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**Georgian prison torture videos and their socio-political
consequences**

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June 2013

Abstract

Prison torture videos disseminated in Georgia in September 2012 were significant to Georgian people, because they uncovered negligence of officials and abuse of basic human rights of protection. People protested the system, which was unable to prevent the violence, and moreover, was implementer of brutal harassment of inmates.

Immediate protest rallies were scheduled online, without any political leader. Social media and primarily Facebook served as the platform for expressing indignation stimulated by the case. Young Georgians were active and uncompromising, being on the foreground of the events. I decided to study the impact of the videos and its online exposure, and gain deeper insight regarding the impact of social media on political attitudes and engagement on young Georgians. By monitoring and analyzing Facebook groups created in response to violent footages, as well as Youtube comments to the videos and nine semi-structured interviews, this study examines the capacity of the case to alter political position and activism of young Georgians, while addressing their motivations for political activism.

Key words: political engagement, social media, uses and gratifications, Georgia, youth

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Chapter 1. Prison torture videos and socio-political climate in Georgia

Introduction

The first chapter of the thesis serves as an exposition to the case study and before moving to initial research and analysis, I describe background information of the case, including description of media reports, which grows into discussion on the purpose and structure of the thesis. As Creswell stated (2006), case study must have time and space limits, therefore geographical scope of my case is Georgia with the special focus on its capital, and the time limit of approximately two weeks – from September 18 until October 2, 2012. This chapter chronologically tells important events to get to know the case, then it informs on central research and sub-research questions to explicate the main focus and interest of the thesis within the story. Next, it defines social and scientific relevance to legitimize the academic value of the research. Structure of the project is also being discussed in the final part, with supporting information on research method and analysis.

* * * * *

Initially, I start by introducing the event. September 18, 2012 turned out to be an important date in Georgian history, because Georgian people were exposed to the information, which made them protest the socio-political state administered by the ruling, Nationalist Party. It occurred that evening, after national television channels, shortly followed by social media, broadcasted several videos, depicting prison guards beating and sexually abusing prison inmates in Gldani Prison #8 in Tbilisi. The videos were first aired on Channel 9 and Maestro on Tuesday evening, September 18, 2012 (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2012). Although television was the first medium to air the videos, they were immediately spread through social networks, which spurred massive anxiety and outrage among Georgians, primarily because of uncovered brutal treatment of culprits (Dzindzikhashvili, 2012). Following the videos, it was primarily through Facebook's event page and statuses that people found out about spontaneously planned public demonstration near the city centre: users created pages and distributed the information

on the protest rally on Facebook. Consequently, roughly 2 000 protesters joined the gathering several hours after the dissemination of the videos. Alongside Facebook events, there were created number of pages such as “Put Bacho Akhalaia on Trial”, “Solidarity to Prisoners” or “Punish Akhalaia”, the members of which essentially communicated their indignation. Pages were abundant with anti-governmental rhetoric including ridiculing caricatures, aggressive posts and comments targeting officials or anonymous photos of harassed inmates.

Reuters, Russia Today and several other media outlets published videos depicting public protests from their perspective. The demonstration, which was organized the same evening, was labeled as “spontaneous” (Reuters, 2012). Recordings show avenues and central area of the capital being blocked by protesters. The voiceover of the Reuters (2012) video report emphasized content of the posters held by protesters saying “successful police reform!!!”, and “punish the executioner”, illustrating crossed portraits of the president and his administration. The messages communicated through these placards voiced public indignation towards the authorities, putting at response those who were running the country. Furthermore, in the video, there appeared young adults holding and waving brooms in expression of violence, rape and humiliation. It is also noteworthy, that most of the participants seemed to be young, some of them wearing T-shirts with the images of crossed brooms. The voiceover highlighted attendees demand on resignation of heads of justice and interior ministry. The video covered alternative viewpoints to the case, stressing the government’s claim that the tortures were staged. According to sources of Reuters (2012) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (2012), another version suggests that the guards have been bribed by the opposition to perform and record violent acts with the purpose of winning the upcoming parliament elections. Although I don’t research the roots of prison torture scandal, these are the details which are important for getting the sense of the overall setting. As a public response, on September 19, 2012 Georgian people gathered in the streets of the Georgian capital, without any political leader and marched peacefully, blocking central avenues of the city. As a result to wide public accusations, which was visible on Facebook and protest rallies

with numerous participants, the Minister of Interior Affairs – Bacho Akhalaia and the Minister of Corrections, Probation and Legal Assistance – Khatuna Kalmakhelidze resigned from their posts, citing moral and political responsibilities as the reasons for their leave (Reuters, 2012).

Despite gradual decrease in popularity and public support, in the meantime the ruling party was considered as the potential winner in upcoming parliamentary elections, however the prison scandal challenged their chance for success at a great extent (“Georgia Prison Abuse,” 2012). All at once, the opposition grouping lead by Georgia’s richest man – Bidzina Ivanishvili, won the elections and came to power. It is interesting to examine if population was so influenced by videos and consequential political activities, that it indeed affected voting results and portrayed different Georgian reality. It must be clarified, that I am specifically concerned, if dissemination of videos and resulting outbreak of responses on social networks, changed political preferences of young internet users, or not, and how it altered political behavior in terms of engagement, which could have reflected in the subsequent elections.

On the other day after spreading the videos, thousands of supporters of victims gathered in Tbilisi, as well as other Georgian cities to express solidarity to the sufferers and indignation towards the ruling party. Documentary photographs (Shmalov, 2012; Nebieridze, 2012) portray young civilians with placards. Posters held by youngsters conveyed different messages: “going to jail = dying in jail”, “Human Rights”, “Sober up”, “Justice is raped”, “So, brooms require instructions?”, “Everyone to jail”, “F*ck you, I won’t do what you tell me!” and “Your democracy hurts!”, as well as “stop the violence”, “Porn Film. Director: Akhalaia” and “I don’t need sex, the government f*cks me every day!”. Some of the protesters were shouting, others held megaphones:

Photo 1



As you can see in the photo below, one participant wears a mask imitating the film “V for Vendetta”. In the film it is worn by an obscure rebel, known to public as “V” and whose tactics to fight against the totalitarian regime is violent and terrifying to people. It was attention-worthy, because youngsters’ feeling of resistance and nonconformity as their reaction and response to the case was demonstrated. This picture was not the only instance: the same “face” was posted various times on Facebook pages as well.

Photo 2



Apart from protest rallies and demonstrations, the fact that torture videos shattered the governing party's image became evident in the forthcoming elections. On October 2, after the elections, the president admitted his unanticipated defeat to an opposing Georgian Dream coalition, which was formed six months prior to the scandal. Before their formation and especially before the spreading of the videos, the Georgian Nationalist Party was considered as the main candidate for winning the elections (Harding and Elder, 2012).

This project aims to conduct analysis of the case in its socio-political context, present chronological development and put emphasis on evidences of the case: more specifically, the core mission of this paper is to examine influence of the case on political attitudes and engagement of young Georgian adults. Sources for obtaining data to perform qualitative analysis vary from 2 Facebook pages and 94 Youtube comments on prison torture videos, to 9 semi-structured interviews with young adults aged 18-25. These three sources supplement each other, because while Facebook and Youtube enable to research users' reactions to the videos – their online political engagement and attitudes, in-depth interviews, along with researching influence on political attitudes and engagement, provide space for studying users' motivations. Political attitudes and engagement are both blanket terms and cover two concepts – outcomes and motivations: political attitudes and engagement as outcomes of the case, and motivations for having those attitudes and engaging in certain political activities. To relate the thesis to its theoretical underpinning, uses and gratifications (UG) theory was applied as an umbrella concept, which discusses users' motivations, psychological gratifications and needs for engaging in certain kind of activism with certain media (Shao, 2008). This project addresses new media in particular, so UG is put in the context of the internet and social media. It expands on the discussion regarding the internet's influence on political engagement, because it enables to argue on psychological needs and impact of online videos on users' political activism. Hence, the theoretical chapter converses not only about UG, but the internet's capacities to influence political engagement and attitudes in general. I address four psychological needs by Park, et al. (2009) for engaging in discussions on social media, in addition to slacktivism, which is a term used by Morozov (2009) to describe inauthentic political activism, without life-changing consequences. It is interesting to observe people's online reactions and assess their activities on the virtual platform, because it will enable to determine the impact of videos' online exposure and consecutive outburst. As a result, the thesis will answer the following central research question: *“How did the internet outburst, ensuing dissemination of violent videos, which*

depicted harassment of prisoners, influence political attitudes and engagement of young Georgian adults?”

Four sub-research questions, deriving from the central query have been formulated:

- 1. What were the young Georgian internet users’ reaction to the videos? RQ1*
- 2. How did the videos and consecutive online processes alter users’ political preferences and attitudes? RQ2*
- 3. What was the impact of the videos and successive online outburst on users’ political activism? RQ3*
- 4. What were the motivations for users’ online political engagement? RQ4*

It is a common practice for scholars to imply their idea and provide own indicators of key words depending on the focus of the research (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003). I offer my interpretation of “political engagement”, which is shared by Boulianne (2009), however, taking into consideration focus of the thesis, I exclude some concepts, such as general political knowledge and concentrate on online and offline political engagement – in terms of voting and attending rallies. Forms of political engagement was primarily discussed through Facebook and Youtube analysis, while in-depth interviews enabled to raise awareness on the motivations and gratifications of the target group to engage with certain kind of media. In “political attitude” I primarily consider voter’s support towards a specific political group and their vision of political parties (Boulianne, 2009). The reason for selecting “young adults” – people within 18-25 age segment, as a target group, is that they represent vibrant part of the society, have strong sense of resistance and were important contributors to political activities during the prison case (Democracy and Freedom Watch, 2012).

Scientific relevance

Scholarship on discourse of the internet (social media in particular) and its influence on political engagement has diverged into different directions beginning from skeptical approach, proceeding to optimistic visions and consequently, relatively balanced judgments, based on empirical data (Chadwick, 2009). Since previous research on the internet and political engagement offers different and frequently contradictory perspectives (Putnam 1995, 2000; Shulman 2005; Bimber 1999), I assume that particular socio-political and cultural context significantly determines validity of a certain theory. Understanding how online exposure of the videos influenced political attitudes and activism of the public can verify one of the academic notions and serve as a supportive real-life example. Furthermore, putting the thesis in uses and gratifications theoretical context aims to study users' incentives to engage and hold to social media while communicating their political ideas during the case time period. Generally speaking, this paper relates to and strives to broaden academic discourse around the new media (internet) and political engagement, as well as seek uses and gratifications of users for engaging in a certain kind of political activism, while using certain medium. As a reflection of the Georgian case, it offers perspectives on the aforementioned academic discussions. It must be noted that, the academic materials are Western-based and there is lack of scientific research on Georgia. Academic value of this topic is that it aims to provide new insights on the impact of the internet on political engagement and attitudes, as well as the uses and gratifications theory within the Georgian framework. It can also contribute to understanding how the internet is used to mobilize people around shared idea and therefore, expand discussion on the capacity of the internet as a political transformer.

This research tries to understand peculiarities of Georgian society in relation with a specific case and social media – an important tool in affecting and setting socio-political trends (DiMaggio et al., 2001). Taking into account magnitude of the interest, the case is based on scholarly foundation of such authors as Shao (2008), Ruggiero (2000), Shulman (2005), Chadwick (2009), Putnam (1995), Bimber (1999) and Boulianne (2009) – the scholarly foundation of which expands on discourses of Polat, (2005) Loumakis and Bergman (2003) and on the other hand, Barber (2001), Krueger (2002) and Ward et al.

(2003). These authors debate on the internet's impact on political engagement from different perspectives and offer their academic groundwork, as well as discuss gratifications and psychological motivations of users to engage with certain kind of media with certain purpose. It assists in deepening research regarding impacts of technological developments on political engagement, which as suggested by Bimber (1999), is the next step in his "search for effects of information technology" (p. 53). Instead of generally studying Georgian society as an independent organism, this paper analyzes its reaction and response to a particular occurrence and tries to draw conclusions derived from a particular setting. As a continuation to Boulianne's (2009) research on Internet use and political engagement, this project will try to add value to the discussion by examining how the exposure of videos on the virtual platform influenced political engagement in Georgia in September.

Social Relevance

Studying the process which was socially important makes the project interesting for people, who were somewhat influenced by the case. The fact that the disseminated prison torture videos resulted in wide Facebook outrage, as well as protest rallies and demonstrations in the Georgian cities, makes it socially pertinent and noteworthy. Moreover, its time and geographic approximation is important to Georgian people. The research was conducted 6 months after the case, so while conversing with people, they still seemed vulnerable and emotional as we discussed the events and moreover, they could clearly recall their behavior and sentiments.

I chose to investigate social feedback of the target group to prison torture videos and successive online discussions, because I believe it is useful to better understand how Georgian society operates under the given situation. It is socially germane in the Georgian context, because the videos challenged meantime government's genuineness, and uncovered pitfalls and faults in the probation and legal system, which had never been openly discussed before. It made people stand for their rights, voice their demands, unite and become supportive. Shortly-successive civil movement, despite its anti-governmental character, was primarily against violence and was without hidden political agenda or

motives, aiming chiefly human rights defense and social justice. The Prison scandal is assessed by the majority of natives, as one of the most painful and critical pages in modern Georgian history, with around nine students' youth organizations serving as the backbone for organizing protests (EurasiaNet, 2012). The thesis is useful to media scholars, as well as those people who research and are interested in recent Georgian prison case; those who want to know how internet contributed to organization of rallies, served as a platform for expressing political voices and attracting young people to participate in socio-political events.

Thesis Layout

As mentioned before, the aim of this thesis is to determine the impact of torture videos and resultant online outburst on political engagement and attitudes of young Georgian adults. I start my quest by reviewing relevant theory and academic works on the influence of the internet on political outburst and engagement, which include both opposing and supportive viewpoints (Putnam, 2000; Delli Carpini, 2000; Bimber, 2001; Boulianne, 2009). I also included studies of Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project (2009; 2010; 2012) on the Internet and political engagement, which is practical and research-based, rather than theory-based. Most importantly, my theoretical part expands on the uses and gratifications theory, in order to determine users' gratifications for engaging in any kind of political activism during the case (Ruggiero, 2000; Park et al., 2009), which is then discussed from the case perspective in the "results" chapter. Further, the methodology chapter discusses central and sub-research questions, as well as three different sources for data collection and content analysis. Justifications for how chosen methods and derived results will respond to the research questions are also discussed. Afterwards, based on previously determined categories, while staying open to interpretations, I offer results of Youtube and Facebook analysis, proceeded with the analysis of nine semi-structured interviews. The final, concluding chapter of the thesis is the discussion section, which provides brief responses to my research questions, summarizes findings, and brings up theory and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2. Theory and previous research

Introduction

Before analyzing the case, it is vital to discuss relevant theories and previous research, which serve as the academic foundation for the analysis and enable to dive deeper into the academic explanations of the case. While assaying previous practical research and theories associating the internet and social media, it is important to distinguish bilateral nature of the discourse: first - the impact of individual's prior political interests and engagement on social media activities, and vice versa - the influence of social media usage on political interest and engagement. This chapter discusses research on both approaches, because despite the fact that my focus is the latter (generally speaking, the impact of social media on political engagement), for extensive understanding of the issue, it is important to examine the case and related theory from various perspectives. The case will pose as an illustration expending on below-discussed theories regarding the internet's capacity for altered political engagement, while putting political engagement in uses and gratifications perspective and building upon academic work of Shao (2008) and Park et al., (2009) who expands on UG from the perspective of new media.

