

УДК 323.2

THE ROLE OF ONLINE TOOLS IN MASS PROTESTS IN HONG KONG 2019

L. A. Khakimova

From June 2019 Hong Kong was swept by a continuous wave of protests related to the dissatisfaction of citizens with the introduction by the authorities of a new extradition law. The demonstrators managed to achieve close cooperation for organizing mass rallies, which complicated the work of the police in countering the protesters. Previously, social networks such as Facebook acted as a way of communicating on promotions; later, the approach changed. Technology change has played a crucial role in the growing anti-government riots. Basically, applications are now used to encrypt messages. The most popular of them were Telegram and LIHKG, acting as virtual command centers for receiving updates and exchanging information. In just five years there have been major changes in communication approaches in protest movements. What is happening in Hong Kong draws attention to how new communication mechanisms can affect the practice of protests and the political sphere in the near future.

Key words: Hong Kong, Telegram, police, protesters, LIHKG, new tools, information technology.

Causes of Hong Kong protests 2019

In the summer of 2019 millions of people protested against the Hong Kong administration's pro Beijing's attempt to introduce a new extradition law between mainland China and Hong Kong. Residents of the special administrative region saw Beijing's next attempt to change the special situation established in Hong Kong in 1997, which allows for an independent capitalist economic system and internal political system. The law under discussion, allowing the extradition of criminals to Chinese prisons, caused widespread public outrage in the city. The precedent case that gave rise to a discussion about the law and extradition took place in early 2018, when a Hong Kong resident Chan Tong-kai committed the murder of his pregnant girlfriend in Taiwan [1]. He was able to return to Hong Kong from Taiwan before the police discovered him. When arrested, they could only accuse him of money laundering, he used his girlfriend's credit cards and was sentenced to 29 months. Hong Kong authorities could not send him to Taiwan due to the lack of extradition law between the two places. The Security Bureau has proposed revising the extradition regime that would allow the fugitive to be transferred to any place where Hong Kong does not have an agreement,

including mainland China, Taiwan and Macau. Using this case, the government tried to justify the need for an extradition law. Before the second reading began on June 12, protesters rallied on June 9 at the first mass rally, which brought together 1 million people. The organizers initially predicted a turnout of half a million, but ultimately surpassed a record protest in 2003 [2]. Two million residents took to the streets on June 16 to express their demands on several points, which was the most massive demonstration in the history of Hong Kong [3]. The demonstrators managed to achieve close cooperation for the organization of mass rallies. The police could not resist in any way, due to such a huge number of people and the peaceful nature of the rally. But how did the protesters achieve such close cooperation that 1/3 of the population of Hong Kong took to the streets? What social media did they use to spread the word and connect with each other? In this article, we analyzed the existing communication online tools used by protesters in Hong Kong during the 2019 rallies.

During the Umbrella Revolution, Facebook and Twitter were the communication tools between the protesters [4]. Later there was a change in technology in protests. Already in 2019, in order to ensure the safety of the

© Khakimova L. A., 2020.

Khakimova Larisa Andreevna (KhakimovaLara1337@gmail.com),
student IV course of the Historical Faculty of the Samara University,
443086, Russia, Samara, Moskovskoye Shosse, 34.

protesters and to avoid the situation when the mobile phone was disconnected, other tools were introduced that we analyzed in our article. Technology change has played a crucial role in the growing anti-government riots. The protesters called a new practice – «Movement without a leader» [5]. Basically, applications are now used to encrypt messages. The most popular of them were Telegram and LIHKG, acting as virtual command centers for receiving updates and exchanging information. They differ from Facebook in their ability to remain anonymous, and it is not possible to teach access to chat, messages are encrypted; only Hong Kong residents can add to the chat.

What is happening in Hong Kong draws attention to how new communication mechanisms can affect the practice of protests and the political sphere in the near future. Therefore, this topic is relevant for research. Social media has become an important platform for the struggle of opposition forces and the Chinese political machine for the minds of city residents.

The success of such mass protests lies in one more condition. More than 92 % of Hong Kong people have a permanent Internet connection [6], and 80 % of the city's residents consider themselves active users of social media [7]. Thus, the fact that such a number of social media users proves the exceptional role of these tools in organizing mass rallies.

