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Towards a conceptualization of casual protest participation: Parsing a case from the *Save*

Roşia Montană campaign

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There is currently an empirical gap in the literature on protest participation in liberal democracies which has overwhelmingly focused on Western Europe and North America at the expense of Eastern Europe. To contribute to closing that gap, this article reviews findings from a multi-method field study conducted at FânFest, the environmental protest festival designed to boost participation in Save Roşia Montană, the most prominent environmental campaign in Romania. By contrast to its Western counterparts, Romania has seen markedly lower levels of involvement in voluntary organizations that are a key setting for mobilization into collective action. Concurrently, experience with participation in physical protests is limited amongst Romanians. Specifically, the article probes recent indications that social network sites provide new impetus to protest participation as an instrumental means of mobilization. Dwelling on a distinction between experienced and newcomers to protest, results indicate that social network site usage may make possible the casual participation of individuals with prior protest experience who are not activists in a voluntary organization. Whilst this finding may signal a new participatory mode hinging on digitally networked communication which is beginning to be theorized, it confounds expectations pertaining to a net contribution of social network site usage to the participation of newcomers to protest.

Key words: protest, participation, social network sites, mobilization, collective identity

Waves of protest have recently swept across the world, providing further substantiation to claims that protest is becoming a staple of political participation in the West and increasingly beyond it¹. Commentators have noted that prominent across the Arab Spring protests and the Occupy encampments has been the use of social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter to

¹ P. Norris, *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*, 188-125 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); M. Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

foster, sustain and disseminate contention². The activist use of social network sites (SNSs) has captivated the political communication scholarship³ which has been quick to point to a possible turn in collective action that relies on digitally networked communication to stage and coordinate protests, a capacity previously concentrated in social movement organizations (SMOs).

Referred to as *connective action networking* (CAN) this development marks a re-articulation of collective action rooted in personal expression and trusted social relationships on social network sites, which act as a fertile milieu for mobilization and identity-building. CAN is not a substitute for the collective action arising out of the resource mobilization efforts of social movement organizations. It is an alternative pathway into collective action based on individual exchanges enabled with networking technologies⁴. To scrutinize CAN, the utilisation of SNSs was probed at FânFest, an environmental protest festival that was the centrepiece of the *Save Roşia Montană* campaign, the longest-running and most prominent environmental struggle in Romania⁵.

² C. Christensen, "Twitter revolutions? Addressing social media and dissent", *The Communication Review* 14 (2011):155-157; P. N. Howard and M. R. Parks "Social media and political change: Capacity, constraint, and consequence", *Journal of Communication* 62 (2012): 359-362; J. Juris "Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: social media, public space and emerging logics of aggregation", *American Ethnologist* 39 (2012): 259-279.

³ Amongst others, see W.L. Bennett and A. Segerberg, "Collective action dilemmas with individual mobilization through digital networks", *Information, Communication & Society* 14 (2011): 770-799; W. L. Bennett and A. Segerberg, "The logic of connective action", *Information, Communication & Society* 15 (2012): 739-768; N. Fenton and V. Barassi, "Alternative media and social network sites: the politics of individuation and political participation", *The Communication Review* 14 (2011): 179-196; Y. Theocharis, "The contribution of websites and blogs to the students' protest communication tactics during the 2010 UK university occupations", *Information, Communication & Society* (2012):1-37, accessed 20 January 2013, doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2012.706315.

⁴ Bennett and Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action", 750.

⁵ C. E. Parau, "Impaling Dracula: How E.U. Accession Empowered Civil Society in Romania", *West European Politics* 32 (2009): 119-41.

Romania is a post-communist democracy with historically low levels of civic engagement in voluntary organizations⁶. As a result, the country stands in contrast to the more vibrant civic landscape of Western Europe and North America which have formed the backdrop to the latest studies into protest participation and the implications of SNS usage for collective action in liberal democracies⁷. FânFest represented a conscious bid to give a fresh impetus to collective action founded on anticipations that digitally networked communication would circumvent the limited mobilization capacities of the environmental movement in the country⁸.

This article has three aims. First, rather than being another attempt at assessing general levels of political activism on a particular social network site⁹, the analysis seeks to discern whether participants actively draw on SNSs to prime their protest participation. To do so, a distinction is pursued between open and closed mobilization channels¹⁰. Open channels may facilitate the mobilization of newcomers to a physical protest; closed channels are instrumental

⁶ G. Badescu, P. Sum and E. M. Uslaner, "Civil Society Development and Democratic Values in Romania and Moldova", *East European Politics and Societies* 18 (2004): 316-41; T. Petrova and S. Tarrow "Transactional and participatory activism in the emerging European polity: the puzzle of East-Central Europe", *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (2007): 74-94.

⁷ Juris "Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere", 259-279; Z. Papacharissi and M. de Fatima Oliveira, "Affective news and networked publics: The rhythms of news storytelling on #Egypt", *Journal of Communication* 62(2012): 266-282; A. Maireder and C. Schwarzenegger, "A movement of connected individuals", *Information, Communication and Society* 15 (2012): 171-195; Y. Theocharis, "The contribution of websites and blogs", 1-37; K. Thorson, K. Driscoll, B. Ekdale, S. Edgerly, L. Gamber Thompson, A. Schrock, L. Swartz, E. K. Vraga and C. Wells "Youtube, Twitter and the Occupy movement: connecting content and circulation practices", *Information, Communication and Society* 16 (2013):421-451.

⁸ Author, 2012.

⁹ S. Valenzuela, A. Arriagada and A. Scherman, "The social media basis of youth protest behavior: the case of Chile", *Journal of Communication* 62(2012): 299-314; S. Vissers and D. Stolle "Spill-over effects between Facebook and on/offline political participation. Evidence from a two-wave panel study" (paper presented at the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 15-17 June 2012).

¹⁰ S. Walgrave and B. Klandermans "Open and closed mobilization patterns: the role of channels and ties", in *The World Says No to War*, ed. Stefaan Walgrave and Dieter Rucht, 169-192 (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

to the mobilization of seasoned participants¹¹. Newcomers have previously been depicted as collective action ‘first-timers’¹², individuals with no experience of protest participation who were not members of an SMO. The possibility scrutinized in this article is that newcomers may be mobilised through SNSs as the latter are an open channel providing scope for both broadcasting and interpersonal communication¹³.

Second, and in order to trace potential usage patterns associated with mobilization among experienced participants and newcomers, a differentiation is pursued between two SNS usage modalities, push and pull communication¹⁴. *Push* communication designates the practice of pin-pointing messages at contact networks whilst *pull* communication refers to the act of receiving such messages and their subsequent exploration through information searches¹⁵. Applied to protest mobilization, this distinction can add a grounded examination of SNS usage as an avenue for the retrieval of information pertinent to protest participation but also for recruitment. Exploratory research into participant usage has suggested social network sites may be relied upon by protest participants to stay abreast with a protest -*pull* communication- but not for active participant recruitment that this study conceptualizes as *push* communication¹⁶.

¹¹ J. Verhulst and S. Walgrave, “The first time is the hardest? A cross-national and cross-issue comparison of first-time protest participants”, *Political Behavior* 31 (2009): 455-484.

¹² Verhulst and Walgrave, “The first time is the hardest”, 475-483.

