
The transnational discourse of political protests: setting the agenda through social media

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Abstract: This article analyses the role of social media as a transnational discursive space and the impact of networked communication on the formation of the traditional mass media agenda regarding political protests that began in June 2019 in Hong Kong. The aim of the present research was to indicate the degree of impact of the dominant themes in networked communication during the anti-extradition bill protests in the transnational network discourse and the impact on the news media agenda, taking into account the activity of user-generated network traffic around the published content. The research was based on two theories shaping the perception of political protests in an international context - theory on transnational discursive spaces and theories of agenda setting. The research was carried out using quantitative content analysis and confirmed that global social networking sites Facebook and Twitter are important channels in creating transnational discursive spaces that affect the news media's agenda. Findings show that social media plays an important role in organizing political protests, and is a tool for establishing transnational discursive spaces; despite the fact that the protesters used applications protecting their data for communication, with the assistance of information and integrated collaboration by other entities. The results obtained contribute to the research on media studies which highlight the role and importance of social media in the process of communicating about political protests.

Keywords: social media, political protest, agenda setting, transnational network discourse, Hong Kong, anti-extradition bill, one country-two systems

Introduction

Social media is an important channel of communication during social and political protests. Numerous studies have revealed that social media is the primary communication channel for both activists and other participants involved in and observing the events (i.e., Lievrouw, 2011; Castells, 2012; El-Nawawy and Khamis, 2012; El-Nawawy and Khamis, 2013; Chao, 2014; Piechota and Rajczyk, 2015; Srinivasan and Fish, 2017; Piechota, 2018). Content made available through social media is an important source of information about demonstrations abroad. Meta-analysis confirm that, apart from the information and integration function, it is

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impossible to unequivocally define the role of social media during events and also to confirm that using it *a priori* determines the effectiveness of the protest. For a protest to be successful, other conditions must be met such as an active civil society which, through acts of civil disobedience, demonstrates both its opposition and its demands (i.e., El-Nawawy, Khamis, 2012; Boulianne, 2015; Jost et al., 2018).

The protests that have been ongoing since June 2019 in Hong Kong have become a platform of analysis due to Hong Kong's special position in international political and economic relations. Namely: (1). the legal international status of Hong Kong as an autonomous region of the People's Republic of China, where the use of global social media channels is not prohibited; (2). the importance of Hong Kong in international economic relations; (3). the use of social media by users in a way focused on guaranteeing their safety (no identification of the leaders and organizers of the protest), which caused a different creation of network content than before and also activated other entities to take over the role of creators of transnational discursive spaces.

The purpose of the presented analysis is to highlight the importance of social media in establishing transnational discourse platforms during political protests, and in shaping the agenda-setting process in selected news media.

Hong Kong's Status and its Importance in International Relations

Pursuant to the British-Chinese declaration of 1984 – the so-called Hong Kong Basic Law adopted by the Legislative Council of the former British colony – Hong Kong was granted the status of a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China from 1997-2047. With the exception of autonomy in foreign and defense policy, Hong Kong and Macau currently operate under the Chinese political concept: “one country - two systems” (Hughes, 2000 p. 47). However, Hong Kong is characterized by religious and economic freedom, a well-functioning civil society, an open media system and a strong local identity than strictly Chinese political and cultural identification. (Fung, 2008, pp. 195-200).¹

Table 1 below describes the two largest protests that have taken place in response to attempts of Chinese political influence over the past five years. The table provides the motivations and effects of the protests.²

Table 1 - protests in Hong Kong against Chinese political influence in 2014-2019

Name and duration of the protest	Reason for the protest and its organizers	The effects of the protest
Umbrella Revolution 26 September - 15 December 2014.	The reason for the outbreak of protests was the announcement that the election of the head of the local government in 2017 will not be conducted democratically, some candidates will be selected by the	1. The protests were violently dispersed in December 2015, 2. During protests and during the dispersal nearly 1,000 people were arrested and almost 500 were injured.

¹ The latest identity survey of June 2019 indicates that 53% of the population identified themselves as Hongkongers, while 11 per cent as Chinese. 12 per cent identified themselves as “Chinese in Hong Kong”, and 23 per cent as “Hongkongers in China”. When asked if they were proud of being a national citizen of China, 71 per cent said “no” and 27 per cent said “yes”. 90 per cent of people in the age group 18-29 answered “no” – more information can be found here: (<https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/06/28/hongkongers-identifying-chinese-record-low-10-youth-proud-citizens-poll/> - 30.06.2019)

² Under the assumption that the protests that started in June 2019 are ongoing

	<p>Election Committee reporting to the PRC government.</p> <p>The organizer of the protests was Occupy Central with Love and Peace - an organization of civil disobedience, around which mainly students of Hong Kong universities were associated.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. The status quo was maintained, the protests ended in the defeat of the demonstrators. 4. The local identity of Hong Kong residents was strengthened, and involvement in creating pro-democratic political parties and civic groups protecting the democratic system of the region has been increased. 5. In subsequent years, persons responsible for organizing and participation in the Umbrella Revolution were sentenced and imprisoned, including one of the most famous activists in Hong Kong - Joshua Wong.
<p>Anti-extradition protest since June 2019.</p>	<p>The reason for the outbreak of protests was a bill that would allow Mainland China to extradite Hong Kong suspects to the PRC. Hong Kong residents were afraid that the proposed bill would allow China to prosecute political opponents in a place that so far had been a safe haven for opponents of the Chinese Communist Party. Protests, according to not only city residents, but also representatives of the international community are all the more justified because the justice system in the PRC does not respect human rights.</p> <p>The protests did not have a single organizer, people are spontaneously organized to take to the streets (according to estimates, more than two million city residents took part in the march on June 9). In the course of the protests, Joshua Wong, the most famous Hong Kong activist, co-founder of the Demosistio group and became the voice of the protesters, also present abroad.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The protests are ongoing despite the fact that according to the position presented by Carrie Lam – head of administration, work on the legal act has been suspended. 2. Protesters call on the head of the Hong Kong administration to resign as well as to reject the extradition bill altogether. 3. Supporters of the pro-Beijing government policy took to the streets of Hong Kong – there are fewer demonstrators, but they point to the existence of deep divisions within the local society. 4. The protests took on different forms – from marches and occupation of administration buildings and other public facilities (such as the airport) to clashes with the police. Throughout the entire period, information and integration activities were carried out on the internet, and the city's inhabitants were also victims of fake news and disinformation, which were spread by both parties - supporters of the protesters and the pro-Beijing party.

