Online versus Offline Activism: the Case of Armenia

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Abstract

This paper[i] examines the interplay of the social media usage and actual civic activism in Armenia based on the resolved cases of civic initiatives in the recent history of Armenia. Using qualitative research methods, the paper discusses social media mobilisation of participants of the civic campaigns on the one hand and actual (physical) participation on the other, intending to compare and understand the practice of online versus offline civic engagement. There is a growing literature on the relationship between the modern communication tools and civic activism. The paper aims at examining this combination based on the resolved, both positive and negative cases of civic initiatives in the country. It aims to examine whether the Internet has been successful in attracting more people to participate in social movements hypothesising that social media contributed to the positive resolution of the selected (positively resolved) civic initiatives in Armenia.

The research shows that social media raised the awareness on the activist campaigns, but did not ensure more participation in the on-ground activities against certain developments. The research suggests that the social media has proved to have become a very useful organisational tool for the discussed civic initiatives, but the online activities did not comply with the real life activities in Armenia. The paper concludes that the social media has been successful in attracting more people to participate in some civic campaigns, and it has partially contributed to the positive resolution of some (specific) cases of civic initiatives in Armenia.

Key words: *civic activism, online activism, social media, Armenia*

Introduction

During the last decade the patterns of civic activism and social mobilisations have been a subject of research by academics and practitioners alike. Specifically, the online civic activism and participation has become an area of increasing research due to the rapid development of modern communication technologies. Nowadays, the social media has developed into a social platform for discussing ideas, phenomena, organising events, demonstrations, riots, signing petitions and engaging in other interactions. Since the noticeable development in this sphere, namely the Arab Spring, the role of social media in civic activism and in social movements was discussed all over the world.

This research looks at the possible linkage between the social media and so-called civic initiatives in Armenia. It looks at whether the Internet and social media has become a tool for civic engagement and communication in the country and also, if the actual public activities defined as physical participation in civic initiatives is influenced by participants' online activism. More specifically this paper examines the interplay between the civic online and physical engagement in the resolved civic initiatives in Armenia during the last decade. The starting questions of this study are: did the usage of social media lead to active engagement in the on-ground movements? What is the level of interplay between online and offline types of engagement?

Admitting that there might be multiple reasons for public physical participation in the cases of civic initiatives (CCI) in Armenia, the authors hypothesise that social media encourages better public involvement in the on-ground civic initiatives and has contributed to the positive resolution of selected (and positively resolved) initiatives. The terms used in this paper warrant conceptualisation: the CCIs refer to the campaigns where organisations or individuals group for a social or political cause to demand a change over a certain policy or decision making.

Social media and social mobilisation

During the last decade almost every corner of the world has experienced riots, movements and other forms of civic activists' manifestations. The modern mobilisation strategies, such as the social media, have joined the traditional means of mobilising people. The social media has played a role not only in covering the occurring realities, but also in mobilising by motivating people to participate in the movements. Representatives of the scholarly community have come up with opposing opinions and approaches in examining the role of the Internet in social movements. Research in various parts of the world has focused on assessing the extent to which social media is capable to facilitate various forms of civic communication and engagement.

Some authors researching protests and movements during the Arab Spring argue that social media, particularly *Facebook* (FB) and *Twitter*, have mobilised protesters and engaged more

people in movements (see Breuer, 2012; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). Some even claim that almost half of protesters have joined movements because of the events' coverage on FB and *Twitter* (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). The authors argue that the social media not only facilitated the organisation of movements by lowering costs of organising it, but also created a collective identity of a nation and set opportunities for cross-class cooperation. Although FB and *Twitter* have had the lion share of attention when it comes to social networking sites (SNS), interestingly enough, the Blackberry Messenger Service has also had some successful mobilisation cases in London (see Bell 2011 and Halliday 2011). As Clay Shirky intelligently puts forward "…Any radical change in our ability to communicate with one another, changes society." (2008, p. 106). Some authors approach social networks as a tool for change, especially a political change (Raoof, Zaman, Ahmad, & Al-Qaraghuli 2013) and the one for empowering ordinary people worldwide to have a public voice (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Internet has a positive effect on civic engagement and the social media is able to facilitate collective action (see authors Yang 2003; Obar, Zube, & Lampe, 2012).

