

Retoryka i pieniądze

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Rhetoric in Digital Communication: Merging Tradition with Modernity

Retoryka w komunikacji cyfrowej: alians tradycji z nowoczesnością

Abstract

Looking into the definition of rhetoric in the digital space, one often encounters the view that rhetoric is too remote or too “ancient” to be used as a conceptual, theoretical or practical framework for researching digital media. However, a substantial body of contemporary media research applies the theory of rhetoric, using a modern conceptual apparatus (e.g. cognitive theories of metaphor). Based on Kenneth Burke’s model of the pentad, the article aims to show that media messages in the digital environment are based on the notion of the rhetorical situation and demonstrate that the rhetorical apparatus has a crucial role in discerning the ways to modify the discourse space in human-computer-human communication. The source of modification in the traditional model of a rhetorical situation is the interactive nature of communication in digital media and the fact that the recipient [agent a] is bestowed with the role of an active participant who can influence the content of the message. Thanks to the use of the rhetorical model of pentad, the argument goes that in contrast to traditional media, modifications in the model *act 1* → *agent* → *agency* → *act 2* are possible and they result from the inclusion of external participants [agent b] and changes in the ontological status of the digital medium from the role of an intermediary to an active participant in the communication process [agent c].

Poszukując definicji retoryki w przestrzeni cyfrowej, często napotyka się na pogląd, iż retoryka jest pojęciem zbyt odległym, by nie powiedzieć „starożytnym”, aby mogła posłużyć jako rama koncepcyjna, teoretyczna lub praktyczna do badania mediów cyfrowych. Tymczasem wiele współczesnych badań w dziedzinie medioznawstwa korzysta z teorii retoryki, używając uwspółcześionego aparatu pojęciowego (np. kognitywne teorie metafory). Bazując na modelu pentady Kennetha Burke’a, Autorka ukazuje, jak przekazy medialne w środowisku cyfrowym odnoszą się do pojęcia sytuacji retorycznej i jak kluczowa jest rola aparatu retorycznego w odczytywaniu sposobów modyfikowania przestrzeni dyskursu w komunikacji na linii człowiek-komputer-człowiek. Źródłem modyfikacji w tradycyjnym modelu sytuacji retorycznej jest interakcyjny charakter komunikacji w mediach cyfrowych i nadanie odbiorcy [agent a] roli odbiorcy aktywnego, który może wpłynąć na treść przekazu. Dzięki zastosowaniu retorycznego modelu pentady, w artykule wykazano, iż w przeciwieństwie do mediów tradycyjnych, w modelu *act 1* → *agent* → *agency* → *act 2* możliwe są modyfikacje wynikające między innymi z włączenia się w proces uczestników zewnętrznych [agent b] oraz zmiany statusu ontologicznego medium cyfrowego z roli pośrednika na aktywnego uczestnika procesu komunikacji [agent c].

Key words

digital rhetoric, Kenneth Burke, rhetorical situation, dramatism, pentad, Facebook
retoryka cyfrowa, Kenneth Burke, sytuacja retoryczna, dramatyzm, pentada, Facebook

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Rhetoric in Digital Communication: Merging Tradition with Modernity

Introduction

For rhetoric, which deals with communication and interaction between people and anchors its analytical apparatus on concepts linking interpersonal communication with human action, the introduction of an intermediary in the form of a computer can be a problem on many theoretical and practical levels. It is enough, however, to assume that the interactive nature of digital communication includes elements of both communication and action. Thus it is possible to shift the perspective from the model of communication on the human-human axis to the human-computer-human model. In this way, interactivity becomes a link connecting rhetoric with digitization, where communication mediated by the digital medium creates the possibility of cooperation [*agency*] on the human-computer axis in the new rhetorical situation. Regarding the specificity of the digital medium and the discussions that we observe among computer games researchers (Wolf and Perron 2013) who are in disagreement about the interpretation of basic media concepts, it can be concluded that we are unable to transfer the conceptual apparatus used in traditional media research in an automatic and non-reflective way.