Source: own elaboration

Both protests – the Umbrella Revolution and the Anti Extradition Bill – have been ongoing since June 2019, indicated on the one hand the strengthening of the local identity of Hong Kong residents, and on the other hand illustrated the growing polarization within Hong Kong society. The supporters of the existing autonomy operating in accordance with the constitutional solution “One Country Two Systems” and entities striving for stronger and, above all, faster integration with mainland China (Lui, 2015; Ma, 2015; Lo et al., 2019).

Hong Kong's role in the economy of the PRC is important but not as important as in the 1990s. At the beginning of the 21st century, Hong Kong constituted 20 percent of the Chinese GDP and was the main channel of access to foreign capital. Currently, it makes up only three

percent of Chinese GDP and Beijing is able to attract foreign investment on its own (Whalen, 2019).

The Role of Social Media in Political Protests

The organization of political protests is not a new issue. However, the emergence of social media has changed the way in which protests are organized and has enabled the tracking of documented behavior of protesters and other entities involved in the course of events (Castells, 2012; Milan, 2013; Margetts, et al. 2016). The development of technology and the widespread use of social media has resulted in greater participation by making possible the use of geolocation, user-generated content and reconstructing a desired self-image (Thielmann, 2010, p. 5; Trottier, 2014, p. 45; Przegalińska & Jemielniak, 2015 p. 93-105, Piechota & Rajczyk 2015, Lamond & Spracklen, 2015, Garland, 2015). In addition, the functions assigned to social media affect communication processes by strengthening messages and concentrating them in metadata to facilitate information analysis and research on their impact. An important example is the hashtag (#),³ used to accumulate content that has been assigned the same characters. In the case of political protests, the use of the hashtag has become one of the forms of digital activism (Cammaerts, 2015; Daniels, 2016, p. 515-525; Barberá et al. 2015; Endong, 2018 pp. 36-53).

When organizing political protests, primarily global social networking sites are used, such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. Levinson (2010, p. 108) calls social media “the defender of democracy” due to its importance in publishing online reports of statements or events that subsequently trigger an avalanche of further facts. Local activists use global websites in an attempt to appeal to global public opinion and influence the virtual community, causing interest and involvement in online activism, and thus disseminating protest and aggregating support. Sykulski (2019, p. 110) emphasizes that currently a significant part of public debate is transferred to the internet and the virtual reality environment creates an “extra territory” in which civilians are at the center of the conflict and are expected to take a stand. Łoś (2017, pp. 115-116) indicates that in the case of authoritarian states, governments usually ignore domestic public opinion during political crises, but the costs are too high when an issue becomes internationally salient. Thus, global social networking sites are becoming a channel of influence on international public opinion and also affect the image of those in power in the place of protests. The magnitude of the protest, expressed in the number of protesters, may indicate a lack of legitimacy of the government to continue exercising power. Activists, thanks to global channels, increase the reach of information, which allows them to attract new followers; they shape the platform of free discourse beyond state control. As a result of framing – conducting a targeted emotional narrative – they shape an alternative image of political leaders whose decisions they protest. According to Mercea (2016), interested users follow activists to global social media services. Thanks to the aggregation of interest by protest leaders, the impact of the content generated is increased due to the individual involvement of demonstration participants in the form of creating and disseminating the content they create in the form of photos, videos, comments, memes and manifestations of street art as a tool supporting local activism. Along with technological development, activists are looking for new effective communication services with which they can achieve their goals, while at the same time eliminating threats, especially those resulting from participation in acts of political resistance in authoritarian and quasi-authoritarian states (Piechota and Rajczyk, 2015; Kusenok, 2015;

³ The hashtag, marked with the symbol #, is used on social media platforms. It enables the audience to get involved in a particular topic, to disseminate information or opinions, which can lead to protests

Hubenko and Wall, 2018, p. 148). Communication channels that mainly gain importance are the ones that protect user data, encrypt connections and prevent identification. The Telegram messaging service used by activists during the Hong Kong protest in question has such features, which is a challenge to Chinese authorities who have limited ability to monitor network activity and repress activists and protest organizers.⁴

In 2018, a group of researchers used metadata from various studies to identify the role of social media in protests. The conclusion from the findings pointed to three important social media functions during the protests:

1. It allows for the transmission of information necessary to coordinate protest activities – transport logistics, turnout, police activities, medical service, and legal assistance
2. It is a medium of transmission of content emotionally engaging and motivating support from protestors or to speak against them. Such content included: messages emphasizing moral indignation, social identification, effectiveness of the group's operation, but also fear of legal consequences
3. The structures of Internet social networks vary depending on the context determined by other factors, e.g., political ideology affects success or lack of success during the implementation of a specific protest (Jost et al., 2018, pp. 111-112).

Technological development strongly affects the choice of specific communication channels as well as the content transmission tools used. However, as has been shown in comparative studies conducted in countries with different political and media systems,⁵ social media in each of the protest sites (Ukraine and Taiwan) played a similar role during the very acts of resistance and were the main channel of communication (Piechota, 2018).

Social Media During the Anti-Extradition Bill in Hong Kong

Taking into account the various forms restrictions on mass media after 1997 in Hong Kong – usually censorship or self-censorship (Meng, 2018, p. 13; Chan, 2019) in newspapers and web portals – social media sites create a platform of free discourse, performing the function of independent media (Lievrouw, 2012; Castells, 2012; Edwards, 2014, p. 63; Piechota and Rajczyk, 2015; Majorek, 2017; Piechota, 2018).

Activists during the protests that began in Hong Kong in June 2019 took advantage of the previous experience with the Umbrella Revolution. After the events of 2014, when the protest leaders were arrested, tried and imprisoned,⁶ the events that started in 2019 did not reveal specific and explicit leadership, did not generate the organized structure of the social movement that originated in Hong Kong, and during the protests, digital news media was not used to identify both the protest organizers and their participants. The events in Hong Kong, at the time the research was carried out, had already lasted two months and for an external observer they assumed the nature of self-organized spontaneous events, based on innovative forms of transmission of the message accompanying demonstrators (e.g. organization at the airport in Hong Kong, demonstration of elderly people remembering the period of the British rule of Hong Kong and the demonstration of families with young children, putting pressure on

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-48802125> - (13.08.2019)

⁵ Comparative research was carried out in Ukraine and Taiwan, taking into consideration protests that took place there in 2014: the EuroMajdan and Sunflower Revolution.