Generally, it is believed that the internet has positive, small, either negative impact on users' political activity (Boulianne 2009; Putnam 1995; Shulman 2006; Barber 2001; Day, Janus & Davis, 2005). I will try to apply to the case and build upon prior academic concepts and reveal, whether the internet engaged politically indifferent population, or not under this particular circumstance. It is important to relate, analyze and explain the case using scientific notions, and see, which relevant Western-based theories it reinforces, taking into account that there is no much theory for the Georgian context exclusively. Keeping in mind academic concepts, I would thus like to test and fit the case within the most applicable theoretical framework, while remaining open to other interpretations, due to the uniqueness of the case.

Uses and gratifications and online political activism

Results of the analysis of the case, will serve as the evidence reinforcing previous academic notions about the internet's capacity to influence political engagement. Apart from addressing forms of responses to a certain occurrence, the thesis also projects users' motivations for their responses, which expands on uses and gratifications theory (McQuail, 1994; Ruggiero, 2000).

In general, UG studies media from the perspective of individual's gratifications and psychological needs (Blumler and Katz, 1974) and is a useful framework to study individual's needs in relation with the internet usage (Park et al., 2009). Uses and gratifications theory is concerned with consequences, that follow from needs, motives, and behavior of the user (Blumler and Katz, 1974). In my case, uses and gratifications theory contextualizes people's motivations for engaging in online political and relating offline activism after being exposed to the videos and online discussions. Gratifications such as self-exposure, interaction, or connection with relevant circles can test validity of political engagement (Shao, 2008). Although genuineness of political activism is not the main focus of the thesis, however it is still an important aspect of broader – users' motivations and supplements the overall research on uses and gratifications. UG tries to explain incentives for online activism and questions the authenticity of their engagement. It is especially relevant, because youth as the target audience of the research has frequently been criticized for political indifference, counterfeit activism or misuse of political potential of digital media (Putnam, 1995; 2000; Shulman, 2006; Xenos & Foot, 2008).

Scholars have various approaches to UG offering own categorization of needs depending on the form of media (Katz et al., 1973; Park et al., 2009). Along with examining theoretical perspectives on the internet's socio-political effects, I check on motifs for online civil and political activism, subsequent to videos' online exposure. Relevant theoretical work leading to uses and gratifications theory (U&G) studies individuals' reasons and gratifications to consume certain media and engage in specific media behavior (Shao, 2008). Katz et al. (1973) put users' motivations to engage with certain media in 5 different categories: cognitive needs, personal integrative needs, social

integrative needs, affective needs and tension release needs. In my case, I discuss U&G perspectives on psychological needs of users to engage in online activities. Due to focus of my research, I narrow down the U&G discussion to needs for participating in groups within Facebook. With the new forms of media, uses and gratifications theory advanced as well. According to Park et al. (2009), factor analysis identified four basic needs for participating in online discussions and joining groups on Facebook, which were categorized as: socializing, entertainment, information and self-status seeking. In socializing, Park et al. (2009) implied need for peer support, meeting interesting people, sense of belonging and communicating with other people. Entertainment meant engaging in online media because of excitement and fun, while self-status seeking implied feeling of peer-pressure to participate, desire to look cool, or career purposes. The final need was information seeking, which includes desire to obtain information regarding on-campus and off-campus events, as well as useful information regarding products and services. These four categories can be put in two groups, which were identified by another research (Raacke et al., 2008): personal and social needs that users fulfill by engaging with Facebook.

Along with personal twist of uses and gratifications offered by Park et al. (2009), a relevant concept, regarding authenticity of political engagement on the internet is attributed to Fred Clark, when he first used the term “slacktivism” on Cornerstone Festival in 1995 (Christensen, 2011). This concept goes under the “self-status seeking” category of Park et al. (2009), because it implies inauthentic online political engagement without real consequences. Slacktivism merges terms “slacker” and “activism”, and can be defined as self-satisfactory activism on the internet, which doesn’t serve any real-life social or political purposes. Some scholars acknowledge that internet activism is futile, while it merely makes users feel good and productive about themselves (Shulman, 2005). It feeds into the uses and gratification theory, because UG suggests that users use certain media, because they have psychological motives and receive gratification by using it (Ruggiero, 2000), while Park et al. (2009) groups these motivations in four categories, as mentioned above. Slacktivism, as the term belonging to broader umbrella theory of uses and

gratifications, is concerned with the reasons, why people tend to engage in political discourses online and what are the social impacts of such engagement. The uses and gratifications theory (UG) primarily revolves around the individual as a research target, studying her/his motivations and psychological incentives for contributing to online content consumption, exchange and sharing (Shao, 2008). Gratifications offered by slacktivism is believed to be self-expression and realization, generated by posting statuses, joining groups, discussions or events, but in reality pointless alertness, which doesn't have tangible political and social consequences. To expand on this theory, according to Shao (2008), self-realization and actualization are the main inducements, which users get from producing own content. Six other purposes cited by Shao (2008) include entertainment, information, mood management, enhancing social connections, communities and sense of belonging, and aforementioned self-expression and actualization. Slacktivism, relating to self-actualization concept, is believed to be especially appropriate for "lazy-generation", when people prefer to fulfill their civic responsibilities merely by clicking and typing, rather than taking actions in the physical world, which on its own, can be rather dangerous (Morozov, 2009).

So, users' motivations can determine the capacity of the internet and social media to influence political engagement, because their needs define the way they utilize media and participate in political activism and that's why, the theory chapter further proceeds the discussion on the internet's impact on political engagement. The fact that the internet offers infinite amount of information and space for conversing doesn't automatically mean it is consumed and adopted by increased number of minds, but is dependent on the motivations and gratifications of users to consume the information. While attributing the internet potential of a social and political transformer, Kearns (2002) advises to pay special attention to a broader socio-economic background of the community which uses it, which influence individuals' gratifications (Park et al., 2009). Therefore, to visualize the link between the concepts, socio-economic factors can influence users' gratifications for using certain media, while these gratifications influence the capacity of the internet to operate as a political transformer. Kearns (2002) pinpoints that digital technologies don't

exist in a vacuum, therefore it cannot be politically neutral, but embedded within the society, the values of which determine its implications. Taking into account that capacities of the internet are dependent upon various social factors, it can be concluded that it has different implications in different societies and needs to be studied not as a remote, independent tool, but within its socio-political setting. As a result, sharing concepts of exclusively one particular group of scholars might not be necessarily valid for different cases.

To summarize the discourse on internet's socio-political capacities, gradually emerging different approaches suggest different assumptions regarding its effects on political engagement. User's gratifications can vary according to socio-economic features of an individual, therefore the internet's potential varies from case to case, being conditioned by gratifications and socio-economic, political and cultural characteristics of the community (Kearns, 2002).

Impacts of the internet on political engagement

Further section takes UG conversation to a further level because, if UG directly addresses and defines psychological needs of users, the debate on the internet's impact on political engagement argues on the reasons and forces for having those psychological motivations, may it be increased exposure to political content, peer pressure accompanied with social media, or entertainment. As a result, it covers three main branches of discourse and their sub-branches, addressing its negative, positive, either relatively neutral impact.

Comparing, contrasting and relating concepts to each other will make it easier to form one cohesive framework of the theory revolving around the central research topic. Issue-related theoretical concept on users' motivations for online participation will also be addressed, in order to theorize reasons for political engagement and conduct of the target group.

Generally, scholars studying the internet and its impact on social and political performance, form several opinion camps, with different approaches and perspectives diverging under them. Some academics believe that the internet has detrimental impact on and distorts political engagement, with people mainly surfing the internet instead of

engaging in civic or political activities (Boulianne, 2009). Others suggest the contrary – that it invites and entices politically inactive users to become more active and engaged, as well as offers already politically predisposed civilians the platform for actions (Barber, 2001; Delli Carpini, 2000). Further, some academics preserve relatively balanced approach, assert that although digital technology can be politically neutral, its effects vary depending on the context, created by social and political values of the population (Kearns, 2002). As a result, these scholars see reasons for excitement, as well as concern. Following aforementioned approaches to the internet’s political capacities, the conversation is further advanced by group of academics, who believe that digital media has infinitesimal effect whatsoever (Chadwick, 2009).

In support of the first notion, Putnam (1995) argues that the internet is primarily source for entertainment, rather than information, therefore it can have counter-effects on political engagement. While devoting more time to entertainment, they are distracted and allocate less time for virtual civil activities, such as joining groups and discussions, signing online petitions, etc. (Putnam, 1995). In his latter publication, Putnam (2000) proceeds that the actual decline of the civic engagement can be kindled by lack of interpersonal communication on the internet, which is the necessary premise for developing social engagement. The scholars find it a degrading standard for the notion of an “ideal citizen”, who is an active participant of communities and groups and an increased contributor to social capital (Bennet, 1998; Zukin et al. 2006). To reinforce Putnam’s skepticism on the internet’s positive political capabilities, Shulman (2006) conducted a research on “new digital landscape of electronic rulemaking through a case study in the US” and came to an end, that there is no “expanding and authentic discourses” online, which would augment the deliberation to more advanced level. Another scholar, belonging to the same opinion camp, who is doubtful about internet’s capabilities to alter political conduct is Bimber (1999), who suggests, that the internet merely provides space to those users, who were previously interested in politics and had prior knowledge on the subject; however, it doesn’t trigger interest and invite apolitical users to get involved in the discourse. Chadwick (2009) shares his opinion adding that this

platform provides discussion forums, which free citizens from *“the constraints of time and space and would provide additions to traditional policy-making structures ... [by being] autonomous, self-governing, flexible, unconstrained and self-consciously designed not to limit or narrowly channel citizen expression”* (p. 15).

Alternatively, those opposing Putnam’s (1995; 2000), Shulman’s (2006), Bimber’s (1999) and Chadwick’s (1999) notions, assert that the internet is primarily used as a tool for interaction, communication, information gathering and sharing, and therefore, instead of distracting, it serves as an invaluable source of data (Day, Janus, & Davis, 2005). This concept is further illustrated by Norris (2000), who asserts that internet doesn’t have capability to mobilize those participants, who are less concerned with politics, but only those, who are engaged in it in the offline world.

Such scholars as Barber (2001), Delhi Carpini (2000), and Krueger (2002) believe that Internet can mobilize inactive participants, attract their attention and engage in political activities. Broader access to information is believed to reduce indifference level (Boulianne, 2009) and moreover, create socio-psychological process which leads to extreme viewpoints and beliefs (Sunstein, 2001) Despite the fact, that political web-sites and blogs are primarily visited by those, who had previous interest in politics, social networks offer grounds, where people come across information, which might not necessarily be in their sphere of interest, however trigger their attention (Zhang et al., 2009).

Internet’s relation to political engagement was researched by Shelley Boulianne (2009), who performed meta-analysis of 38 different studies with 166 effects, in order to assess validity and justification of different concepts on the effects of the internet. Prolific meta-analysis concluded that the internet has positive effect on civil engagement, although it remains questionable, if its effects are substantial, or not. Core reason to affirm the internet’s transformative abilities, is its capability to reduce participation costs – time and effort spent to obtain information. Moreover, variety of information assortment gives platform for alternative viewpoints to exist, generating heterogeneous society.

It is generally agreed that social networks provide space for politically agitated citizens; as a result, citizens' discussions and conversations about politics can facilitate increased interest and desire to participate in further political activities among less active users (Katz, 1992). However, this approach implies the need of users for information, but excludes the notion of self-seeking, or socializing, which is about peer pressure or merely appearing to be "cool" (Park et al., 2009). Individuals are able to directly participate in democracy by obtaining content, sharing and interacting without any penetration and direct control from the authorities, and serves as the platform for free expression. Thus, the internet can be seen as a discussion forum, which offers equal opportunities to users to participate in deliberative democracy (Ferdinand, 2000). As a proof, governments with authoritative tendencies, with the fear of being exposed and resisted, see digital networking as a major threat and therefore, immediately target independent media and internet activists (bloggers, civil journalists) in times of increased protests, hoping to prevent e-mobilization (Juris, 2005). Existing independent space for expression and activism is certainly an invaluable feature for democracy, however authenticity of socio-political activism is questionable (Christensen, 2011).

Some scholars agree that youth might not necessarily be engaged in traditional models of civic and political activities, such as voting or signing petitions, however they might express their political standpoints and identities by alternative, previously unpracticed ways (Putnam, 2000; Skelton & Valentine, 2003). In defense of this concept, Skelton and Valentine (2003) assert that traditional measurement tactics for political engagement are not adequate to various forms of activism that youngsters pursue. As a result, this may cause exaggerated alarm about their indifference towards social and political concerns, because in fact, it may be that youngsters demonstrate unfamiliar and unconventional methods of civic engagement (Putnam, 2000). The combination of youth and internet is believed to be a new phenomenon, which creates novel forms of socio-political activism, that is why traditional assessment methods might not be fully applicable (Rheingold 2002; Jenkins 2006). It is a different topic, whether they practice slacktivism,

are inauthentic or their activities have no life-changing consequences in the physical world, however the fact that they are engaged is already noteworthy and laudable.

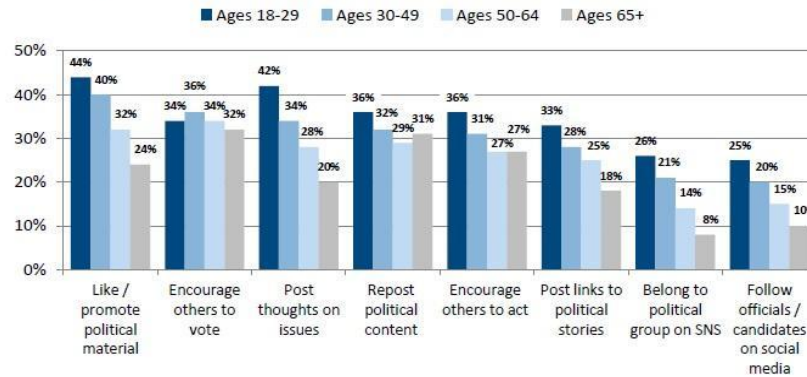
Apart from academic conversation, this section contextualizes recent practical research conducted within the framework of Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project in 2009, 2010 and 2012, which researched the relation between the internet and social media in particular, and civil and political engagement in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2012).

