

Iulian CHIFU
Lavinia SAVU

Technology and Social Media and their Impact on the Human Being, Society and Politics

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Iulian Chifu

Lavinia Savu

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TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA AND THEIR
IMPACT ON THE HUMAN BEING, SOCIETY AND
POLITICS

Iulian CHIFU, Lavinia SAVU

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edituralumen@gmail.com

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Introduction

The technological evolution, and especially of social media, has come with tremendous advantages for the citizens: internet connections, access to infinite information at practically no costs, possibilities of connecting and finding people we never knew but which have common problems and common aspirations or beliefs. At the same time, even though we begin to use extensively technology and social media at the very early ages, nobody undertook the needed social and psychological studies linked with the consequences of this tremendous evolution.

And the fact is that those evolutions are coming with a lot of added values for our day by day life, but also with shortcomings or at least changes in our preferences, behaviour and choices. They made the world look differently in a matter of some years, and that created difficulties for the institutions, for the leadership as well as for the politicians to adapt. They promote charismatic leaders and those with extreme ideas, that made visibility and popularity and discharged the serious experts and political figures that were much less appealing for the mass followers. It shifted the public space and common knowledge, reality and facts into a plethora of split public spaces as bubbles where debates are expelled and only echo chambers are multiplying the strict ideas of the administrators.

The current book is addressing the research as of today in those fields and is trying to present, in a pragmatic way, the impact and changes, both positive and negative, of technology and social media especially on human being, the behaviour and psychic, how social psychology and sociology are changing in

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the current era, as the society and political life changes as well. We are exploring it in four chapters: **I. The New Generation of Threats – the effects of technological evolution, II. Technology and the impact on the contemporary societies, III. Social media and its impact on contemporary societies, IV. Characteristic of the society speculated and amplified by social media.**

The research was made by the Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Center in a very thorough manner, trying to cope with the ethics of the acceptance of changes and improvements in a day by day life and avoiding to see only the negative effects of the change, even though the impact identified is huge and shakes the known rules of sociology and human life. We are also thanking the IFSPD for the generous founding of our research.

Iulian CHIFU, Lavinia SAVU

Chapter I

The New Generation of Threats – the effects of technological evolution

1. The change of the new generation of threats to the national security – Iulian CHIFU¹

Abstract

The threats and risks to national security have evolved in ways that are putting under a question mark the very change in nature of the new generation of threats. Technology, social media, their impact on the society, as well as new instruments of hybrid nature which provoke huge rifts in our democratic liberal societies are creating a new environment and new categories of threats that never showed up before. Moreover, these types of changes have tremendous impact on the resilience of democratic societies, on the public support for spending in the security field and on the perception of the threats, including those of conventional source – military operations, espionage, and subversion.

Keywords: Unconventional threats, hybrid conflicts, technological society, identity gap.

¹ Iulian Chifu is an associate professor at the National School for Political and Administrative Studies Bucharest and a professor at the National Defence University. He is the President of the Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Centre, Bucharest and a former advisor to the Romanian President in the fields of Strategic Affairs, Security and Foreign Policy.

The New Generation of Threats to National Security: Internal Societal and Political Security at Stake

Security as a concept has evolved as well as the substance of the threats to national security. At the beginning, all was about military conventional threats. Then we embraced the classical definition of the European School of Copenhagen² (Romaniuk, 2018), with the 5 dimensions of the security – military, political, social, economic, environment (Buzan, 2014) - that became, in 1991, with the Strategic Concept in Rome (1991), NATO's approach to security. Barry Buzan added the need to consider three objects to be “securitized” – state, society and individual (Buzan, 2014).

Beginning with 2010, concerns at the NATO level evolved to “non-traditional threats” than “emerging security challenges”, including terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, cyber-attacks, disruption of energy supplies and even extends to climate change and migration (NATO Watch, 2010). That approach led to the new “Emerging Security Challenges Division” (*Ibidem*). Then hybrid threats emerged and join the list of the evolution of the complexity in security matters. The EU and NATO formally establish in Helsinki, on 11 April 2017, the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (NATO, 2017).

The new generation of threats to national security has a very specific format, that's why we tend to assume that we can even talk about a change in the very nature of the threats to national security. The unconventional threats we already studied (Chifu, 2020) are a hybrid typology of threats (Chifu, 2018) developed on internal vulnerabilities turning to threats. It

² The Copenhagen School of security studies is an academic school that employs a critical approach to security studies. It is part of the post-positivist movement in the field of international relations (IR), which became a salient part of post-Cold War scholarship.

is the case of all the characteristics of the liberal democracy, values and principles which are considered to be vulnerabilities by some players (specifically the Russian Federation) – (Chifu & Tutuianu, 2017; Simons & Chifu, 2017) that build instruments in order to take advantage of those characteristics, becoming real threats with external sources against our societies (Chifu, 2013) coming from the speculation of the values and principles of our democratic systems (Muller, 2017; Richards, 2017).