Revealing some of the negative consequences of the Internet proliferation, several authors highlight that social media tools can be beneficial to governments and intelligence agencies, be used by authoritarian regimes for propaganda reasons, suppress any action of civic activism, and sometimes even misinterpret the reality (consider Aday et al., n.d.; Dewey, Kaden, Marks, Matsushima, & Zhu, 2012; Greer & McLaughlin, 2010; Morozov, 2012). Similarly, some authors do not consider that social media has played a significant role in the successes of movements arguing that activists have to be thankful to the traditional means of protest for their success, and that social media is good in framing the protest, not in organising it (see, for example Metwalli, 2010; Theocharis, 2011; Tusa, 2013; Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012).

An important debate that has to be considered in the framework of this research is that in the recent years, with the abrupt development of the social media and the various opportunities it presents, the discussion evolved around the importance and the actual role of social applications' users. Is activism really developing, or perhaps it is a "slacktivism"? a term described by Evgeny Morozov (2012) as making one easy to engage in politics "…when all one has to do is *like* a political candidate or cause" (as cited in Badger 2011). According to Malcolm Gladwell, the technologies may bring a million people to FB but fail to mobilise a thousand in the street (2010). An enquiry of the online versus offline activism has demonstrated negative influences of the social networking phenomenon. Some authors suggest that while usage of communication channels is on the rise, it narrows people's mobilising potential and makes them lose contact with their social environment (Nie and Erbring 2000; Van Laer 2010).

The social media impact on citizens' political participation has been another area of enquiry. Some studies demonstrate that social networking enhances likelihood of citizen engagement in politics (Lake & Huckfeldt 1998) and impacts organisational membership and protest attendance (Schwarz 2012). Overall the importance of internet has been framed as

helping to build 'bridging' capital (Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll, & Rosson, 2005) which, in its turn, helps consolidating cooperative mutual engagement and promotes collective action (Granovetter 1973; Putnam 2000).

Hypothesis and research questions

This research puts forward the following hypothesis (H) and research questions (RQ).

H: <u>Social media has contributed to the positive resolution of CCIs in Armenia.</u>

RQ1: *Has social media been successful in attracting more people to participate in civic initiatives (campaigns) in Armenia?*

RQ2: *What role has the public online mobilisation played in the positive resolution of the civic initiatives (campaigns) in Armenia?*

Methodology

In order to examine and distinguish between the actual and online activism among Armenian population this research paper uses three qualitative methods: (1) social media analysis, (2) CCIs online visibility analysis, and (3) semi-structured interviews with civic activists and leaders of civil society organisations (CSO). The selection of combined qualitative research methods is done on purpose: to look at public online participation/behaviour related to the resolved, either positive or negative social mobilisation cases in Armenia on the one hand, and to examine the practice of actual, physical participation in initiatives seeking for data on public real-life behaviour, on the other. This research aims at examining and comparing the online public activities with the 'offline' answers on public actual behaviour. The online public activities are examined through observing the social networking sites (SNS) (defined as number of people using the application) and online visibility of CCIs (grouped into selected in advance categories) for a better understanding of the online 'popularity' of the content. The offline public activities are defined as frequency of physical participation in demonstrations on the street.