Age, in general is an important factor in determining patterns of social media use in relation with the political engagement as well as different gratifications, which differs youth from adults. Therefore analyzing young adults is expected to have different results than that of individuals over the age of 40. In addition to age, demographics is also an important factor while considering users' gratifications or patterns of internet use as stated by Park et al. (2009). Youth primarily is seen as technologically savvy (Ward, 2011). In this respect, the research conducted by Pew Research Center (2012) states, that youth is rather likely to exhibit online civic engagement including political activism, than the generation over 50. Activities pursued by youngsters range from posting and sharing own thoughts to encouraging others to take political actions, as well as posting relevant links, providing materials, joining political groups and supporting issue-relevant causes, which goes under the need groups of socializing, information and self-actualizing (Park et al., 2009).

The graph below depicts that online, politically most active age segment in the United States is 18-29. We cannot be absolutely confident that this graph applies to Georgian context. However, if we consider that the above-illustrated activism patterns are stipulated by Bennett's (2003, 2008) and Coleman's (2008) general characteristics of youth as autonomous and self-actualizing citizenry, then it can be assumed that similar tendencies can be valid for Georgia as well; it is because youth in general, in the epoch of the internet and digitally networked activism is believed to actively practice autonomous citizenship, which is alternative to conventional form of the "managed citizenship", usually controlled and moderated by the institutions in a top-down manner (Wells, 2010).

Younger social media users are more likely to use the tools for civic activities

% of users of social networking sites or Twitter who use social media these ways



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project Civic Engagement Survey, conducted July 16-August 7, 2012 on landline and cell phones and in English and Spanish. N for social media users ages 18-29=323. N for social media users ages 30-49=388. N for social media users ages 50-64=323. N for social media users ages 65+=167.

Figure 1

But the logical question which arises is, if youth exceeds the older generation in online political activism, then why does the offline world show the reverse picture? Xenos and Foot (2008) indicate on apparent declining rate in youth's civil and political engagement in the offline world, which is especially affecting the electoral contribution in past several decades. They agree and accept empirical evidences on youth's increased online activism in comparison to older generations, however their engagement is not positively related to voting trends. The instance, when youth exhibited simultaneous, relatively active online and offline political activism was in 2004 during the presidential elections in the United States. The reason for this is believed to be unrelated to new media, but the concern and interest of youngsters in Iraq war (Xenos & Foot, 2008). In support of Xenos and Foot (2008), Livingstone (2007a) believes that youngsters tend to demonstrate increased skepticism, cynicism and apathy towards politics and news media, despite their grasp and use of digital technologies and the internet.

As the Pew Research Center (2009) suggests, impact of the internet on political engagement will be interesting to examine, when current youth gets older and it will be possible to compare their engagement indicators to that of the older generation today. Then scholars will be able to assess this trend as the "generation change" and discuss the internet's merit, instead of seeing it as a "life-cycle phenomenon" (Pew Research Center, 2009).

To further enhance the discussion, findings of Pew research reveal that 66% of social media users in the United States, which is roughly 39% of the overall American adults, have engaged at least one political activity. The Pew Research Center (2012) also uncovered that users with firmer political beliefs are more inclined to online political activism, rather than relatively moderate users. This correlation of two variables (social media usage and political engagement) is the opposite “cause-result” process, which I am researching in this project. It addresses how primary political beliefs and engagement influence social media use, while focus of this project is the other way round - to shed light on the impacts of the social media on political engagement.

Another factor apart from age, influencing online political engagement, as concluded by the Pew Research Center on “The Internet and Civic Engagement” (2009), is user’s socio-economic status. It was revealed that there is a positive correlation between socio-economic profile and online, as well as offline political participation and activism; however, internet does not change characteristics of this engagement. Therefore, it can be claimed, that primarily individual’s personal background, rather than use of social media determines his/her online political activism (signing petitions, posting about social and political issues and etc.).

Political activity is highly correlated with income, whether that activity takes place online or offline

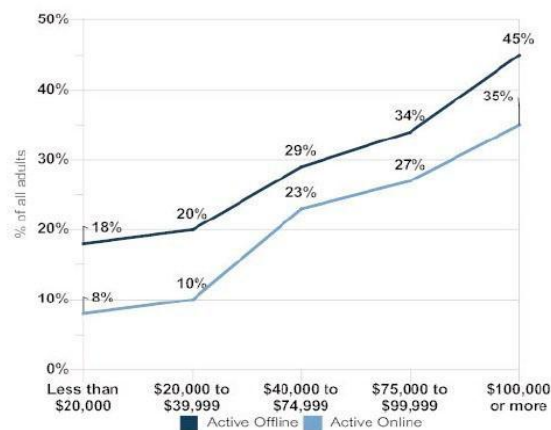


Figure 2

Figure 2 can also be stipulated by the fact that people with lower income are less likely to have the internet access, as well as education and confidence to engage in political discussions. Those people however, who are active online political participants, are most likely to be engaged in other forms of civil and political activities (Pew Research Center, 2009). They are believed to be more active in traditional forms of activism, in comparison to those who have inactive online political presence and those, who don't use internet at all. This research concludes, that:

Contrary to hopes of some advocates, the internet is not changing the socio-economic character of civic engagement in America. Just as in offline civic life, the well-to-do and well-educated are more likely than those less well off to participate in online political activities such as e-mailing a government official, signing an online petition or making a political contribution (Pew Research Center, 2009)

This statement undermines transformative capacities of the internet to influence political participation and puts emphasis on the individual's socio-economic aspect, which affects the use of the internet, as well as the degree of political activism. Despite this assertion, the internet's independent transformative capabilities are supported by part of scholars with auxiliary theoretical frameworks, who positively estimate its potential to modify users' civic and political conduct (Barber, 2001; Delhi Carpini, 2000; Krueger, 2002). In practice, studies discovered that those users who use social media and Facebook in particular, are more politically active, than those who don't use social networking sites (Pew Research Center, 2012). In addition, it was stated that those people who use social media as a platform for political activities have more diverse socio-economic background, than those who are engaged in traditional, either offline political activities. This triggers a doubt, whether diverse socio-economic background contributes to increased political engagement, or it is use of social media, which for its own part, is believed to be conditioned by diverse socio-economic context. If the study findings will be applied to the thesis, then it can be debated that Georgian's who used Facebook during the case showed

more political and civic activism. However, their engagement might haven't necessarily been the outcome of internet use, but rather, socio-economic factors at the individual level. While most of the studies are carried out in Western countries, unfortunately no relevant surveys have been conducted in Georgia, which would enable to narrow down the discourse on interaction of social media and political engagement to the local context.

Summary

The discussed literature suggests how scholars studying the internet's and more generally speaking, digital technologies' influence on political engagement have developed multidimensional perspectives regarding gratifications of individuals to use certain media. Apart from their polygonal attitudes, a noteworthy advise was to take into account broader socio-economic, cultural and political context while considering politically transformative capacities of the internet and social media. Academic concepts presented above, primarily disputed about the internet as an independent influencing factor on political engagement, meanwhile, practitioners highlight importance of personal setting on online political participation and motivations for participation, while bringing individuals' socio-economic context to the foreground, which is believed to be in positive relation with online political activism.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

Introduction

After introducing the case, describing events related to it and exploring previous theories, which serve as an academic foundation of the thesis, it is timely to shift the discussion to the research methodology, which combines research strategy, instruments and justifications for choosing selected methods. The discussion demonstrates how designed methods respond to the central research query and explore the impact of *Georgian prison videos on political attitudes and engagement of young Georgian adults*. I also illustrate how findings complement each other and create a cohesive framework of the results.

Research question and sub-questions

Initially, I try to examine the impact of videos' online exposure on young internet users. The main research question, which addresses the issue of the thesis, was formulated as:

How did the internet outburst, ensuing dissemination of violent videos, which depicted harassment of prisoners, influence political attitudes and engagement of young Georgian adults?

To narrow down the scope of the research, I am interested in online reflections of the videos, specifically on the social networking site – Facebook, such as political groups, events, statuses, comments and conversations, and its capacity as a political transformer. Furthermore, interrelation between the online discourse consequential to the videos and political engagement echoed in offline socio-political activism will be inspected. Firstly, I list sub-questions, which grow out of the central query and cover main aspects of it:

1. What were the young Georgian internet users' reaction to the videos? (RQ1)

This questions aims to discover users' reactions in general, narrowing down the notion of the "reaction" to approach to the videos, shifted attitudes and political

engagement. It is interesting to explore users' general responses to the case and then focus on political engagement specifically, because although it expands the scope of the case, it will shortly zoom out the focus and enable to see more general context of the case. As a further step, following two sub-research questions, more specifically address the central issue.

2. How did the videos and consecutive online processes alter users' political preferences and attitudes? (RQ2)

Georgian government was directly criticized and put responsible for violent acts in the prisons by the majority of people. Some people weren't doubtful about the authenticity of the videos, while others remained skeptical and questioned truthfulness of the person, who provided these materials short before the elections (Chance, 2012). Therefore it is interesting to put in the spotlight upshots of the videos on political attitudes of youth and see how a certain case altered their opinion.

3. How did the video materials disseminated through social media influence online political engagement? (RQ3)

This question primarily deals with the videos' impact on the virtual political engagement. It is vital to examine effects of the videos on online conversations and engagement, as well as its aftermath on social networks – political groups, events, pages or polls. It serves as the starting point in answering the central research question and commence analyzing corollaries on social networks.

4. What were the motivations for users' online political engagement? (RQ4)

Although I am interested in the outcomes of the case in terms of attitudes and engagement, I research motivations for political engagement as well. My research interest expands on and seeks to explore users' motivations for political engagement as well. Main theoretical reference here is the uses and gratifications theory, which was discussed in the previous chapter and serves as an academic groundwork of the thesis. The reason for

addressing users' motivations and gratifications derived from online political engagement is to evaluate wider societal implications of the case and test genuineness of users' political activism.

According to Creswell (2006), the case study analysis implies detailed description of the event and its setting. In this regard, multiple sources of data must be adopted, in order to ensure coverage of as many aspects of the case as possible. Taking into account Creswell's (2006) categorization of case studies, my project can be characterized as an intrinsic case study, because of its uniqueness, instead of being an instrument for illustrating broader issue. Expanding on Stake's (1995) four forms of data interpretation, with additional fifth criteria offered by Creswell (2006), I propose the following steps for obtaining and digesting the information: on the first place there is a description of happening, which in this case implies detailed illustration of facts taking place from September 18, when the videos first appeared on television and the internet, until 2nd of October, when the results of the elections were announced. It limits the case by time and location – which takes place in the Republic of Georgia and relevant online pages. For detailed description of the case, relevant articles, online publications and audio-video materials are studied and analyzed to draw a vivid picture of the events. Unlike Yin (1989), who practices both quantitative and qualitative approaches to a case study, this thesis espouses qualitative data analysis exclusively.

To carry thorough analysis of the case, the classical case study approach suggests multiple methods and sources of information, in order to avoid omitting and cover all important aspects of the issue (Creswell, 2006). Hence, my methods for obtaining data include content analysis and semi-structured interviews. As for the sources of information, they will range from respondents and Facebook pages to users' comments accompanying the torture videos on Youtube. While Facebook pages and Youtube comments facilitated studying the case in its natural setting, interviews helped gain deeper insights into youngsters' understanding of the research-related issues and zoom on their motivations for online and offline political activism. Thus, each method for data

collection had its advantages as well as restrictions in comparison to the other, and together formed a comprehensive strategy.

Content Analysis and data selection

Broadly speaking, the purpose of the analysis, as well as the interest of the research is to examine socio-political results of the videos and investigate users' reactions to them in terms of political engagement. It is within the scope of the research to perform qualitative study of users' responses both online (posts, membership of groups) and offline (attending rallies, demonstrations, elections), in order to effectively assess impact of the videos on the target group. Holsti (1968) defines content analysis as "any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages" (p. 608). My approach to qualitative data analysis can be labeled as interpretative, which is one among three major approaches for qualitative data analysis offered by Miles and Huberman (1994). It seeks to uncover "patterns of human activity, action and meaning", where human behavior, including their communication is the text and content for analysis.

According to Creswell (2006) any useful fact, which can add certain meaning to the case is valuable to draw the most precise picture and describe the case in details, therefore I have chosen several sources of data, including content of online communications on Youtube and Facebook, which depict public reaction to the case. Berg (2007), underlines that in order to objectively analyze messages implied in the study materials, there must be established "criteria of selection" prior to the data analysis. He characterizes these criteria as "reliability of measures and validation of eventual findings" (p. 242). However, on the other hand there exist grounded theory approach, which is an inductive process and instead of validating findings, it draws theories based on data analysis. I determine categories using both – inductive and deductive approaches, which is a practiced method and enables to preplan categories, while staying open to interpretations (Straus, 1987; Mayring, 2000). Moreover, practicing both inductive and

deductive approaches is also valuable for determining the relationship between the case and its theoretical perspectives (the internet's impact on political engagement and U&G).

Issue-related Facebook groups and pages, are virtual spaces where people communicated their responses, therefore analyzing messages and posts on the virtual platform is useful for examining online public feedback. Observing relevant social network pages, as well as Youtube video comments will serve to explore politically pertinent conversations, in order to project public reaction to the cause as well as shift in political attitudes. The purpose of findings and examining relevant online content is to discuss tendencies and patterns of political discussions on the virtual platform in its natural setting.

With the sub-research questions on mind, I have formulated aspects for analyzing online comments and sorted them in categories. Interview analysis also uses these categories, however taking into account that the interviews additionally deal with users' motivations (sub-research question 4), it uses additional category, which is discussed afterwards. Here, at the end of each category a research question is indicated, depending to which research question they respond:

- Reaction and approach to torture videos (RQ1)
 - Aggression
 - Skepticism
 - Fear
 - Tone of users – firm, categorical, reserved
 - Use of vocabulary – bad language
- Altered political preferences and attitudes (RQ2)
 - Increased incomprehension towards the Nationalist Party
 - Increased sympathy towards political parties other than the Nationalist Party
 - Unchanged political opinion
- Modified online political engagement (RQ3)
 - Propagation of political ideology and beliefs

- Increased conversations, debates, groups and pages
- Non-rational argumentations vs. deliberative argumentation

As for data sources, two Facebook pages including “Put Bacho Akhalaia on trial”(2012) and a group “Solidarity to prisoners” (2012) will be scrutinized. They were selected based on their ranking on the Facebook, having the most group members, with increased users contribution and consequently, richer data for analysis. I have found and selected the pages by typing keywords: “prison scandal Georgia”, “Bacho Akhalaia” and “violence in Georgian prisons”.

In addition to Facebook pages, valuable source for information are video comments on Youtube, where people directly convey their messages regarding the case. Number of prison torture videos were immediately uploaded on Youtube after being broadcasted on television channels. Comments on 2 of the most viewed videos¹ were selected and chosen for the analysis. Due to complexity of analysis, I have included a research methodology table (see below), for better explanation and visualization of quantity and type of data sources.

