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## **Tweets on top. Responsive policy**

### **KEY WORDS**

new media, old media, responsiveness, power of communication

### **ABSTRACT**

The goal of this article is to analyze the microblog service Twitter from the perspective of its significance in the political communication. In the recent years it has become one of the most popular media services in the world, next to Facebook, YouTube and Google. Thanks to its popularity, politicians have a chance to avoid traditional media gatekeeping and to directly reach followers with the most important information.

Twitter is an important structural element of the new “new media”<sup>1</sup>. It plays an increasingly important role in political communicating. It is also a vital component of the media system shaped by the evolution of the Internet and mobile telephony, as well as computer technology.

The content published in the new “new media” is a result of presumption, arising from the cooperation of multiple authors participating in its creation. The best example here is the YouTube website, which is the largest video library in the world, containing files created by rank-and-file users. In this context, the primary interpretation of a media system must take the virtual space into account. In a system construed this way, Twitter plays a significant role as a tool of communication for political actors who use it to provide first-hand news, mostly journalists and other politicians. It should be added that thanks to the technological progress it is now possible to publish pictures and films on the website as well. This functionality is provided by applications known as Twitpic<sup>2</sup> and Twitcam<sup>3</sup>. Twitter belongs to the category of social networking website operating in real time. It is a place of exchanging information and connecting with other users, quick publication of important news, and linking to more complex sites (most often YouTube and Facebook).

Its greatest advantage is the shortening, immediacy, and compression of content. People following a given profile receive information about new entries in real time. This led

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<sup>1</sup> The term was introduced to scientific discourse by Paul Levinson.

<sup>2</sup> <http://twitpic.com/> [accessed: 2 Jan 2014].

<sup>3</sup> <http://twitcam.livestream.com/> [accessed: 2 Jan 2014].

to the development of a pragmatic custom that the followers<sup>4</sup> of political actors are usually journalists, who use it to obtain the most important, short, and concise information directly from the source. This way political actors gained a tool allowing them to react immediately to the current domestic and foreign events, and the journalists are now able to follow many politicians at the same time. This mechanism is known as the responsiveness of Twitter, or the ability to immediately reach the public opinion with the information which is important for the sender and a broad audience. Using the traditional mechanisms of informing media, such as press conferences or briefings, prolongs this process, which makes Twitter indispensable in urgent situations. “Due to its unique, SMS-like nature, it is now one of the most important tools of Web 2.0, useful not only in the interactions between individual politicians but most of all along the politician-voter line. Thanks to this microblog platform, politicians may present their positions on a given matter in a short and easy way, reply to messages coming from other members of the elite, or react to the signals from the public opinion”<sup>5</sup>, thus becoming a tool of responsive policy, or the policy of quick replies.

### **Twitter – the Tools**

Twitter employs a couple of characteristic tools. The user name is preceded by the @ character and looks like this: @*username*. A similarly marked account makes it possible to publish tweets, or posts of up to 140 characters which may contain text, references to other users (@Mentions), external links directing recipients’ attention to materials in other services (such as YouTube, Facebook, blogs), containing more comprehensive versions of the events, and *hashtags*. The #*tag* symbol, frequently used on Twitter, is a kind of curiosity. It is a cultural phenomenon organically introduced by users to mark key words or subjects in a tweet, as a way of categorizing messages. “Adding the # symbol before a key word or phrase will cause the tweet to be categorized and facilitate finding it in the tag cloud. Clicking on a #tagged word results in displaying other tweets tagged with the same key word”<sup>6</sup>. Another tool is “Retweet” (RT), used for interaction and debate with chosen users. The retweeting format may look like this: “RT@*username* tweet content”. The number of retweets is the proof of the account owner’s talkativeness. One more tool offered by the website is “Trending Topics” (TTs), which is a compilation of subjects mentioned by the majority of Twitter users at the time. It is a kind of public opinion barometer, which may indicate social attitudes. TTs

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<sup>4</sup> Followers are the recipients of content on Twitter.

<sup>5</sup> M. Lakomy, *Demokracja 2.0* [Democracy 2.0], Krakow 2013, p. 180.

<sup>6</sup> Cf.: <http://support.twitter.com/articles/20170359-twitter-czesto-zadawane-pytania-faq#> [accessed: 2 Jan 2014].

becomes an important tool for political actors when there are socially important topics on the media agenda. Clicking on a subject selected from the trends calls up a range of posts, which may allow to recognize the themes in social deliberation. “Twitter lists” are another feature seldom used by political actors. It allows to organize following a network of associated @users. For instance, an account of a political party could offer the account list of all party members. Next, what may come in handy is the “Promoted Tweets” application, which may serve a political actor to direct the mainstream attention to important subject, mentioned for example in the party program. The abovementioned Twitpic (TTpic) and Twitcam (TTcam) are very helpful as well.