This research looks at the resolved (either positive of negative) CCIs and does not include cases which were started and abandoned or are on-going (yet unresolved) at the time of this research. The reason behind the selection is that the resolved civic initiatives would allow drawing conclusions looking at the result of the resolution on the one hand, and comparing with the available data related to their online and offline activism, on the other. The resolved CCIs (defined as a group of people demanding for a change) were identified through a desk study using available reports on civic activism in Armenia (see Ishkanian, Gyulkhandanyan, Manusyan, & Manusyan, 2013) and consulted with a website on civic initiatives in Armenia, prepared and maintained by the Institute of Democracy and Human Rights.[1]

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[1] The website is available at: http://organize-now.am/am/ (in Armenian)

(1) Social media analysis

This section discusses the content analysis applied to the social media networks pages and groups. Technically speaking it observes online activism focusing on user generated content defined as "Web 2.0", the term emphasising the second stage of the World Wide Web development, which creates networks effecting the architecture of participation (O'Reilly, 2007).

The following methodological steps were applied to identify the pattern of online civic participation in Armenia related to the resolved civic initiatives in the country. The full list of resolved (either positive or negative) cases was created focusing on the developments of the past decade in the country.[2] A total of 17 resolved CCIs were identified. With the aim to tap into the patterns of social online participation regarding each selected initiative and to seek for available SNSs and other types of user generated content like blogs, videos, audio files etc. The first online technique applied was the *Google* search engine. The online search of the full name/official title of each case on the list was conducted in Armenian (original) and English (to seek for any possible occurrences) languages. The pages generated as a result of search were examined to seek for availability of SNSs used by CCIs.

If the first search didn't provide any information on availability of SNSs, the team went on searching the names/official titles of cases specifically on FB, which was recognised as the main SNS in the course of this research, as according to authors' personal experience FB was used before to mobilise people for a specific purpose in Armenia (the authors either like pages or have been/are members of civic activist groups advocating various causes). The authors conducted search using their personal FB accounts with an aim to locate an existing public page or group. The search of CCIs on FB examined the available pages, groups or personal profiles created with CCI titles, which was done to register the number of *likes* in the case of pages, and number of *members* in the case of groups to have a better understanding of how many people are either included or follow CCIs.

(Note 1: As the research looks at the resolved civic initiatives, there might be a risk that the CCIs used SNS at that time. For this purpose, the authors also searched for other reference sources to identify any information that might indicate the availability of a SNS usage in the past). One such case has been detected. See the list of initiatives and their SNS usage statistics in Table 1.

(2) Civic initiatives online visibility analysis

This section discusses methodology applied to examine the online visibility or 'popularity' of the initiatives defined as availability of a CCI mention in various online sources and applications. The purpose behind looking for the online visibility of initiatives is the team

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[2] The civic initiatives (in the format observed in this paper) are a practice roughly developed during the past decade.

hypothesises that the more there is a frequent mention of the case online, the more there is likelihood that people are aware about the initiative and, thus, more likely to participate.

Examining online visibility of the initiatives was chosen for the purpose of this research, as opposed to, for example mass media sources (print media and/or TV programmes), taking into account increasing access and usage of internet in Armenia (Freedom House 2015) most of the time among youth (Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2013), as usually civic activists in Armenia are youth (Paturyan & Gevorgyan, 2014). Another reason for choosing to examine the online visibility, including online media is to minimise the risk of the Armenian government highly centralised mass media not providing an appropriate coverage of demonstrations and CCIs that are most of the time aimed against governmental policies.

The online visibility of CCIs was similarly examined through *Google* search engine. Using the full list of initiatives each CCI was searched in *Google* to look for the main results. The search was conducted in Armenian and English languages using the names of civic initiatives. The online pages generated were examined to seek for availability of a CCI mention in the sources.

A preliminary search of randomly selected four civic initiatives was conducted to allow for selecting categories in which CCIs will be examined. The pages generated in *Google* were examined to locate the availability of a CCI mentions online. The following categories were developed: availability of a) an official CCI website, b) CCIs mention in pro-governmental media, c) CCIs mention in oppositional media, d) CCIs mention in neutral and/or international media, as well as e) CCIs mention in CSOs websites: speeches (by activists, organisational leaders or government officials); documents (regulations, resolutions, announcements), and f) other category to cover any potential additional mention of the initiatives online. The distinction among the types of media sources was done on purpose to see if the mentions about initiatives are equally represented in different reporting sources, and thus have increased popularity online. In Armenia, the majority of existing online media sources can be classified into being pro-governmental, oppositional or neutral. In the cases of confusion, the authors consulted experts representing CSOs that work on the press-related issues to clarify the originality of source.