Table 2. Visual representation of research methodology

	Semi-structured Interviews	Protest videos	Photos of protests	Facebook pages	Youtube comments
Content Analysis	9	3	5	2	94

Semi-structured interviews

Further, semi-structured in-depth interviews were considered to be the most appropriate for determining impact of the videos’ online exposure on internet users, form of online feedbacks, gratifications for online participation, and social and political consequences, because it enables deeper insight in the discussion topics (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell &

¹ Video links: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YllCkXngsno> <http://rt.com/news/georgia-torture-prison-protest-455/>; <http://rt.com/news/prison-torture-saakashvili-enemies-572/>;

Alexander, 1990). Asking open-ended questions, such as *why* did they behave in a certain way, or *how* did they respond to videos and what was their reaction to politically agitated online users, can provide profound insight in social dynamics of the case. It also allows to bring in unplanned topics and new perspectives therefore, it is a flexible process for obtaining relevant data. Non-verbal cues of respondents, such as gestures and articulation won't be analyzed, because I am only analyzing the interview transcripts – being exclusively interested in the content of their speech, rather than gestural communication. Furthermore, analyzing non-verbal behavior implies additional method and goes beyond the scope of the project.

Although, it is impossible to respond to this question convincingly, it still can be argued that without the internet people wouldn't had had similar opportunities to mobilize their human resources and coordinate protests, because it offered the platform for political discussions and space where protest rallies were organized – encouraging political engagement this way.

Conducting individual qualitative interviews with young online users will enable to go deeper in examining their socio-psychological responses to the case and make them consider their decisions and actions. So, semi-structured qualitative interviewing was decided as the proceeding step of the research, because it facilitates analysis of complexity of the event within its real-life context and guarantees diversity of sources for evidence. By interviewing social network users, it becomes possible to dig deeper into their motivations, behavior and responses to the case at the individual level, as well as apply the four psychological needs offered by Park et al. (2009) to their gratifications.

According to Yin (2009), for interviews to serve as an effective research mechanism, it is vital to formulate its questions on the basis of the central research and sub-questions. However, depending on the fact that I plan to conduct semi-structure interviews, pre-determined questions will be combined with those questions, which naturally surface during the conversation and weren't preplanned to ask, however were appropriate. This way, the dialogue won't be bounded and enable to zoom in the answers that are especially relevant to the research. Open-ended questions also increase

possibility of receiving exhaustive responses, ensuring that no important matters are omitted. Face-to-face conversations can decrease the risk of inaccuracy and deceptive answers, which can be identified by gestures, facial expression and voice of the respondent – important visual messages apart from content of the speech.

Selection of respondents and data analysis

The unit of analysis derived from the problem of the case, which in this particular occurrence, is the impact of online videos' on young Georgian adults, therefore it is fair to identify politically engaged young online users as the target group. After conducting content analysis and selecting part of online participants through Facebook pages, users were directly contacted through the internet and invited for the interviews. Due to difficulty to invite strangers for the interviews, my personal acquaintances were also my respondents. It eased the process of talking potential interviewees into being interviewed, and furthermore, the fact that they were my acquaintances increased respondents' trust and honesty. In total, 9 individuals participated out of which 5 were my acquaintances, either friends of friends.

The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. After gathering interview recordings, the next step was to summarize and structure its main points, while decreasing them in size. Gathered data was analyzed in a qualitative manner. To enhance quality of data collection, I used categorical aggregation, which serves as a tool for identifying correlating meanings and common characteristics from multiple data. It means that "collection of instances" will be sought in the information with the purpose of detecting an issue-related meaning (Creswell, 2006). Creswell (2006) explains usefulness of categorical aggregation by defining that "it is a process of pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful way" (p. 154). Following the categorical aggregation, I listed themes, which logically sort the responses to answer the central research question. On the other hand, through direct interpretation, I was able to draw conclusions from single instances, such as separate online posts and particular response of

an interviewee, without trying to relate to other respondent feedbacks or meaningfully link different sources of data.

Interview questions

With the central research query and relating sub-questions as the foundation for the interview questions, participants were asked about their internet experience prior and after the case, because by contrasting users' online engagement patterns, I can ascribe it to and measure the impact of the videos' and resultant online discussions. I started interviews by shedding light on users' primary reaction to the videos and their resultant behavior, so that respondent's recall in details what their response was and if an emerging pattern can be identified. what forms of political engagement they practices (if any). The interview section which contains questions addressing every issue raised in the sub-research questions, aimed to describe the internets' potential to invite citizens into political discussions, as well as determine reasons for partaking or avoiding online political activism. The complete interview guide is included as an appendix.

Summary

In this chapter, I overviewed research questions and sub-questions, and methodologies applicable for answering these queries effectively. For clarification and transparency of the research process, sources of information, as well as techniques for selecting these sources have also been explained. Based on the fact that the thesis is a case study, it seeks multiple sources of information and combination of research methods – content analysis and semi-structured interviews. Each method was discussed in separate sub-chapters, with respective units of analysis in the end of each of them. The interview part was further divided in several sub-chapters, due to its complexity.

Chapter 4. Results

Introduction and chapter overview

After introducing the Georgian context of the prison torture videos, its theoretical underpinnings and designed research methodologies for data collection and examination, now the focus is shifted to reporting the results derived from data analysis. Initially, this chapter tries to respond to the central research question of the thesis: *“How did the online exposure of prison torture videos and consequential online discussion influenced political attitudes and engagement of young Georgian adults?”* In order to ensure exploring different angles of the thesis, five sub-research questions were elaborated based on the central query, which were used to structure the results. Sub-research questions that this chapter tries to cover were formulated as:

- 1. What were the young Georgian internet users’ reaction to the videos?*
- 2. How did the videos and consecutive online processes alter users’ political preferences and attitudes?*
- 3. What was the impact of the videos and subsequent online outburst on users’ political engagement?*
- 4. What were the motivations for users’ online political engagement?*

Considering the fact that data sources included interviews and user-generated online content (Facebook and Youtube comments), different sources deal with research questions from different perspectives. The answers to all research questions are addressed and covered by nine individual interviews with young Georgians, while analysis of Facebook and Youtube comments supplement the information obtained through the interviews, however they don’t address individuals’ motivations, which was impossible to research by studying the comments. Analysis of online comments gave the opportunity to discuss users’ reactions to torture videos (RQ1), altered political attitudes (RQ2) and related online political outburst (RQ3). The interviews in addition, enabled to gain deeper insights in users’ political engagement, as well as motivations and gratifications (RQ4).

3 main information sources have been integrated in order to obtain all-embracing data and draw the most precise picture of the case. Content analysis was the main method for digesting all data (Creswell, 2006), therefore the study was divided into three parts – content analysis of Youtube comments, Facebook pages, and finally, in-depth interviews with the selected online users.

I started analysis of public reaction, by studying users comments on 2 torture videos on Youtube²³, which provide valuable data for exploring public feedback and discussion of the case. As a continuation of studying public reaction, this chapter further reports analysis of comments on two Facebook pages, which were created in the beginning of the case, on September 19, 2012 in support of the tortured victims. The report of results is finalized with the interview section, which was the final step for data collection.

The prison scandal and consequent public response on Youtube

As mentioned above, the present sub-chapter informs on results of comments' analysis of two Youtube videos, which reflect citizens' reactions to the videos and online political engagement and creates cohesive whole with the Facebook analysis. It seeks to explore users' responses and reactions to the prison footages, which were posted online, as well as monitor online political outburst. 94 Youtube comments and 2 Facebook pages have been analyzed with emerging categories relating to the theoretical background and research questions:

- Reaction and approach to torture videos (RQ1)
 - Aggression
 - Skepticism
 - Fear
 - Tone of users – firm, categorical, reserved
 - Use of vocabulary – bad language
- Altered political preferences and attitudes (RQ2)

² Prison torture video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RZWQcPceSg>

³ Prison torture video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vzpPF3un4k>

- Increased incomprehension towards the Nationalist Party
- Increased sympathy towards political parties other than the Nationalist Party
- Unchanged political opinion
- Modified online political engagement (RQ3)
 - Propagation of political ideology and beliefs
 - Increased conversations, debates, groups and pages
 - Non-rational argumentations vs. deliberative argumentation

It was emphasized in the introduction chapter of the project how prison videos spurred outrage among Georgian people, however looking at the video comments on Youtube, they clearly depict not only Georgians', but foreigners' negative reaction to the case as well, inviting and enabling them to converse, however foreign users exceed the scope of the research and will be omitted. To structure the results, I address each category step-by-step and discuss the relevant comments which fit within the category, while staying open for interpretations and elaborating where necessary.

Initially, I start analyzing those comments, which convey reactions towards the videos, considering aggression, skepticism and fear as the main categories. Aggression, skepticism and fear were identified based on tone, vocabulary and content of messages. Youtube was abundant with negative comments dense with swearing remarks, however skepticism towards the genuineness of the videos was hardly identifiable:

This is really so offending. Changing the president wouldn't make a difference. Hitting and abusing a prisoner by these prison guards is like watching a pack of hyenas feeding upon a carcass. These guards should be identified and publicly humiliated just like they have misused their power. These mindless cowards should be ashamed.

The authors' aggression is focused on responsible parties at a lower level, who are the executioners of orders, while other users' hostility is primarily aimed at the minister of Interior Affairs and the governing organ: "Akhalaia and Kalmakhelidze [...] they've destroyed my country, killed and tortured my people!" or "Saakashvili and others deserve death penalty!!!". The last comment is inciting violence and is not the only response, which insists on punishing Georgian officials: "Saakashvili, your family must be treated in the same way!". Some people felt deeply offended and insulted, as well as ashamed of fellow tyrant civilians, assessing the case as defamatory for Georgian people as a whole and tried to defend the image of nation: "We are Georgians. It was a shock for us to watch these videos for the first time. We are all humiliated by these vandal acts" or "Good and bad are in every nation! These people are sadists, I agree, but not every Georgian behaves like them!". Reactions varied, however none of them carried positive undertone, were mostly sympathetic towards the tortured inmates and condemned government's oppression. Users' reaction to the videos is further reported in the Facebook analysis and Interview sections.

Altered political attitudes was the second aspect of analyzing online comments. From most of the feedbacks it was impossible to conclude, either deny shift in political preference, because I didn't have the sufficient information on people's political viewpoints prior to the case. In this regard, interviews helped to ask and compare political attitudes and provide more thorough analysis of the impact of the case on political preferences. One significant comment underlying change in political attitude after the case said: "I was for Saakashvili, but after this, f*ck Georgian government". In general, all Georgians participating in the discussion spoke against the Nationalist party, without a single case trying to defend and justify their actions. Majority of comments qualified the case as "shameful", "disgusting", "insane" and "sadist", pointing on the President and his intellectual comrades as being exclusively responsible for "inhumane brutality against the inmates". On the other hand, the only comment carrying relatively balanced approach towards the Nationalist party, said that "it has nothing to do with the President" but "it is

a proven human nature” and recalled the Stanford prison experiment as an equivalent Western example (Ronald Crabtree, 2012). It must be noted that the author isn’t Georgian, but from the United States of America and that none of the commenter engaged in further polemics with the person having alternative viewpoint.

Extreme viewpoints, such as “I hate you Saakashvili and wish you death”, clearly present indignation against the Nationalist Party. Apart from predetermined categories, overall sense derived from scrutinizing the comments was that people appeared rather united, uncompromising and like-minded: the degree of extremism and aggression however, varied. There were several instances, of extreme commentary when users pressured and offended people, who would vote for the Nationalist party, appealing to their consciousness: “if anyone after watching this video dares to vote for Saakashvili, they deserve to be treated equally”. This message sounding like an ultimatum, communicates the author’s firm approach: if not with us, then against us. However, due to small sample size and absence of supportive examples, it cannot be generalized that those with anti-governmental attitude were offensive towards alternative viewpoints. Moreover, as previously mentioned, relatively balanced user “Ronald Crabtree”, who didn’t point on Saakashvili as the main offender, was left unreciprocated. As a result those sharing different views than the majority of Georgians, preferred to keep silent – this however, making the conversation unilateral and unbalanced.

In terms of online political outburst, it is noteworthy that none of the comments propagated political ideology or used this instance to disperse messages with political agenda. While damaging the image of the Nationalist Party, political discussions on Youtube during the case didn’t fuel the success of any other political party in particular. Although communicated political comments were strongly anti-governmental, however they were not supportive to other groups. In addition, one user called to keep away from advertising any political ideology, however it cannot be asserted as a trend, but instead a single instance of an appeal. It is also an attention-worthy comment, because it called students for action and political engagement:

We plea all the students to join the protest “Students’ Solidarity to Prisoners” in front of the Tbilisi State University tomorrow at 3. Please, don’t wear political t-shirts and don’t demonstrate your political ideology! Instead, let’s sincerely condemn existing Fascism!

This message underlines some people’s effort to preserve political neutrality, while avoiding to turn into instruments for voicing political parties, but instead, aimed to independently protest against the ruling system and the violence accompanying it. It also demonstrates how people use Youtube for mobilization, communicating political messages and getting in touch with those who share the same opinion on a certain topic. Although, primary purpose of Youtube and social media isn’t political mobilization, but as Putnam (2000) argues – communication or entertainment, people tend to adjust the virtual platforms according to their socio-political or cultural backgrounds (Kearns, 2002). As a result, they exploit differently and stimulate different socio-political consequences depending on contexts: internet’s potential therefore, is highly determined by how people and organizations utilize it for political engagement, mobilization and information distribution (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003). The fact that the author of the comment tries to connect with like-minded civilians and create unity with a specific purpose, contributes to community development, which can be short-existent, but vigorous and purposeful. From theoretical perspective, in this case the internet gives space to political conversation leading to better informed citizenry (information on time and location of demonstrations), which can enhance political engagement (Bimber, 2001). Pathos of the author is encouraging: Youtube operated as an engine for directly inviting people into political activism, which can contribute to increasing political engagement. Putting analysis in the theoretical prism of the thesis regarding the internet’s impact on political engagement, I am assert that Youtube, by providing space for political discussions, gives opportunity for already engaged citizens to advance their discussions; however it is questionable, to which extent it invites inactive users to become politically engaged, especially on the long-run.

During the case, after analyzing the comments on torture videos, I can conclude that Youtube served as a tool for political expression. This case proves how people communicate their political messages and argue with each other using the internet as a medium: It indicates how different socio-political events alter aims which internet serves. Additional space for conversation created by the internet, doesn't necessarily have detrimental effect on political outburst and activism. Those, who contradict this idea and consider it harmful for civic and political life, bring "slacktivism" as an example of inauthentic political outburst and activism (Morozov, 2009). However, I see slacktivism as an independent variable, practiced by previously apolitical users: those users' who are and were politically authentic, are highly unlikely to practice slacktivism, but it is mainly practiced by previously inactive users – which I believe is more valuable, in comparison to complete inactivity. However, to preserve boundaries of the present project, I will not further argue on positive effects of slacktivism and alter the focus to the analysis of Facebook pages and groups.

Public Response on Facebook

Two of the most active and dynamic political Facebook pages with the most number of members were chosen for analysis, in order to ensure increased public engagement and therefore – richness of data. Analysis of these pages, on one hand "Put Bacho Akhalaia on trial"⁴ and "Solidarity to prisoners"⁵ on the other, deal with and enable to answer first three sub-questions of the thesis, regarding users' reactions to the videos, as well as their influence on political attitudes and engagement and on online political outburst. I applied previously determined categories to online political conversations, underlying inductive approach to the research. Initially, creation of these Facebook pages already indicate on increased political activism stimulated by the case, because otherwise, it was the cause for creating these virtual spaces.

