activities to the online world they intensively live in.

Social media has become a "natural" component of the current social world. Hence the old distinction between real and virtual, or between online and offline is no longer valid. The current world is a hybrid, with the intertwined activities in virtual and real space (Castells, 2015, p. 260). The collective action is manifested in the hybrid organization of social movements, interest groups or political parties. The characteristic features of contemporary political mobilizations are fast repertoire switches, both in the spatial dimension between the online and offline, as well as temporary - within and between campaigns (Chadwick, 2007, p. 283).

The question of social media

But what is social media really like? What is so 'social' in social media that makes it different from media we are already familiar with? The term 'social media' is often referred to a variety of online services e.g. social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, NK), blogs, collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), content communities (e.g. YouTube, Slideshare), or virtual worlds (e.g. Minecraft, Second Life), social bookmarking sites (Digg, Reddit) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) (Margetts, John, Hale, & Yasseri, 2016). These services are founded on the Web 2.0 philosophy that could be boiled down to the following principles: user-generated content, interactivity, sharing and convergence (O'Reilly, 2007). In recently published work, Humphreys (2016) argues that social media cannot be reduced to any particular medium. Accord to her "It is a practice, or set of practices, for using media socially" (2016, p. 1). This set is made of collaborative, participatory and sharing practices e.g. citizen journalism, fan fictions, mashups, remixes or gifts. The Web 2.0 philosophy matters, but what makes social media really distinct from other media, is a set of practices related to its usage.

For Meikle (2016), the part of what is social in social media is sharing. Without sharing of ideas, images, information, trust, reputation, and emotions social media platforms would not achieve a global success of this scale. Sharing practices are as old as humanity, but Kramer (2015) suggests that in the age of social media we do not share to survive but rather to thrive. Social media has turned sharing into a daily routine, or wider, into a cultural trait of modern society. Peer-to-peer networks, the social infrastructure of sharing on social media, enable users access to diverse resources: material and symbolic, scarce and renewable, free and paid. In peer-to-peer networks, sharing is enhanced by new socio-technological mechanisms enhancing trust, reputation and reciprocity (Tang & Liu, 2015). As a consequence, everyday millions of social media users engage into sharing of everything what is suitable for online exchange.

However, sharing considered as a specific social practice encouraged by social media, is the beginning of the complex process leading to capital accumulation and labor exploitation in the 21st century. Fuchs (2015), in a critical manner, distinguished social media from other media based on its ability to mobilize diffused labor resources. He argues that "in the social media economy the basic strategy is to <crowdsource> value production to unpaid users". (Fuchs, 2015, p. 155) For critical analysts, social media is a recent way of making money from resources previously assessed as valueless or little valued goods. In this view, sharing is a new mode of production satisfying social media owners and exploiting social media users. Thus, sharing as a specific social practice that blossomed in the age of social media have multiple effects on contemporary society and should be examined with no delight or prejudice sometimes exposed by emotionally engaged scholars.

A number of scholars argue that social media redefine the contemporary society by catalyzing new practices exposed by politicians and citizens. Loader, Vromen and Xenos (2014) give evidence on political involvement of networked young citizens. Their results contradict some prior findings accusing young social media users of political apathy. Networked young citizens appear to be politically involved, however their engagement cannot be examined through models of political involvement we know from the past. They are less likely to become members of established organizations such as trade unions, political parties or local clubs. They are no longer interested in elections, personal contacts with politicians or street marches. Instead, they prefer participation in horizontal networks, online protests, political parody, mashups or remixes of cur-

rent public issues. Simultaneously, politicians adjust their strategies to practices of networked citizens and become active on social media sites. Political campaigns, public announcements, party comments or political statements can be easily found on platforms such as Twitter or Facebook. Unfortunately, this new communicational environment is not free of barriers and threats. Scholars found that social media, like any other media, generate negative effects having impact on political communication such as selective exposures, echo chambers, polarization or filter bubbles. Building on that it is evident that social media has become a source of new practices shaping contemporary politics.