The search was conducted by authors independently, to double-check the results by comparison and minimise subjectivity. The online search was conducted in April 2015. The authors hypothesise that observation of information in various online sources will allow for an increased understanding of the CCIs' popularity online. See Table 1 for the information generated as a result of employing social media and online visibility analysis.

Table 1 Resolved CCIs in Armenia: social media usage and online visibility (Yes/No)

	Civic Initiative/Campaign Name	Issue addressed	Start date, Resolution	Social Media[3]	Website	Media pro-gov-al	Media opp-al	Media neutral/ Int-al	Blog/s, video/s	CSOs webpages/ references	Other
1	Protecting the Rights of Individual Taxi Drivers[4]	Consumer Rights	Feb 2009 **Positive**	--	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
2	We are the Owners of the City – Protect the Dragon's Grove Park	Public Parks, Green Spaces	Nov 2010 **Positive**	--	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y
3	Demanding an Independent Trial for the Murder of Zaruhi Petrosyan	Human Rights	Nov 2010 **Positive**	--	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
4	SOS! Save Moscow Cinema's Outdoor Amphitheatre	Cultural Preservation	Mar 2010 **Positive**	--	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
5	We are the Owners of the City – Save Students' Park	Public Parks, Green Spaces	Apr 2010 **Negative**	FBP: 1,173	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
6	Protect the Rights of Open Air Stall Market Traders	Human Rights	Jan 2011 **Negative**	--	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y
7	We Demand the Return of the Minas Avetisyan Frescoes	Cultural Preservation	Jun 2011 **Negative**	--	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N
8	We are Against Metro Inflation	Public Rights	Jun 2011 **Negative**	FBG: 8,000[5]	Y[6]	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
9	SOS! Let's Save the Afrikyan Family Building	Cultural Preservation	Jul 2011 **Negative**	FBP: 1,966 FBG: 996	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
10	Save Trchkan Waterfall in Armenia	Ecology	Sep 2011 **Positive**	FBG: 4,581 FBG: 1,766	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
11	Fight Against the Demolition of Architect Rafael Israelyan's Home	Cultural Preservation	Oct 2011 **Negative**	--	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N
12	Save Mashtots Park	Public Parks, Green Spaces	Feb 2012 **Positive**	FBP: 174 FBG: 338	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
13	Save the Closed Market	Cultural Preservation	May 2012 **Negative**	FBP: 442 FBG: 1,184	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
14	We are Paying 100 Dram	Public Rights	Jul 2013 **Positive**	FBG: 9,183	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
15	We are Against Armenia's Accession to the Custom's Union	Public Rights/Foreign Policy issue	Sep 2013 **Negative**	FBP: 5,283	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N

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[3] Including FB groups, FB pages or any other SNS used.

[4] As a result of the civic initiative "Centre for Protecting Rights of Taxi Drivers" NGO has been established.

[5] FB page: not available after the resolution of initiative.

[6] Link: http://mermetro.com/: not available after the resolution of initiative.

16	DEM EM (*I Am Against)*	Human Rights	Dec 2013 **Positive**	FBP: 20,775 FBG: 53,131 Personal profile	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
17	Stop Changes in Maternity Leave Law	Human Rights	Sep 2014 (2010) **Positive**	FBG: 2,356 Petition	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Note: Table created by authors based on the methods discussed in this paper.

Data checked in April 2015.