⁴ You can visit the page "[Put Bacho Akhalaia on trial](#)" by pressing the hyperlink.

⁵ Link to "Solidarity to Prisoners" - <http://www.facebook.com/SolidarobaPatimrebs1?fref=ts>

The page “Put Bacho Akhalaia on trial” was created on September 19, the day after broadcasting of the videos. I was interested to find out if the page creators were young people, however despite writing to them, I didn’t get a reply. Being oriented on criticizing only one person, the narrow focus of the group resulted in attacking and disparaging mainly Bacho Akhalaia, posting his caricatures and scolding him. While evaluating reactions and users’ approach to torture videos, aggressive comments were the most common. Aggression was identified by tone and plot of the posts, which contained abusive vocabulary and bad language: “I detest every member of the Nationalist Party blindly supporting Saakashvili, I hope you come to sensible decisions after all”, or “this rotten rascal must be severely punished!”, referring to the Georgian Minister of Interior Affairs - Akhalaia. The page was abundant with firmly anti-governmental political attitudes and demand for “justice”, which implied punishing authorities responsible for prison torture: “Akhalaia must pay back for everything he did!”, “current criminal authorities are no different than past Georgian government and imprisoning them is not enough”. Gratifications, which attract and hold users to the social media with the purpose of criticizing Georgian government, or calling for punishment cannot be identified, because I didn’t have an opportunity to speak to every user. However, motivations are researched in interviews, as I was able to directly ask about their gratifications. Reactions such as fear or skepticism regarding authenticity of footages were not present – the majority of users who were posting during the case, were hostile and violent. Anger towards Akhalaia and his team members speaks about public support of the tortured victims, because people’s indignation was caused by inhumane treatment of inmates by the authorities.

Comments with alternative political approach, defending the minister and the Nationalist Party, appeared several months later, which raises the question regarding users’ reason for avoiding participation back in September. It must be emphasized that none of the comments tried to protect the Nationalist Party’s position during the case, however two users – “Guranda Lemonjava” and “Ambebi Chorebi” became Akhalaia’s active advocates only in March 2013, when the whole process of criticism and discussions was brought to a conclusion. It can be argued that people with alternative perspectives

avoided starting debates and expressing themselves in September because of unforeseen consequences and stern tone of the majority. Defendants in this particular case, voiced their standpoints only after agitated population went moderately stable, because it was less likely to stimulate serious clashes. Aforementioned two users were the last ones to comment and engage with the page, roughly 5 months past the case.

Similarly to Youtube comments, it was difficult to identify the degree of influence of the case on political attitudes, because I didn't know users' political opinion prior to the case. Interviews supplement the analysis in this regard, because the respondents contrasted their attitude prior, during and after the case.

In contrast to the page "Solidarity to prisoners", was free from propaganda, because there was no instance of users promoting any political party or ideology. Video-related criticism against him was emotional (comments with numerous exclamation marks, caps locks and extended vowels) without structured argumentations: "Looooord, this is horrifying! it must be oveeeer!", "Resignation means nothing!!! He must be put in jail!!! Such radical, anti-governmental pages didn't exist before the case. All the analyzed Facebook pages were created only after dispersion of torture videos, thus, as there was no specially dedicated virtual space for criticizing Akhalaia and his teammates, there was less mobilized criticism. The page made anti-governmental rhetoric and criticism more collected and visible.

"Solidarity to prisoners" (2012) was the page with the most number of members, hitting 2626. The page was created right after the dissemination of the videos on September 19, 2012 identically to "Put Bacho Akhalaia on Trial" page, but unlike to it, went gradually inactive after the elections on October 2, 2012, going completely silent after January 29, 2013. The reason for leaving the page inactive can be ascribed to attaining its mission: the Nationalist Party lost the elections, with Georgian Dream Coalition taking over the management.

While carrying out the analysis built on the first category regarding users' reactions and approach to prison videos, the first most visible and eye-catching message that appeared on the page was the cover photo, which said: "F*ck the system, they cannot

imprison us all!”. The most important about the cover photo were multiple likes and shares, which illustrate the page members tendency to sort the public in two groups: “them” – who are supporting the violent system and the system executives and “us” – inmates and people, who are the victims of the system. Users’ posts here were also dense with aggression: “Beware of angry people, the end is near [The Nationalist Party]”. Amount of anti-governmental posts indicated that joining the virtual community “Solidarity to prisoners” automatically meant criticizing the administration. Rhetoric of the page admin during the case period was strongly anti-governmental, inciting resistance and calling people to demand justice and put the meantime ruling party on trial. I was interested to know if the page creator was also a young adult, however I couldn’t contact admins. However what I’m interested are people and public, therefore it didn’t alter the outcome of the thesis much. By directly interpreting users’ feedbacks, it can be summarized that all the page members agreed and shared admin’s radical opinion against the Nationalis Party. Photos uploaded by users were strongly oppositional, with statements such as “system failure”, “fear the people”, “punish executioners!”, “we never forget, we never forgive, we are Georgia!”. Based on sentiments, rather than rational consideration and reasoning, messages incited violence and aggression , rather than peace and stability. After the case, the page started posting off-topic materials, such as celebrity news and interesting facts, which didn’t receive as much feedback, as it was not its primary purpose. To draw parallels between the two pages, it can be concluded that overall rhetoric, tone and character of posts were identical: aggressive, strongly anti-governmental and violent. Origin, sources and authenticity of the videos were never questioned neither on Facebook, nor on Youtube. The majority of people acknowledged it as it was, but expressed no interest or doubt about the intentions of sources and processes of filming the prison violence. Only instance, when a user’s approach to the case was reason-based and the person doubted purpose of the videos was during the interview, which will be discussed in the successive section. Taking into consideration the fact that “Put Bacho Akhalaia on trial” had a special focus of criticizing mainly one person,

“Solidarity to prisoners” was broader in scope, targeting not only Akhalaia, but rather the Nationalist Party and its leader – Saakashvili.

As I previously mentioned, it was hard to apply and collect tangible results from the second category *altered political preferences and attitudes*, because of absence of sufficient data on users political frame of mood prior to the case. However, the fact is that the criticism and anger against the government, although possibly existent, was not so evident, because radical anti-governmental pages were created and massively disseminated after the case.

The third category *modified online political engagement* presented users’ activities, which were less common before the case, such as propaganda of political ideologies, increased conversations and debates, as well as non-rational argumentations versus deliberative argumentation. It is noteworthy that among other pages, liked by the “Solidarity to Prisoners” was “Bidzina Ivanishvili official” – who is the leader of the Georgian Dream Coalition. Thus, it can be argued that the page was not only anti-governmental, but pro-oppositional, having and communicating certain political ideology. Although the page doesn’t directly promote its political attitudes, the religious posts by the page-admin and pictures of priests and Georgian patriarch gives sense about the orthodox ideology which is was associated with. Political inclination of the page becomes especially vivid after posting another video, which is a recorded telephone call of Georgian criminal authorities condemning the Nationalist party and speaking for the Georgian Dream coalition. Although the parties engaged in the call clearly speak about criminal activities of bribing people to vote for Georgian Dream coalition, the page author comments, that he/she still believes it has nothing to do with Ivanishvili (Solidarity to Prisoners, 2012a). The video itself, has only one like and didn’t lead to further discussions about its authenticity: Georgian Dream coalition was perceived as the only alternative and rescue at that time, therefore it can be considered that people avoided discussing its faults and preferred to keep silent.

The page further served as a tool for posting announcements on protest time and locations, with multiple likes and shares, underlying the internet’s capacity for public

mobilization. A caricature depicting government representatives in a cage, pleading for help, as well as anti-governmental comments accompanying it, speak about people's demand to incarcerate the representatives of the Nationalist party. A link to an online poll – asking to express support to the victims and vote for one of the political parties – reflects the direct relation of the case to political preferences and attitudes of the population. After voting, I could see that the ratio between three options was unilateral: Georgian Dream coalition had 54 votes, the Nationalist Party – 0, and 0 again for Christian-democrats. Although the sample was small, it still underlines relative passiveness of supporters of the Nationalist, either other political parties. The group “Solidarity to Prisoners” in general, was abundant with anti-governmental rhetoric, including documentary photos, videos and articles from different media sources about the torture of prison inmates, therefore the poll results were not surprising. Ideological unity of group members resulted in one-sided perspective on the case and politics. The only comment with relatively even-tempered nature called users to keep calm and avoid posting negative commentary, otherwise they were turning into the violent horde themselves (Aladashvili, 2012). The comment however, received no support, either contradiction and was ignored.

I started by reviewing statistics of pages in the “page insights” section, where Facebook provides data analysis, such as the most popular and active week, or the most active age group. It turned out that the most popular age segment was 18-24 with the most popular week 16 September, 2012. This data underlines engagement and online political participation of youth, making them more active in online political outburst, than other age groups. Identically to the “Solidarity to Prisoners”, another page – “Put Bacho Akhalaia on Trial” reaffirms this notion. The most active age group there was 18-24, with the most popular week of September 16, 2012. The page went practically inactive after September 23, when it stopped posting any content, however page members proceeded to share and post comments, with the last post made on April 19, 2013. It was created on September 19, 2012 and remained vigorous for four days. In order to avoid fallacy of making conclusions based on two pages, I've checked three more page insights section of case-related online communities, with corresponding active age groups of 13-24 for

“Solidarity to Prisoners” (2012b) and 13-17 for the page “Defend inmates” (2012), which reinforces assumption on youngsters active online participation.

Taking into account the fact that Bacho Akhalaia, the meantime Minister of Interior Affairs of Georgia, was considered as the main person responsible for prison violence, I decided to examine discussions taking place on his supportive Facebook page. This way, I would be able to identify reactions of users who were pro Nationalist Party, instead of solely concentrating on its opposition, in order to ensure extensive coverage of diverse opinions. The outcome was that there were no discussions at all between September 19 and October 1, 2012. The last comment before the case was posted on September 18 informing about appearance and dissemination of the videos and its assumed organizers, while consecutive post was made on the following November, 6 which was a long post in the name of Mr. Akhalaia. Apparently, his opponents didn’t visit the page, either chose to keep silent, because all the posts were supportive: it is notable, that tone of his supporters was less extreme, more calm and peaceful, in comparison to those posting in “Solidarity to Prisoners” or “Put Bacho Akhalaia on Trial” pages.

To parallel the analysis results of both Facebook pages and relate them to the third sub-question of the thesis regarding *altered online political engagement*, I can conclude that it gave space to one stream of opinions predominantly, depending on reactions, rhetoric and tone of users. This created social constraints for those, who were against the flow and therefore, blocked alternative approaches. Minimal presence of alternative views during the case period doesn’t necessarily mean their absence; users’ reasons for keeping silent is not however, researched in the present project, but would be useful to understand social dynamics within the case. As concluded before, I assume that the major reason is social pressure and sense of belonging to the political minority.

After the case, many people expressed intense and extreme viewpoints, bad language and emotionally dense tone, while staying and communicating their opinions mainly within the circle of like-minded people. My analysis showed that government supporters didn’t appear on pages “Put Bacho Akhalaia on Trial” and “Solidarity to Prisoners”, which resulted in online absence of alternative viewpoints and debates. This

tendency of pro-governmental people keeping silent, while oppositional wing was free in condemning the ruling party during the case, can be attributed to the videos influence on political outburst, as well as engagement, which responds to the third and fourth sub-research questions, regarding the videos' influence on political discourse and activism. It must also be noted, that during that period not a single page defending Bacho Akhalaia and the Nationalist Party was created. Moreover, conversations on the pages supporting Bacho Akhalaia and the Nationalist Party (created before the case) were temporarily halted, however due to time pressure, I didn't have the opportunity to ask users about their reason for passiveness.

Unfortunately, I didn't have the opportunity to speak with all the group members to assess their psychological desires and needs for joining the groups and engaging in conversations to address four psychological needs posed by Park et al., (2009), however based on the aggressive and annoyed tone, content of their messages – primarily criticism and expression of deep dissatisfaction, as well as vocabulary and bad language make “entertainment” the least probable option out of four, previously discussed needs. Similarly to Youtube, results of Facebook analysis contradict Putnam's (1995; 2000) idea on the internet's main purpose to be an entertainer, and therefore, being detrimental to political and civic engagement. To further expand the results, while considering reasons of Georgian users to utilize social media platform to share and engage with political content within the case time period, the content analysis of comments concluded that the majority of users called for justice, communicated indignation and expressed political opinions (Ruggiero, 2000). The following section on interview analysis provides deeper insight in people's uses and gratifications for engaging with social media and posting political comments – explaining motivations for their actions. In-depth interviews strengthened the link of the thesis with its academic underpinning by enabling to examine users' gratifications received from online political activism, which was practically impossible to investigate during the “Facebook” and “Youtube” analysis.

To visualize and structure the responses, I created table 1 (see below), which systematizes the results.

Reactions and approaches to torture videos	Altered political preferences and attitudes	Modified online political engagement
Mainly aggression, anger, frustration, rarely sadness and pity. No demonstrated skepticism towards originality, source and purpose of the videos.	Difficult to identify due to data restrictions, however increased hatred and disbelief towards the Nationalist Party could be identified, because most of anti-governmental pages were created only after the case. No obvious increased support for other political groups.	Increased number of political pages and groups supporting the tortured victims, criticizing the government and demanding justice. No propagation of different political ideologies could be detected. Emotionally-based conversations and argumentations.