¹³ A. Chadwick, “Web 2.0.: New challenges for the study of e-democracy in an era of information exuberance”, *I/S A Journal of Law and Policy for The Information Society* 5 (2008): 9-42; Z. Tufekci and C. Wilson, “Social media and the decision to participate in political protest: Observations from Tahrir Square”, *Journal of Communication* 62 (2012): 363-379.

¹⁴ A. M. Kaplan and M. Haenlein, “The early bird catches the news: nine things you should know about micro-blogging”, *Business Horizons* 54 (2011): 105-113.

¹⁵ Kaplan and Haenlein, “The early bird catches the news”, 107.

¹⁶ Author, 2013.

Third, it has been proposed that digitally networked communication enables collective action in the absence of social movement organizations (SMOs), previously credited with an exclusive capacity for resource mobilization- be they material, symbolic or human resources¹⁷. Resting on a claim of a networked transformation of collective action, the recent connective action scholarship has brought into new focus processes of social interaction and identity-building that underpin successful mobilization¹⁸. These processes, examined at the level of the individual, have been foregrounded by social-psychological and cultural approaches in social movement studies¹⁹. Informed by those traditions and the latest insights into connective action networking, this article queries notions of collective identity that are linked to SNS usage. Thus, it considers that whilst collective identity may be shaped through SNS communication, it becomes an outcome of mutual experience rather than group membership²⁰.

In what follows, the literature study outlines the concept of mobilization as deployed in this article. Following that, it dwells on mobilization channels into protest in the attempt to situate social network sites within the wider constellation of mobilization channels. Third, it connects push-and-pull communication to enquiries into the bearing of SNS usage on participant mobilization. Fourth, the implications of networked communication for collective

¹⁷ A. J. Flanagin, C. Stohl and B. Bimber, "Modelling the structure of collective action", *Communication Monographs* 73 (2006): 29-54.

¹⁸ Bennett and Segerberg, "Collective action dilemmas", 770-799; Bennett and Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action", 739-768.

¹⁹ B. Klandermans, "The demand and supply of participation: social-psychological correlates of participation in social movements", in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule and H. Kriesi, 360-379 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004); A. Melucci, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

²⁰ Bennett and Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action", 739-768.

identity are reviewed. The consequent empirical study examines primary data gathered at FânFest in 2012.

Literature study

Mobilization is a concept that has taken many guises in the social movement scholarship. Resource mobilization theory appropriated the term to capture the rational pursuit of a collective actor, the social movement organization, which pursues an optimum of material (funds, manpower, communication infrastructure) and non-material (shared beliefs and matching cost-benefit calculi) resources to foster collective action²¹. As a blueprint for a pathway into collective action, resource mobilization has been disputed on grounds that it obscures social interaction processes that shape those very collective action resources²². This article takes stock of this critique and concentrates on what Snow et al. (1986: 464) have termed *micromobilization*, “various interactive and communicative processes” which facilitate participation in physical protests²³.

Querying the purchase of SNS usage on mobilization is an undertaking set against a backdrop of rich scholarship that has probed the application of new media to protest for more than a decade²⁴. There seem to be two complementary long-held views on the potential

²¹ D. della Porta and M. Diani *Social Movements: An Introduction*, second edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2006); B. Klandermans, “The demand and supply of participation”, 260-379.

²² A. Melucci, *Challenging Codes*; J. M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

²³ D. A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Jr., S. K. Worden and R. D. Benford, “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation”, *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 464-481.

²⁴ Notable milestones in the literature are D. J. Myers, “Communication technology and social movements: contributions of computer networks to activism”, *Social Science Computer Review* 12 (1994): 250-260; W. van de

contribution of new media to protest mobilization. Prevailing indications are that the use of new media applications such as email and websites contributes to mobilization principally within social movement networks, thus reinforcing them²⁵. One illustration of this scholarship is the rank-scaling of mobilization channels deployed by Verhulst and Walgrave. In their ranking scheme, mass-media together with friends and family sat at the *open* end of the mobilization channel continuum as the principal recruitment agents for newcomers to protest.

Organizational meetings, organizational websites and emails were located at the *closed* end.

Websites and emails were germane to the mobilization of seasoned participants.

Newcomer participants are fundamentally distinct from experienced protest participants. The former lack the social embeddedness in formal or informal movement networks comprising individual activists as well as various SMOs such as volunteer organizations that renders one a likely target for mobilization and fosters one's motivation to participate²⁶. Experienced contacts who are members of an SMO have been key recruiters of

Donk, B D. Loader, Paul G. Nixon, D. Rucht, eds., *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movements* (London: Routledge, 2004); M. Castells, "Communication, power and counter-power in the network society", *International Journal of Communication* 1 (2007): 238-266, J. Earl, "Dynamics of protest-related diffusion on the web", *Information, Communication and Society* 13(2010): 209-225.

²⁵ M. Diani "Social movement networks virtual and real", *Information, Communication and Society* 3(2000): 386-401; J. Pickerill, *Cyberprotest: Environmental activism online*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Verhulst and Walgrave, "The first time is the hardest", 455-484; J. van Laer, "Activists 'online' and 'offline': The internet as an information channel for protest demonstrations", *Mobilization* 15 (2010): 405-417.

²⁶ D. A. Snow, L. A. Zurcher, and S. Eklund-Olson. "Social networks and social movements: A microstructural approach to differential recruitment", *American Sociological Review* 45 (1980): 787-801; D. McAdam, "Recruitment to high-risk activism: The case of Freedom Summer", *The American Journal of Sociology* 92 (1986): 64-90; Verhulst and Walgrave, "The first time is the hardest", 459; N. M. Somma, "How do Voluntary Organizations Foster Protest? The Role of Organizational Involvement on Individual Protest Participation", *The Sociological Quarterly* 51 (2010): 384-407.

newcomers²⁷. However, newcomers are significantly less likely than their experienced counterparts to be the object of mobilization in the first place²⁸. On the other hand, broadcast media enable mobilization beyond the confines of social movement networks when relaying calls to participation from SMOs to members of the general public²⁹.

The suggestion that new media are closed channels effective solely for the mobilization of seasoned participants is not without challenge. Fisher and Boekkooi have shown that in spite of the recognized prominence of social contact for mobilization, individuals with no pre-existing social connections to other protest participants may attend an event alone after learning about it from internet sources (websites, email/ mailing lists). The events that would mark such a turning point, they proposed, would be increasingly publicized and coordinated with new media applications that would open the way to the participation of individuals beyond movement networks³⁰.

Although the aforementioned study did not dwell on SNSs, social network sites may make for the most prominent open channel yet. SNSs provide scope for concomitant personal broadcasting and interpersonal conversation relating to protest. These usage modalities are strong correlatives of involvement in physical protests³¹ and can result in the devolution of

²⁷ Snow *et al.*, "Social networks and social movements", 787-801; McAdam, "Recruitment to high-risk activism", 64-90.

²⁸ D. McAdam and R. Paulsen, "Specifying the relationship between social ties and activism", *The American Journal of Sociology* 99 (1993): 663.

²⁹ J.M. Jasper and J. D. Poulsen, "Recruiting strangers and friends: moral shocks and social networks in animal rights and anti-nuclear protests", *Social Problems* 42 (1995): 493-512.