### **Twitter – the History**

Twitter appeared online in 2006, launched by four IT specialists, who had previous experience with the podcast service Odeo. In the beginning, nothing indicated that the initiative would succeed. The website was just one of many operating then in the web. It belonged to elite media, as the number of its users was negligible. All that changed during five months of 2009<sup>7</sup>. During the so-called Green Revolution in Iran, when the youth went out to the streets to protest against manipulating the presidential elections, the brutally crushed protest was publicized thanks to Twitter. The world learned about the events in Iran, which triggered the flash popularization of this medium. It is sometimes argued in this context, that the number of Twitter users in Iran at the time was minimal. Nevertheless, the message reached the United States, where in 2009 it was used already by 62.4 % of the internet users, and so the information about the revolution reached worldwide media (CNN effect). This coverage was reflected in the well-known speech by Hillary Clinton, in which she addressed the situation in Iran and mentioned Twitter as well.

The dynamic development of the service culminated in its stock market debut (7 Nov 2013), which confirmed both its business value (estimated at about 14 billion dollars<sup>8</sup>) and cultural value (the evolution from a small project to a global socio-cultural phenomenon of social communication).

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<sup>7</sup> <http://twitpic.com/> [accessed: 2 Jan 2014]. Cf.: <http://support.twitter.com/articles/20170359-twitter-czesto-zadawane-pytania-faq#> [accessed: 20 Nov 2013].

<sup>8</sup> *Twitter wystrzelił na giełdzie. Akcje wzrosły o 72,69 %* [Twitter soared at the stock exchange. Shares up by 72.69 %], <http://tvn24bis.pl/informacje,187/twitter-wystrzelil-nagiieldzie-akcje-wzrosly-o-72-69-proc,369500.html> [accessed: 2 Jan 2014].

## Twitter – the Statistics

Twitter developed in a flash. In as little as two years it evolved from a niche medium into a popular one, through the EPS cycle. At present, this website is most popular in the United States, Western Europe, Japan, South Korea, and Brazil. This is clearly imaged by the Tweetping website, which allows to watch in real time, on a world map, the intensity with which tweets are placed<sup>9</sup>. According to Kamila Tuszyńska<sup>10</sup>, “during the 7 years from its inception, Twitter became the fastest source of information in the world. If anything happens, it appears on Twitter within 20 minutes on average, and only after 4 hours on Facebook”<sup>11</sup>. The traditional media usually follow the most important account, which are used as one of the most important journalistic information sources. As a result, the site has activated “more than half a billion users who often post several dozen tweets every day. This is true for citizens of the United States, Western European countries, Brazil (the second most eagerly tweeting country in the world), and even Egyptians and Indians”<sup>12</sup>. The Twitter activity broken down by language shows that the most often used language is English (41.57 % of all tweets), followed by Spanish (11.16 %) and Portuguese (9.5 %). The Polish language holds the 18th place, with 0.4 % of users<sup>13</sup>.

According to the data of the Polish Press Agency, “Twitter is used by 218 million users a month. They produce half a billion tweets on average every day. The most popular user on Twitter is the Canadian singer Justin Bieber, whose profile is followed by 45.3 million people. The American President Barack Obama is only fourth, with 37.5 million followers. The Dalai Lama holds the 90th place. His tweets are followed by 7.8 million people”<sup>14</sup>. It is interesting that the President of the United States, who tweets with passion, has been called a tweetaholic and now holds the 4th place in this ranking, after the singers Katy Perry, Justin Bieber, and Lady Gaga<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://tweetping.net/> [accessed: 2 Jan 2014].

<sup>10</sup> Kamila Tuszyńska – Doctor of Humanities, media expert, sociologist of culture and visual arts theoretician. She successfully defended her doctoral thesis at the Chair of Rhetorics and Media of the University of Warsaw. She is a member of the Workshop of Commemorative and Utility Literature (PLOiU) at the University of Warsaw and ZBOTL of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

<sup>11</sup> M. Wachnicki, *Dlaczego Polacy nie lubią Twittera?* [Why don't the Poles like Twitter?], <http://polska.newsweek.pl/dlaczego-polacy-nie-korzystaja-z-twittera-newsweek,artykuly,270698,1.html> [accessed: 26 Dec 2013].