⁶ 20-year-old Joshua Wong was sentenced to eight months in prison, his older colleagues Nathan Law and Alex Chow to 10 months. The sentences were not given for political engagement but for “rowdiness, lawlessness and creating social turmoil.”

European and American politicians to pay attention to human rights during protests). Protesters appeared in a specific place, demonstrated and dispersed, including the fact that in the first weeks of protests they were tidying up the places where demonstrations took place. Activists used communicators, primarily Telegram,⁷ which allows data encryption, and the popular WhatsApp messenger and internet forums to announce where the course of events were set. Popular websites such as Facebook and Twitter were not used to organize subsequent events, and the use of Octopus cards was discontinued.⁸ Leaving digital traces would allow the cardholders to be identified, which could potentially lead to restrictions placed on them. It was also common for people participating in events to prevent identification by covering their faces and using lasers to interfere with police recordings. Two portals and their social networking sites have become communication channels reporting on the course of the protest. The first was the independent and pro-democratic Hong Kong Free Press website (hereinafter HKFP).⁹ The portal is an English-language internet newspaper allowing users to subscribe to the newsletter, running news websites, including the ones on Facebook (over 110,000 fans), Twitter (116,000 followers), and on its YouTube content channel (3,621 subscribers).¹⁰ It was established as a network and civic response to the 2014 protests. The newspaper positions itself as a defender of democracy and human rights, and its content indicates that Taiwan and Macau are also in its area of interest. When analyzing the content of the newspaper, attention is drawn to the content architecture, which clearly distinguishes topics by positioning them as to the place (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau)¹¹ and themes, including a separate tab dedicated to politics and protests,¹² as well as opinions added by journalists and commentators. At the time of the protests, the portal's activity in its social media channels focused solely on the issue of protests, becoming a source of information about the protests, aggregating social, financial and logistic capital as well as disseminating information on a global scale. At the same time, the reception of protests by the international community was presented, illustrated by evidence of support for the events in Hong Kong from other parts of the world. The newspaper created its own content in a variety of forms – film coverage, photos, shared memes, articles and opinions – by the newspaper's commentators and other people.

⁷ Telegram (TON - Telegram Open Network) was created in 2013, its creator is the Russian, Pavel Durov, who previously founded the Vkontakte service popular in the countries of the former USSR. It is estimated that Telegram is currently the fastest growing social network in the world, mainly due to the protection of user data. The telegram has no central computers and servers on which data is stored. The website is based on a distributed, decentralized platform, co-created and verified by the users themselves. It is an ideal tool for opposition groups in authoritarian countries, e.g., in Iran or Russia.

⁸ A name card popular in Hong Kong allowing the user to pay for small purchases, transport services, etc.

⁹ Hong Kong Free Press HKFP – “With attacks on journalists, advertisers withdrawing from media critical of the establishment along with the existential pressures facing the wider industry, it is ever more vital that the territory has an independent platform for critical voices to be heard. Our mission: We aim to be the most independent and credible English-language news source in Greater China. We seek to amplify the voices of the voiceless, not the powerful. And our platform will act as a monitor should Hong Kong's core values and freedoms be threatened. The HKFP team is fully committed to reporting the facts, without fear, favor or interference. Free of charge and completely independent, HKFP launched in 2015 amid rising concerns over declining press freedom in Hong Kong. It was the city's first crowdfunded media outlet, and the fastest-funded, biggest crowdfunding project of its time. HKFP is home to a mix of breaking news, original reporting, features and interviews, providing a direct platform for expert voices, citizen contributors, NGOs and advocacy groups.” (<https://www.facebook.com/hongkongfp/>) (accessed on 27.06.2019)

¹⁰ Data on the number of people who follow content as on June 27, 2019.

¹¹ Hong Kong and Macau function as autonomous regions, according to the principle of one state, two systems, and the Republic of China is an independent state, treated by the PRC as a rebellious province.

¹² <https://www.hongkongfp.com/category/topics/politics-protest/> (accessed on 27.06.2019).

During the protests, the community established in 2016, Demosisto,¹³ was also important, acting as a social movement seeking democratic self-determination in Hong Kong. According to the declarations of the founders, among whom is Joshua Wong,¹⁴ the goals of the movement are to be achieved through direct actions such as referendums and peaceful means of pressure. The movement is primarily on two global social networking sites – Facebook and Twitter,¹⁵ of which Facebook is a platform of internal discourse – materials are shared in Chinese, while Twitter is in English. During the protests, the activity on Twitter consisted mainly of sharing retweets from news media, activists’ retweets, and HKFP’s retweets. Content created directly by Demosistō was rare. The Demosistō movement on the internet (most often through Joshua Wong) communicated information about events. On behalf of the protesters, he turned to EU and US politicians calling for influence on Hong Kong’s authorities to respect human rights during the riots, but it was not identified as the organizer of the protests, and the movement was only identified as a local and pro-democratic subject of public debate in Hong Kong. To sum up, the content of both sites determined the choice of research location, which was implemented by analyzing the original content made available in English by HKFP on global Facebook and Twitter services enabling the use of content on an international scale.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The considerations contained in this article are based on two theories shaping the perception of political protests in an international context – the theory of transnational discursive spaces and the theory of agenda setting. The theory of transnational discursive spaces is based on two important aspects. The first is the assumption that there is a global public space in which global discursive spaces are created. The second is the assumption that the geographical expansion of transnational public opinion is caused by the media, in recent years primarily social media. The theory of transnational discursive spaces is a development of the theory of public space of Jürgen Habermas (1989, pp. 73-74), which assumes that public space is characterized by: free access of citizens and their exercise of their rights, including the possibility of assembly and free expression of opinions. Social media as a platform for discourse enables access for everyone so that they can express issues relevant to their own needs while accepting the importance of issues relevant for the community. Public opinion is formulated in the discourse process, which, thanks to its reach, can potentially have a global character. According to Castells (1996) and McQuail (2009), international communication using social media creates a