³⁰ D. R. Fisher and M. Boekkooi, "Mobilizing friends and strangers", *Information, Communication & Society* 13 (2010): 204.

³¹ S. Valenzuela, "Unpacking the use of social media for protest behavior: The roles of information, opinion expression and activism", *American Behavioral Scientist* 57 (2013): 920-942.

mobilization from organizational to wider and more diverse individual networks which are more easily accessible by newcomers³². In Tunisia, the birthplace of the Arab Spring, social network sites were relied upon to amplify the popular uprising beyond its original hotspot. Concurrently, they were part of a grassroots communication ecology wherein mobile phones also figured prominently and which was designed to overcome state censorship, geographical, age and class boundaries³³. At the Occupy encampment in Boston, SNS usage translated into the mobilization of a “crowd of individuals” with varying degrees of participatory experience³⁴.

Such signs that the growing presence of newcomers at physical protests relates to SNS usage are supported by research on the initial mobilization into Tahrir Square during the uprising against the Mubarak regime³⁵. Participants in those demonstrations most likely used SNSs rather than broadcasting media such as satellite TV to source information about the protests as the former provided more comprehensive access to last-minute developments. Ultimately, the participation of newcomers in the Egyptian protests was predicted by their use of blogs and Twitter for general information and of the telephone, e-mail and Facebook to converse about the first protests when faced with the misrepresentations purveyed by government-controlled media³⁶. Thus, to update the scholarship on mobilization channels, it is

³² Juris “Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere”, 267. See also S. González-Bailón, J. Borge-Holthoefer and Y. Moreno “Broadcasters and hidden influentials in online protest diffusion”, *American Behavioral Scientist* 57 (2013):943-965. These authors showed how ordinary Twitter users formed an early and extensive contingent of protesters who were instrumental to the diffusion of contention in the Arab Spring, los Indignados and the Occupy protests.

³³ M. Lim, “Framing Bouazizi: ‘White lies’, hybrid network and collective/connective action in the 2010-11 Tunisian uprising. *Journalism* (2013) 921-941.

³⁴ Juris “Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere”, 267-68.

³⁵ Tufekci and Wilson, “Social media and the decision to participate in political protest”, 363-379.

³⁶ Idem, 375; W. El Hamamsy, “BB= Blackberry or big brother: digital media and the Egyptian revolution”, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47 (2011): 454-466.

posited that SNSs may represent an open channel that is firmly associated with the mobilization of newcomers (H1).

There are further studies which have probed the contribution of SNS communication to successful mobilization. They have distinguished between SNS activity types that predict participation such as peer socialisation that blends one's private interaction with public concerns³⁷; or have indicated that social referral and reliance on socially circulated information to confirm expectations of large turnouts at a protest increase the likelihood of participation³⁸. Further, it has been shown that a few actors are information brokers who play a vital part in the distribution of social information about a protest³⁹. However, an apparent blind spot in the treatment of SNSs relates to the roles different types of participants may take up in the mediated communication.

In marketing studies, communication on Twitter has been catalogued along a push-pull scale which may be mapped onto social network sites with similar capabilities⁴⁰. *Push* communication designates an active effort at content dissemination, an act that may result in a message being "cascaded down" through user networks whilst its social circulation adds to its impact and credibility. *Pull* communication, on the other hand, portrays the act of receiving

³⁷ Valenzuela *et al.*, "The social media basis of youth protest behavior", 307.

³⁸ A. Rutherford, M. Cebrian, S. Dsouza, E. Moro, A. Pentland and I. Rahwan, "Limits of social mobilization", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110 (2013):6281-6286; H. Margetts, J. Peter, T. Escher and S. Reissfelder, "Social information and political participation on the internet: an experiment", *European Political Science Review* 3(2012):321-344; Tufekci and Wilson, "Social media and the decision to participate in political protest", 363-39.

³⁹ Y. Theocharis, "The wealth of (Occupation) Networks? Communication patterns and information distribution in a Twitter protest network", *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* 10 (2013):35-56.

⁴⁰ d. boyd and N. B. Ellison, "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13 (2008): 210-230.

information in a communication initiated by someone in a person's contact network which may be followed by subsequent explorations of that content through hyperlinked information searches⁴¹. Applying the theory of *push* and *pull* communication to participant mobilization, it is postulated that *push* communication is prevalent among experienced protesters who use SNSs to pass messages actively encouraging their contacts to participate in collective action. As indicated, particularly experienced participants who are members of an SMO account in good part for the mobilization of newcomers to protest. By contrast, for newcomers SNSs may chiefly be a vehicle for *pull* communication as they would more likely be targets rather than purveyors of appeals to participate in collective action (H2).

The third aim at the core of this article is fuelled by the continuing interest in collective identity as a key predictor of protest participation. Succinctly, collective identity signifies a sense of attachment to a group that takes collective action on a shared issue⁴². Recent scholarship has probed the scope for the development of collective identity through digitally networked communication. There are sceptical accounts that point to collective identity as being inextricably rooted in socialisation in organizational settings to which the networked communication of websites, emails and chat fora was an addition not an alternative⁴³. Equally,

⁴¹ Kaplan and Haenlein, "The early bird catches the news", 107.

⁴² J. van Stekelenburg and B. Klandermans, "Individuals in movements: a social psychology of contention", in *Handbook of Social Movements Across Disciplines*, ed. B. Klandermans and C. Roggeband, 157-205 (New York, Heidelberg: Springer, 2010).

⁴³ Diani "Social movement networks virtual and real", 386-401.

there are insights alluding to identity-building unfolding within the confines of activist email lists⁴⁴.

Complementary perspectives, these contentions converge on their assessment of the limited latitude for the cultivation of trust in networked communication. Trust has been seen as a lubricant to identity-building in that it aligns individual cognitive frameworks and emotions associated with group membership. In networked communication, trust seemed to be inversely related to the openness of a communication channel. In her examination of activist email lists, Kavada ⁴⁵noted that “open email lists, where anyone can subscribe and where no one has complete knowledge of the list’s membership, can be a hostile habitat for fostering relationships of trust”.

Yet, this problem of limited trust in networked communication appears to have been surmounted in the communicative environment of social network sites. Two proposed reasons for this are, firstly, the social architecture of SNSs which is erected on the selective association of individuals with preferred social contacts⁴⁶. Second, we have been witnessing a mounting reflexive personalisation of participation in collective action that has been attributed to the rise of self-actualising *life politics*⁴⁷. The former development refers to a technological affordance that grants users the capacity to closely manage their digital networks whilst the latter calls

⁴⁴ A. Kavada, “Email lists and the construction of an open and multifaceted identity”, *Information, Communication and Society*, 12 (2009): 817-39.

⁴⁵ Idem, 834.

⁴⁶ boyd and Ellison, “Social network sites”, 210-230.

⁴⁷ A. Giddens, A, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 1991); W. L. Bennett, “Communicating global activism”, *Information, Communication & Society* 6 (2003): 143-168; Bennett and Segerberg, “The Logic of Connective Action”, 739-768.

attention to a mode of individual participation decoupled from SMO membership and the organizational structures that have hitherto been deemed pivotal to the orchestration of collective action⁴⁸ and the formation of a collective identity⁴⁹.