In this article it is argued that in the case of digital media, rhetoric, or, more precisely, its latest variation: digital rhetoric, is the field that operates with a compatible conceptual apparatus. After demonstrating the relationship between rhetoric and media in the digital environment and reviewing the scientific theories on the subject, a specific rhetorical analysis model based on Kenneth Burke's dramaturgical pentad theory will be discussed. The pentad will serve as an example of potentially applying rhetorical methodology in digital media research. The application of Burke's theory to the analysis of the selected rhetorical situations related to a specific medium (Facebook) in the second part of the article will show how the modifications of the classical rhetorical model resulting from the specificity of the digital medium (i.e. introducing subsequent participants [*agents*] of the rhetorical act) can be described comprehensively. The analysis carried out in this article is

meant to demonstrate the usability of a method based on a rhetorical apparatus that can adapt its instruments to contemporary phenomena, often not yet described in scholarly literature. The replicability of the method used in this analysis may allow for its application in further analyses of modern communication in the digital environment.

“Rhetoric” + “digital” – a correlation of meanings

The term “digital rhetoric” contains two concepts – “rhetoric” and “digital” – which are not coincidentally connected with each other. They form the framework of the concept of modern communication on the human-computer-human axis, based on the classical questions about the goal, the context and the recipient. It is necessary at this point to refer to the source that is the classical definition of rhetoric according to Aristotle, which is usually omitted in (the) studies on digital rhetoric. In common perception, rhetoric is associated with persuasion tantamount to inducement, which is often perceived in eristic terms, where the goal is *ergon* (a product, a creation) in the form of a favorable solution to the dispute regardless of the truth. However, Aristotle rejects the sophistic concept of rhetoric as the art of inducement. According to him, rhetoric is the “the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever” (Aristotle I.2). The task of rhetoric is, therefore, to find reliable methods of argumentation, thus the goal here is not *ergon*, which is a product – a ready-made solution, but *energeia*, which is a process – an action in progress leading to the solution. This activity takes place in a specific environment, named by Terry Winograd and Fernando Flores (1987, 5) an “interface” environment. As mentioned in the introduction to the book *Digital Rhetoric and Global Literacies*, “Current digital technologies, such as Web 2.0, social networks, cloud computing, mobile apps, video games and virtual worlds use rhetorical principles to engage, inform, instruct, persuade and (inter)act in novel ways” (Verhulsdonck and Limbu 2013, xviii).

It should be emphasized that the abovementioned technologies have not caused the disappearance of orality, literature or printing, i.e. the departure from the media referred to as traditional. That is why we should not talk about replacing traditional forms with digital media. Rather, we are dealing with a recurring “remediation” process of our approach to older technologies initiated by the emergence of new technologies (see Ong 1982). Therefore, as Janet Murray (2011, 431) postulates, the term “new media,” which emphasizes only the attribute of novelty, should be replaced with the term “digital media” to give an overview of what this novelty consists of. The motto of the second chapter in her book *Inventing the Medium* is a quote by Brenda Laurel: “Think of the computer not as a tool, but as a medium.”

Janet Murray (2011, 56) distinguishes four characteristics or *affordances* of the digital medium: (1) encyclopedism, (2) spatiality, (3) procedurality, and (4) participativity. In her theory, the Internet can be described as a medium: (1) providing information on every topic; (2) taking place on many conceptual levels, both on the internal level of programming (production), as well as in the form of the product and its consumption, including, for example, the space of computer games or virtual reality; (3) based on powerful strategies for creating abstraction through the ability to describe reality through a code; and (4) responsive, that is providing (a) the ability to manipulate the digital artifact with the mouse, touch screen or motion sensor, and (b) the possibility of social interaction at the new level of *many-to-many* (next to traditional *one-to-one* and *one-to-many* levels).

Undoubtedly, rhetoric has to offer a wide conceptual apparatus that can be used to analyze individual Internet affordances. These may include: *logos* (encyclopedism), *kairos* (spatiality), *sylogism* (procedurality), or *ethos* and *pathos* (participativity). All these concepts are linked to the concept of rhetorical situation developed by Lloyd Bitzer in 1968. Bitzer (1968, 2) pointed to the need of introducing a situational context to rhetorical research, because “[t]he presence of rhetorical discourse obviously indicates the presence of a rhetorical situation.” However, it must be emphasized that rhetorical discourse does not have to accompany every situation. In a problematic situation, for instance, we sometimes choose not to speak out the utterance in our minds at that moment. Likewise, it should not be assumed that any statement will create a rhetorical situation. The key implication for a rhetorical analysis is Bitzer’s (1968, 11) observation that “it is the situation which calls the discourse into existence.” Not all situations are rhetorical, only those that can be modified, and the modification requires an act of persuasion. That is why *kairos* is important, that is, the sense of timing to talk about the situation in a way that can best remedy the problem.