¹³ “Demosistō- Demos (‘de:.mɔs), its origin from Latin and Ancient Greek δῆμος, carries the meaning of “the people,” “the commoners” and “the citizens,” and constitutes the etymological roots of the widely used term democracy in English today. While democracy, or, δημοκρατία (“dēmokratía”) in Ancient Greek, represents the “krátos of the demos” (the rule of the people), we believe that the key leading us to this final goal lies in an essential stage of perseverance, struggle and endeavor - the rising up of the people – and that, is what defines our mission. Sistō (‘sis.to:) is a Latin word, first person singular, for standing - standing up, standing still, standing firm. What we imply is that it is we who are the demos, and it is we who shall stand and fight, even if we shall be the last one to stand alone. Together, Demosistō represents our mission to recognize, to awaken, and to mobilize each and every member of the community of Hong Kong in rising up against injustice. Through embodying the people of Hong Kong, we strive to stand up in our resistance against tyranny and hegemony. We strive to stand firm in our persistence of the struggle for liberation from oppression. We strive to stand still in our insistence on freedom and equality.” (<https://www.demosisto.hk/about?lang=en> - 14.08.2019)

¹⁴ The most famous activist from Hong Kong, who since 2012 (then a 15-year-old student) has been organizing protests against Chinese influences limiting Hong Kong’s autonomy, was one of the leaders of the “Umbrella Revolution” after which he was tried and sentenced to prison. He was released already during the protests in 2019.

¹⁵ On August 14, 2019, the number of fans on Facebook was 88,500 liking and 97,000 followers (the site is run in Chinese). On Twitter on the same day there were 21,000 followers.

transnational arena of public opinion discourse. Similarly, Volkmer (1999, p. 119) claims that global communication has changed the orientation of public opinion, which ceased to be only an element of the political system of society, but instead became an autonomous global public sphere existing between the state and the global community. This leads to the conclusion that currently public opinion may have a transnational character; in its space there is a discussion about topics important from a global perspective (Volkmer 2014). When determining the subject matter relevant to public opinion, the agenda setting theory assumes that it is the news media, mainly through the process of filtering reality, that creates an image by transferring information of their choice and thus influencing what becomes the subject of discourse in public opinion. Pointing to the relevance of themes, the media therefore can order important topics that shape public opinion and discourse conducted in its space. According to Endong (2018), in the digital age, social media plays a much more important role than traditional media. Journalists, activists as well as users of social media such as Twitter and Facebook take advantage of their reach, influencing and shaping the agenda. According to research findings cited by Endong (2018, p. 39), there are five ways for activists to shape the agenda by using networks:

1. Social Networking Sites' (SNS) users decide what news is important by choosing what to share within their networks (basics agenda-setting effects)
2. Attributes regarding events are issued by SNS users under particular limitations (attribute agenda-setting)
3. In conditions of high uncertainty and relevance, SNS users can directly impact public opinion (psychological effects of agenda-setting theory)
4. SNS are becoming the source of traditional media agendas (sources of media agendas)
5. SNS users are reaffirming their opinions as a result of SNS homophily (consequences of agenda-setting effects); and users influence public figures within SNS (reverse agenda-setting effects).

The agenda setting theory in connection with the development of online media is subject to modification, which allow for new models and expanding the understanding of changes taking place in the world coming from new forms of communication (McCombs, et al. 2014, p. 783). The new agenda setting models includes a network agenda-setting model and a reverse agenda-setting model. The first of the models indicates the possibility of imposing the interpretation of the world view of public opinion by social media, which plays an important role thanks to the possibility of enhancing the effect by using emotional attributes corresponding to the preferences of the recipients (Weiman and Brosius, 2016, pp. 27-29). At the same time, the generated level of interest in the network affects traditional media, which take over topics indicated by network users, treating them as important. This leads to the use of the reverse agenda-setting model, under which the hierarchy of issues important for online public opinion is formed, which causes interest and ordering of the topic in the media agenda (Vu et al., 2014, pp. 675-680).

Assuming, therefore, that the theory of transnational discourse may affect agenda setting as a result of users' online activity, the research hypothesized that (H1) social media creates a transnational discursive space during political protests by providing a platform for global transfer of information about protests and content confirming their impact on public opinion in a supranational dimension. Therefore, the main hypothesis assumes that social media during protests primarily performs a utilitarian function of creating a virtual space for exchanging content. The additional hypothesis adopted in the research assumes that (H2) it is the amount of information available on leading topics that shapes the media agenda, thus influencing public opinion and the transnational discourse conducted in its space, and not the reported event itself.

The research was carried out based on the content published from June 13-28 on Facebook and June 17-28 on Twitter. Posts in specified topics were categorized and the network traffic generated in connection with their publication was analyzed.¹⁶ All posts and tweets published by HKFP on Facebook and Twitter in the research period were encoded. The coding consisted of manually extracting the content and saving it in two independent files in which the content was coded. The coding consisted of analyzing the text of each of the posts or tweets and then assigning them to the appropriate thematic category. After seven days, the encoding was repeated using a second file. A summary of the results obtained from two data coding processes revealed differences in the categorization of a total of five posts and six tweets (in both cases this information was assigned to different substantive categories). These posts and tweets were added to the category 'other'. The percentage of mismatch in the encoding process was: 2.53% for posts and 1.56% for tweets.

Posts were categorized (the same model was used for tweets) into the following thematic categories:

1. Coverage of protests – materials describing and reporting the protest, events that took place in connection with it were included here.
2. Information on reporting events in foreign media – materials from other media, which were made available on HKFP channels as reports from the Hong Kong protests.
3. The impact of events on the image and activities of Hong Kong politicians – information and opinions that referenced and commented on Hong Kong's administrative authorities in a way that simultaneously formulated opinions and assessments of the situation and responsibility for it.
4. Repressions against activists – this category includes information that concerned both previous repressions against protesters during the Umbrella Revolution, which were recalled in connection with protests, as well as potential threats to the civil movement and political opposition resulting from the introduction of the extradition bill.
5. Effects of protests – posts describing all circumstances surrounding protests, such as commenting on protesters' behavior, devastation, pollution of the city, seizure of public facilities, facts directly related to the protests.
6. Protests in the world – information reporting support for protests from the world - organized happenings, demonstrations, declarations of support by famous and popular persons.
7. Other – this category includes memes, fundraisers for protesters, and other information that was not included in the other categories.