In organizationally orchestrated collective action, individual mobilization is enacted through network links that flow out of key organizational nodes⁵⁰. Organizationally-rooted social networks facilitate the distribution and adoption of predefined collective identities distilled in collective action frames. Conversely, mobilization in connective action networking arises out of one's immersion into the emergent culture of collaboration, sharing and personal expression characteristic of SNSs. The latter pathway designates a process of cognitive mobilization based on pooling "already internalized or personalized ideas, plans, images, and resources with networks of others"⁵¹. CAN designates a distributed mode of co-creation, interpretation and circulation of collective identities that may involve SMOs but does not presume their leadership of the process. A prominent exemplification of this *modus operandi*

⁴⁸ For a theoretical revisitation of classical collective action theory that takes into account the spread of new media see Flanagan *et al.*, "Modelling the structure of collective action", 29-54.

⁴⁹ An account of a collective identity expressed as a shared experience of collective action with new media applications is provided by K. McDonald, "From solidarity to fluidarity: Social movements beyond 'collective identity'- the case of globalization conflicts", *Social Movement Studies* 1 (2002): 109-128.

⁵⁰ Diani "Social movement networks virtual and real", 386-401; Bennett and Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action", 748.

⁵¹ Bennett and Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action", 751-753. See R. J. Dalton, "Cognitive Mobilization and Partisan Dealignment in Advanced Industrial Societies", *The Journal of Politics* 46 (1984): 264-284. Used in the context of electoral politics, the notion of cognitive mobilization alludes to a pathway followed by individuals who are not involved in a political party, who have the ability to independently seek out and select information conducive to their participation.

has been the Occupy movement which was characterised by a conspicuous lack of SMOs from its midst⁵².

Returning to the interest in the SNS usage of newcomers to protest participation and its bearing on a shared notion of collective identity, a notable finding has been that newcomers differ significantly from experienced participants in that they exhibit a high level of identification with co-attending demonstrators⁵³. Such identification was described as being a consequence of their unfamiliarity with organizations involved in the protests and their members⁵⁴. Consequently, the third hypothesis (H3) proposes that the SNS usage of newcomers feeds into a collective identity hinging on one's identification with fellow participants in a protest. In other words, SNS usage would be linked to fellowship rather than membership identity. This development may signal a widening of cognitive mobilization also with SNSs and beyond networks of SMO members and seasoned protest participants. The Romanian case study at the heart of this analysis was seen as an apt choice for tackling its three aims because of the reviewed evidence which has indicated that SNS usage may be linked to the protest participation of newcomers, not least in countries with particularly weak civic infrastructures⁵⁵. A justification for the chosen research case is given below followed by a review of the main findings.

⁵² Idem, 754; Juris "Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere", 260; Author, 2013.

⁵³ J. Verhulst and S. Walgrave, "The first time is the hardest", 475.

⁵⁴ Idem, 462.

⁵⁵ Tufekci and Wilson, "Social media and the decision to participate in political protest", 363-379.

Case selection

This research was based on a single case design⁵⁶. Single case designs are suitable to the complex treatment of a situation distinct in substantial ways from conditions underpinning extant theoretical propositions, herein by means of a mixed-methods approach. FânFest represented such an *extreme case* that puts theories to a unique test as it quizzes the scope of their applicability. Since 2004, FânFest has represented the highpoint of the *Save Roșia Montană* campaign. The latter is a loose network of organizations, groups and individuals that are united by their opposition to the largest proposed gold mine in Europe that would be built in the mountainous Romanian village of Roșia Montană.

The *Save Roșia Montană* campaign has become one of the most conspicuous and enduring environmental protests in Romania⁵⁷. Previously, it was hailed as “probably the most enduring, successful and transnationalized environment-centered protest in Southeastern Europe”⁵⁸. The opposition to the gold mine formally came into being with the establishment in 2000 of “Alburnus Maior”, an association of landowners intent on defending their property rights in and around the village of Roșia Montană in the face of their planned resettlement to make way for the new mine. In time, international supporters added their weight to local efforts to forestall the development of the mine. They included Greenpeace CEE, Friends of the

⁵⁶ R. K. Yin, *Case Study Research Design and Methods*, second edition (London: Sage, 1994).

⁵⁷ C.P. Parau (2009) “Impaling Dracula: How EU accession empowered civil society in Romania”, *West European Politics* 32 (2009): 119-141.

⁵⁸ A. Romantan, “The role of the E.U. in civic opposition to gold mining in Romania”. Unpublished. Paper presented at the *ECPR General Conference*, Budapest, (2005): 1.

Earth International, Bank Watch CEE, Mining Watch Canada, and Oxfam America. The continuing dispute escalated in September 2013 with an unprecedented level of mobilisation on the streets of numerous Romanian cities and towns as well as among Romanian diasporic communities around the world⁵⁹. Protestors rallied against proposed legislation designed to streamline licensing procedures and grant the mine operator extensive powers, *inter alia*, to execute forced purchase orders on the properties in the mining perimeter. FânFest foreshadowed those demonstrations as an outlet of public solidarity with the local opposition.

The individuality of FânFest derives first from its broader circumstances as a protest which unfolded in an Eastern European democracy marked by some of the lowest levels of involvement in voluntary organizations on the continent. Similar investigations into protest participation have concentrated primarily on Western liberal democracies with higher levels of organizational involvement and a deeper history of protest⁶⁰. For instance, in their study Verhulst and Walgrave⁶¹ drew on data collected in Belgium and other Western European democracies such as Britain, Germany and Spain⁶², countries with significantly higher levels and a longer history of involvement in voluntary organizations and environmental protest than

⁵⁹ G. Wong "Protests continue in Bucharest against gold mine plan in Rosia Montana", *The Guardian* (2013), <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/sep/04/protest-rosia-montana-gold-mine-protest> (accessed 01 December 2014).

⁶⁰ For a consideration of protest participation in East-Central European countries other than Romania see K. Vráblíková, "How Context Matters? Mobilization, Political Opportunity Structures and Non-Electoral Political Participation in Old and New Democracies", *Comparative Political Studies* 47 (2014).

⁶¹ Verhulst and Walgrave, "The first time is the hardest", 455-484.

⁶² See also C. Saunders, M. Grasso, C. Olcese, E. Rainsford and C. Rootes, "Explaining differential protest participation: novices, returners, repeaters and stalwarts", *Mobilization* 17(2012): 263-280.

Romania⁶³. On the one hand, the Romanian environmental movement did not gain a parallel momentum to other movements in the East-Central Europe⁶⁴ due to the authoritarianism of the communist regime which had no tolerance for political pluralism⁶⁵ and following its demise, because of the comparatively slow pace of environmental reforms⁶⁶. Post-communism saw voluntary organizations among which were also environmental NGOs become increasingly professionalized in order to attract scarce external funding necessary for their subsistence⁶⁷. As a result, environmental organizations would focus more on their structural survival than on grassroots outreach⁶⁸.