Analysis of online tools

First, it is worth analyzing the role of individual mechanisms in the mass protests in Hong Kong in 2019. Let's start with Telegram - this messenger, according to the protesters, helps to maintain the anonymity of users and is therefore widely used by protesters in Hong Kong. A number of volunteers coordinate and monitor this messenger. Many of them serve as a source of news, maps of current events and play the role of observation posts that warn of police actions. To protect against possible persecution, members of the Telegram groups organize a vote to take decisions during the protest, so that in the event of an investigation it would be impossible to arrest all those who voted [8].

The huge role of Telegram is to discredit any actions and comments of the police. This helps create emotional posters. There is a series of posters with thanks to the employees of

various services. The telegram contains stories of the feats accomplished by the protesters to encourage other people to go out. On the other hand, posters are published that show the brutality of the local police in relation to the protesters, for example, the poster «Police Return Your Eye» – on August 1, the police knocked out the girl's eye [9]. They use caricatures of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Hong Kong Administration Head Carrie Lam in the guise of Winnie the Pooh and Piglet, and the poster is famous for «The Crime Police. Have you finally lost your conscience?», On which Winnie the Pooh eats hearts, a hint, again, to Chairman Xi.

However, this tool revealed a serious flaw that allows the security services to find your phone number, even if in the settings you have hidden the number from all Telegram users [10]. Plus, messages via Telegram by default are not end-to-end encrypted, often people do not know that they should enable it.

Nevertheless, the protesters are not going to change the platform, because it helped to unite a huge number of people and the transition to another, more reliable, in terms of anonymity, will take a huge amount of time.

Another tool that played a huge role was the LIHKG online forum, conducted in Chinese. It is often called Hong Kong Reddit – the forum divides content into sections. Only people with an email can sign up on behalf of one of the Hong Kong Internet providers, so that people in mainland China do not have access. In addition, the forum does not require users to disclose any personal information, they can remain anonymous. Through LIHKG, residents are encouraged to skip work and classes, discussions, and information about detainees is disseminated. It is also used for crowdfunding, for example, to support the application of world leaders to resolve the crisis of draft laws on extradition during the G20 summit. On June 25, open letters from protesters were published in newspapers, including the Financial Times and The New York Times. Due to the influence of LIHKG, 22,066 activists raised almost 5,5 million Hong Kong dollars (700 000 US dollars), which is 82 % more than the planned amount [11].

In a survey conducted by the Center for Communications and Public Opinion at China University, 49 percent of respondents aged 15 to 34 thought Telegram was important for receiving information about protests, while 61 percent in

this age group thought that Reddit Platform LIHKG was important for such information [5].

Sometimes protesters use more creative tools for communication. Protesters contact Tinder, Pokémon Go, and Apple AirDrop to distribute messages. After the police began to act violently during the protests, the Hong Kongers switched to new methods for disseminating information. If the police forbid the march, the protesters decided to say that they were not going to march – they just came to the game in Pokémon Go [12]. Apple AirDrop sends messages calling to rally Apple devices that are nearby. In addition, protesters publish demonstration routes on Tinder's dating service and broadcast live from street processions at Twitch Streaming Site. Another FireChat.5 tool, very useful in situations where there is no mobile connection or when it is disconnected. However, the role of these tools is not so high and the main work has been done on more traditional online forums, such as LIHKG, and instant messengers such as Telegram.

Conclusion

In this paper, the following conclusions were made. Firstly, after analyzing the part of social media that has become the main one for use by protesters, we can conclude that those tools that allow you to remain anonymous were used to a greater extent. Hong Kong residents remember the experience of the 2014 protests and are now trying to maximize their safety on social media. Tools such as Twitter and Facebook are used only to disseminate information and news after the rallies, but at these venues, Hong Kong people can often encounter misinformation and interference from the people of mainland China. Secondly, all social media in aggregate help to carry out tremendous work on the preparation and conduct of rallies. Thirdly, the evolution of communication tools, and the use of them by protesters, allows for such strong cooperation that opposition to the police and the administration becomes extremely difficult.

References

1. Lau C., Lok-kei S., Zhang K. Hong Kong murder suspect at centre of extradition bill crisis begs for public forgiveness upon release from jail. 2019 [Electronical resource]. URL: <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law->

[and-crime/article/3034128/hong-kong-murder-suspect-chan-tong-kai-who-triggered](https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-) (accessed 23.02.2020).