Interview analysis

As mentioned in the research methodology chapter, along from Facebook and Youtube, interview analysis was additionally useful and aimed to uncover interviewee’s motivations for engaging in political discussions, as I conversed about influences of the videos on their political behavior and attitudes. This sub-chapter represents summary and analysis of 9 semi-structured interviews using structured approach, which will be shortly explained. Data collected through the interviews also covers the theoretical groundwork of the thesis and deals with the uses and gratifications theory. To relate back to themes for analysis, interviews were helpful to understand people’s reactions such as aggressiveness, skepticism and doubt, or fear and empathy, and elaborate where necessary. While other methods enabled me to describe and analyze people’s responses and feedbacks to the case, as well as add important details to draw the most precise picture of the case, qualitative data collected from the interviews facilitated gaining deeper insights in previously determined public responses and reactions to the case. Depending on the fact that I use both inductive and deductive approaches to analyze collected data, first I read

transcribed materials and tried to discover themes among them. According to Woods (2011), seeking patterns after reading the transcriptions is the basis for preliminary interview data analysis. After marking the main points and reducing the information in order to explore the findings and make responses more consistent, there were identified and sorted categories, which derive from and aim to respond to the research sub-questions. It shares common categories with Facebook and Youtube analysis, however due to specificity of the information, additional theme on users' motivations and gratifications emerged. As mentioned previously, interviews were the only source which enabled to gain insight in users' motivations, so it resulted in adding one more category – "Motivations and gratifications for political activism":

1. Reactions and approaches to torture videos *RQ1*
 - Anger
 - Skepticism
 - Fear
2. Altered political preferences and attitudes *RQ2*
 - Increased incomprehension towards the Nationalist Party
 - Increased sympathy towards political parties other than the Nationalist Party
 - Unchanged political opinion
3. Modified political engagement *RQ3*
 - Increasingly posting political content
 - Engaging in political discussions
 - Participating in demonstrations
 - Avoiding posting and engaging in discussions
 - Voting
4. Motivations and gratifications for political activism *RQ4*
 - Expression of anger, condemnation, protest
 - 4 needs of Park et al. (2009)
 - Slacktivism
 - Share and obtain information

First three themes deal with the political engagement in terms of the outcomes – online and offline engagement, or the influence on electoral processes; while the fourth –

is concerned with the political engagement, in terms of reasons and motivations. It is noteworthy that the second and third categories of the fourth theme – “4 needs of Par et al. (2009)” and “slacktivism”, were pre-determined based on the theoretical framework of the thesis, while other categories were formed after reading transcribed interviews. Based on the questions asked during the interviews, out of total 4 sub-research questions, the scope of interviews enabled to address all of them, which were as follows:

- 1. What were the young Georgian internet users’ reaction to the videos? RQ1*
- 2. How did the videos and consecutive online processes alter users’ political preferences and attitudes? RQ2*
- 3. What was the impact of the videos and successive online outburst on users’ political activism? RQ3*
- 4. What were the motivations for users’ online political engagement? RQ4*

Who are the respondents?

The majority of respondents as you will notice, were politically active during the case both offline and online, which eased the process of finding and contacting them through Facebook. As the results revealed, the most of them were engaged in the protests, either wanted to engage, thus demonstrated political interest and awareness of the case. Despite political awareness, three out of nine respondents didn’t want to participate in demonstrations, either online discussions and these respondents, due to their meantime online absence, were found and chosen through my acquaintances, as advised to be politically inactive and temperate. By including relatively dormant young citizens, I avoided analyzing only politically active users, and ensured covering alternative standpoints towards the torture videos. Three of the respondents are current students of Tbilisi State University, while the rest are the graduates, and part-time, either fulltime employed, residing in the Georgian capital. None of them belong to any political party, or have strong predetermined political ideology, however they all participated in the elections and made grounded political choices. The majority are young women, however

small gender misbalance doesn't have life-changing effect on the results. In order to preserve anonymity, I have labeled the interviewees with numbers from 1 to 9. "R" stands for the "Respondent", so R2 for example, means respondent 3.

For a better illustration and organization of responds, I've created a table, which assemble and structure the answers in accordance with the themes and allows to visualize the answers. The table also eases categorical aggregation, which aims to determine similar instances from the data, with the hope that parallels can be drawn and certain meaning will emerge (Creswell, 2006). As you will further see, the interview results were structured around those four categories.

Table 2. Categorized responses of the respondents.

Reactions and approaches to torture videos	Modified political engagement	Influence on political preferences and attitudes	Motivations and gratifications for political activism
Mostly fright, shock, aggression towards the violators and anxiety; urge for protest. Rarely skepticism and doubtful state of mind – questioning authenticity of the videos.	Reactions to increased online political engagement were mostly irritation, anxiety and frustration, because it was believed that online outburst didn't help anything. Shock and understanding was also present, when the respondents felt urge to engage in online discussions themselves and express their support this way. However those who thought it useless, avoided participation. Most of the users attended either wanted to attend rallies.	Mainly, enhanced or in several cases extreme antipathy towards the Nationalist Party, reinforced idea that new government must be appointed. However, in several cases it didn't affect respondents' attitudes. Respondents claimed to have become more critical and politically demanding.	Main motivation was to express indignation and protest, also inform others and share information on protest rallies and developments.

Along with direct interpretation, I performed categorical aggregation – one among four forms of data analysis discussed by Stake (1995), in order to explore certain meaning from

responses. Table 2, which (see above) I created to pinpoint and visualize responses, was helpful to determine certain pattern: political engagement prior, during and after the case. It was evident, that the case didn't have long-term impact on online political engagement. All the respondents, who declared posting political materials before the case, proceeded to do so afterwards, however those respondents who were previously inactive, then engaged in one of political activities online, consequently stopped after the case was over. The next and the last section of the interview analysis speaks about respondents' motivations for engaging in political activism.

Reactions and approaches to torture videos

To measure and analyze the influence of the videos and successive social media processes on political engagement of young Georgians, it was important to ask about their reaction and frame of mind during the case development. Discovering and assaying the first theme – “users' reaction to the case” in the transcribed materials is the foundation for answering the first sub-research question: *What were the young Georgian internet users' reaction to the videos and consequent online outrage? (RQ1)*

Reaction of the respondents to the videos was almost homogenous: 8 out of 9 of the interviewed felt either “fright”, “revulsion”, “horror”, “sorrow”, “shock”, “disgust”, “hatred towards the violators”, or “aggression” – all negative. Only one person, whose responses were moderately composed and rational, rather than emotional throughout the interview, declared that the first thing she questioned was the authenticity of the videos, its origin and “whether they really depicted the reality or were staged”.

I wasn't convinced about the originality of footages. I initially tried to closely observe the videos and determine how authentic they were. In general, I'm not impulsive, so I didn't participate in the demonstration organized the same evening, because I was more concerned with who disseminated them and why, instead of going out to protest.

R3 was the only respondent, and moreover, the only person throughout all analyses to express skepticism towards the videos. However, when asked, if she expressed her doubt online, she responded: “I purposefully avoided engaging in debates, while coming across unfounded pathos, so I chose several friends with whom I discussed the events”. She expressed anxiety on the consequent online outrage too. This answer shows, how a person with alternative viewpoint, which contradicted that of the majority, chose not to communicate and share it publicly, because of increased outrage and non-rational argumentations.

According to the results, the greater part of the interviewees attended, either wanted to attend the demonstration the same night, but couldn't for different personal reasons: 6 out of 9 expressed desire, either went there, while the rest felt it was “useless”, either doubted authenticity of the footages, or never participated in demonstrations in general. However, support of the majority towards the victims was evident. Desire to immediately attend demonstrations can be interpreted as youngsters' emotional density and impetuous nature to rapidly respond to on-going events. To recall analysis of Facebook pages and corresponding statistics on the most popular age-group of political pages, it reinforces the notion of youngsters being politically responsive to the case, instead of being passive. The only person, who again, demonstrated even temper and made primarily rational evaluation of the case in comparison to others, was R3, who declared that she didn't intended to go there, because of being concerned with the source of the videos and intentions of those who disseminated it. It must be emphasized that, while the majority of youngsters were emotional and had analogous reactions, along with the urge to support the victims, the aforementioned R3 was the only one to keep tranquility and initially question legitimacy of the information.

The reactions towards political discussions and “online rush” varied from deep anxiety and evasion, to engagement and initiation of discussions. Two respondents cited uselessness of online debates as the reason for avoiding engagement in political conversations. One informed about posting a long comment on her profile to express deep concern, but didn't participate in further discussions, because everyone was

emotionally overloaded. Another stated posting comments and sharing political materials, although there was no need to debate, because all her acquaintances shared the common misery and stood together. Her pathos during the conversation, apparently prohibited acceptance of alternative viewpoints, characterizing everyone, who tried to judge the case in favor of the government, as “inhumane”. A remarkable instance was when a respondent declared using the social media for encouraging people to actively participate in demonstrations and protest rallies, which accentuates how people use this platform for communicating political messages and mobilizing mass audiences.

It is noteworthy, that the interviewees, who participated either planned to participate in demonstration taking place the same night, characterized it as an “adequate public response”, however others, who preferred to stay at home, thought it was an impulsive step, or thought it was “worthless”. Also, those interviewees who notified being politically active during the case (posting, sharing, liking and commenting on political content) didn’t feel anxious or disturbed by online political processes. Others, who were politically less active, felt increased irritation and considered the activism and online discussions as irrational and waste of time. There was also demonstrated personal dislike towards the people with opposing political standpoints:

I normally avoid involving in online political discourses, because nowadays in Georgia people lose friends for having contradicting political beliefs. I immediately feel antipathy towards a person, who supports the ex-government, especially after the case.... so, although I closely monitor everything, as soon as I see that my political expression online won't be of any use, I avoid doing so and prefer to keep silent.

It can be summarized, that negative reactions triggered by the videos were mainly oriented on the Nationalist Party and its supporters. Based on the answers, I conclude, that the majority of people didn’t start analyzing the videos’ origin, intentions of its purveyor or their validity. Instead, it was believed that the footages were genuine and clearly depicted brutality in Georgian prisons, ordered and supervised by the government.

How this reactions turned into altered political attitudes or political activism is discussed in the following sub-sections.

After analyzing two responses simultaneously, an interesting conclusion could be made. The majority felt increased antipathy and hostility towards the Nationalist Party, while they became more convinced in rightness of their voting choice, which makes us assume that they intended to vote for the party other than the Nationalist. The fact that they became more confident while voting for another party, can also mean enhanced sympathy towards other political parties, especially that of Georgian Coalition, which won the elections.

Influence on political preferences and attitudes

As it was decided to examine impact of the videos and subsequent online discussions on youngsters' political standpoints, the second sub-research question was formulated: *How did the videos and consecutive online processes alter users' political preferences and attitudes towards Georgian political parties?* The interview questions were devised based on the sub-questions, therefore in order to perform required analysis, I specifically devoted two interview questions dealing with the RQ2. The first corresponding interview question asked: *1. Were your political attitudes altered after the case? How?* And the second – merging several questions: *2. How did the videos and successive online discussions influence your choice made on the elections? Would you make the same choice or not? Why?*

There were three emerged categories to address political preferences and attitudes, including increased antipathy towards the Nationalist Party, increased sympathy towards other political parties and unaffected political attitude. The vast majority of the respondents declared, that the case merely reinforced the rightness of their political choice planned for the elections. It appears that, the majority didn't intend to vote for the Nationalist party, if we take into consideration their negative reaction to the videos and the responsible bodies. R2 stated that, dissemination of the videos reaffirmed his belief that it was "time for a change". He wasn't surprised to see the videos and therefore,

wasn't deeply affected by them: "Everyone always knew what was happening out there. But unless the alibi was on the table, nobody dared to protest and conformed".

Another respondent declared, that while at first she was hesitant about correctness of her decision, after dispersion of the videos and formed social climate, she was certain that she was making the right choice and had no further doubts. Similarly to her, 4 others confirmed becoming certain about rightness of the decision they were making: the videos inflamed angst and enhanced disbelief towards the Nationalist Party. While asked about changed political preference, R6 stated:

It didn't particularly change my opinion. I just felt increased hatred towards the Nationalist Party, which I didn't sympathize before either. So, I voted for the same party as previously intended, I was more strongly convinced that they [the Nationalist Party] had to leave.

Similarly to R6, R8 stated becoming "polarized" and feeling extreme loathing, if previously she didn't feel as radical. 2 others made vague comments regarding their choice, avoiding to disclose their political preference; they simply stated that they voted for the party, which they supported prior to the case. R3, who previously expressed skepticism towards the authenticity and validity of the videos, declared that it didn't affect her political choice in any way, because she was dubious about genuineness of the materials. Only one respondent – R5 admitted being influenced by the processes and voting for a different party than intended. She declared feeling social responsibility, as well as solidarity to the victims and people and acknowledged that her conscience wouldn't let her behave otherwise. One respondent out of nine still proved to be influenced by the videos and online outrage, which ascribes the case politically transformative nature: its capacity to influence political attitudes and as a consequence, influence political situation in the country. The fact that R5 completely changed her political choice and voted for a different party than intended prior to the case, puts

emphasis on the power of the videos, as well as the online outrage and general social feedback to determine individual's political attitude and preference.

As previously mentioned, the majority of the respondents declared to have become more critical, skeptical and distrustful towards the political parties in general, avoiding to point at the Nationalist Party in particular. One of the respondents said, that she became more politically demanding and judgmental – insisting political parties to fulfill the promises they make and obligations they have. In addition to her, another respondent declared becoming more politically interested and demanding, because she felt that political negligence created grounds for the prison violence. Further, it was noted that the case spurred sense of protest and abhorrence against the Nationalist Party, however it didn't kindle sympathy towards any other party.

My analysis shows, that frequently it was not the predetermined support or sympathy towards other parties that stipulated people's choices, but primarily urge for change and rescue, as well as extreme dislike of the meantime ruling party. In most of the cases, respondents' underlined increase in their detestation and disbelief towards the "Saakashvili team", however didn't stress support for the Georgian Dream coalition, either any other political party. The only instance, when the case didn't have any impact on political preference or attitude was when R3 expressed deep concern about legitimacy and the hidden agenda of the videos. Based on the responses, it can be concluded that the case strengthened skepticism, disbelief or in extreme case, hatred towards the Nationalist party, even on the short-run and therefore, increased chances of the opposition to win the elections. To supplement the interviews, content analysis of Youtube and Facebook comments revealed, that the Nationalist party supporters were silent: not a single comment was trying to defend the ruling party at that time, therefore loathing and criticism boosted and the conversation was single-sided. Although, as I previously mentioned R3 had an alternative view on the case, her choice was to avoid participation in the discussions. The following section continues and takes present discussion one step further by shifting the focus to the influence of the case on political activism, after discussing its influence on political preferences.

Modified political engagement

Number of the interview questions were specifically designed to test and evaluate respondents' altered political activism (if altered), as a result of the case. Its conceptual basis is and expands on the fourth sub-question of the research, which asks: *What was the impact of the videos and successive online outburst on users' political activism?* The question implies both online and offline political engagement, such as electoral-related activism, online discussions, membership of groups and attendance of demonstrations. In general, answers regarding political engagement varied, however accord was achieved regarding the reactions to the videos, and the internet as an effective tool for political mobilization and planning.

Despite contradicting viewpoints, the instance when all 9 respondents were equally positive about, was the role of social media and the internet in organizing and planning rallies in response to the videos, as well as influencing youngsters' political engagement. The majority of the interviewed, 6 out of 9 learned about the videos from Facebook, while the rest from the television, or friends and family. Therefore, it can be assumed that the internet was the primary source of information and reduced time needed for information to reach wide audience.

Voting was another issue, when the responses came to agreement: all the interviewees felt necessity to make their political choices, which was especially enhanced after the case: so, based on the analysis, I can assert that the case increased people's sense of civic responsibility. If some of them think that engaging in online political discourses doesn't have life-changing effects and are futile, they consider that by voting they are participating in decision-making process, "which is the least that can be done to country" (R7). R8 revealed that all the happenings encouraged her participate in the elections:

I would definitely make the same decision, however I may not have gone to the elections at all and haven't stood in the queue so patiently, if not the case. I became more engaged in the meantime political affairs, because I was so deeply

affected by what I saw.... Social media was the one to disseminate the footages massively and I think that it wouldn't have similar effect on me, either other people if not the internet.