The results obtained because of the categorization were compared with the number and content of journalistic materials published on the internet portals of selected news media (global, regional and national) in the period from June 13-30, 2019. The first period of protest duration was deliberately taken into account. When it was purely local, information about the reasons for the outbreak of the demonstration and the course of the protest was new and original, and at the same time the protest generated no significance outside of Hong Kong. Over time, the escalation of events took place, taking on an increasingly serious course (brutal police actions against demonstrators, directing Chinese military troops to the city limits) and also affecting people unrelated and uninterested in the event (the occupation of the airport by protesters and two-day halt of departures from Hong Kong), which increased news media interest in the situation in Hong Kong. The aim of the research was to find a relationship between reporting events in social media and their impact on shaping the agenda in the analyzed news media. The

¹⁶ The research was carried out from June 28 to July 3, 2019 – data on network traffic included in the tables was up to date at the time of the study.

selection of news media with content devoted to Hong Kong protests (contained on their websites) that was accepted for analysis included: global news media (CNN International, BBC World, RT, Al Jazeera), European news channels (Politico and EuroNews) and a local Polish daily newspaper, positioning itself as pro-democratic and civil (Gazeta Wyborcza). The media were selected into the sample based on their ownership diversity, which affect the type of content published and their media impact.

The second part of the study shows the number of direct references in the texts of the analyzed information channels to the content published on the HKFP website (the time criterion was omitted here, taking into account all the information for which the portal was the source of the content) and citations listed (directly from social media – Facebook and Twitter and photos also from the Instagram channel), which came from leaders of the Demosistō movement or other people actively participating. This part of the conducted research allowed linking and analyzing the agenda setting of the studied information channels with the communication acts that were conducted on the network by entities communicating about events in Hong Kong.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of the content made available on June 13-28, 2019 showed that there was no information other than on the subject of the extradition act and related issues on HKFP social media channels.

Table 2. HKFP service content on Facebook (13-28 June 2019).

Theme of posts	The number of published posts	The number of people liking	The number of comments	The number of shares
coverage of protests	65	54 255	4553	11875
information on reporting events in foreign media	3	1680	77	420
the impact of events on the image and activities of Hong Kong politicians	35	17 122	2549	5115
repressions against activists	16	5979	740	1684
effects of protests	25	7238	1734	1684
protests in the world	29	18368	1204	6103
other	25	9059	887	2230

Source: own elaboration

There are several regularities confirming that the HKFP service has been transformed into a service reporting the course of protests and their impact on the environment at the place of protest and beyond.

1. The main content was coverage of the protest, which also generated the largest network traffic. On average, 13 posts per day were published on the website during the surveyed period (15 days), all related only to the subject of protests.
2. An important element of the content were posts in which the image of the Hong Kong administration was presented, especially its head Carrie Lam, as a dishonest person implementing Beijing's orders against the will of Hong Kong residents (this image was comprised of opinions expressed by commentators and published opinions of activists and other people, such as scientists). Noting both the number of posts about this topic and the network traffic they generated, it should be assumed that much attention was paid to the image of local political leaders presenting their attitude and actions in opposition to the dominant majority of protesters.¹⁷
3. Creating the image of protests in the context of political and social circumstances in which Hong Kong operates (one state, two systems), attention was paid to the repression of authorities against protesters and activists. Reaching for the opinion and also describing the story of Joshua Wong, the HKFP reported the stories of activists, their persecution by the Chinese authorities in the context of the fate that political opponents may face after the introduction of the extradition law.
4. On its Facebook page, HKFP reported the protests that took place in the world as support for Hong Kong events. The posts reported demonstrations of support, which took place, among others in London, Oxford, Frankfurt, Belgium and Switzerland and outside Europe in Vancouver, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra, Hobart, Perth and Adelaide. HKFP also shared that the protests took place as an expression of support for the pro-Beijing policy of Hong Kong authorities. The relations, therefore, were seemingly objective in nature, not limited to merely providing information on the activities of the opponents. However, taking into account the previously mentioned divisions that exist in the local society, such information had the effect of mobilizing and activating opponents. Protesters mainly relied on increasing the reach of posts that they liked or shared. Posts were much less frequently commented on.

In the process of reporting events, various content carriers were used – movies, reports (27 reports were made available during the period under review, which generated over 350,000 original views by June 28. In addition, Carrie Lam's statements regarding explanations and apologies to Hong Kong residents concerning the commencement of work on the extradition act were also made available twice, which received a total of 81,000 views.), photos and memes as well as journalistic materials and the opinions of newspaper commentators. Using the same forms of communication and communication tools during protests, which are used by protest leaders and activists, the effect was achieved by transforming the newspaper's website into a channel covering the protests, recognizing them as the most important information for both Hong Kong residents and other network users tracking the published content.

¹⁷ These words take on significance in relation to the number of protesters in Hong Kong, which during the demonstration and march on June 16, exceeded 2 million (the number of Hong Kong residents is currently less than 7.5 million inhabitants), which places this protest among not only the most numerous in Hong Kong, but also in the world.

Table 3. HKFP service content on Twitter (17-28 June 2019).¹⁸

Theme of tweets	the number of tweets	the number of responses	the number of retweets	the number of likes
coverage of protests	91	292	4233	6129
information on reporting events in foreign media	1	7	30	37
the impact of events on the image and activities of Hong Kong politicians	78	281	2005	3130
repressions against activists	35	82	745	916
effects of protests	64	152	1540	2044
protests in the world	87	192	3802	4942
other	29	43	550	874

Source: own elaboration

In the case of Twitter content, protest information was definitely dominant over the period (but it was not the only topic). Unlike Facebook content, tweets were multiplied, the same tweets were posted several times, increasing both the number of published information per day and their potential ranges. Comparing the average number of daily published tweets to Facebook posts, the relationship was as follows: Facebook – 13 posts per day; Twitter – 35 tweets per day. The activity of Twitter users, similarly as in the case of Facebook, was primarily aimed at increasing the reach of the published content, through information retweets and liking. HKFP on Twitter created a discourse platform, but it was negligible compared to the basic goal of users, which was to increase the reach of information. Published tweets (marking was less often used on Facebook) were accompanied by hashtags: #ProtestHongKong; #HongKongDemocracy; #ExtraditionBill; #FreeHongKong; #FreedomHongKong; #g20OsakaSummit; #g20FreeHongKong; #HongKongprodemocracy; #HongKongisChina.