2. Hui M., Lahiri T. Photos: Hong Kong has got its protest mojo back. 2019 [Electronical resource]. URL: <https://qz.com/1639005/hong-kong-extradition-protest-draws-massive-turn-out/> (accessed 23.02.2020).

3. Hong Kong protest: 'Nearly two million' join demonstration: BBC. 2019 [Electronical resource]. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-48656471> (accessed 23.02.2020).

4. Chiu K., Lew L. From Facebook and Twitter to Telegram, WhatsApp and Signal: how protest technology has evolved since Occupy Central. 2019 [Electronical resource]. URL: <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/3014255/facebook-and-twitter-telegram-whatsapp-and-signal-how-protest> (accessed 23.02.2020).

5. Chiu P. Older Hongkongers taking to online apps and social media for latest updates on protests, and some may join rallies too. 2019 [Electronical resource]. URL: <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3032496/older-hongkongers-taking-online-apps-and-social-media> (accessed 23.02.2020).

6. Ritchie H. How many internet users does each country have? 2019 [Electronical resource]. URL: <https://ourworldindata.org/how-many-internet-users-does-each-country-have> (accessed 23.02.2020).

7. Davis H. What social media platforms run Hong Kong and what are the implications? 2019 [Electronical resource]. URL: <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/community/article/2142652/what-social-media-platforms-runhong-kong-and-what-are> (accessed 23.02.2020).

8. Vinsent D. Telegram i drugie: prilozheniya, kotorye pomogli vyvesti sotni tysyach lyudej na ulicy Gonkonga // BBC. 2019 [Electronical resource]. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-48815279> (accessed 23.02.2020).

9. Chernyavceva V. Pochemu Vinni-Puh est serdca? // Novaya gazeta. 2019 [Electronical resource]. URL: <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/10/05/82238-chto-napisano-na-plakatah-gonkongtsev-spetsproekt> (accessed 23.02.2020).

10. Alizar A. Protestuyushchie v Гонконге обнародовали, что Telegram показывает телефонный номер независимо от настроек конфиденциальности // Habr 2019 [Electronical resource]. URL: <https://habr.com/ru/news/t/464855/> (accessed 23.02.2020).
11. Yeo R. Hong Kong protests: how the city's Reddit-like forum LIHKG has become the leading platform for organising demonstrations. 2019 [Electronical resource]. URL: <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/3021224/hong-kong-protests-how-citys-reddit-forum-lihkg-has-become> (accessed 23.02.2020).
12. Borak M. Swipe right for revolution: Why Hong Kong protesters are using Tinder and Pokémon Go. 2019 [Electronical resource]. URL: <https://www.abacusnews.com/digital-life/swipe-right-revolution-why-hong-kong-protesters-are-using-tinder-and-pokemon-go/article/3021460> (accessed 23.02.2020).

РОЛЬ ОНЛАЙН ИНСТРУМЕНТОВ В МАССОВЫХ ПРОТЕСТАХ В ГОНКОНГЕ 2019 ГОДА

Л. А. Хакимова

С июня 2019 г. Гонконг охватила непрекращающаяся волна протестов, имеющих связь с недовольством граждан введением властями закона об экстрадиции. Участникам протестов удалось достичь тесной кооперации и мобилизации для организации массовых митингов, что усложнило работу полиции в противодействии протестующим. В своё время способом коммуникации на акциях выступали социальные сети, такие как Facebook, в связи с приобретением опыта ведения протестов позже подход изменился. Смена технологий сыграла ключевую роль в усиливающихся антиправительственных движениях. Теперь больше популярность приобрели приложения, позволяющие шифровать сообщения. Самыми востребованными из них стали Telegram и LIHKG, выступающие в качестве виртуальных командных центров для получения обновлений и обмена информацией. Всего лишь за пять лет произошли крупные изменения в подходах к коммуникации в протестных движениях. Происходящее в Гонконге заставляет обратить внимание на то, как новые механизмы коммуникации могут повлиять на практику проведения протестов и политическую сферу в ближайшем будущем.

Ключевые слова: Telegram, полиция, протестующие, LIHKG, новые инструменты, информационные технологии.

Статья поступила в редакцию 06.06.2020 г.

© Хакимова Л. А., 2020.

Хакимова Лариса Андреевна (KhakimovaLara1337@gmail.com),
студент IV курса исторического факультета Самарского университета,
443086, Россия, г. Самара, Московское шоссе, 34.