Social media symbolize "participatory culture" (Jenkins, 2006) of the contemporary media. People are no longer only recipients in communication processes. Users are also creators of communicative interactions at large extent. In this way social media express the paradigm of 'mass self-communication' in which individuals and groups can transmit their messages to large groups of the public. This in turn facilitates greater scope of grassroots political and social involvement (Gerbaudo, 2012).

Theorizing social media and society

The impact of ICTs on politics, culture and economy has challenged the existing theories of contemporary society. Scholars acknowledged the role of networks in community building process, distribution of symbolic and material resources, (re)production of individual and social identities, creation and/or transformation of social ties, communication between individuals, groups, organizations or governments. Two decades ago Castells (1996) proposed a brave vision of modern society immersed into network space of flows and organized around different forms of networks. He claimed that "Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture" (Castells, 2009, p. 500). Although, Castells updated the vision of the network society by recognizing social media as significant factor of new social movements (2015), his theory is not specifically focused on social media and rather burdened by technological determinism (Fuchs, 2012). Still, the range of concepts, theoretical models and empirical evidence, makes the theory of network society extremely popular among scholars examining social networking platforms.

Wellman and Rainie (2012) proposed the theory of networked individualism referring to the increasing importance of personal networks. This theory complies with the transition from a society organized around large, hierarchical organizations (e.g. bureaucracy) or social entities based on strong ties (e.g. family, friends), to communities organized around specific issues, connected by weak ties (e.g. online protesters). According to the authors, the three revolutions: networked revolution, Internet revolution, and mobile revolution, co-produced a 'networked operating system' rich of social practices afforded by ICTs. The social operating system is made by people connecting, communicating and exchanging information (Wellman & Rainie, 2012, p. 7). Social media are key technology contributing to the emerging operating system as they empower users with tools helping them to manage their personal networks. Networked individuals use social media to share stories and ideas, mobilize around common issues, or consume news. At the same time, social media may be used as means of surveillance by governments and organizations. Thus, in the age of social media networked individuals are both mangers of their personal networks and victims of a double-edge sword provided by digital technology.

In a similar vein, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) developed the idea of 'connective action' denying the logic of 'collective action'. They claim that in a new networked reality individual actions are increasingly mediated by digital technologies "taking the role of established political organizations" (2012, p. 742). Connective action, unlike collective one, is based on loose organizational linkages, ICT use, and personal engagement of actors. The course of the connective action is not coordinated by formal organizations. In this scheme, network technologies encourage weak involvement that contradicts the face-to-face participation known from the past. "Networks in this hybrid model engage individuals in causes that might not be of such interest if stronger demands for membership or subscribing to collective demands accompanied the organizational offerings" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 757). Social media enable to reduce the coordination and outreach costs limiting the collective actions. By enhancing the connective actions, social media has become a technology shaping the practices and outcomes of contemporary protests or mobilizations.

A technological shift enhanced by the spread of social media produced the culture of connectivity profiled by van Dijck (2013). The core argument of van Dijck's study is that social media enabled the transition from connectedness among people to media-driven connectivity. 'Sociality' in her proposal becomes a technical process managed by automated systems coded by engineers paid by corporate media. Connectivity is a precondition of sociality that finally is transformed into a commodity of social media. Individual social media platforms constitute a new ecosystem of connective media. To explore relations between human and technological actors, van Dijck applies actor-network theory. "Platforms, in this view, would not be considered artifacts but rather a set of relations that constantly need to be performed; actors of all kinds attribute meanings to platforms" (2013, p. 26). More recently, Van Dijck's suggested that after the connectivity phase we are entering into the era of connectication (2015). "Connectication" refers to the global expansion of California-based social media platforms. In the new era, connectedness of humans is being replaced by connectivity of platforms. The ambitious goal is to hook up people from around the world with no current access to the Internet.