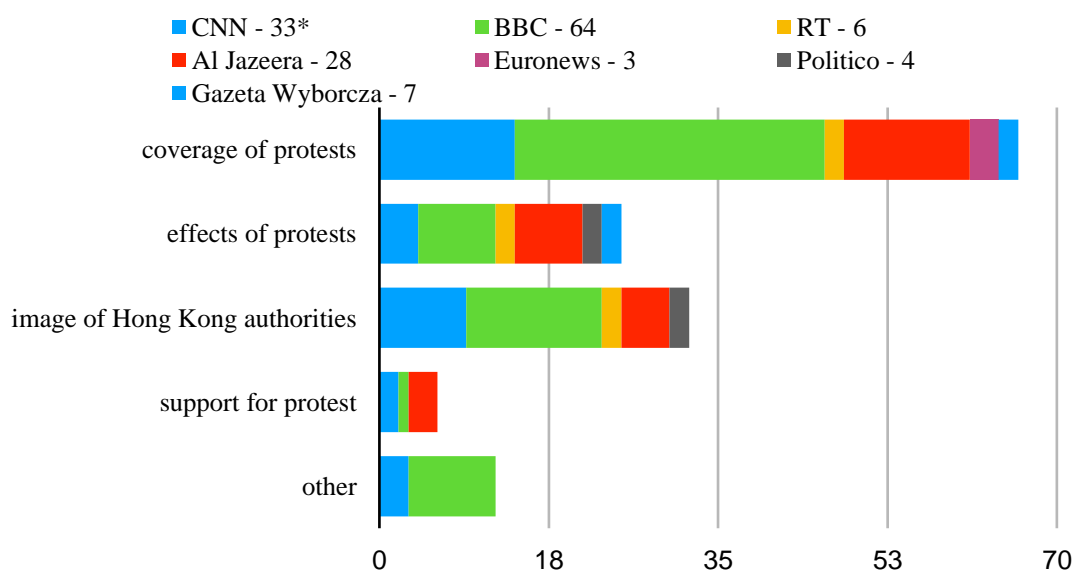
To sum up, content analysis on both HKFP newspaper's social networking sites has identified and defined the perception of protests. The largest amount of information was found for two thematic categories, i.e., reports on events and information whose content shaped the image of Hong Kong authorities. Analyzing the content dominant in messages on both Facebook and Twitter with user activity, which was primarily focused on increasing the reach of content, it can be assumed that the portal assumed the role of the sender of information about events in Hong Kong, thus filling the gap created in connection with the lack of integrated communication conducted by event organizers themselves.

¹⁸ Given the restrictions imposed by Twitter, it was possible to access the published content only until June 17. Previously published tweets were not available. Thus, it was impossible to analyze the content created at the same time as on Facebook.

Coverage of protests by news media

When determining the content of selected news media, the same information categorization model was used as in the case of posts and tweets posted on HKFP websites. The chart below illustrates the distribution regarding the amount and subject matter of information in the news media in the period June 13-30, 2019. (see Figure 1)

Figure 1. The subject of materials devoted to protests in Hong Kong appearing in selected news media in the period from June 13-30, 2019.



* the number of reports that appeared in individual media during the period considered

These data show that news media focused attention on the same two dominant topics that appeared when analyzing user activity in global social media. The news media most often presented accounts of protests (in this case, broadcasts on three global television stations dominated – CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera). Both Al Jazeera and the BBC devoted several materials to the organization of events using social media, indicating how they were used by activists. Attention was paid to the use of applications that protect user data, the important pro-democratic role of social media in the organization of protests was emphasized.¹⁹ The second dominant topic in the news media was the image of the Hong Kong authorities in the light of the information presented, which contained content highlighting the lack of confidence in local authorities and the demand for the resignation of the head of the Hong Kong administration – Carrie Lam, who is considered by residents to be implementing the policy of the PRC in Hong Kong. The opinions published in the news media, which touched upon the subject of the image of the authorities, which lost the reputation and trust of citizens, also emphasized China's violation of the "one state - two systems" principle underlying the takeover of Hong Kong in 1997. Again, the largest amount of information appeared on three global television stations (CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera). It should be noted that European news media did not devote a lot of attention to the events, and they reported the events in a different way to the aforementioned TV stations. Euronews focused on reporting the protests, pointing out the accompanying ideas and the number of demonstrators. Politico, however, drew attention to the events in Hong Kong

¹⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-48619804>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-48802125>; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/surveillance-savvy-hong-kong-protesters-digitally-dark-190618104439415.html>; accessed 12.03.2020.

focusing on the effects of protests and the image of the Hong Kong authorities. The protests were presented in the context of the visit of a representative of the German government to China, who drew attention to the protests, emphasizing the need to maintain the unchanging status of the region and respecting human rights by the authorities in Hong Kong. He pointed out that this could be a condition for Germany's further cooperation with the Middle Kingdom. Politico also referred to the events in Hong Kong in the context of the G20 meeting, referring to opinions expressed by the Demosisto movement, which proves that journalists noticed the movement as a local political entity, its activity and formulated postulates.

In the Polish daily, the news concerned two topics – protests were reported, highlighting the involvement of people in their course and the effects of events were presented, mainly in the context of the future of Hong Kong.