On the other hand, involvement in voluntary organizations in Romania at the turn of the 21st century was very limited. The proportion of members in one or more non-governmental volunteer organizations was the second lowest in East-Central Europe (9.6 percent), just above Russia which came at the bottom of that ranking. That level of involvement was more than four times smaller than in the U.K. (41.8 percent); more than three times lower than in Belgium

⁶³ Membership in volunteer organizations in Western and some non-Western democracies from Latin America and South-East Asia has been examined in P. Norris, "Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism", 195-196; Badescu *et al.*, "Civil Society Development and Democratic Values", 322. For a review of participation in environmental protest in Western Europe see C. Rootes, "The transformation of environmental activism: an introduction", in *Environmental Protest in Western Europe*, ed. Christopher Rootes, 1-21 (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶⁴ C. G. Pickavance, "Democratization and the decline of social movements: the effects of regime change on collective action in Eastern Europe, Southern Europe and Latin America", *Sociology* 33 (1999): 353-72.

⁶⁵ D. Deletant *Ceausescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-89* (London: Hurst & Company, 2006).

⁶⁶ M. S. Andersen, "Ecological modernization or subversion? The effect of Europeanization on Eastern Europe", *American Behavioral Scientist* 45 (2002): 1394-1416.

⁶⁷ A. Sloat, "The rebirth of civil society: the growth of women's NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe", *European Journal of Women's Studies* 12 (2005): 437-52.

⁶⁸ L. Botcheva, "Focus and effectiveness of environmental activism in Eastern Europe: a comparative study of environmental movements in Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania". *The Journal of Environmental Development* 5 (1996) 292-308.

(34.4 percent) and around half that in Germany (18.5 percent) and Spain (16.6 percent)⁶⁹. The low membership figures among Romanians were attributed to scarce material resources, a deep-seated scepticism of collective action prompted by the atomization of social life during communism and a poor organizational infrastructure in post-communism⁷⁰. More recently, a 2012 survey has pointed to rising albeit still rather modest levels of organizational membership (13.6 percent)⁷¹. The degree of experience with participation in physical protest was even lower than membership levels in 2012 with only one in every eleven Romanians (9 percent) having ever taken part in a public demonstration or a strike.

Second, although in Western Europe the rejuvenation of collective action has previously been kindled with music concerts⁷², FânFest stands out as a distinctive attempt in Romania to attract newcomers to collective action⁷³. To that end, the festival combined a protest agenda with a cultural repertoire, a tried approach to mobilization premised on the expression of aesthetic values that have wide political resonance⁷⁴. The only prerequisite to participation in the festival was an interest to discover the village of Roşia Montană and a readiness to explore

⁶⁹ Badescu *et al.*, "Civil Society Development and Democratic Values", 322.

⁷⁰ Badescu *et al.*, "Civil Society Development and Democratic Values", 324-29; E. Nicholson of Winterbourne, "Civil Society and the Media in Romania", in *The EU and Romania. Accession and Beyond*, ed. David Phinnemore, 64-78 (London: Federal Trust for Education and Research, 2006); Parau, "Impaling Dracula", 121.

⁷¹ The Romanian Resource Center for Public Participation together with the Babeş-Bolyai University conducted a survey in August-September 2012 on a representative, multistage, stratified sample of 1,100 individuals aged over 18 with an error margin of +/-3%. Respondents were asked if they were members of sports, religious, environmental, animal rights, pensioners', charity, cultural and professional or any other volunteer organisations.

⁷² A. Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, 59-60 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

⁷³ Author, 2010

⁷⁴ J. Street, J., S. Hague and H. Savigny, "Playing to the crowd: the role of music and musicians in political participation", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 10 (2008): 276.

the festival's rich programme⁷⁵ comprising music concerts, theatre plays and activist workshops and culminating with a demonstration against the mining project.

Third, through its inexpensive online presence, FânFest sought to establish a communication mainline with its expected key demographic, young newcomers. Networked communication was viewed as a means to compensate for the limited scope of the environmental movement network, the feebleness of the broader civic infrastructure in Romania and the lack of mainstream media interest in the anti-mining campaign⁷⁶. FânFest was systematically promoted online through its own website whilst news about it was featured on all other websites associated with the *Save Roşia Montană* campaign. On Facebook, the protest festival was publicized through a dedicated event page and other fan and group pages run by the campaign whilst its prominent members kept public personal profiles on that SNS.

The research data

Data collection at FânFest was done with a mixed-method approach. A survey was followed up with in-depth interviews in the attempt to retrieve accounts of SNS usage by protest participants and contextualize aggregate observations within personal experience⁷⁷. In

⁷⁵ Keira, member of the FânFest Coordination Team interviewed by the author in Cluj, Romania, 10 August 2012.

⁷⁶ Odette, member of the FânFest Coordination Team interviewed by the author in Cluj, Romania, 3 August 2007; Keira, member of the FânFest Coordination Team interviewed by the author in Cluj, Romania, 10 August 2012. The festival nonetheless received some mainstream media coverage in a special edition of a nation-wide freely-distributed monthly magazine and in a broad-circulation weekly. News items about it were featured in regional public radio and television broadcasts for Central and North-Western Romania.

⁷⁷ See K. Seashore Louis, "Multisite/multimethod studies: an introduction", *American Behavioral Scientist* 26 (1982): 6-22.

so doing, the expectation was that the ensuing analysis would give scope to a *member validation*⁷⁸ of the findings. This course of action was seen as suitable for further theory-building⁷⁹ on the basis of the extreme case study. All the research data were collected in August 2012.

The survey was conducted on a purposive sample from the 'specialized population' of protest participants⁸⁰. By means of a self-administered paper-based questionnaire respondents were queried about their membership in non-governmental organizations other than parties or trade unions; their previous experience with participation in a physical protest be it a demonstration, strike, march or flashmob⁸¹. Further, they were asked whether they had previously attended FânFest and finally were quizzed about their collective identity. As to SNS usage, the questionnaire included a collection of items on the utilisation of Facebook, Twitter and Google+. As indicated, the first two applications have been the centre-point of research into the implications of network communication for collective action. The incorporation of Google+ in the survey was done following feedback from a pre-test⁸² carried out with respondents who approximated the population of interest delineated in earlier investigations⁸³.

⁷⁸ T. R. Lindlof and B. C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, second edition, 242 (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage, 2002).

⁷⁹ A. Bryman *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*, 91 (London, New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁸⁰ L., W. Neuman, *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*, fifth edition, 213 (Boston: Allyn and Bacon: 2003).

⁸¹ The interview item on participation was modeled after the example of L. Mosca, "A double-faced medium? The challenges and opportunities of the internet for social movements", in *Net-working/Networking: Citizen initiated internet politics*, ed. T. Hayhtio and J. Rinne, 41-73 (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2008)

⁸² B. Gillham, *Developing a Questionnaire*, (London, New York: Continuum, 2000).

⁸³ Author, 2012.

Survey respondents were invited to either complete the questionnaire on the spot or to return it to the survey team at a later time before their departure from Roşia Montană. Distinct heuristic procedures were employed to attain randomness and representativity⁸⁴. They included distributing questionnaires at different locations within the field sites at different times of the day and on each day of the five day event. Consequently, in the course of the festival, every other participant in the activist workshops and the evening concerts was polled adding up to a total of 340 surveyed participants and a high response rate -81 percent (n=276)- for the chosen survey administration strategy⁸⁵. The resultant sample size was comparable to samples in similar analyses⁸⁶.