For a rhetorical situation to arise, three elements are crucial: a problem that needs a solution (an *exigence*), an *audience* that can change the situation under the influence of discourse, and *constraints*, or “persons, events, objects and relations,” which can impose limitations on decisions and actions necessary to modify the exigence (Bitzer 1968, 8). A rhetor also introduces a certain set of restrictions in the form of a personal character (*ethos*), evidence (*logos*) and emotions (*pathos*). In his concluding remarks, Bitzer (1968, 14) proves that the model he describes possesses the attributes of a scientific method:

[T]he world presents objects to be known, puzzles to be resolved, complexities to be understood — hence the practical need for scientific inquiry and discourse; similarly, the world presents imperfections to be modified by means of discourse — hence the practical need for rhetorical investigation and discourse.

On the basis of Bitzer's words, a thesis can be formulated that rhetoric can be an appropriate tool for studying communication in a digital environment thanks to a wide range of concepts that can help recognize and investigate social and cultural situations and effects resulting from human functioning in a new environment of digital technologies.

The interdisciplinary character of digital rhetoric may, on the one hand, create problems with specifying the identity of the discipline (so familiar to rhetoric itself), but, on the other hand, it may generate a wide range of options for the analysis of digital artifacts from the point of view of rhetoric. Traditional views both in rhetoric and in the humanities share the belief in human uniqueness, which places every new technology as a potential threat directed against man and his innate ability to think, act and express emotions. Meanwhile, digital rhetoric tends towards a philosophy that recognizes the correlation of worlds known as human and nonhuman: the world of people and the world of technology.

Ideas about how to translate contemporary challenges resulting from the co-existence of the world of humans and the world of technology into the language of science about new phenomena can be found in various theories from the fields of rhetoric, media and information technology (Landow 1991; Manovich 2001; Zappen 2005; Bogost 2007; Losh 2009, Couldry 2013). Among the many available theories in digital rhetoric, two authors seem to answer the question about the new quality of digital media in the context of the new understanding of the (hyper)text (Lanham 1993, 2006) and the new dynamics of a fluid digital interaction in the convergence-continuum model (Verhulsdonck 2013). What is more, both authors refer to the concept of Kenneth Burke, showing human action as an activity producing symbolic meanings according to a model called the dramatistic pentad. The pentad consists of five rhetorical elements: act [what?], scene [where? when?], agent [who?], agency [how?] and purpose [why?]. According to Burke (1969), from the combination of these elements we can read the motives of human action. The author himself describes the need for this type of analysis in the introduction to the book *A Grammar of Motives*:

We want to enquire into the purely internal relationships which the five terms bear to one another, considering their possibilities of transformation, their range of permutations and combinations – and then to see how these various resources figure in actual statements about human motives (Burke 1969, xvi).

A very important declaration in the context of conducting a rhetorical analysis using a dramatistic pentad is Burke's statement on the impossibility of defining human motives in simple terms:

We take it for granted that, insofar as men cannot themselves create the universe, there must remain something essentially enigmatic about the problem of motives, and that this underlying enigma will manifest itself in inevitable ambiguities and inconsistencies among the terms for motives. Accordingly, what we want is not terms that avoid ambiguity, but terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise (Burke 1969, xviii).

In this context, research into ambiguity goes beyond purely linguistic research, just as dramatism itself as a method goes beyond linguistic dimension. Michael A. Overington (1977, 133) draws attention to the social and scientific dimension of dramatism, which as a method or meta-method seeks to be “the logic of inquiry and instrumental logic, which can be used to study hypotheses in specific problems.” Hence the element of the theory of dramatism, the pentad, has been applied in this article to demonstrate its potential for the analysis of the “transformations,” “permutations” and “combinations” in the traditional communications model with the advent of digital media

It is also worth specifying where, according to Burke (1969, xvii), lies the boundary between the rhetorical and symbolic actions:

We sought to formulate the basic stratagems which people employ, in endless variations, and consciously or unconsciously, for the outwitting or cajoling of one another. Since all these devices had a “you and me” quality about them, being “addressed” to some person or to some advantage, we classed them broadly under the heading of a Rhetoric. There were other notes, concerned with modes of expression and appeal in the fine arts, and with purely psychological or psychoanalytic matters. These we classed under the heading of Symbolic.