As a result, enhanced desire to participate in the elections, as well as change in choice made on the elections (R5), are political activities that were caused by the case. If we recall the theoretical framework explicated in chapter 2, it discussed academic notions regarding the internet and its capacity to invite politically inactive users (Barber, 2001; Delli Carpini, 2000). In this case, despite the fact that the majority of the respondents declared being previously comparatively inactive, they engaged, either wanted to engage in political activism and attend the demonstration, which was organized online. Therefore, similarly to Facebook analysis, based on the results of Facebook analysis, I conclude that Putnam's (2000) assertion that the internet is the primary tool for entertainment and can have counter-effects on and distract users from political engagement doesn't apply to the case. In contradiction to Putnam (2000), I argue that the internet's capacity highly depends on the context and socio-political and cultural background of the society where the internet operates. So while uses and gratifications theory discusses different reasons for online political engagement depending on the socio-political and cultural context (Kearns, 2002), Putnam's (1996; 2000) main option is entertainment. Returning to the case, the only exception, who didn't want to participate in demonstrations because of her skepticism towards the source of the videos, was one respondent (R3) out of nine. This was the case when the case had no impact on political activism. However, in terms of altered online engagement, R1 stated sharing political materials during the case, in order to inform fellow civilians, although she doesn't usually engage in political activities and didn't proceed to do it after the case. It can be assumed that the case had temporary effect on politically disengaged users and modified youngsters' political engagement on the short-run, in the form of attending protest rallies and posting political content online. R1 declared posting online materials, stated being politically reserved and inactive before and after the event, therefore it can be assumed that, while the case didn't necessarily

had lasting effect on political activism, it modified political attitudes and preferences on a long run.

Although every respondent agreed on the importance of the internet in organizing political gatherings of that time, not all of them attended. Except for 3, 6 respondents attended, either wanted to attend the demonstration organized the same night after the dissemination of the footages. 3 respondents cited different reasons for not attending: one – having more important things to do, another – being skeptical about videos authenticity and avoiding to make hasty conclusions and the third – never participating in political demonstrations in general. The event was spontaneously planned on Facebook, where according to R6, were numerous calls and pleads to join the gathering. While recalling her meantime emotions, the speaker remembered uncompromising unity and public support that was communicated through Facebook. The internet in this case, promoted political activism by appealing to numerous minds and creating snowball effect of emotions, as well as served as a space for mobilization and political planning.

Motivations and gratifications for political activism

Unlike to other methodologies, interview was the only tool to offer sufficient qualitative data for analyzing users' motivations for online political engagement. It formulated the response to the fourth sub-research question: *What were the motivations for users' online political engagement?* (RQ4)

The first interview question (see appendix) directly aims to reveal respondents' motivations and reasons for online political involvement, while the second – elaborates on their approach on authenticity of young Georgian adults in general. Thus, this section is focused on examining authenticity of those users, who practiced online political activism (posting political comments, links, joining groups, signing online petitions, etc.) and their perspective on authenticity of Georgian youngsters' partaking within the case time period (18 September – 1 October, 2012). The academic foundation for the present section revolves around the uses and gratifications theory, which seeks to determine users' gratifications and psychological needs for political partaking while choosing certain kind of

media. Concept of “slactivism”, which as stressed in chapter 2, is one form of online political activity among others, is considered to be inauthentic (Morozov, 2009) and serve self-satisfactory aims, without any tangible consequences.

Current analysis zooms in on those respondents, who declared being politically active on social media during the case. Yet, the outlook of inactive users on Georgian youth’s online political activism is also considered, because it adds value and deepens the discussion. Table 2 (p. 52) reveals that engagement in one of the online political activities during the case was frequent. Reasons for doing so ranged from “information dissemination”, “desire to inform other users” and “communication of own viewpoints and indignation”, to “facilitate conversations which increase political awareness”. “Expressing own viewpoint” is self-centered, and therefore can be considered as an act of slacktivism as long as it doesn’t have any socio-political consequence, apart from self-actualization (Christensen, 2011; Morozov, 2009). I related respondents’ gratifications to four primary psychological needs for political engagement on Facebook, stated by Park, Kee and Valenzuela (2009): socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information. “Information” apparently best applies to the interviewees’ motivations, while entertainment, was least applicable category, based on the content of posts. If we consider expression of solidarity and support as a form of socializing with a specific group, then it was also an actual motivation. As for self-status seeking, which relates to an act of slacktivism, none of the respondents revealed doing so. One of the respondents stated that slacktivism was very unlike during the case, because people were united and felt truly sorry, however her response was derived from own emotions and feelings, which can’t be valid for the whole population.

Going back to information sharing, as outlined by R9 “more talking means more informed citizenry”, so she wanted to share her knowledge and “invite people converse”. Speaking of motivations for online political participation, R1 considers that without preceding political interests and engagement, it is practically impossible to make sensible political announcements with a blank mind: *“I believe it is impossible to make political announcements without being politically aware and having previous political interests.*

However, I know people, who consider that demonstrating political engagement is the part of intellectual activity”.

To approach R1’s idea from different angle and take her response to further level, inauthentic activism can primarily be practiced by joining groups and simple political activities, which don’t require political analysis; once a person starts posting political content and adds his own perspective, it means she gave a thought about, evaluated events and shared own outlook, which stresses person’s concern and prior interest. The fact that a person might have political awareness, doesn’t necessarily mean she can’t practice slacktivism, because self-actualization or socialization are self-centered activities, which is slacktivism (Park et al., 2009). It is noteworthy that the same respondent, who claimed to be politically engaged during the case, systematically share and post information and express solidarity to prisoners, didn’t attend any political rally, making her online engagement less credible and authentic. Once asked about the reason for not participating, she answered that it was because of her mother’s fear and request to stay away from populous demonstrations.

When asked about reasons for engaging in online political activities within the case time period, R3 responded that the main reason was to express “indignation”, although typically she “found it useless to converse with people, who have radically different opinions”. Similarly to R3, R8 avoids being politically active, because she believes it can lead to confrontations; moreover she considers that many people pretend to be concerned and their interest in politics is ostentatious, even though during the case, everyone seemed sincere and truly shocked. In this sense, R8 comes in agreement with R1, who generally believes that people appear being politically interested for different reasons, however back in September 2012, the vast majority was candid.

R5, who declared being politically inactive online, cited her irritation towards the “people, who try to prove something via social media, when in reality it is just a waste of time”. When asked if she believed young Georgians tend to practice slactivism, she said: “I absolutely agree and my frustration and the fact, that I avoid engaging in online political

discussions is partially conditioned by this". Another respondent considers that even though slactivism exists in Georgia to a certain degree, it doesn't interfere with authentic political activism and is still laudable that youngster's at least try to appear politically interested. Once compared to complete political indifference and inactivity, slactivism was given an advantage.

Overall, it was expected that they would feel embarrassed and none of the users would state seeking self-actualization, or being ostentatious while practicing online political activism. Almost all the respondents agreed that part of young Georgian adults do practice slactivism and are sometimes inauthentic, however within the time period of the case, everyone must have been genuine and sincere with the primary aims of communicating with like-minded people, sharing ideas and discussing opinions, as well as informing fellow citizens. However, being genuine doesn't necessarily exclude slactivism, because a person may have a political idea and authentically try to express it, as well as join groups and pages with the aim of self-realization. Reactions towards slactivism varied, but was mainly negative: one part of respondents thought it doesn't interfere with, but facilitates increased political interest and is better than being inactive, while others become frustrated and avoid engaging in discussions with such people.

While Facebook pages and Youtube comments provided data on individuals' reactions to prison videos, their feedback and online political engagement, interviews enabled to dig deeper into their motivations for political activism, and therefore, supplemented each other and created one cohesive whole.

Summary

Chapter 4 reported and analyzed collected data from multiple sources using mainly one methodology for analyzing gathered materials – content analysis. Combined mechanism for data collection, which ranged from online content (photos, videos, Facebook pages and Youtube comments) to semi-structured interviews proved to be useful to comprehensively answer the research sub-questions and fulfill each other.

Online content allowed to study the case from my – researcher's perspective, while preserving political neutrality. Semi-structured interviews on the other hand,

facilitated deeper insights in the respondents' perspectives and personal understanding of the case, including altered political preferences and attitudes, as well as patterns of political engagement. Structured four themes for interview analysis derived from five sub-research questions, which in a broader sense belong to an umbrella, central research question. Because of the complexity of the research, I have included table 2 (see below), which illustrates units of analysis, number of sources and methods used for collecting data. Subsequent, concluding chapter of the research discusses recommendations for further research, methodological implications of the thesis and final remarks links with the research questions.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

Introduction

The concluding chapter of the thesis summarizes responses to central and sub-research questions, which derive from the results chapter. It wraps up the discussion regarding the influence of social media on political attitudes and engagement of young Georgian adults. It places the findings within the theoretical framework and explores methodological experiences. At the beginning, this chapter reports on each sub-research questions separately with the summary on central query. Then it overviews socio-scientific significance of the study, proceeds with methodological lessons and is finalized with discussion on recommendations and prospects for further research.

Research questions and findings

This project is a case study of responses on social media and political position of young Georgian adults within two weeks time period, from 18 September – 1 October 2012, and affected Georgian population by altering socio-political climate in the country. Initially, the aim of the thesis was to determine the impact of prison torture videos on political engagement and attitudes of young Georgian adults by scrutinizing online discussions and personally conversing with young adults. In the introduction chapter, I explained and offered my definitions of terms – “political engagement” and “political attitude” to avoid any conceptual ambiguity. Content analysis was the main tool for data processing, while multiple sources of information were selected to ensure variety of evidences covering different perspectives of the occurrence (Cresswell, 2006; Yin, 1994). Sources included Facebook pages, Youtube comments and nine semi-structured in-depth interviews. 4 Respondents were selected through Facebook, while other 5 were acquaintances, who volunteered to participate in the interviews. Based on the central research question, four sub-research questions have been elaborated, which guided the study.

Reactions of young Georgian adults to the videos

The first sub-research question, sought to explore users' reactions towards the disseminated videos, in order to investigate the influence of the case on people's general frame of mind. It was formulated as: *What were the young Georgian internet users' reaction to the videos?* Results generally revealed that reactions were strongly negative, however activities accompanying the reactions varied and were discussed in the section on political engagement. Response to this question was identified both from analysis of Facebook pages and Youtube comments, as well as the interviews. If during Facebook and Youtube analysis I had to interpret users' reactions based on their posts and was guided by predetermined categories, during the interviews respondents directly recalled their reactions.

Depending on sub-categories, discussed in the "methodological" chapter, both analysis of online content and inter-personal conversations revealed, that the emotional tone of users was aggressive. People expressed protest and strongly criticized the ruling Nationalist Party, some of them being intolerable and violent. There was no positive feedback whatsoever, which was expected. The only relatively balanced response was "skepticism", when a respondent questioned authenticity of the videos and didn't make any conclusions based on the footages or online discussions, because she thought the videos might have been fabricated and online discussions were irrational and emotionally-based. Studies revealed, that the reactions were mainly emotionally driven and disloyal to alternative viewpoints, because supporters of the Nationalist Party were also condemned. It must be emphasized that there was lack of alternative viewpoints, with the main flow of one point of view concentrated against the meantime government. Facebook analysis showed that alternative approaches emerged only several months after the case. However their absence from online space during the case doesn't exclude their existence. Though the reason why they weren't expressed and communicated during the case is a different research interest and beyond the research area. Facebook and Youtube analysis uncovered negative feedback of all researched users, who belonged to two political pages, either commented on torture videos. Apart from the

content of the messages, their tone and use of vocabulary (swearing and bad language) referring to the ruling Party clearly emphasized hostility of people towards the government. Photos shared by users were also critical: most of them bullied officials, portrayed violated prisoners and participants of demonstrations.

Their comments and posts generally didn't call for practical actions with tangible consequences. To link to the theoretical underpinning of the thesis, expressing emotions and communicating political messages online without any socio-political outcomes can be considered as an act of slacktivism (Christensen, 2009). Findings show, that social media was the main platform for sharing feedbacks, while the principal aim for the majority was to express solidarity to the victims and express own viewpoint. While building upon uses and gratifications theory, the research suggests, that people's feeling of self-realization and engagement increased by posting pictures, comments or shares and may be considered as the main motivations for their online engagement. In reality, they merely communicated indignation and unloaded from emotions, which had no concrete socio-political outcome.

Change in political preferences and attitudes

Modified political preferences and attitudes were addressed by the second sub-research question, which was formulated as follow: *How did the videos and consecutive online processes alter users' political preferences and attitudes?* Interviews served as the primary source for structuring the response to this question, because Facebook and Youtube posts didn't give the opportunity to compare users' preceding with meantime political attitudes and preferences: they merely demonstrated users' antipathy. The conclusions, which could be made after analysis of Facebook and Youtube comments alongside the respondents' feedbacks, was that primarily the Nationalist Party was put responsible and criticized for prison torture: the antipathy towards the ruling party intensified among those, who didn't sympathize them beforehand. There was only one instance out of nine interviews, when the case had no influence on a person's political opinion, because the respondent questioned legitimacy of the videos. So, the person who didn't change her

voting choice after the case and considered the videos as inauthentic, didn't engage in online discussions and thought that users were irrational.

Violent videos proved to directly altered users' political preference in the form of voting for another party, than intended, which indicates on dislike of the Nationalist Party after the case, when the elector previously favored it. Respondents revealed having voted for the same political group as pre-planned, however their disbelief and in some cases hatred towards the Nationalist Party had intensified. While most of the interviewees claimed to experience enhanced antipathy towards the Nationalist Party, some people became more politically demanding, which can be considered to affect general attitude towards politics on a longer term. Apart from antipathy towards the governing team, I concluded that the case resulted in increased sympathy towards other political parties, especially Georgian Dream Coalition, which ended with their victory in the elections.

It must be emphasized that altered political attitudes were primarily triggered by the videos, rather than online outrage, because most of the respondents claimed that they would have the same opinion, regardless the discussions on social media. However, several of them believed to have aggravated viewpoint after being exposed to online outburst, which fits within the Sunstein's (2001) notion that the internet can reinforce socio-psychological process, which can result in extreme opinions and beliefs. The research proposes that increased discussions and stream of mainly one point of view against the Nationalist Party socially stressed those with alternative viewpoints, which explains the absence of the Nationalist Party supporters in online discussions. Then it becomes logical that, as mentioned in the previous section, such people appeared only several months later, when extreme criticisms came to an end.

Impact of the case on online political engagement

The third sub-research question aimed to shed light on the influence of social media, as an information platform, on political engagement: *How did the video materials disseminated through social media influence online political engagement?* For answering this question, content analysis of Facebook and Youtube, as well as interviews were utilized. After

analysis of Facebook pages, the creation of these groups underlines increased activism of civil society, which had a motivating factor for online civil and political activities. However it was concluded that the activism was short-term, because the groups went gradually silent after the end of the case, on October 1, 2012.