Second, the qualitative component of the study comprised semi-structured participant interviews. In the course of three group interviews, seventeen participants were interviewed out of which fourteen were newcomers. All interviewees were selected from amongst survey participants. The interview protocol invited interviewees to reflect on their pathway to participation in the protest festival and whether they used social network sites at any point in that process. The ensuing analysis started with a description of participant demographics, the level of organizational membership among them, aggregate levels of participatory experience and finally with descriptives for the use of social network sites. Subsequently, the study's three

⁸⁴ The heuristic procedures were modeled after K. A. Goss, "Rethinking the political participation paradigm", *Women and Politics*, 25 (2004): 83-118 and S. Walgrave and J. Verhulst, "Protest surveying. Testing the feasibility and reliability of an innovative methodological approach to political protest", <http://www.protestsurvey.eu/index.php?page=publications> (accessed 10 December 2010).

⁸⁵ H. F. Weisberg, J. A. Krosnick, B. D. Bowen, *An Introduction to Survey Research, Polling and Data Analysis*, third edition, 121 (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage, 1996).

⁸⁶ Verhulst and Walgrave, "The first time is the hardest", 455-484; Saunders *et al.*, "Explaining differential protest participation", 263-280.

hypotheses were tested with 3 binary logistic regression models. As in similar previous research⁸⁷, the socio-demographic variables of age, gender and education acted as controls in the analytical models.

Analysis

FânFest participants were typical protest goers⁸⁸ in that they were by-and-large young, unlike demonstrators nationally who tended to be 35 years of age and older ($\chi^2=15.907$, $df=8$, $p<.05$). Further, participants at FânFest (see Table 1) were better educated than the overall demonstrators in Romania, the majority of whom only held a high-school or vocational degree ($\chi^2=24.561$, $df=4$, $p<.001$). There were nevertheless similarities between the festival participants and public demonstrators, who were predominately male ($\chi^2=14.533$, $df=1$, $p<.001$) and heavy internet users ($\chi^2=24.735$, $df=2$, $p<.001$).

As shown in Table 1, the degree of organizational membership among FânFest participants was twice as high as the national level that same year⁸⁹. As to their participatory experience, the proportion of individuals who had previously been to a physical protest was approximately ten times higher than among the general population. Newcomers represented a minority ($\chi^2=5.286$, $df=1$, $p<.05$), a finding that suggested the festival had not met its long-standing aim of widening the pool of participants in collective action. Yet, more than two thirds

⁸⁷ L. Mosca, "A double-faced medium?", 41-73; Tufekci and Wilson, "Social media and the decision to participate in political protest", 363-379.

⁸⁸ McAdam, "Recruitment to high-risk activism", 64-90.

⁸⁹ The general level of organisational membership was measured with the question 'Are you a member of a non-governmental organization?'

of all participants were new-comers to the festival. There was no relationship between general participatory experience and previous participation at the protest festival suggesting that participation at FânFest was a novelty for both the experienced and newcomers.

TABLE 1 HERE

In their consideration of mobilization channels, Verhulst and Walgrave⁹⁰ employed a survey item which queried respondents on the open and/or closed channels of communication they used to learn about the protests they attended. Similarly, FânFest participants were asked about their sources of information about the protest festival (see Table 2). Participants most commonly turned to the internet for information about FânFest, with family and friends being a distant second to it. Open mobilization channels, mass media such as newspapers, radio and television were far less popular, as shown in Table 2. Online, the largest number of participants sourced their information from Facebook and to a lesser extent from closed channels such as NGO websites. Twitter and Google+ were used generally far less than Facebook as a means to gather information about the festival.

TABLE 2 HERE

Open and closed mobilization channels

⁹⁰ Verhulst and Walgrave, "The first time is the hardest", 455-484.

To test the possibility that SNSs may constitute an open channel for the mobilization of newcomers, dummy variables were created for mass media sources and social network sites, respectively. As the SNS scale did not prove reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .35$) because of the significant variance in the usage of the three applications, dummy variables for each individual application were subsequently introduced in separate logit regression models. The results are presented in Table 3. The listed coefficients in that and the following two tables are odds ratios. A coefficient value of 1.0 or more represents a positive relationship whilst values below 1.0 connote a negative relationship.

Results on the relationship between the use of open mobilization channels and participatory inexperience were less clear-cut than in earlier studies⁹¹. Facebook was the only channel whose usage was predicted by participatory experience but the relationship was contrary to the one postulated. Experienced participants were more likely to rely on Facebook than newcomers. However, pursuing the distinction between general experience and previous participation at FânFest revealed a negative relationship between the latter type of participation and the use of Facebook, Twitter and NGO websites. Ultimately, it was experienced participants who were at FânFest for the first time that were the most likely to use SNSs as well as closed channels such as NGO websites and email for information and not individuals that were complete newcomers to protest in general. Altogether, these findings suggested that SNSs may sit uneasily at the open end of the channel continuum as they were not conducive to the mobilization of newcomers. They appeared to be nearer to the closed

⁹¹ See Verhulst and Walgrave, "The first time is the hardest", 455-484.

end, a conclusion which led to the partial rejection of H1. Like friends and family, SNSs may occupy a median position on the continuum, whilst arguably being a more salient source of information than unmediated communication with the latter.

TABLE 3 HERE

The most powerful of the logit models was that for Facebook usage but that model's explained variance was small. Overall, these regression models as well as those presented in Tables 4 and 5 seemed to hold limited explanatory power and therefore are best viewed as exploratory models allowing for predictions on membership in the categories of the dependent variables⁹². Interview data helped embed the above findings in participants' communication practices. They were a source of additional interviewee reflection on aspects raised in the survey. All interviewees lacked the experience of participation in a physical protest other than FânFest which three of them had previously attended. One of the three returnees was also a member of a non-governmental volunteer organization. Yet, as two interviewees put it -Peter, a musician and his girlfriend Carly, a medical student- a conflation of affiliation with participation would have failed to give credence to extra-organisational activism such as their festival attendance. Their recurrent participation at FânFest was sparked by chance exposure to germane information which fuelled a deepening submergence into what they independently identified as the convergent media ecology of the protest:

⁹² S. Menard, *Applied logistic regression analysis*, second edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002).

“We’re not involved in non-governmental organizations but that doesn’t mean that we are not involved as such. We’re simply not affiliated to any one organization... the first time we learnt about it [FânFest, in 2006] I think it was from a poster ‘cause there wasn’t much else. I mean there was the Internet then, but...but I mean these days the best way to promote an event is through Facebook. People are on Facebook a lot”⁹³.

A research student, Jane⁹⁴ had no participatory experience or membership credentials. She explained that she was aware the festival had been taking place for a number of years but she personally first learnt about the 2012 event when she saw it publicised by contacts on her Facebook news feed. Among those contacts were prominent members of the *Save Roşia Montană* campaign whom she previously befriended when seeking information about the campaign for a research project. As she recalled, “Facebook was the one place where I learnt about FânFest even though I normally stay abreast with the *Save Roşia Montană* [campaign]”. Her and Peter’s testimonies vividly intimated to the relative prominence of Facebook among all sections of participants by contrast with the other mobilization channels.