This profile of rhetoric with the starting point in the relationship between agents engaging in acts resulting from their motivation proves that Burke treated language first and foremost as an *action*. In his opinion, language acts create reality, provide it with meaning and determine the nature of social relations. In the next part of the article, this concept will be extended to language acts with an indication of the specific role of the medium (traditional medium vs. digital medium), and, depending on the type, the acts provoking different “transformations,” “permutations” and “combinations” of action. In this way, we move to the domain of digital rhetoric, which studies the amalgam of reality in the spheres of human and nonhuman.

Kenneth Burke’s pentad as a rhetorical method of analyzing communication in the digital environment

According to Kennedy Burke’s (1969) model of pentad [language as a symbolic action: *act - scene - agent - agency - purpose*], we (*agents*) engage in a semiotic/symbolic action (*act / scene*), which gives us the causative power (*agency*) based on our identification with specific motives for these activities performed for a specific *purpose*.

In a traditional model, the media message [*act 1*] evokes in its recipients [*agents*] the causative power [*agency*] to undertake symbolic actions (meaning: containing symbolism) [*act 2*]

medium
act 1 → *agents* → *agency* → *act 2*

For example, a fiery speech by an activist inspires the members of a demonstration to go on strike. Analyzing this situation using Burke's model of the pentad, the following steps and elements can be distinguished: the activist's speech [*act 1*] → gives the causal power [*agency*] → to the members of the demonstration [*agents*] → to go on strike [*act 2*].

In the above model, where the medium of transmission is traditional, based on a classical pattern (a direct speech to the members of the assembly), we deal with acts which are two-dimensional (from-to) and linear (*act 1* – *act 2*), where *act 1* and *act 2* are happening on separate rhetorical levels. Both carry a specific symbolism resulting from a given rhetorical situation, but their planes do not intersect. The speech [*act 1*] and the strike [*act 2*] take place in a linear and chronological order and there is no place for feedback (third dimension), where the strike [*act 2*] would affect the speech [*act 1*]. This model can therefore be considered two-dimensional and non-interactive, and thus complete and closed.

The flow of the rhetorical situation in the case of digital media is different. The starting point, based on Burke's pentad, is analogical, that is, the message transmitted by the medium [*act 1*] gives the recipient [*agent*] the causative power [*agency*] to undertake certain symbolic actions [*act 2*]. These activities, in contrast to communication using traditional media, can go in two directions: (1) traditional, linear and two-dimensional:

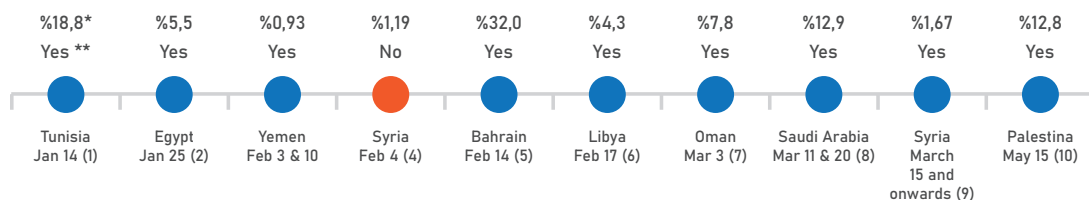
digital medium
act 1 → *agents* → *agency* → *act 2*

or (2) modified, non-linear and three-dimensional, generating at least 4 variants described below in the "Modifications" section, with the possibility of creating further ones, depending on the communicative situation.

The classic linear rhetorical situation in digital communication according to Burke's model of the pentad

One of the attributes of digital communication is its wide scope, significantly increasing both the speed of the message transmission and the number of its

recipients, which also translates into the influence wielded by a given message. The above argument can be illustrated on the example of a situation analogous to that described above (a speech that provokes a strike), when the message [*act 1*] engages the recipient [*agent*] into a symbolic act [*act 2*], thanks to the transmission of a causative power [*agency*] through the identification with specific motives for these activities. A specific example will be based on the events of the Arab Spring period between 2010-2012 in the Middle East and North Africa. As a result of mass protests largely inspired by social media activities, there have been changes in the political situation in individual countries, including the disintegration of the regimes in Egypt and Tunisia. The authors of the report on the role of social media during the Arab Spring have paid attention to two phenomena related to the impact of the interactive nature of digital media on the political activity of citizens (Fadi and Mourtada 2011). First of all, the Internet research shows that most of the protests against the authorities at that time were initiated via Facebook:



* Facebook penetration rates at the start of protests in each country

** Initial protest was not organized on Facebook, although further protests were

(1) <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2011-01-15/tunisia-protests-the-facebook-revolution/>

(2) <http://www.newsweek.com/2011/01/22/the-revolution-comes-to-egypt.html>

(3) http://articles.cnn.com/2011-02-10/world/yemen.student.protest_1.student-protest-demonstration-facebook?s=PM:WORLD

(4) <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gmg4rvAfz5HpVrBLnRRPpOxQUwvQ?docId=CNG.48f3fb2a5d4e5791795d8c3f3b8c5311.8e1>

(5) <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5i2YM2LCYTiuv6jLNIhaLdPiOAA?docId=CNG.174090b19aab9f0dd092524489bf4699.331>

(6) <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2011/02/16/libya-protests-begin-in-benghazi-ahead-of-february-17-day-of-wrath>

(7) <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/01/world/middleeast/01oman.html>

(8) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/23/us-saudi-facebook-idUSLDE71M08Q20110223>

(9) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12749674>

Fig. 1. Mapping calls for protest on Facebook with the actual demonstration on a given day (Fadi and Mourtada 2011, 4)

As indicated above, out of 10 countries covered by the survey, only in Syria the calls for demonstrations in the streets on a given day did not trigger the intended effect. In other countries, Facebook campaigns indeed translated into mass protests.¹

In this case, the classic linear model of the rhetorical situation in accordance with Burke's pentad is confirmed.

1. In reference to the presented data, the authors of the report (Fadi and Mourtada 2011, 4) included a following disclaimer: "As detailed further on within this report, the number of Facebook users has risen significantly in most Arab countries, most notably so in the countries where protests have taken place. The role of social media in the revolutions that have swept the region has been debated, with some camps labeling them the main instigators and other relegating them to mere tools. Regardless, it can be stated that many of the calls to protest in the Arab region were initially made on Facebook (save for the first protest in Tunisia)."

digital medium

act 1 → *agents* → *agency* → *act 2*

The call to protest [*act 1*] gives the recipients [*agents*] a causative power [*agency*] to go out into the streets in a gesture of protest [*act 2*]. This is illustrated in the table with the results of a survey on the purposes of Facebook use conducted among Facebook users in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, where social mobilization induced the regime change.

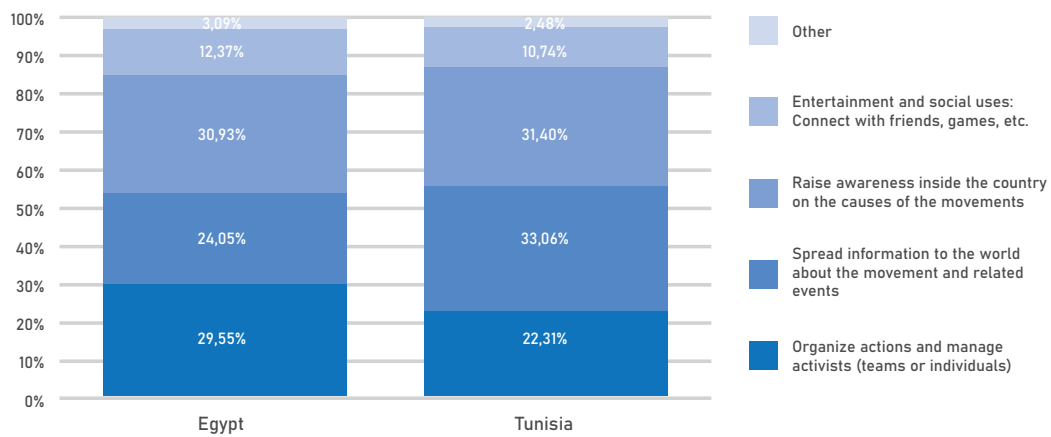


Fig. 2. The main purposes of Facebook usage during the Arab Spring based on the survey carried out in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011 (Fadi and Mourtada 2011, 6)

When asked about the most important functions of this social media platform during the Arab Spring, the respondents in both countries indicated in particular: raising awareness about protest activities among citizens of their own country (Egypt and Tunisia, 31% each); informing the world public about the origins and the course of the Arab Spring (Tunisia 33%, Egypt 24%); and – what is important in the context of the rhetorical pentad model – organizing protests and internal coordination of activities among the organizers and participants (Egypt 33%, Tunisia 22%).