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.sgi.com> [accessed: 26 Dec 2013].

<sup>14</sup> Polish Press Agency (Pol. *Polska Agencja Prasowa – PAP*), *Gospodarka*, [http://www.pap.pl/palio/html.run?\\_Instance=cms\\_www.pap.pl&\\_PageID=1&s=infopakiet&dz=gospodarka&idNewsComp=124707&filename=&idnews=128018&data=&status=biezace&\\_Checksum=1895943468](http://www.pap.pl/palio/html.run?_Instance=cms_www.pap.pl&_PageID=1&s=infopakiet&dz=gospodarka&idNewsComp=124707&filename=&idnews=128018&data=&status=biezace&_Checksum=1895943468) [accessed: 2 Jan 2014].

<sup>15</sup> <http://twittercounter.com/pages/100> [accessed: 2 Jan 2014].

The importance of Twitter in Poland is also growing, but we are still far behind other countries. As the report prepared by the Interactive Research Center for the Edelman Digital Polska company states, “in September 2012, the most popular Twitter account in Poland was TVN24, with 238,162 users. Well behind, in the second place, there was the account of “Gazeta Wyborcza” with 64,609 followers. The third place, with little more than 64 thousand observers, was held by Ludwik Siadlak, a career guidance specialist and organizer of specialist trainings”<sup>16</sup>. Not far behind the readers, we can find the most active politician on Twitter, Minister Radosław Sikorski. A certain trend can be gleamed here, that in the world it is the masses of internet users who tweet, while in Poland it is mostly politicians and celebrities. These data are confirmed by the research carried out by Rafał Janik (“Twitter in Poland”) between 1 October 2012 and 15 January 2013. It shows that even though as much as 2 million people visit Twitter in Poland, there are only 350 thousand registered accounts, and 56 thousand users sent two messages or more<sup>17</sup>. The most popular politicians were Janusz Palikot, Donald Tusk, Paweł Graś, Radek Sikorski, Sławomir Nowak, and Michał Boni. The Twitter accounts of politicians are followed mainly by journalists, which attest to the catalytic effect of old and new media. By doing so, the traditional media ensure they have first-hand access to the information they can use as news. The author of the report compiled the following ranking of tweet quotations: “Gazeta Wyborcza” – 633, “Rzeczpospolita” – 448, “Dziennik Gazeta Prawna” – 313, RMF FM – 290, “Radio Zet” – 189, “Wprost” – 185, TVN24 – 161, “Newsweek” – 128, “Fakt” – 97, “Polityka” – 95<sup>18</sup>.

### **Twiplomacy**

Thanks to the remarkable ease of using Twitter, which boils down to composing a message on a smartphone and posting it to the Twitter account with a single click (just as you would do sending an SMS), this medium became one of the best communicating tools political actors. In consequence, it is now difficult to find a politician who would be absent from Twitter. Its growing popularity in this milieu led to the creation of a ranking of the most active politicians involved in the so-called twiplomacy (which is a kind of communication power<sup>19</sup>). The term refers to using the microblog in broadly defined diplomacy. The enormous surge in the interest in Twitter led also to the formation of a new line of research into the presence of

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<sup>16</sup> <http://natemat.pl/38235,twitter-w-polsce-coraz-popularniejszy-poznaj-jego-najwieksze-gwiazdy> [accessed: 26 Dec 2013].

<sup>17</sup> Por. <http://www.slideshare.net/rafaljanik/twitter-in-poland> [accessed: 26 Dec 2013].

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>19</sup> M. Castells, *Władza komunikacji* [Communication power], Warszawa 2013.

world's political leaders there. It showed that more than 77 % of leaders from 196 UN member states use this kind of communication. Almost half of the accounts analyzed on the Twiplomacy.com website, belonging to the Burson–Marsteller company, are personal accounts of heads of state, heads of governments, and ministers of foreign affairs. Every third world leader tweets personally, using fast access via a smartphone or a netbook. This study shows that Twitter has become a powerful communication tool, allowing to convey short messages to millions of recipients. This community service also made it possible for users to interact directly, as over two thirds (68 %) of world leaders became mutually connected to one another<sup>20</sup>. Thanks to Twitter, the direct communication (interaction) between the leaders of the greatest world powers, the USA and Russia, was made possible as well. Twitter replaced the red phones, installed for the purpose of crisis calls between the leaders of the two states during the Cold War. The US President Barack Obama is following just two of his counterparts: the Prime Ministers of Russia and Norway, Dmitrij Medvedev and Jens Stoltenberg<sup>21</sup>. Both these politicians are active Twitter users as well. It is also worth paying attention to the following ratings:

- the best connected political actors in the world (measured by the number of mutual connections): the Swedish Foreign Minister (@carlbildt), Foreign Ministry of Poland (@PolandMFA), UK Foreign Office (@foreignoffice), Foreign Ministry of France (@francediplo);
- the most followed world leaders (measured by the number of followers), including, in this order: Barack Obama (@BarackObama), Pope Francis (@Pontifex), the President of Turkey Abdullah Gul, and the Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan (@RT\_Erdogan);
- the most active leaders (measured by the number of tweets per day): the President of Venezuela (@PresidencialVen), the President of Dominican Republic (@PresidenciaRD), the Government of Croatia (@VladaRH), the Cabinet of Ukraine (@Kabmin\_UA), and the President of Columbia (@infopresidencia);
- the most conversational world leaders (measured by the number of replies): the Prime Minister of Uganda (@AmamaMbabazi), the President of Rwanda (@PaulKagame), the Foreign Minister of Sweden (@fragaCarlBildt), the President of Ecuador (@MashiRafel), and the Foreign Minister of Rwanda (@LMushikiwabo)<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf.: <http://twiplomacy.com/> [accessed: 2 Jan 2014].

<sup>21</sup> Cf.: <http://twiplomacy.com/info/north-america/> [accessed: 2 Jan 2014].

<sup>22</sup> [http://twiplomacy.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Top5\\_infographic\\_final.png](http://twiplomacy.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Top5_infographic_final.png) [accessed: 3 Jan 2014].

According to the author of the Twiplomacy 2013 report Matthias Lüfkens, “[p]eople want to engage with their leaders on Twitter (...) However, it is astonishing to see that accounts with the largest number of followers have the least interaction with other Twitter users”<sup>23</sup>. The analysis of the report also reveals that Twitter is highly popular in smaller countries, for which it is a great tool “to put them on the world map and tweet eye-to-eye with their peers. (...) All 45 European governments now have an official presence on Twitter. In South America all countries except Suriname have an official Twitter presence. In North America, Asia and Africa 79 %, 74 % and 71 % of all governments have a Twitter account. Only a third (38.4 %) of all governments in the Pacific uses the micro-blogging service”<sup>24</sup>. The list tool available on Twitter, which allows creating lists of government agencies and diplomatic posts, is little used. Only the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs uses it properly, “with 15 lists on the @Israel account and eight on the @IsraelMFA account. The @EU\_Commission maintains 12 lists, the @StateDept maintains eight lists and the @ForeignOffice and Malaysia’s Prime Minister @NajibRazak seven lists respectively. The UK @ForeignOffice lists 184 ambassadors, embassies, consulates and missions on Twitter followed by the Polish Foreign Ministry @PolandMFA (150), Israel’s Foreign Ministry @IsraelMFA (127), the US State Department @StateDept (127) and the Swedish Foreign Ministry @SweMFA (116)”<sup>25</sup>.

### **Twitter – Case Studies**

The experiences of Egyptian activists during the Arab Spring showed that Twitter is an excellent tool communication and mobilization in the times of crisis. The tweets from Tahrir Square went down in history, published in a book as the evidence of the role of the new “new media” in the overthrowing of a totalitarian regime<sup>26</sup>. The activists from Bahrain, who unsuccessfully fight to abolish monarchy in that country, also strive to reach the public opinion through Twitter. Their activities are entirely ignored by the mainstream media, so the activists use tools available online<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> [http://www.proto.pl/informacje/info?itemId=125989&rob=Twiplomacy:\\_@BarackObama\\_wciaz\\_najpopularniejszy,\\_polski\\_MSZ\\_na\\_dobrej\\_pozycji](http://www.proto.pl/informacje/info?itemId=125989&rob=Twiplomacy:_@BarackObama_wciaz_najpopularniejszy,_polski_MSZ_na_dobrej_pozycji) [accessed: 3 Jan 2014]. [English quotation from: <http://burson-marsteller.ch/en/2013/07/two-thirds-of-world-leaders-are-engaged-in-diplomatic-relations-on-twitter-the-latest-burson-marsteller-twiplomacy-study-finds/> — AP] [accessed: 29 Dec 2014].

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem. [English quotation from: <http://twiplomacy.com/blog/twiplomacy-study-2013/> — AP] [accessed: 29 Dec 2014].