(3) Semi-structured interviews with civic activists and CSO leaders

Semi-structured interviews are an essential element of this research and were chosen by authors as the best primary data collection method to inform the study. In order to strengthen and support the findings of this research interviews with civic activists were conducted. The interviews helped tap into some real stories by activists on how the CCIs are born, organised and the strategies followed with an aim to attract more people and face the challenge of a policy/behaviour change of public institutions. Interviews helped to get information about actual public participation from the main organisers, leaders and witnesses having participated in resolved CCIs. Likewise, the preference was given to interviews as opposed to, for example, focus group discussions as these are not considered to be effective while speaking about vulnerable issues, existing problems facing society and inherent in the system. Although being advocates of debate and highly valuing civic discourse, the authors assumed that representatives of various civic initiative groups might not speak out in the presence of others, whereas during an interview people usually feel privacy and are more willing to share their experience and opinions. Also, the authors sought to look at the findings in case of contradicting views among participants over particular developments in histories of civic initiatives.

15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with civic activists and leaders of Armenian non-governmental organisations (NGO) - participants to civic initiatives. The questions were focused on the organisational structure of mobilisation cases, their relationship with NGOs and the role of social media in civic initiatives. The interviews were conducted through January 2015 to April 2015 in Yerevan. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed (each lasted 40 minutes on average). The analysis was conducted using MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software.

Analysis and discussion

This section presents the analysis of the methods employed with an overview of the most recent and also popular four initiatives (one negatively, three positively resolved), to have a better understanding of some cases supported by qualitative analysis of the interviews.

a) Social media analysis

Out of the 17 resolved civic initiatives in Armenia, ten cases used social media.[7] FB is the most popular social media tool among civic activists organising for collective action. Five civic campaigns have (or had) official websites. This means that creating a separate website for the initiative is not a popular practice among civic campaigns in Armenia. However, the usage of social media shows a somewhat different picture: ten out of 17 civic initiatives have used FB to mobilise and raise awareness. The minimum amount of people following a FB application of a campaign is 174 people (*Save Mashtots Park*), with the largest one including 53,131 group

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[7] Information available at the time of the research conducted (March-April 2015). Authors also aimed to find out if the already resolved initiatives with no availability of a FB page at the moment might have had one when it was relevant: one such case has been found and included in the analysis (Table 1).

followers (*DEM EM*). Interestingly, with a dissimilar visibility on the internet and diverging numbers of followers online, both initiatives were resolved positive. This means that apart from online social mobilisation techniques and initiatives' online visibility, there should be other factors involved in the positive resolution of civic campaigns in Armenia. Social media and the Internet helps spreading information and mobilising (online), but it does not play a significant role in the resolution of the CCIs. The overwhelming majority (15) of the initiatives used blogs; some also had video materials to support campaigns.

b) Online visibility analysis

Eight initiatives appear to have mentions in the pro-governmental media. Interestingly however 16 initiatives are found in the oppositional media and the mentions about all (17) initiatives can be found in the neutral and/or international media. This means that oppositional and neutral local/international media was better covering initiatives, paying attention to almost every civic campaign in the country.

Mentions about eight civic initiatives are found in various announcements or materials posted by/on the webpages of CSOs. See Table 1 for the full list of initiatives' social media usage and online visibility on the internet. The other category includes mentions of the initiatives in analytical articles, international websites, human rights reports and Wikipedia. Governments and international organisations containing mentions of Armenian civic campaigns on their websites include the United States Department of State, Embassy of the United States in Armenia, Eastern Partnership Culture Programme and World Wide Fund for Nature.