Modifications of the rhetorical situation model in digital communication according to Burke's model of the pentad

Modifications of the rhetorical situation model mediated by digital media can be illustrated by a situation analogous to the one discussed above, in which the message is to evoke a symbolic action. The medium of communication will change – from traditional (direct communication or via traditional media: radio/press/television) to digital medium (internet/social media). The basic distinguishing

feature of the digital medium is its interactive character, which allows the recipient to react back to the sender of the message. Using Burke's terminology of the pentad, this means that in the framework of symbolic actions [*act 2*] under the influence of the stimulus [*act 1*], the causative power of the recipient [*agency*] can go in several different directions and cause several different effects.

The novelty which has arisen thanks to digital media technology is the active attitude of the recipient [*agent*], who, with appropriate instruments, strives to interact with the input message [*act 1*] in order to: (a) provide feedback to the sender, or (b) affect the shape of the output message (interaction with the sender). This attitude of the recipient radically changes his or her rhetorical status. While in the traditional model (e.g. while watching TV) the recipient remains at the level of passive audience, showing no motivation to interact with the input message [*act 1*] (in contrast to the motivation to take action [*act 2*] inspired by this message), in an interactive model with the use of digital communication the recipient consciously, and sometimes involuntarily, engages in various forms of dialogue with the sender and his message. In digital rhetoric, therefore, we are dealing with a person who switches from the classic and passive mode of the "audience" into the new and active "end-user" mode (Lieberman et al. 2006).

Modification [*act 2*] → *act 2a*

digital medium [→ *traditional medium*]

act 1 → *agents* → *agency* → [*act 2*] → *act 2a*

The authors of the previously quoted report from the Arab Spring period drew attention to the significant activation of users in the long-term perspective. The majority (about 60%) of the respondents confirmed the thesis that blocking access to the Internet by their government, contrary to the intended effect, had a positive impact on the mobilization of citizens, even though their actions could temporarily be hampered and therefore performed on a smaller scale. The protesters who were suddenly deprived of the basic communication channel, the Internet, quickly realized that this medium, like no other before, let them unite in their common cause and become a powerful community. Despite the complications with swift communication, the protesters did not give up but sought alternative forms of communication so that their actions could be continued. This situation indicates that the disappearance of the Internet, the fastest and most effective medium compared to traditional media which serves as a space for information exchange and mobilization for action [*act 1*], affects not only the way the action is performed [*agency*], but can also cause a change in the intended effect of the action as a result of the

smaller range of traditional media. We are dealing here with the transition from *act 2* → to *act 2a*, i.e., for example, in place of the planned large demonstration in the city center, there are several smaller rallies in the districts, which, apparently, would be likely to generate less attention and thus their outcome would also be less spectacular:

digital medium [→ *traditional medium*]

act 1 → *agents* → *agency* → [*act 2*] → *act 2a*

Interestingly, this model illustrates not so much the modification in the rhetorical situation as a result of the *introduction* of the digital medium, but as a consequence of its temporary *absence*, which results in a return to traditional media. This reversed situation proves how significant digital media can be in the promotion of all kinds of civic movements (e.g. the Arab Spring, #metoo movement) thanks to their wide range and real time immediacy of operation. As shown by the situation in some Arab countries where the government temporarily blocked access to the Internet, the immediate effect of limiting contact between protesters through Facebook was – despite the increase in their motivation to act – a temporary decline in the scale of the entire movement activity.

Modification agent a + agent b

The modification of the rhetorical act in the digital network is also influenced by other activities, such as the appearance of a new participant in the communication process [agent b], for instance, the government. As described above, thanks to the available technological means, the government agents were able to block selected communication channels, and thus limit the citizens' revolutionary activities. The report also mentions the practice of creating Facebook pages by the military council in Egypt in order to “interact with the citizens” (Fadi and Mourtada 2011, 4). This is the second type of rhetorical act modification in the pentad model, which assumes the introduction of a synchronous agent [*agent b* – the government] operating in parallel with the protesters [*agent a*] on the same medium [Facebook]:

digital medium

act 1 → *agent a* + *agent b* → *agency* → *act 2*

This is the result of the technological efficacy that does not exist in the case of traditional media: first, a parallel data transfer by different users through the same channel; second, the visibility of the transmitted content real time of its appearance in the network.