RT devoted six reports to the events in Hong Kong, which significantly distanced this global television station from other stations (CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera). RT's reports focused on the presentation of the brutality used to pacify student protests (two materials), emphasizing Carrie Lam's apology for the situation of residents and opinions expressed by the PRC, which demanded that the US "not interfere in China's internal affairs" (2 materials) and others. One of the reports was devoted to the cleaning of Hong Kong by protesters after the demonstration – which made this protest different from others (specific examples of events in the US were given)²⁰ and the second was dedicated to Nike company which was forced to withdraw some of the goods from the Chinese market after declaring support for the protesters by one of the brand's designers.²¹

To sum up, the news coverage of Hong Kong events coincided in the number of materials giving relevance to specific topics with the image promoted by users involved in the Hong Kong protest online. The differences consisted in the way the content was presented, which resulted from framing by individual channels (especially Politico – economic issues and the situation of Hong Kong as the EU's economic partner and RT – content useful for the propaganda of the channel owner). In contrast, global TV stations such as CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera focused on the transmission of content, taking into account a lot of it published on the web in connection with protests, such as street art performance related to the protest, support of the protest by Hong Kong's religious leaders or local celebrities (Al-Jazeera). Global TV stations also focused on Joshua Wong's involvement in protests and his internet activity – calling on Carrie Lam to step down, coverage of the protest of supporters of Hong Kong's faster integration with mainland China (BBC), and finally reports from the G20 where Hong Kong residents demonstrated to draw the attention of world leaders to their problems, information on fake news that activists were spreading (CNN).

²⁰ <https://www.rt.com/news/462133-hong-kong-protest-clean-up/> (accessed: 16.08.2019)

²¹ <https://www.rt.com/sport/462724-nike-china-hong-kong-protests/> (accessed: 16.08.2019)

The HKFP portal and the Demosistō movement as sources of shaping content in news media

Table 4 - pointing to the HKFP portal as the source of information about protests in Hong Kong

Media	Date of publication and access to the publication
BBC	20.08.2019 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49403619 21.08.2019 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49419711 24.08.2019 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49445555
CNN	4.06.2019 https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/badiucao-documentary-reveals-identity-intl/index.html 12.06.2019 https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/11/opinions/hong-kong-protests-government-abuse-judiciary-cheung/index.html
Al Jazeera	12.08.2019 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/police-fire-tear-gas-thousands-rally-hong-kong-190811100536606.html 11.11.2019 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/police-fire-tear-gas-thousands-rally-hong-kong-190811100536606.html
RT	none
Gazeta Wyborcza	30.10.2019 https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,25361078,w-piatym-miesiacu-protestow-hongkong-wszedl-w-recesje-br.html 03.10.2019 https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,25266298,hongkong-postrzelony-przez-policjanta-nastolatek-uslyszal-zarzuty.html
Euronews	28.07.2019 https://www.euronews.com/2019/07/28/protesters-in-hong-kong-defy-authorities-and-march-once-again 30.08.2019 https://www.euronews.com/2019/08/30/hong-kong-pro-democracy-activists-arrested-ahead-of-planned-protests 30.09.2019 https://www.euronews.com/2019/09/30/hong-kong-protests-expected-to-go-ahead-on-china-anniversary-despite-ban
Politico	none

An analysis of the content published on the websites of the studied traditional media revealed that the HKFP website was the source of information (journalists referred to the website and cited the information posted there) in materials published on the dates presented in the table. Most of them cover a period later than the one that was the subject of the analysis (except for two publications from the CNN, which date earlier than the analyzed period). This means that in the first weeks of protests (June 2019) the website may not have been recognized globally, so it was not an important source of information. It was more often derived from the social activity of Demosistō activists (table below). Over time, however, not only did global services such as BBC and Al Jazeera draw attention to the content published through HKFP, but also local media, such as the Polish daily Gazeta Wyborcza. This means that as the events in Hong Kong intensified and gained international character, the importance of the local internet portal increased, affecting media agenda-setting.

Table 5. citing statements published on social media by the Demosistō movement and its leaders

Media	Date and access to publications	Statement in question
Al Jazeera	13 of June 2019 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/hong-kong-clashes-erupt-protesters-storm-legislature-190612062139226.html	“Isaac Cheng, the 19-year-old vice chair of student protest group Demosisto, told Al Jazeera he saw the decision to postpone the debate as “some kind of victory for Hong Kong people and the protesters,” but warned the city’s pro-China legislators would be “ready for a marathon meeting” in an attempt to outlast those demonstrating outside”
Al Jazeera	18 of June 2019 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/leaderless-masked-face-hong-kong-protests-190618032833711.html	“By and large, the protesters were young. “They’re definitely leaderless,” Chow said. “They communicate through social media.” Among protesters, the app of choice was Telegram. Police appeared to know this - they had arrested Ivan Ip, the administrator of a chat group with some 20,000 members. But there were dozens of groups like Ip’s on Telegram and across the internet. If a chat was shut down, users could easily take their discussion elsewhere. They also used Airdrop, a file-sharing function on Apple devices, to share messages and memes, sometimes with random strangers”

BBC	25.06.2019 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-29457900	In an essay posted on his Facebook page (in Chinese) he wrote: "Many citizens have said to me that 'Hong Kong relies on you.'" "I feel uncomfortable and even irritated when I hear this praise. When you were suffering pepper spray and tear gas but decided to stay for the protest despite the repression from the government, I was not able to do anything other than stare at a meal box and the blank walls of the detention room and feel powerless."
BBC	30.06.2019 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-40453253	"Police later arrested the 26 activists, who were calling for greater political freedoms and protesting against the perceived growing influence of Beijing. They also called for the release of terminally ill Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo . The political party Demosisto, founded by Mr Wong and Mr Law, said on its Twitter account on Friday morning that all its arrested members were released. Mr Wong tweeted that he was detained for "breaking the 'public nuisance' law". Police said in a statement the activists had been released on bail and must report back to police in September. They have not been charged, reported AFP news agency."
CNN	16.06.2019. https://edition.cnn.com/asia/live-news/hong-kong-protests-june-16-intl-hnk/index.html	"As American security and business interests are also jeopardized by possible extradition arrangements with China, I believe the time is ripe for Washington to re-evaluate the U.S.–Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992, which governs relations between the two places. I also urge Congress to consider the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act. The rest of the international community should make similar efforts," Wong wrote.
CNN	17.06.2019. https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/17/asia/joshua-wong-hong-kong-protests-intl-hnk/index.html	Tweet of Joshua Wong in the text: "Hello world and hello freedom. I have just been released from prison. GO HONG KONG!! Withdraw the extradition bill. Carrie Lam step down. Drop all political prosecutions!"