Push and pull communication

The question of how mobilization may be enacted on SNSs informed the second hypothesis (H2). Experienced participants were expected to act as recruitment agents, more likely than newcomers to use SNSs to encourage their contacts to participate. Conversely, newcomers

⁹³ Peter and Carly, participants at FânFest. Interviewed by author in Roşia Montană, 18 August 2012.

⁹⁴ Jane, participant at FânFest, interviewed by author in Roşia Montană, 18 August 2012.

would be involved in pull communication as targets of appeals to participate in the festival⁹⁵.

SNS scales for *push* and *pull* communication comprising the three named applications were not reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .35$). Therefore, as before, each individual service was placed in a separate logistic regression model.

TABLE 4 HERE

Participatory experience was the strongest predictor of both *push* and *pull* communication on Facebook. Experienced participants seemed to be part of a communication ecology where participation was a topic to which they both contributed and were exposed. At the same time, not having previously been at the protest was likely to predict push communication. It thus appeared that those most likely to engage in push communication were the experienced participants who had not previously attended the festival. This snapshot of push-pull communication resonates with earlier descriptions of mobilization in social movement networks to the extent that it pertains to an environment that one enters with a degree of familiarity with collective action and social contacts that are capable of nurturing that experience. However, both push and pull communication aimed at mobilization bore no relationship to organizational membership suggesting that participatory experience can flourish through SNS communication among people who are not activists in non-governmental volunteer organizations.

⁹⁵ Respondents were asked if they used Facebook, Google+ or Twitter to encourage their contacts to go to FânFest; or alternatively, if they had been encouraged by their contacts on Facebook, Google+ or Twitter to attend the festival.

Jane, the interview participant, relayed information about the festival among Facebook friends, urging them to accompany her to the festival. Her example, of a newcomer with a long-held regard for the campaign, testifies to the notion that push and pull communication are two sides of the same coin:

“...we ‘liked’ and ‘shared’ it [FânFest] on Facebook... and that basically means that we distributed, somehow disseminated the information in cyberspace... As a result of publicizing it there’s now 7 of us that are here. It’s as simple as that”.

This vignette alluded to both experienced participants and newcomers engaging in push communication as long as their interest in collective action is stimulated by their social contacts that pull them into a conversation about protest participation. Nonetheless, experienced participants were more likely than newcomers to ultimately act as active recruiters engaging in push communication, at FânFest primarily on Facebook (Cramer’s $V = .192$, $p < .01$). In the end, the first part of H2 was upheld as experienced participants seemed to decidedly engage in push communication. However, the latter part of the hypothesis had to be rejected. Newcomers did not stand out for their pull communication.

SNS usage and collective identity

The final hypothesis (H3) contrasted two distinct notions of collective identity: a membership-based identity and alternatively one rooted in participant fellowship⁹⁶. The theoretical

⁹⁶ Drawing on examples from T. Brunsting and S. Postmes’s “Collective action in the age of the Internet: mass communication and online mobilization”, *Social Science Computer Review* 20 (2002): 294 and Verhulst and

proposition has been that the SNS usage of newcomers in the run up to the protest would bear a relationship with the latter type of identity which underpins connective action networking. A single scale for SNS usage was constructed comprising information retrieval, push and pull communication (Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$). A statistically significant positive relationship was found between fellowship identity, participatory experience and SNS usage (see Table 5). There was no significant relationship between SNS usage, participatory experience and membership-based identity.

TABLE 5 HERE

These results indicated that SNS usage reinforced a fellowship identity among experienced protest participants who were not members of a non-governmental volunteer organization. In other words, among experienced participants, SNS usage was germane to a sense of companionship with co-participants. Further bivariate tests revealed that fellowship identity only correlated with participatory experience (Cramer's $V = .190$, $p < .01$) and had no relationship with organizational membership. This evidence contradicted the earlier contention that participatory experience would be coterminous with membership identity⁹⁷. Indeed, from among the experienced participants it was only members of an organization who espoused a membership-based identity (Cramer's $V = .141$, $p < .01$). Ultimately, a fellowship identity was not

Walgrave's "The first time is the hardest", 455-484, respondents were queried about the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements, 'I identify with the other people present here' and 'I am a member of the Save Roşia Montană campaign'. Dummy variables for fellowship and membership-based identity were used in the final binary logistic regression.

⁹⁷ Verhulst and Walgrave, "The first time is the hardest", 455-484.

common to newcomers. This outcome was a further substantiation of the emerging conclusion that SNS communication was unlikely to systematically shape the participation of newcomers.

Again, interview data helped embed the findings on fellowship identity in participant practice whilst alluding to newcomers sharing a fellowship identity with experienced non-members. Although interviewees voiced a strong commitment to the key goal of the *Save Roşia Montană* campaign to prevent the development of the open-cast gold mine, they did not regard themselves as activists in the campaign. Engagement both in the campaign and in civic actions more widely was seen as confined to communication on Facebook and the odd signing of an online petition. The interviewees had little time to invest in activism and held the view that others could do it more effectively. Their decision to go to the festival was grounded in a desire to learn more about the campaign and to understand how other people like them might give a boost to the struggle without becoming full-blown activists themselves. Illustratively, one of the interviewees said:

“We clearly support the campaign but none of us have actually done anything to show our support for it...Okay, we would like to do something but in the end it’s not only up to us. I mean if you do something, collect signatures, how many should you aim to get? ...the only way to stop this mine will be through protest and that’s what it’s gonna come down to... If that happens I’m certainly going to be there even though up to now I haven’t been actively engaged in it”⁹⁸.

⁹⁸ Jeff, participant at FânFest, interviewed by the author in Roşia Montană, 18 August 2012.

Conclusion

This examination proceeded from the overarching contention that social network sites may be crucial to the mobilization of newcomers to a physical protest unfolding in a democratic country exhibiting low levels of organizational involvement such as Romania. In its latest iteration, FânFest attracted more participants with protest experience and membership credentials than it was expected. SNS usage may have been key to the participation of individuals with a cache of participatory experience who nonetheless were not members of a voluntary organization. Crucially, on the open-closed mobilization channel continuum, Facebook appeared to unseat both mass-media and friends and family as a channel that consolidates mobilization beyond formal movement networks.

Yet, Facebook was the chief source of information about the protest among all participants- a finding which lends some support to extant claims that Facebook usage may contribute to protest participation with two additional qualifiers. First, such usage is not necessarily linked to organizational membership. Second, as a mobilization channel, Facebook may make possible a deepening of the distinction between participatory experience and organizational membership as particularly the experienced but possibly also newcomers can be mobilised through public information that is socially circulated on Facebook. Whilst this was the case at FânFest, the wider applicability of this proposition may be assayed by dint of a multiple case-study design incorporating a series of physical protests. Comparative, large-N research

may provide a robust test for the theoretical claims herein, contrasting membership and experience levels together with data on mobilization channels across a wide gamut of liberal democracies whilst controlling for contextual differences⁹⁹. Conversely, an ethnographic research design and perhaps the use of diaries¹⁰⁰ amongst individuals that avow their intention to take part in a physical protest on Facebook would provide an even deeper understanding of the relationship between SNS usage and protest participation.