Another source for those unconventional threats is generated by the speculation of the internal vulnerabilities of our liberal-democratic societies (Kagan, 2018) coming from the evolution of technology and its impact on societies (Chifu, 2019). Social media and informational warfare, drones and hypersonic weapons are shaping the security environment of the future, with impact on the approach and the way of thinking security related matters. And specifically, the most profound change comes from the impact of technology on democracy itself (*Ibidem*).

Technology has a tremendous impact on democracy and society (Gavriliuță, 2018) via the direct influence on the criteria and behaviour related to the societal cohesion – solidarity, the sense of community, alienation and fragmentation (Appadurai et. all., 2016; Rice & Zegart, 2018; Kirchick, 2018). On another point, the sense of lack of privacy, altered identity – individual and collective, need for dignity and respect (Fukuyama, 2018), all are the new effects of technology on our day by day life that have an impact on our societies and the participation in the democratic processes, as well as on the life of the community, on the substance of our democracy (Gurri, 2018).

These specific processes have been underlined in a number of studies, in some other cases the study is just at the beginning. In some other cases, the psychological processes

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linked to our reaction as humans to the speed of change (Rosling, 2018) are working against us. In all those cases, the deep study has to be launched and we have to consider that those evolutions themselves are creating vulnerabilities to our society (Ishinger, 2019) that we have to cope with. And the bases of this reaction should be building resilience for our societies. Not so easy, since the resilience needs the involvement of the state, society and individuals alike, and that cohesion could be forged only if there's a reasonable level of trust in the authorities (Chifu, 2018; Chifu, 2020).

Social Media and the Impact on Democratic Societies

We all witnessed the evolution and the use of social media in shaping the society. From the Twitter Revolution in the Republic of Moldova, 7-9 of April 2009, to the Arab Spring, the capacity of mobilization proved enormous, when the stakes and impact are passing a certain threshold of emotional impulse. Then, the use of social media in informational warfare has been extensively studied (Simons & Chifu, 2017; Chifu & Nantoi, 2016; Chifu & Nantoi, 2016; Chifu, 2016a; Chifu & Ivan, 2013; Chifu, 2015; Chifu, 2016b; Chifu, 2017).

At least as important as the informational warfare is the impact of social media as an instrument on political security and societal security. The extensive use of social media proves to determine important changes in the human individual behaviour, on society development and the evolution of the community spirit, as well as its impact on liberal democracy as a political system.

Once again, it is not the instrument which is bad, on the contrary, it is an added value to democracy, free flow of ideas, empowering people and hearing their opinions. But the way this instrument is used can create side effects of the society that, at least, we have to know and research in depth.

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Internet itself has originally created a side effect in transforming the people accessing the virtual reality into a far more contemplative and passive group, reacting with a click in front of a computer rather than taking the streets or protest and claim their rights in the physical reality.

Once social media has the advantage of reaching targeted audiences, people placed in determined geographic locations and diverse individuals all over the world with specific preferences in political, social, beliefs or ways of living the religious feelings, it constitutes an instrument that has an important share of the impact on the changes in society and individual preferences. Moreover, it is a tool that could let everybody reaches all of us across borders and barriers of any type.

Societal, Psychological and Political Impact on Democracy

There are several ways social media is influencing the democratic societies. It has an impact on societal security through its abilities and side effects in the general fragmentation of the society, in affecting participation in several events, in its capacity of mobilization, in modifying the human and social behaviour in several ways. With a double type of impact, it also refers in different way to the different type of people – active or passive, contemplative or inclined to action.

Then it has an enormous psychological impact on the individuals and, as a consequence, on the society through the impact and spread of collective emotions, addressing pragmatism, accentuating sensibilities and senses and, at the same time, depriving of sensibilities and humanity some events and factual realities. It also creates big splits between perceptions and realities with bubbles promoting uncritical ideas and isolation from other ideas and the real debate. It

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creates environments very friendly to each of the opinions, but that approach creates stronger and unchallenged perceptions of the truth and reality that it doesn't confront with other arguments and never verifies those perceptions with the reality and truth around us.

Last but not least, it is about social media important impact on political security, favoring strong statements and giving equal saying to all participants in a conversation, in spite of the different credentials and legitimacy. Thus anybody could draw attention and win a debate by popular vote as opposed of listening to expert or specialist credentials, rejecting arguments less adapted to the communication at the general level of education and in the real world.

It favours ideas that are attracting traffic and that privilege nationalist and extreme statements, anti-system believes, and thoughts and opinions well supported and spread via conspiracy theories (Rice & Zegart, 2018).

Social media is promoting, at a high speed, extreme and shocking ideas, even those without even a shred of truth or reality in them, sensations, emotions and personal opinions, instead of verified information, expert analysis, and traditional journalism with its rules of checking the facts.