CNN	19.06.2019 https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/19/asia/viral-photo-hong-kong-protests-trnd/index.html	“The image is the first result of a Twitter search for "Hong Kong protests,” with more than 28,000 likes and 8,000 retweets. It’s also been reposted on Instagram by people including Nathan Law, founding chair of the pro-democracy group, Demosisto.”
Euronews	17.06.2019. https://www.euronews.com/2019/06/17/hong-kong-activist-joshua-wong-freed-from-jail-to-join-mass-protest	Tweet of Joshua Wong in the text: “Hello world and hello freedom. I have just been released from prison. GO HONG KONG!! Withdraw the extradition bill. Carrie Lam step down. Drop all political prosecutions!”
Euronews	17.06.2019. https://www.euronews.com/2019/06/17/hong-kong-mass-protests-are-just-start-wider-human-rights-n1018211	George Chen ,, Hong Kong Police chief clarifies it only holds 5 riot suspects and respects HK people’s rights to protest, a rare and clear attempt to ease public frustrations on the police earlier defining HK protest a “riot”
Politico	27.06.2019. https://www.politico.eu/article/the-g20-report-presented-by-demosisto-us-china-ceasefire-moody-macron-trump-vs-india-on-tariffs/	**A message from Demosistō: Hong Kong is a top destination for FDI and the EU is Hong Kong’s second largest merchandise trading partner. A proposed extradition law in Hong Kong has brought 2 million citizens to the street, yet the government refused to withdraw the bill and has stigmatized the peaceful protests as riots.**
Politico	28.06.2019. https://www.politico.eu/article/politico-pro-g20-report-presented-by-demosisto-trump-xi-redux-eu-eyes-big-deal-abc-frets	**A message from Demosistō: The fable of the ‘boiling frog’ vividly describes how freedoms of speech and assembly as well as political participation have been gradually shrinking in Hong Kong since its handover to China in 1997. Ironically, many people around the world might still consider the city is enjoying a high level of liberty unimaginable to many living in mainland China. In June 2019, Hongkongers have spoken up to the world to express their distrust of an undemocratically elected government that ignores the economic hardships of the many underprivileged citizens and that relies on finance industry as the only pillar of development, which can be detrimental to the city’s sustainability. Therefore, today, the 7 million Hongkongers call on the international community to support their fight in preserving their fundamental values that have been binding the society.**

Politico	29.06.2019. https://www.politico.eu/article/politico-pro-g20-report-presented-by-demosisto-china-ceasefire-climate-counterattack-mercosur/	**A message from Demosistō: As you are reading this, the Trump-Xi meeting in Osaka is already over and businesses worldwide are evaluating its influence for them. In the past two decades, Hong Kong has weathered multiple crises and remained as a world financial center — but will this success story prevail?*
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The above table contains examples of the impact of content posted on social networking sites used by people associated with the Demosistō movement and the movement itself in the period under consideration. The content of the table confirms that social media was a tool for shaping social impact and influenced the transnational discourse, which was also significant for publications in the analyzed period. This usually happened as a result of quoting opinions or presenting photos in the examined media channels. The content came from Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (photos). Research has not confirmed the direct impact of HKFP services (disclosed in reference directly to the content of the portal) on setting the agenda, here content framing resulting from the sender's expectations was more important, however the analysis of hashtags indicated that these overlapped significantly. One global channel which did not mention either HKFP or the pro-democracy movement related to the organization of events in Hong Kong was RT – a channel managed by the Kremlin. As mentioned earlier, the information appearing on the RT website was informative or described curiosities, and in the following months the message was intensified and aimed at achieving the propaganda goals of the sender, in whose interest was neither the promotion of civic groups nor the free press (Piechota, 2020). However, considering the intensification of events and the international dimension, the RT channel could not ignore protest coverage on its news sites.

Conclusion

Social media is a source of information for traditional news media which conveys content by framing it according to traditional media's program line, shared values and in a manner dependent on the interests of ownership and recipient profiling. The main limitation of the study is that the analysis only included English-language channels of communication about protests. Shaping transnational discursive spaces using the studied content was global, although at the same time limited due to the effects of media channel values on the content shared. The content provided by HKFP and the Demosistō movement directed the discourse to specific values. At the same time, other existing and active channels of communication, also networked communication, constructed an alternative messages regarding protests, also shaping transnational discursive spaces in the network, with reference to other values (Piechota 2020). This leads to the conclusion that networked communication is a space for the dissemination of various content, each of which can potentially generate opportunities to shape transnational discourse spaces. Global social networking sites Facebook and Twitter are important channels creating transnational discursive spaces that affect the news media's agenda, despite the fact that the protesters used applications protecting their data for communication, thanks to the taking over of the information and integration function by other entities. An additional important tool are hashtags. They channel emotions in the discourse which give a symbolic meaning to the slogans disclosed in them. Shaping the space of transnational discourse consists primarily of increasing the reach of information, giving importance to the event and arousing

interest in network public opinion by giving meaning to specific topics. In the case of this protest during the period under review, it created the image of the Hong Kong administration in international public opinion. The importance of specific thematic content in social media results from the number of shared posts and tweets, determining the manner in which protests are reported by news media. An important element confirming the role of social media in shaping the transnational discursive space can be seen in posting information about support flowing to protesters in various forms from other parts of the world. This confirms that the protest is of global significance and the information shared through the network affects the attitudes and behavior of individuals and then shapes global public opinion causing interest in news media. Emotions arising from the content of posts and tweets influence the image of politicians taking specific positions toward the protest. Users' network traffic which channels and disseminates emotions is further reported and commented in the news media and in turn shapes public opinion.

The conclusions of the study confirmed H1, which assumed that protesters use social media as a platform for the global transfer of information about protests, and a source of knowledge about their impact on public opinion in the global dimension, as evidenced by various forms of support for the network-reported protest. The space of discourse marked out by social media is informative and emotional in nature, resulting from the amount of information on a particular topic and its emotional channeling through the hashtags used (#). In the context of the conducted research, H2 was also confirmed, which assumed that the amount of published information that can be attributed to a specific topic has an impact on the shape of the media agenda. This is subject to framing by the sender, however, the information that dominates is the result of users' network activity that gives selected topics a dominant meaning. Thus, shaping the agenda with its sources in social media messages is not so much the effect of the significance of the reported event itself, but becomes the effect of attention paid to specific elements of this event by network users giving meaning to selected topics.

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