The attributes of digital media can be used both by the party directly involved in the communication process [*agent b* – the government], but also by theoretically unbiased and uninvolved entities, including commercial ones. An example may be the company Cambridge Analytica, whose illegal practices, disclosed in 2018, caused one of the world's largest data leakage scandals in recent years. It turned out that the company used Facebook users' data for purposes of conducting personalized, and thus more effective, political campaigns (2015 and 2016 elections in the USA, 2016 campaign on Brexit, 2018 elections in Mexico) (Cadwalladr and Graham-Harrison 2018). The danger of such a situation lies in the fact that due to access to data in the network, companies of this type may influence the course and result of the rhetorical situation they initiate, such as election or marketing campaigns, without consent, or even awareness, of the data owners.

Modification *digital medium* [= *agent c*]

The reaction of the global opinion to events occurring in the digital network related both to the Arab Spring and the leakage of Facebook users' data points to one more modification of the classical rhetorical act according to Burke's pentad. It is the appearance on the rhetorical *scene* of the third agent [*agent c*] in the form of a digital media operator, such as Facebook company:

digital medium [= *agent c*]

act 1 → *agent a* + *agent b* → *agency* → [*act 2*]

In the case of the Arab Spring, the authors of the report formulated their reflection in such a way that they gave Facebook the role of a third party in a conflict between the government and the citizens:

[I]t is not just governments and citizens that are wrestling with the new political uses of social media. The social media companies themselves are facing a dilemma when it comes to addressing this kind of usage, the implications it may have, and how to maintain the neutrality of these sites without infringing upon their users' freedom of speech (Fadi and Mourtada 2011, 4).

The situation concerning the controversy around Cambridge Analytica was concluded more radically, or even spectacularly. In this case, the founder and owner of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, entered the scene of the rhetorical act in the role of the accused and was summoned to give explanations regarding data leakage before the investigation committee in the US Senate (Kang 2018). This fact made digital medium undergo a specific process of personification. By revealing details of the functioning of the Facebook portal, in this specific rhetorical act Zuckerberg

functioned as a metonymy of the media he embodied and self-identified with. He thus became the participant [*agent c*] of this act, creating an unprecedented situation.

The internet medium has become a personified participant of the rhetorical act, yet in a different way than from, for instance, the press in the Watergate scandal of 1972-74. In the case of Watergate, the media – here the press – also played a significant role, but not as a medium involved in the scandal, but as a medium that revealed the spy activity undertaken by members of President Nixon’s administration. In addition, in the case of Watergate, the medium was the actual mediator, but not *The Washington Post*, the newspaper that made Nixon resign from office, but the journalists who investigated the scandal for the newspaper – Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward (1974). Comparing the status of the medium in the Watergate and Cambridge Analytica cases, it can be stated that in the case of the latter, the ontological status of the digital medium has undergone a change in the rhetorical act. In this structure of reality, the medium in itself gains the status of an active participant in the communication process [*digital medium = agent c*], and has a perceptible influence on the final result in this act (e.g. in elections).

Conclusion

The digitization of modern communication, which puts human-computer interaction at the forefront, requires the creation of a new framework for the research apparatus that would comprehensively reflect the processes taking place during interaction that have not yet been fully explored. One of the recommended directions is rhetoric, including digital rhetoric, defined in this article as the study of human interaction with and through the digital medium. Rhetoric is able to capture the essence of digital communication, which is based on the constant changeability of the rhetorical situation, resulting from the immediacy of the transmission and reception of the signal. Undoubtedly, the added value of using methods derived from rhetoric is the possibility of reflection going beyond the outer layer of the message form towards the internal dynamics of communication between human and nonhuman agents. As the analysis carried out in this article has shown, breaking up a specific rhetorical situation mediated through digital means into individual elements identified in Burke’s pentad model allows us to discern specific modifications in the communication process and formulate conclusions that reach up to the ontological status of the medium itself. This method may prove especially useful in the study of the social media, blogs, interactive websites as well as more and more popular digital literature. Including in the analysis a reflection on the motives of human action in a new digital environment, as well as an

open approach to the roles traditionally assigned to the participants by non-digital media theories may open the possibility of recognizing the hitherto unexplored social, cultural and cognitive effects of human interaction with technology.

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