Along with the first sub-research question regarding the reactions such as aggression, skepticism or fear, I tried to determine actions triggered by online outrage, which can demonstrate activism and engagement of users. It was important to see, how the consequent political outburst influenced political attitudes and engagement of users. The information was primarily provided by the interviews and two main opinion camps emerged: those who were irritated by online demonstration of outrage and those who were understanding to people communicating and sharing information regarding the case. It is interesting that those who were annoyed, didn't engage in online and offline political activism as much, while those who were compassionate to the people online, practiced at least one virtual political activism. Boulianne (2009) said, that more space for political conversation can enhance political engagement and reduce indifference level, however in this case, some people were frustrated by overwhelming online discussions and instead of feeling motivated to engage, avoided any kind of participation, because they considered it "useless" or "irrational".

All the interview respondents came to agreement that social media was an effective tool in organizing protest rallies and informing people on demonstrations and proceedings of the case. The majority of interviewees, apart from two, said to have found out about torture videos from social media, making it an efficient information distributor among youngsters. While the majority of respondents were politically active during the case, it may be the Internet's ability to reduce costs of participation and increase access to information (Boulianne, 2009).

As a conclusion, the internet's capacity to reduce costs (time and effort) for obtaining and sharing information was evident, and resulted in diverse minds accessing and having ability to introduce information from own perspective (Boulianne, 2009). The fact that for many people it was the source for news, as well as space where they could express

emotions, increases likelihood of the internet to enhance political engagement, because according to Boulianne (2009), “increased access to a large, diverse set of political information may help reinvigorate civil life” (p 205).

Motivations for users’ online political engagement

The fourth research question queries: *What were the motivations for users’ online political engagement?* I mentioned in the previous chapter that interviews were the primary source for providing comprehensive information on uses and gratifications of users’ online political activism, because neither Facebook, nor Youtube enabled me to speak with the authors of comments and therefore, examine their motivations for practicing online political activism.

The fourth sub-research question of the thesis sought users’ gratifications and motivations for political engagement. To relate the results of the analysis of Facebook groups to four needs of Park et al. (2009), primary reason for engaging with groups was information sharing. To be more precise, share information on own outlook and reaction towards the case. It was hard to argue, to which extent other categories applied, because content analysis of posts and comments restricted researching users’ motivations apart from information sharing and communication of personal point of view.

While asked about the gratifications, the interview respondents declared expressing own opinion and information, as well as solidarity to the victims, which fit both within personal and social needs offered by Raacke et al. (2008). To relate back to four psychological needs categorized by Park et al. (2009), information and socializing can be considered as main gratifications for online participation.

A common reason for online engagement was expressing opinion and emotions, which was evident after Facebook and Youtube analysis of posts as well. Such form of self-expression can be considered as an act of slacktivism, when users’ political engagement doesn’t have any tangible socio-political consequence, but makes them feel self-realized and socially active (Christensen, 2011). Apparently being an unattractive label for online users, none of the respondents claimed practicing slacktivism – self-satisfactory,

inauthentic political activism and useless social activism with the aim of self-exposure (Morozov, 2009). However, they agreed that they have noticed it back in September 2012 and consider it as a common practice in Georgia. Results revealed that slacktivism can irritate some people and politically disengage them. On the other hand, findings showed that those people who aren't irritated by inauthentic political activism, considered that worthless political participation is better, than complete indifference, because at least people try to appear politically and socially interested and make political statements and choices of joining groups.

Coming out from the essence of the case, entertainment was a highly unlike gratification for engaging in political activism. Neither Youtube and Facebook, nor interviews revealed it as a primary motivation, based on responses, as well as tone and content of posts. It contradicts Putnam's (1999) notion on the internet's main purpose to be an entertainer. The same cannot be asserted for "socializing". Expression of solidarity and support can be a form of socializing and belonging to a certain social group – in this case, the majority of Georgian population, which was affected by brutal treatment of inmates.

While being politically active online and claiming to be concerned regarding the case, some people didn't attend political rallies at all. One of the respondents, who stated to systematically share and post information and express solidarity to prisoners, didn't participate in demonstrations or practice offline engagement in any form, other than voting, which reduces the authenticity of political engagement, and increases probability that her political activism served self-actualizing purposes.

Lastly, I put together responses and return to the central research question which asked: *How did prison torture videos and consecutive online outrage influence political engagement and attitudes of young Georgian adults?* Briefly summarizing, findings show that young Georgian adults were loaded with negative emotions after viewing torture videos, however reactions on online outrage stimulated different responses ranging from irritation and avoidance, to engagement and participation. Despite negative feedback to

the videos, political attitudes didn't change, because most of the respondents had previously favored other party than the Nationalist. The only influence that the case had on them was strengthening political standpoint in terms of confirming and intensifying their previous position. There emerged only one instance of altered political attitude, which resulted in voting for a different political party.

Young Georgians felt increased social responsibility to vote after the case, with one of the respondents sharing that she wouldn't have probably gone to the elections at all, if not the case and wide social annoyance. In terms of motivations for political engagement, analysis demonstrate that the main reason was sharing own viewpoint without any specific socio-political outcome, therefore it can be attributed to form of social activism without any real possibility to solve the problem – which is one way to define slacktivism (Christensen, 2009).

Methodological lessons

Chosen methodology of multiple sources of evidence and one technique for analysis – content analysis, prove to be effective to thoroughly study the case from different angles and layers. Multiple sources of information is a common strategy while conducting a case study, and are used to supplement each other for most precise recovery of the story (Yin, 1994). Method and data for analysis provide consistent picture for understanding gratifications of young Georgian adults, derived from online political activism. Collected data was analyzed in a qualitative manner. Facebook and Youtube analysis was efficient for interpreting the case through the researcher's eyes, while interviews facilitated to gain deeper insights and reflect audience's perspectives. Each source of information had an advantage over the other, but complemented each other. While Facebook and Youtube helped obtain information on users' reactions and forms of political engagement, interviews permitted to explore motivations for political engagement, as well as compare users' political attitudes and activism prior and after the case.

Qualitative research was my main technique for data analysis, however for prospective research I would coordinate both qualitative and quantitative methods for the

most comprehensive outcome, which logically will be more time consuming. Including questionnaires and surveys and conducting quantitative analysis, can ensure the most precise, interpretation of set of opinions and help determine emerging patterns between the responses. They can add value by providing comparative information on political engagement prior and after the case, while Likert scale can offer users' precise assessment of terms, concepts, events, etc. Moreover, distribution of surveys and questionnaires can increase the sample size, while decreases time of the research.

Interviews had its restrictions. Due to sensitivity of the topic and its political interest, respondents sometimes felt uncomfortable answering political questions on their voting choices and slacktivism. They felt especially unconfident while discussing and assessing slacktivism; their responses ranged from dislike of slacktivism to its preference over political indifference. Also, semi-structured interviews are about elaborating and expanding topics where necessary, however paying attention to responses, making notes and simultaneously coming up with questions needs proper concentration and experience. In terms of four psychological needs offered by Park et al. (2009) and its application to Georgian context, data analysis showed that respondents' political engagement during the case was authentic and mainly belonged to group needs of information seeking and socializing, where entertainment and self-status seeking was never cited as a motivation for engagement. The respondents believed that "self-status seeking" – such as appearing politically engaged and interested, or cool, is frequently present in Georgian reality, however during the case, they thought it was not common and fellow civilians were mainly authentic.

Social relevance

Online public outrage, as well as respondents' concern and intense reactions such as shock, fear or anxiety as a response to the case, makes the research topic socially significant. Dynamic processes creating and forming the case deserve attention primarily because some believe that it had affected political engagement of the population and influenced voters' choice on the 1st of October, 2012 (Shuster, 2012).

I analyzed the information, which conditioned the development of the case and its relation within the context of young Georgian adults: in a broader manner, as Anderson (1993) characterized the case study – how and why events occurred. In the introduction chapter, I underlined geographical and time proximity, which adds significance to the event for Georgian people as well as scholars, because it took place in September-October, 2012.

Moreover, Facebook is becoming an increasingly important tool for information sharing, political engagement and civic activism. This research is especially pertinent and useful for people, who want to understand dynamics of new media and its part in determining socio-political developments. Or those, who are interested how young Georgian people react to a certain cause and behave under the given circumstance. It can be especially relevant to institutions and politicians, whose actions and unfulfilled responsibilities were the main topics for discussion and reasons for outrage. Results showed the role of social media in organizing protest rallies and voicing public opinions, which proved the importance of the internet for political activism, enhancing transparency and responsibility of the public figures.

Scientific relevance

This research is primarily valuable, because English-language academic studies on Georgia are not common. The project aimed to identify influence of prison torture videos and successive online outrage on political attitudes and engagement of young Georgian adults. This research has explored an event and its socio-political implications, which occurred in Georgia within two weeks time period.

Along with the influence on attitudes and engagement, users' motivations and gratifications were also researched. Theoretical underpinning for researching motivations and gratifications was uses and gratifications theory (U&G). More specifically speaking, theoretical discussion was built on Ruggiero's (2000), Shulman's (2005) and Shao's (2008) discussion of uses and gratifications, four psychological needs for engaging in online activities categorized by Park et al. (2009) and notion of slacktivism addressed by Morozov

(2009) and Christensen (2011). The research can be considered as a real life test of U&G theory, and the measurement of its validity within the case. It enabled to see, to which extent do four psychological motivations (socializing, entertainment, information and self-status seeking) apply to the Georgian case. After qualitative analysis, the results revealed chiefly “information” and “self-actualization”. Results of the case also support previous theory about the internet’s influence on political engagement, along with users’ actions from psychological, users and gratifications perspective. As previously mentioned, no scientific data exists on the influence of social networks on political behavior and attitudes of Georgian citizens. Thus, this paper was useful to expose results of the dissemination of videos on social media, as well as online outburst and relative changes in political engagement in Georgia.

Internet’s capacity for enhancing political engagement was also addressed. If Putnam (2000) argued that primarily it’s the source for entertainment and distracts people from civic lives and political activism, the results of this thesis suggest that its capacities depend on the context (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003): during the prison torture case, it served as a tool for mobilizing people, sharing political messages and posting information, therefore it can be thought to have influenced people’s political engagement by providing space for conversing and organizing protest rallies. However its ability to invites inactive users is questionable and would be interesting for future examination. Respondents’ claims to have learned about demonstrations from the internet, builds upon and serves as an illustration of Boulianne’s (2009) meta-analysis on the internet use and political engagement. The project is valuable for facilitating scientific discussions on Georgia and informs on how the internet assembled and organized one stream of public opinion, inviting and engaging mainly those who belonged to the major opinion camp. Applying Western-based theories to Georgian setting gives local, unique academic flavor, which is useful for perceiving idiosyncratic society and advancing knowledge on the ways Georgian people utilize social media for political engagement, thus fill the informational gap on new media in Georgian context.

Theoretical outlook and perspectives for future research

Socio-psychological constraints as a side effect of social media

Youtube analysis revealed, that along with the criticism of Bacho Akhalaia and the Nationalist Party, their supporters were also strongly condemned, increasing the gap between public position and opposition. The findings demonstrated, that people with alternative viewpoints supporting Bacho Akhalaia, or the Nationalist Party kept silent during the case, while their comments, contradicting that of the majority, appeared only several months after the case – when online discussions were practically over. This raises the question about reasons for silence: was it because of peer-pressure and widespread social criticism of the Nationalist's supporters? While this thesis studied impact of torture videos and successive online discussion on political attitudes and engagement of people regardless their political opinion, further experimental investigation should examine, how social media and online discussions influenced political behavior of the intellectual minority – those who were supporting the Nationalist Party prior and after the case.

Apart from the videos, the focus would be the impact of online discussions on users' passiveness. It would be interesting to study people's psychological constraints and hurdles for avoiding to express themselves on social media and the extent, to which social media encouraged peer pressure to create these social constraints. It advances academic discussion on the internet as a socio-political transformer, and is socially worthwhile, because people get to know and discuss dynamics and effects accompanying social media. From scientific point of view, it can enhance the study on the impact of social media on political engagement, however under specific context. In the "specific context", I imply an occasion when the research audience belongs to minority.

Another perspective to the case is to study those people, who supported the Nationalist Party beforehand and changed their political standpoint after the case. In this occasion, desert of social media is to be evaluated. Tendency of human beings to comply with the majority in order to enhance sense of belonging to social groups, is not a novel notion (Fahr & Irlenbusch, 2011; Surowiecki, 2005). People tend avoid going against the crowd. The degree by which social media helps either hinders the process of self

expression, or in more extreme case – compliance with the intellectual majority can advance the discussion on crowd psychology and social media (Reicher, 2001).

One of the interviewees stated that she voted for a different party than intended prior to the case, because her conscious wouldn't let her behave otherwise: but would she behave otherwise, if not immense online disapproval of the Nationalist Party and its followers? Focus of this thesis didn't allow to ask the respondent and gain insight on the influence of social media on her behavioral motives. However future qualitative research will enable to conclude on what was the bigger influence for altered opinion: torture videos, or massive online outrage, which might have made the person feel isolated and create psychological anxiety.

The research aims to think on the differences between rational, independent behavior and that in the context of majority versus minority on social media. Therefore central research question can ask: *What was the impact of social media on intellectual minority during the case?* The background theory can expand on the notion of conformity, “when people change their behavior to match or imitate the beliefs, expectations, or behavior of real or imagined others” (Griskevicius et al., 2006, p. 281). Academic research on conformity have numerously stressed the influence of actions and beliefs of others on people, especially when “others” belong to vast majority (Asch, 1956; Moscovici, 1985).

The future research can bridge communication and social psychology by examining how social media shaped users' behavior and affected core social motives, such as belonging, which determines their behavior. Exploring facts, that social media influenced political engagement of the minority for example is interesting, however studying its reasons and social influential forces takes the discussion one step further and links communication (social media) with social psychology (behavior and social motives).

Appendix A. Semi-structured Interview Guide

Topic 1. Introduction

- Background information of the interviewee – name, age, occupation, profession.
- Purpose and structure of the interview.

Topic 2: Reaction to the videos and online discussions;

- What was your reaction to the footages?
- When do you first see them?
- What was your reaction to increased online political discussions and did you participate in them?

Topic 3: Political preferences and attitudes;

- Did the videos affect your political attitudes? If yes, how?
- Would you make the same political choice on the elections, if not the case?
 - Why yes/ why not?
 - If no, what made you change your mind in particular? Did the online discussions affect your choice?

Topic 4: Political activism (forms of offline and online engagement prior, during and after the case);

- Did you engage in any political activity online or voice your opinion before case?

- Why yes / why not?
- Have you been politically active during the case?
 - Why yes / why not?
- Did you attend protest rallies? Why yes/why not?
- Did you become more politically engaged after the case? If yes, how can you describe your increased activism?

Topic 5: Motivations and gratifications for political activism;

- If you have ever posted political content online, joined political groups or engaged in any political activism, what are the motivations and incentives for the activism?

If never, then:

- How do you think, do some people engage in online political activism to appear politically interested, or do it for self-realization and public image?

Topic 6: End of the interview;

Would you like to add anything in the end?

As soon as I will transcribe materials, I will send it to you.

Thank you for your time and efforts.

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