One of the social practices which is being transformed under the influence of new media are mass mobilizations in the form of protest and revolutionary movements. Most of them prefer mass gathering in public places - on main squares or streets of large cities.

Manuell Castells, based on his earlier arguments (1996, 2004, 2009) focused in his book *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in The Internet Age* (2015) on „networked social movements", which in the years 2008-2014 challenged authoritarian as well as democratic governments in different parts of the world, from Iceland through Tunisia, Egypt, Spain, USA, USA, Turkey, Brazil, Mexico. All these movements, despite local differences, emerge in a network form and rely on their opportunities on the internet. They are based on autonomous communication networks, mediated by the ICTs and wireless communication. Simultaneously, networked social movements engage themselves in the occupation of urban space, creating a new spatial form - hybrid autonomous space (Castells, 2015).

Jeffrey Juris distinguished in this context „logic of networking" - cultural structure, which facilitates initiation of a complex communication and coordination of collective action and „logic of aggregation" - based on the interaction in social media, which refers to a massive accumulation of individuals from different social backgrounds within specific physical spaces (2012, p. 260). The logic of aggregation is based on the interaction in social media, which not only facilitates the formation of smart mobs aggregated in a specific physical location, but also makes them

visible. According to Jeffrey Juris, social media are probably particularly useful in gathering a large number of protesters in a specific location. They link interpersonal networks, and through viral communications flows they are facilitating the fast and mass aggregation of persons (Juris, 2012, pp. 266-269).

Paolo Gerbaudo argues that social media are tools to create new forms of closeness and interaction face to face in the physical space. Entries on Facebook and Twitter can help to create a sense of the centre in occupied squares. But the process is not entirely spontaneous, requires choreographers. Therefore Gerbaudo uses the term "choreography of assembly". It is a process of „symbolic construction of public space which facilitates and guides the physical assembling of a highly dispersed and individualised constituency" (Gerbaudo, 2012, p. 5). The key is the emotional „scene-setting" and creating a scenario for the participants gathering in a public space. Social media make this type of practice visible, directing people's attention at specific protest events. They mediate in providing suggestions and instructions of operation and construction of emotional narrative, which facilitates gathering in public space (Gerbaudo, 2012).

Rediscovering society

The theoretical frames presented above do not resolve all the questions and dilemmas emerging in social media research. However, they offer a useful set of models and terms designed to understand diverse phenomena related to social media platforms, or more generally, to information and communication technology.

This special issue of Konteksty Społeczne (Social Contexts) offers four articles focused on different aspects of social media sites and an interview with prof. Anabel Quan-Haase, a world-recognized scholar in the field of social media research. Although, all texts could be read separetly, a complete reading gives a reader a broader scope of ideas and problems related to a relationship between contemporary social science and social media.

In the interview, which is an introduction to the issue, Anabel Quan-Haase points on diverse issues e.g. big data, social theory and ethics related to social media research. She explains on how sociologists contribute to the emerging field of research and give an outline of methods designed to social media studies.

In the first article, Ilona Grzywińska and Dominik Batorski analyse how emergence of social networking sites challenges agenda-setting theory. They argue that basic assumptions of that theory are being challenged in its five stages.

Bartosz Pietrzyk focuses on the content published by YouTube users (youtubers, vloggers) that was creatively designed (remixed) in correlation to well know pop-culture publications and tries to estimate the importance of content mixing via a YouTube platform.

Kamil Filipek examines sharing of resources among Polish immigrants in Germany, Norway and United Kingdom who belong to the public Facebook groups. The analysis reveals some sharing strategies related to sharing economy paradigm, developed by Polish migrants active on Facebook.

Jaroslaw Chodak examines the role of social media in initiating and organizing protests and revolutions. He also tries to answer the question why the occupation of public space has become the dominant tactic in the protest and revolutionary movements in the era of social media.

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