A second conclusion is that an earlier distinction between Twitter as a means for information retrieval for prospective protest participants, and Facebook for communication about a protest may be due a reassessment. At FânFest, Facebook was the application of choice for information sourcing and thus possibly, a contextual supplanter of Twitter. Moreover, Facebook was a channel for push communication by experienced participants, directed at encouraging the participation of their Facebook contacts in the protest festival. Yet, such communication did not seem to systematically encompass newcomers as it was initially proposed herein. Consequently, that platform did not appear to be an apt surrogate for Twitter, deployed as an engine for the mobilization of weak ties into co-presence at physical protests, as previously encountered at international environmental demonstrations¹⁰¹. Ultimately, Facebook seemed to provide experienced participants with ample support for

⁹⁹ An illustrative study is Vráblíková, "How Context Matters?".

¹⁰⁰ For a relevant illustration see A. Kaun *Being a Young Citizen in Estonia: An Exploration of Young People's Civic and Media Experiences* (2013: University of Tartu).

¹⁰¹ A. Segerberg and W.L. Bennett, "Social media and the organization of collective action: Using Twitter to explore the ecologies of two climate change protests", *The Communication Review*, (2011): 197:215.

participating in collective action. Thus, experienced participants may be part of an SNS mobilization loop as initiators and principal targets of mobilization attempts.

Third, a collective identity rooted in a sense of fellowship with co-participants was predicted by SNS usage, albeit again chiefly among the experienced rather than the newcomers. This point confounds previous claims of a relationship between participatory experience and membership-based identity. Thereby, it advances the prospect that SNS communication is related to individual participation that is no longer inextricably linked to an organizationally-bounded sense of belonging to a given social group. On the one hand, this finding suggests that a logic of connective action may have been at play at FânFest which gave impetus to the participation of individuals who had not previously attended the festival, were not activists in a voluntary organization whilst concurrently not being complete newcomers to protest in general. This most numerous group at the festival may represent a cohort of tentatively termed *casual participants* whose SNS usage informs and drives their participation. The presence of casual participants at protests is now being charted in Western democracies as they make up an important contingent of largely self-activating returnees that will attend protests on their own, who have limited linkages with SMOs but who have activist friends¹⁰². This article adds further scope to such research first by focusing on a particular Eastern European context and affirming the centrality of casual participants to protest. Second, it testifies to the instrumentality of SNS usage to their participation whilst calling for a broader consideration of the media practices of casual participants.

¹⁰² Saunders *et al.*, "Explaining differential protest participation", 275.

Table 1: Participant demographics and general SNS usage levels (%)

Organizational membership*	Participatory experience**	Participation at previous FânFest***	Age			Gender		Education			Social network site usage		
			16-24	25-34	=> 35	F	M	Secondary	High-school/vocational education	Baccalaureate and higher	Facebook	Google+	Twitter
34	77	29	36	55	9	45	55	1	13	86	88	36	19

* The survey questions for membership were: "Are you a member of a non-governmental organization?" "Tick the box next to any of the organizations listed below if you are involved in any one of them (more than one answer is possible)". The final answer option for this question was "any other type of organization. Please describe it here".

** The survey question reported here was: "Have you ever participated in a public protest (strike, demonstration, flashmob, march)?"

*** The survey question was: "Is this the first time you are attending FânFest?"

Table 2: Sources of information about FânFest* (%)

Mass media	Friends and family	The internet	Social network sites			NGO websites
			76			
			Facebook	Twitter	Google+	
12	57	91	71	3	13	44.5

* Participants were asked the following questions: "In the last year where did you get information about FânFest?" and "If you used the internet to get such information, where specifically did you find it?" On a nominal scale, answer options ranged from open mass-media channels such as radio, television, newspapers to family and friends, SNSs and closed channels such as NGO websites. Results are reported as dummy variables with percentages for users.

Table 3: Push and pull communication on SNSs directed at the encouragement of participation at FânFest (%)

SNS push	Facebook push	Twitter push	Google+ push	SNS pull	Facebook pull	Twitter pull	Google+ pull
79	79	10	14	75	76	6	11

Table 4: Logistic regression models predicting use of open or closed mobilization channels (block entry method, Exp (B))

	Mass-media	Family and friends	Facebook	Twitter	Google+	NGO websites	Email
Organizational membership	1.382	1.435	1.071	1.256	.837	1.393	1.031
Participatory experience	.467	1.264	3.207***	-	.646	1.031	2.540*
Previous FânFest participation	1.138	1.170	.360**	.171*	2.306	.445*	.641
Age	1.131	.675	.932	.859	1.531	.974	.814
Gender (ref. male)	.979	.542*	.729	1.003	1.055	.768	.453*
Education	.946	.818	1.170	.822	1.040	1.396	.942
Model	R ² = .028 (Nagelkerke)	R ² = .087 (Nagelkerke)	R ² = .148 (Nagelkerke) $\chi^2=$	R ² = .154 (Nagelkerke)	R ² = .076 (Nagelkerke)	R ² = .090 (Nagelkerke)	R ² = .096 (Nagelkerke)
Sig :	$\chi^2=3.774$, df= 6, n.s.	$\chi^2=16.679$, df=6, p<.05	26.399, df=6, p<.001	$\chi^2=8.776$, df=6 n.s.	$\chi^2=10.200$, df=6, n.s.	$\chi^2= 17.191$, df=6, p<.01	$\chi^2= 17.257$, df=6, p<.01
*.05, **.01, *** .001							

Table 5: Logistic regression models predicting SNS push and pull communication (block entry method, Exp (B))

	Facebook push	Twitter push	Google+ push	Facebook pull	Twitter pull	Google+ pull
Organizational membership	.844	2.745	.406	.987	1.954	.560
Participatory experience	2.815**	1.058	1.366	2.597*	1.164	1.072
Previous FânFest participation	.420*	1.523	1.600	.662	1.248	.905
Age	.985	1.886	1.805	.994	1.159	3.041*
Gender	.992	2.332	1.056	.840	2.157	.424
Education	.701	.623	1.178	.887	.868	.994
Model	R ² = .104 (Nagelkerke) χ ² = 15.233, df= 6, p<.05	R ² = .099 (Nagelkerke) χ ² = 7.223, df= 6, n.s	R ² = .113 (Nagelkerke) χ ² =10.845, df= 6, n.s	R ² = .063 (Nagelkerke) χ ² =9.628, df= 6, n.s	R ² = .038 (Nagelkerke) χ ² =2.182, df= 6, n.s	R ² = .115 (Nagelkerke) χ ² =9.596, df= 6, n.s

Sig :

*.05,

** .01,

*** .001

Table 6: Logistic regression models predicting collective identity (block entry method, Exp (B))

	Membership-based identity	Participant fellowship identity
Membership	2.044*	1.217
Participatory experience	.911	2.626*
Previous FânFest participation	1.138	.704
SNS usage	1.388	1.545**
Mass-media	1.890	2.459
Friends and family	.869	.993
Email	1.575	.870
NGO websites	1.606	1.448
Gender	1.327	1.407
Age	.714	1.049
Education	.820	.900
Model	$R^2 = .126$ (Nagelkerke)	$R^2 = .158$ (Nagelkerke)
Sig :	$\chi^2=19.141$, df= 11, n.s	$\chi^2=24.028$, df= 11, p<.05
*.05,		
** .01,		
*** .001		