<sup>26</sup> Cf.: A. Nunns, N. Idle, *Tweets from Tahrir*, 2011.

<sup>27</sup> <https://bahrainwatch.org/ipspy/> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

In 2011, which went down in history as *Annus Horribilis*<sup>28</sup>, important social events took place in the United Kingdom, known as the London Riots, even though they involved many other British cities. On 24 August 2011, the journalists from one of the most important quality newspapers “The Guardian” (John Burn–Murdoch, Paul Lewis, James Ball, Christine Olivier, Michael Robinson, and Garry Blight) analyzed the events from the viewpoint of the Twitter activity of the participants. The result was an interactive chart<sup>29</sup> which showed the interdependence between the activity on the website and in the urban space (according to Castells, it is the so-called space of autonomy<sup>30</sup>). What is surprising is the regularity which supports the argument about the interferentiality between online and offline activity<sup>31</sup> and the mobilizational function of this website. The chart also shows that when the rioters communicated with one another on Twitter, the streets of the British cities were silent. However, whenever the online activity ended, the streets filled with aggressive young people. Thus, this study leads to the conclusion that observing this service may provide crucial information for security services, as it may allow them to get ready to intervene in certain urban regions in advance.

Recently, Twitter also gained significance as a tool for counting votes in popular TV quiz shows, where the audience chooses the winners. In Poland, the TV stations are still using the SMS technology. In the US, Twitter is used more and more often, which allows for immediate resolutions<sup>32</sup>. Let us imagine that the show participants have the following accounts on Twitter: @player1, @player2, @player2, etc. The vote is performed in a certain time interval by sending a tweet to the chosen address. On the screen, the viewers can watch a chart showing the number of incoming votes in real time. The bout is won by the participant who gains the greatest number of posts. Transferring this mechanism to the political practice may decrease the significance of traditional election surveys. According to “The Washington Post”, Twitter will soon make it possible to predict the outcome of the election<sup>33</sup>. This seems to be confirmed by the research results obtained by Fabio Rojas, a sociologist from the

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<sup>28</sup> M. Lakomy, *Internet i polityka światowa w 2011 roku* [Internet and world politics in 2011], „Perspektywy Kultury” 2012, No. 7, p. 111–127; idem, *Internet i kultura* [Internet and culture], Akademia Ignatianum: Kraków 2013.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/interactive/2011/aug/24/riots-twitter-traffic-interactive> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

<sup>30</sup> M. Castells, *Sieci oburzenia i nadziei: Ruchy społeczne w erze Internetu* [Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age], Warszawa 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Cf.: M. Lakomy, *Demokracja 2.0. Interakcja polityczna w nowych mediach* [Democracy 2.0: Political interaction in the new media], Kraków 2013.

<sup>32</sup> <https://dev.twitter.com/media/twitter-tv> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

<sup>33</sup> <http://wpolityce.pl/artykuly/60068-washington-post-siec-internetowa-zmniejszy-znaczenie-sondazy-czyli-o-tym-jak-dzieki-twitterowi-mozna-przewidziec-wynik-wyborow> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

<sup>34</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com) [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].



Indiana University. A modern politician communicates with his voters by various means, yet more and more often these are Internet means (politics 2.0). Therefore, by analyzing the process of deliberation on these planes, it is possible to determine the political preferences of a given society (netizens). The studies carried out by F. Rojas investigated the elections to the US House of Representatives. In his words, “[u]sing a massive archive of billions of randomly sampled tweets stored at Indiana University, we extracted 542,969 tweets that mention a Democratic or Republican candidate for Congress in 2010. For each congressional district, we computed the percentage of tweets that mentioned these candidates. We found a strong correlation between a candidate’s “tweet share” and the final two-party vote share (...) In the 2010 data, our Twitter data predicted the winner in 404 out of 435 competitive races”<sup>34</sup>. It should be added that the study of the tweets did not take into consideration the assessment of the candidate. Consequently, it was not determined if the name appeared in a positive or a negative context. The very fact that somebody was discussed on Twitter meant that he or she was about to succeed. Therefore, in societies which are at a more advanced stage in using the Internet, surveying the public opinion and predicting election results will be much easier than it is now.