Therefore, social media favours populism, nationalism, extremism of any kind, including extreme progressive ideas, as it puts a huge emphasis on emotions, perceptions instead of factual realities. Identities – both classical and new ones – are also in the forefront of the impact of social media, linked both to the fragmentation of society but first and foremost to the emergence of new types of political ideas, interest groups and fight for new types of rights.

All these impact with the classic political ideas and change the majority support from mainstream politics into a blow for extreme ideas and political parties, or populist figures instead of strict, conservative, limited, decent politicians who

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have, practically, no chance. The personalization of politics is also a side effect of the impact of social media.

Social Media and the Impact on Social Security

Social media has a side effect of fragmenting the society. This type of bubbles that could self-isolate are creating strong new types of identity but also isolated from the real debate of ideas and confrontation with other people's arguments (Appadurai et. all., 2016).

Fragmenting the society creates a real threat to solidarity, generosity, communitarian spirit, participation for common goals in the local communities and rifts in the society as a whole. It creates problems of cohesion on common national policies and strategic options.

As we have seen before, social media has awkward and biased impact on participation, keeping people away from reality and protests rather through likes and dislikes in a contemplative virtual space, on another part being able to mobilise huge numbers of people that don't know each other, once the emotion involved and the level of excitement reaches and touches an important number of followers. Both attributes can harm or mislead concrete ideas and initiatives for protest or defending rights or, on the contrary, can mobilize on very awkward and non-representative ideas of the agenda who could be promoted in the mainstream with their supporters and leaders of the minority groups, well organised in order to take over the lead of the public space with marginal and controversial ideas that are tainted and presented as mainstream preoccupation of a society.

Social networks reaffirm in a "bubble" our own opinions and beliefs like an echo chamber, a bubble that filters what we read, limiting our vision of the world. Groupthink is also a side effect of it (Stern, 2003). The impact is the creation of strong identities, fragmentation of the social spectrum and

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lack of dialogue and debate, which is an integral part of the formation of opinions and development of a democratic society. Instead we just have individuals with strong opinions on different subjects without hearing the arguments of the others. This is a threat to societal security.

On another point, social media is giving short, obvious, harsh and strict answers to any type of problem. In this environment, we don't have time for nuances, elaborated answers or complex evaluations, with open questions and unsolved dilemmas. Social media is simplifying the reality to the level of caricaturizing it, because we find it hard to understand it in its complexity. The effect on the society is the same clear and strict perception, the lack of questions on a subject and the split of the society on each question. Cohesion is hard to reach and any decision is criticised or supported on an emotional and not on rational bases. Accepting the other's opinion and weighting its arguments, a bases of liberal democracy, disappears on those platforms.

Social media has also an impact on the behaviour of individuals linked to socialisation, humanitarian approach as well as community involvement and participation. It creates new types of behaviour at different individuals, fuelling fears and alienation (Simons & Chifu, 2017) or on the contrary, forcing pragmatism and efficiency without compassion or taking advantage, on the contrary, of emotions, amplified to passionate approaches to themes promoted in a disputable way at the national level (nuclear energy, presence of foreign troops on the national territory etc.) – (Chifu & Ivan, 2013).

But the most important part is linked to post-truth, perceptions and realities and the psychological impact of this instrument, social media, used by specialised users with bad intentions that could harm individual conscience, will or social behaviour of people (Gurri, 2018). Here the society is directly targeted by means that are using extensively social media.

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Democratization brought by the technical build-up of the social media has led to an explosion with enormous consequences by promoting a generous idea that every truth, every idea has equal value. So, the Internet and the social media have made each sentence and every opinion equal. We have come to an absolute democratization of the Truth and those ideas are confronted in a competition for audience in the public space where the popularity is the driving factor that consecrates the spread of the idea.

Any group or theme is an image of the people using social media and addressing a subject. It reflects their traits and their knowledge when they become public in such a special media environment, if we consider social media as being also a source of news and a mass media space. It reveals education, habits, traditions, characteristic features, and also society, relationship, community spirit and its natural hierarchy. But it also alters the same characteristics via the fashion it establishes and the multiplication of some models and leading ideas. But this once the only criterion is the idea of attraction, a dramatic change in the societal hierarchies.

Social Media and Political Security: Populism, Nationalism, Identity and Progressive Ideas

Social media introduced some tremendous changes when it offered to anybody free access to infinite information, with practically no cost. And those changes are clearly in favour of the democracy. The low level self-censored people that didn't participate in the elections due to the lack of understanding of the impact and relevance of the vote, of the low civic spirit and to the lack of information now move to polls all over the world (Chifu, 2019). It has an impact on the political capacity of the society.

The second phenomenon is the creation of numerous groups of like-minded persons, with very concrete and difficult

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