c) Overview of four CCIs and qualitative analysis

(1) By numerous experts the decision of the Armenian president (2013) to join the Eurasian Custom's Union has been framed as an unexpected and an extremely sudden "U-turn" in the country's foreign policy. For the period of three years preceding the announcement, the country has been preparing itself to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union. Also, the decision was largely a surprise for the Armenian population itself, since there has been no public discourse about it in advance. Armenian civic activists, those advocating country's Western vector of development and the ones disappointed of a state-level decision-making based on no whatsoever discourse in advance, created a FB page to raise the awareness on the concern. Although with the availability of more than 5,000 people following posts and updates on the page, the online arrangements unfortunately did not ensure participation in the on-ground movement against this foreign policy development. In the case of this initiative, the people preferred to express their opinion and be a part of the movement online, as opposed to actually protesting on the street. In this specific case of mobilisation, the online activities did not comply with the real life activities. With a negatively for the initiative resolved governmental decision, the CCI's online page is active until present with followers sharing information on various not happy for Armenia developments as a result of having joined the Custom's Union. In this case,

the social media's role has not been important, if any at all, in relation to mobilising people to protest for a common cause and against the decision on the street.

(2) In 2013, the 50% increase in the main transportation fare rates became a source of great disappointment and anxiety on behalf of the public. The same day of the decision becoming effective, a huge online disengagement with the new policy was seen in the social media. Hundreds of people engaged in the campaign through FB posts and online media. With a main protagonist, the youth, the campaign generated considerable disappointment and concern over, and the need to act against the policy initiative. The online campaign found its manifestation in the form of a mass protest by the young people in the centre of the city with an effort to protect their rights. The youth was active in posting and reposting every single development of the campaign progress, a stimulating culmination of which was manifested in the well-known people taking passengers on their own cars to the required routes, and thus encouraging ordinary car owners to do the same for the public. Very soon car-owning community was mobilised to provide their services to the public on the biggest bus stations of the city free of charge. "An independent bus drivers' union" was created in the city providing unprecedented leverage for future civic mobilisations (Der-Grigorian, 2013). Six days after decreeing the new cost "verdict" for the transportation the mayor of Yerevan made a statement suspending the decision on increasing the transportation fare rate. The "decision to suspend the decision" was greatly welcomed by the public and confirmed the inevitably strong role the young generation plays in the current Armenian society. The performance of this initiative in social media was noticeable as well: several groups were created on FB related to withstanding from paying more. The one however, entitled "We are paying 100 Drams" was the official open group, created by the original initiators. FB made it easier to recruit and mobilise public and it was through FB that public was able to learn there are people who continue paying the original amount instead of newly increased resolution. Moreover, one of the activists noted: "If there were no posts about the fact that some people do not obey the decision and continue paying 100 AMD, the public might have gotten used to paying the increased amount, which would have made the task of the initiative harder." (Activist, 28, male) Likewise, FB made public aware at which bus stop activities are taking place. This CCI has been positively resolved for the public, but it is difficult to name the social media as the main 'actor' in this achievement, as many other types of techniques and activities were used to make public voice heard. On the other hand however the opinions vary. For example, according to an interviewee, this movement, in a way, owes its success to FB. Currently the online group addresses other civic initiatives.

(3) The DEM EM (*I Am Against*) civic initiative owns a longer time frame. The initiative is aimed at opposing the mandatory component of the then-new funded pension law in Armenia. A discussion platform in social media was created in 2013 by a group of people who accidentally heard of the upcoming pension reform. DEM EM civic activists created several pages, groups and a personal profile on FB. The discussions were initiated to inform the public of the pension reform and see what the general moods are. This period lasted 1-2 months. The initiators used this time to do research and find out what is the experience of other countries with pension

reforms. Journalists also got involved in the group, and they started to cover FB discussions. This was the way that public got informed such a reform is planned. During the demonstrations people took photos with their thumbs down and/or with placards, with DEM EM written on these, or they either photographed the stickers on their phones or cars with the same expression, which was the way people showed they join the movement online. The DEM EM stands out from other discussed initiatives in terms of the website availability,[8] being the largest in terms of numbers of FB followers and members (see Table 1), and demonstration attendees (10,000-12,000 people). A special page was designed for the initiative thanks to the fact of many information technology specialists involved in the movement. The DEM EM initiative had an increased popularity through its visibility in online media as well.