There are innumerable examples of political actors using Twitter, which could be mentioned here. One of the most interesting users, who deserves a presentation, is Herman Van Rompuy – the President of the European Council – whose Twitter account gained special popularity on 7 and 8 February 2013. After the failed negotiations of November 2012, the tension around the EU budget was increasing. The public opinion in the EU member states awaited an official communication. Journalists tried in vain to get some leaks on this subject, as the leaders were cut off from the media. It was Herman Van Rompuy who came to their aid, being the first to publish the good news on his Twitter account: “Deal done!”<sup>35</sup> A moment later, Paweł Graś – the spokesperson of the Polish government – reported: “SMS just came from the Prime Minister: ‘Done!!!!’”<sup>36</sup> Prime Minister Tusk also tweeted, thus shedding some light on the secret negotiations<sup>37</sup>. Twitter turned out then to be an indispensable source of first-hand information, a tool of responsive policy. Its greatest success was becoming the source of information to 500 million citizens of the European Union. Prime Minister Donald Tusk, so far a fairly skeptical user of community media, felt that it may be a way to

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<sup>34</sup> [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-twitter-can-predict-an-election/2013/08/11/35ef885a-0108-11e3-96a8-d3b921c0924a\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-twitter-can-predict-an-election/2013/08/11/35ef885a-0108-11e3-96a8-d3b921c0924a_story.html) [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

<sup>35</sup> <https://twitter.com/euHvR> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

<sup>36</sup> <https://twitter.com/pawelgras> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

<sup>37</sup> <https://twitter.com/premiertusk> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

implement policies. In August 2013, when the parliamentary session was adjourned, there were news in the media (Reuters, Newsweek) leading to the conclusion that Minister Jacek Rostowski resigns from his duties. As this information may have been detrimental to Polish interests, it was countered immediately by Donald Tusk who defused it via Twitter, writing: “Minister Rostowski did not hand any resignation. Rumour or smear?” The boldest example when the service was used to interact with the citizens was the action on 30 December 2013, when Donald Tusk was going to give live answers to questions from internet users between 3 and 4 p.m. However, it has to be considered a failure. Another interesting thing was the clash between Prime Minister Tusk and Jarosław Kaczyński about the conflict with David Cameron, who stigmatized Poles abusing the British social benefits for children, which strongly reverberated in the media. Politicians eagerly spoke in defence of Polish citizens, using a great variety of arguments. Both the leader of the Civic Platform (Pol. *Platforma Obywatelska – PO*) and the President of Law and Justice (Pol. *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS*) publicly announced they would call the British Prime Minister on the phone. This led to a peculiar form of rivalry between the two. As the later comment on the 300polityka.pl website said, “the picture from the Kaczyński–Cameron call, posted to TT, immediately went viral, it will most likely become fuel for meme makers, too<sup>38</sup>. (...) The picture also immediately reached TV information channels”<sup>39</sup>.

Early in October 2013, Janusz Palikot rebranded his party, trusting it would have a better social reception. The seriousness of the event, intended to improve the image of Your Movement (Pol. *Twój Ruch*), was shattered by Leszek Miller’s extremely accurate bon mot posted on his Twitter account “Prof. Hartman announced the Ruch-men will be PO, PiS, and SLD at once. What about PSL?”<sup>40</sup> It should be added in this context that the Democratic Left Alliance (Pol. *Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej – SLD*) is well acquainted, as a party, with using online communication tools. It is shown by the events of the recent years, yet it was most visible during the SLD Convention in Sosnowiec on 14 December 2013. During the speech of Leszek Miller, on the screen behind him, there was a group of young people carrying such banners as: “Poland: #course\_on\_change”, “#job”, “#seniors”, “#youth”, “#economy”, “#education”, and “#health”. These extremely current slogans, used in the campaign, referred to the hashtag cloud in order to move the discussion to Twitter. This way, the SLD used the

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<sup>38</sup> One of the memes featuring Jarosław Kaczyński: <https://twitter.com/michalgornicki/status/420952133135900672/photo/1> [accessed: 10 Jan 2014]. [The caption says: “Jarosław Kaczyński ordering pizza” — AP.]

<sup>39</sup> <http://300polityka.pl/news/2014/01/08/pis-wrzuca-na-tt-zdjecie-z-rozmowy-kaczynski-cameron-tuz-pokonferencji-tuska/> [accessed: 10 Jan 2014].

<sup>40</sup> <https://twitter.com/LeszekMiller> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

new media to communicate with voters through television (a symbiosis between the old and the new media).

Among the world leaders, what drew the attention was the profile of the new President of Iran Hasan Rouhani, who in September 2013 wished “a blessed Rosh Hashanah” to “all Jews”<sup>41</sup>. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict has been playing out for several years now in the shadow of the Iranian plan to build nuclear weapons. Rouhani set a course on reconciliation with Israel, thus avoiding a military action announced and prepared by Israel. Therefore, as can be seen here, Twitter also serves the new Iranian policy, where the subject of peace talks between the sides of conflict is touched again and again.

On 22 and 23 October 2013 in Warsaw, the World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates took place, called the Nobel Summit for short. It was attended, among others, by the 14th Dalai Lama, Mikhail Gorbachev, Frederik Willem de Klerk, and Sharon Stone, who drew media attention. The actress also very actively tweeted on her account. One of the most important posts was published on 21 October: “in Poland where 90% of the population have a secondary education & 50% procure a higher education! great example”<sup>42</sup>. Such a positive opinion about Poland spread by such a medial person as Sharon Stone, greatly contributes to creating a positive image of Poland in the world. Even more so, since the remaining participants of the Summit did not comment the event on Twitter. The Dalai Lama did not even mention he was in Warsaw...<sup>43</sup>

Twitter was also used by German politicians discussing the spying scandal, when the information received from Edward Snowden revealed that the US National Security Agency was tapping into the phone calls of Chancellor Angela Merkel. Hans-Christian Ströbele, the leader of the German Green party, was particularly active in exploring the circumstances of the case, as he even met the former CIA employee in Moscow. He has been regularly publishing the results of his investigation on Twitter<sup>44</sup>.

To follow the subject of PRISM – the global-scale electronic spying government program – it should be said that the majority of American internet corporations agreed to give access to their servers for the purpose of NSA activities. Microsoft did so in 2007, Yahoo in 2008, Google and Facebook in 2009, YouTube in 2010, Skype in 2011, and Apple in 2012. This way, the privacy of the users of these media was seriously infringed upon. It was only Twitter that resisted the pressure of the Agency and refused to cooperate, thus gaining the

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<sup>41</sup> <https://twitter.com/HassanRouhani> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

<sup>42</sup> <https://twitter.com/sharonstone> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

<sup>43</sup> <https://twitter.com/DalaiLama> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

<sup>44</sup> [https://twitter.com/MdB\\_Stroebele](https://twitter.com/MdB_Stroebele) [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

respect of internet users. However, in Latin America, where it is very common for politicians to use this service, there are more and more frequent voices calling for a departure from its use. Such a sentiment arose after a series of incidents when the accounts of some politicians were compromised by hackers from the USA during electoral campaigns. One of its most fervent critics is the President of Venezuela Nicolas Maduro, who revealed that the Twitter accounts of Latin America politicians were attacked 6,600 times, including his own, targeted with particular ferocity<sup>45</sup>. In this light, he proposed initiating activities which would make Latin America independent from the social media monopolized by American corporations. A similarly negative opinion about the service was voiced by the activists of the Occupy Wall Street movement, who accuse the medium of not publishing the information about the movement in the Twitter Trends (TTs) application. One of the reasons is, they say, that one of the greatest American banks, interested in combating the OWS, is a shareholder of the service.

The examples show that Twitter may become the arena of supra-national political rivalry, as hacktivism has become a component of the present-day political culture. One of the most spectacular actions of this kind was the attack made by the Syrian Electronic Army on the Twitter account of Barack Obama. On 28 October 2013, the President posted a tweet that “[i]mmigration is a bipartisan issue” containing a link to an article in “The Washington Post”. The link, however, did not lead to the newspaper website but to a movie clip showing the Syrian army fighting the terrorists – as they call the rebels attacking Bashar al-Assad’s forces<sup>46</sup>. The SEA claimed the responsibility for the attack on their Twitter profile, writing: “Thank you Obama for redirecting people to the #SEA website”<sup>47</sup>. On 24 April 2013, the Associated Press Agency informed that its Twitter account had been compromised. Before the information posted there was officially denied, it reverberated loudly around the world, as the hacktivists wrote: “Breaking: Two Explosions in the White House and Barack Obama is injured.” After the incident, the AP account was suspended. To follow the thread of the White House, we should mention the events which led to the sacking of Jofi Joseph from the US President administration. “He was a director in the non-proliferation section of the National Security Staff at the White House, but he was better known online as @NatSecWonk<sup>48</sup>,

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<sup>45</sup> <http://rt.com/news/twitter-liberation-maduro-venezuela-145/> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/obama-wspiera-syryjska-armie-zart-syryjskich-hakerow,366965.html> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

<sup>47</sup> [https://twitter.com/Official\\_SEA16/status/394879792727601155](https://twitter.com/Official_SEA16/status/394879792727601155) [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

<sup>48</sup> <http://favstar.fm/users/natsecwonk> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

posting strong, often offensive tweets about other users,”<sup>49</sup> in particular against Hillary Clinton. He was identified after a series of posts criticizing the policy of US administration.