(4) Activists from the "Stop Changes in Maternity Law" called upon citizens to contribute to the struggle against the change in the maternity law on temporary leave benefits. The initiative used FB as a platform to inform the public about their activities and the responses of the state. In this case social media mainly served as an effective means for spreading the petition, created on the *www.change.org* website, calling for the National Assembly to change the draft law. The petition got more than 5,000 signatures, while the number of participants in the movement on the ground was 200 maximum. Initiative's online group is active until present. Women keep sharing posts as questions regarding the maternity leave, and the ones concerning other civic initiatives are also being published. *Stop Changes in Maternity Leave Law* was the least popular on FB, having 200 demonstrators.

The interviews revealed that the FB has contributed to the positive resolution of selected civic initiatives. It was described as a tool that implemented multiple functions. One of those was maintaining the discourse. It was very useful for a) spreading information about the demonstrations plan, for informing the public in details what activities to be held as well as using FB as a mobilising tool. The FB was mentioned as an organisational tool. The key actors of the movements designed and disseminated the announcements through FB.

Speaking quantitatively, a total of nine CCIs were positively resolved, whereas ten out of 17 resolved civic initiatives used social media to organise, mobilise or improve discourse on the concerns. While the social media has partially played a role in the resolution of selected initiatives, it is difficult to state that it has fully contributed to their positive resolution. The most recent and biggest civic initiatives discussed in this paper used FB as an organisational, mobilising and discourse-maintaining tool. Civic activists reflect positively about public online and physical participation. However, the physical activities and public engagement in the movements were not equal to the ones on social media.

The hypothesis put forward by this research is partially supported: the social media has been successful in attracting more people to participate in some of the initiatives, has partly contributed to the positive resolution of selected civic initiatives in Armenia. Public mobilisation through online means has played a supporting role, however the resolution of initiatives has been

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[8] Available at: www.dem.am

conditioned by additional activities, such as for example public physical mobilisation and activeness on the streets (for example, in the case of *We are Paying 100 Drams*). Out of total 17 initiatives nine were positively resolved: with five out of these having used social media. A total of four positively resolved cases did not use any social media (see (Note **1**, page 5), but have resulted in positive resolution. This means that the social media has been successful in specific cases, and has thus partially contributed to the positive resolution of selected initiatives.

Conclusion

The interplay between online and offline activism in Armenia differs case by case. In some cases the social media was used to mobilise, but it did not bring any success whatsoever, while in other cases the social media has played an important role at the same time serving an addition to other mobilisation and information spreading techniques aimed at positive resolution.

The analysis shows that the social media was used as a tool for mobilisation and communication by some civic initiatives in the recent history of Armenia. The most recent and biggest civic initiatives used social media as an organisational, mobilising and discourse-maintaining tool. The social media has proved to be successful in specific cases, which means positive resolution is conditioned by other factors as well, such as physical activities on the street.

Oppositional and neutral local/international media was better covering initiatives, providing coverage of (almost) every civic campaign in the country. The research shows that the majority of initiatives were represented in different reporting sources, and thus had increased popularity online. However, exercising an online media visibility and number of people supporting an initiative online does not necessarily mean that the initiative will be able to mobilise the same amount of people for a demonstration purpose. The Armenian public proved to be more active when it comes to 'local' and directly-affected issues as opposed to major decisions on the state-level. Financial concerns get more attention and are successful.

While the social media has become a useful organisational tool for the discussed civic initiatives in Armenia, most of the time the online activities do not comply with the real life activities. The findings of this research suggest that in Armenia the online activism do not translate directly into physical mobilisation action and that the social media has partially contributed to the positive resolution of selected civic initiatives. The social media helped mobilise, but there should be an array of additional factors involved in the resolution process of civic initiatives which need be taken into consideration. This research shows that the social media has been successful in attracting more people to participate in some civic campaigns in Armenia, but it did not play a significant role in their positive resolution.

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