According to Brian McNair, the category of political actors includes, besides political parties, social organizations, and various pressure groups, also terrorist organizations<sup>50</sup>. More and more often, they use the tools of social media in political communicating. One of the most spectacular examples of it is the use of Twitter by Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen, commonly known as al-Shabaab, a radical Islamist group from Somalia. They are a militant group connected to al-Qaeda, using brutal terrorist means, yet unknown to the broad public opinion worldwide, which most likely led to their attempt to draw attention and gain notoriety by organizing an extremely bloody attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, on 21–24 September 2013. Most likely it was retaliation for the Kenyan offensive launched against the al-Shabaab combatants with the silent complicity of Somalian authorities. The inherent feature of terrorist attacks is to have the information about them appear in the media agenda in order to sow fear, stress some political message, or consolidate the brand of the organization in the consciousness of recipients. Using the traditional media to do so is burdened with many disadvantages, which the social media do not have. They enable reaching the recipients directly with the message. Already several months before the attack, al-Shabaab engaged in a tough dispute with the spokesman of the Kenyan army Emmanuel Chirchir. This discussion led to two Twitter accounts of this organization, @HSMPress and @HSMPress1, being shut down for violation of the Terms of Service. However, the press office of the militia informed on 10 September 2013, that the @HSMPress address was restored to ensure – they wrote – “the participation of Mujahideen in the events in Somalia as well as the ongoing events in a broader global context.” From the beginning of the attack until 5.34 p.m., when the account was suspended, al-Shabaab posted current information on the development of the events in the Mall, reporting the number of casualties, among others, and trying to influence Kenyan morale: “The Mujahideen entered #Westgate mall today at around noon and they are still inside the mall, fighting the #Kenyan kuffar inside their own turf.” “Kenyans, look how fear has gripped your nation. You do not even have the freedom to send a simple SMS to your friends and family;” “You can put on a brave face but you're shaken. Your spirit is on the

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata,2/krytykował-na-twitterze-wyleciał-z-pracy-wysoki-urzednik-zwolniony-z-bialego-domu,365357.html> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

<sup>50</sup> Cf.: M. Kolczyński, *Strategie komunikowania politycznego* [Strategies of political communicating], Katowice 2008. <http://www.marketingwpolityce.zgora.pl/ksiazki/ksiazka110.pdf> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].

wane & your leaders lack the moral fibre to do the right thing”<sup>51</sup>. In reply, the chief of the Kenya Police wrote on Twitter that the security forces are taking control of larger and larger portions of the building. Some negotiation attempts were made on Twitter as well, but the terrorists replied: “We'll not negotiate with the Kenyan govt as long as its forces are invading our country, so reap the bitter fruits of your harvest”<sup>52</sup>. During the fighting, the terrorists also published pictures from within the Mall using a Facebook profile for this purpose<sup>53</sup>. The al-Shabaab example shows how the young generation of terrorists attempts to use the social media tools to reach a young recipient in the West with their ideological message, which is particularly threatening in the view of the proliferation of Islamist fundamentalism in the multicultural Western society.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, it should be added that Twitter was also employed in the so-called micro-mapping during humanitarian disasters. A special crowdsourced application was developed, named TweetClicker, which works by tagging tweets based on the categories defined by such organizations as the UN or the Red Cross. The application found its use in the relief action for Philippines struck by the greatest typhoon in history, Haiyan (Yolanda).

Moreover it should be said, that Twitter found acclaim as:

- an organizing and mobilizing tool used by social movements;
- a tool for immediate and direct informing of the public opinion by political actors (including even terrorist organizations);
- a tool for direct interaction between politicians;
- a tool for polling the public opinion;
- a tool for crowdsourced micro-mapping during humanitarian disasters.

In this way, Twitter documents its usefulness as a responsive medium, the faster portal in the world used for conveying important political information.

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<sup>51</sup> <https://twitter.com/HSMPress> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014]. [All HSM accounts are suspended, English tweets taken from <http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/26/opinion/bergen-twitter-terrorism/> — AP] [accessed: 14 Jan 2015].

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/kenya-attack-why-al-shabaab-live-tweeted-the-assault-1.1865566> [accessed: 4 Jan 2014].