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# How to be loud enough during the pandemic?

A qualitative study of the demonstrations that arose as a result of the amendment of the abortion law in Poland.

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# Abstract

The study aims to find connections and compare the pre-pandemic action and media repertoires of demonstrations and the period during and after the pandemic. It is looking for the answer to how the organizers of the feminist movement were able to adapt to forced digitalization and what changes they had to introduce. It investigates how the attitude and motivation of the activists changed when it was no longer possible to participate in street demonstrations due to the strictness of the pandemic rules by using in-depth semi-structured interviews with organizers and participants. The thesis explores these connections through the series of demonstrations following the amendment of the Polish abortion law adopted in 2020. The results showed that, despite the attempts, with zoom meetings and more social media activity, the online presence is not equivalent to face-to-face meetings and demonstrations, but it is a good additional tool for raising awareness.

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# 1. Introduction

Abortion is a fundamental human right that is protected by several international and regional human rights treaties and constitutions around the world. WHO (2021) estimates that 73 million induced abortions occur annually around the world. Three out of ten pregnancies (29%) and six out of ten (61%) unplanned pregnancies result in an induced abortion (WHO,2021). However, abortion is a straightforward medical intervention that can be successfully handled by a variety of healthcare professionals utilizing drugs or a surgical technique. A medical abortion can also be safely self-managed by the pregnant person outside of a healthcare facility (such as at home), in whole or in part, within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. However, unexpected pregnancy sufferers frequently turn to unsafe abortion when they encounter obstacles to obtaining a safe, fast, inexpensive, geographically accessible, respectful, and non-discriminatory abortion (WHO,2021).

In 2016 in Poland, thousands of women and men gathered across the country to express their displeasure with the change in the regulation of abortion. The law already made it possible almost to totally ban the abortion, as it was only allowed in case of rape (needs to be confirmed by a prosecutor), when a woman life's in danger or in chance of irreversible damage to the fetus (BBC, 2016).

Law and Justice (Prawo I Sprawiedliwo), a conservative, far-right, populist, and anti-immigrant coalition, and two other smaller, less well-known political parties took control of the Parliament in 2015, it appeared that the Polish version of an extremely conservative backlash would not be halted. Both in the newly proposed legal rules and in less formal but no less powerful forms of informal pressure on the media (particularly public service), non-governmental organizations, cultural institutions, and educational sector, it has thoroughly ingrained its core ideological beliefs (Nacher, 2021).

Among other things, the current government supports the traditional cisgender, i.e., female-male relationship, which supports the conservative patriarchal system, which can be traced back to the country's post-socialist past (Winiarczyk-Kossakowska, 2021).

The Law and Justice coalition, which holds a majority in the Polish parliament, in 2016 endorsed a parliamentary motion known as "Stop Abortion" that called for a complete abortion ban and five years in prison for women who attempt it (Nacher, 2021). Poland's abortion restrictions are among the most stringent in Europe. It is one of only two European Union member states, along with Malta, that has not legalized abortion on demand or on

broad social grounds. Abortion is already only legal in Poland if the life or health of the pregnant woman is in danger, or if the pregnancy is the consequence of rape. In practice, however, obtaining a legal abortion for people who are qualified is almost impossible. Thousands of women leave Poland each year to seek abortion care in other European countries, while others smuggle medical abortion pills or choose for an illegal abortion in Poland. Polish women, particularly those in tough socioeconomic situations, must rely on civil society organizations for vital assistance, which is often limited (Amnesty,2016).

As a response to the possibility of changing the law and making it more stricter, a wave of protests began in 2016 across Poland. Simultaneous demonstrations were organized across the country, more than 140 demonstrations took place in various cities and villages on Monday, October 3, which was thus named "Black Monday" (Guardian,2016). The movement started online and soon emerged as an offline mass protest.

Grassroots organizations such as Strajk Kobiet and Dziewuszki Dziewuszkom participated among the organizers. Participants wore black to express their feelings and solidarity for possible changes to the law. As a result of the demonstrations, the party did not enact the law but held further discussions about it. Thus, it seemed that the movements had achieved their effects. However, the amendment to the law was postponed and discussed again in 2020. This resulted in another series of demonstrations during the pandemic (Nacher 2021) and despite the attempts the law came into effect. With the onset of the pandemic in 2020, the state of the epidemic was declared (Rak, 2020), and as a result restrictions were introduced. Public gatherings were restricted, and a lockdown came into effect. People were only allowed to leave their homes if they went to work or to the shops or something of similar vital importance. At the same time as these temporary laws entered into force, in 2020 the amendment to the abortion law, which was not adopted in 2016, reappeared. Another wave of protests began across Poland. Nevertheless, this was a different kind of demonstration. Even though street protests were illegal due to the pandemic, people still took to the streets. Crowds gathered and there were almost as many demonstrations as in 2016 during the Black Monday demonstration series. Altough, during the pandemic, online demonstrations also started in addition to offline ones. According to Nacher (2021), the offline action repertoire adapted to the restrictions created due to the pandemic, during certain street demonstrations people stood 2 meters apart, and attention-grabbing posters were put on cars and bicycles and windows. In addition, the online repertoire had to adapt to the restrictions, zoom demonstrations were organized, and the use of different hashtags increased, such as #strajkkobiet, which grassroots organization was one of the biggest

organizers of the demonstrations during the pandemic. However, despite the efforts, demonstrations, and calls for attention, the law amendment came into force and the right to abortion was regulated in Poland in one of the strictest ways in Europe. In addition to the fact that this law limits women's free decision-making rights, it also puts doctors in a difficult situation, since they can only perform abortions on patients under certain circumstances. In addition, according to Krajewska (2021), the newly introduced law states that women who wish to terminate their pregnancy can take an abortion pill, however, family members or friends who contribute to this with their help and buy the medicine can be reported to the police and be prosecuted.

As it was already mentioned, communication aspects played an important role in the demonstrations. The thesis distinguishes the approach from the grassroots organization side, that is, what action repertoires were used (van Laer & van Aelst, 2010) to mobilize people, raise awareness and motivate people. It also analyses their media repertoire, how they were able to include online media, and the opportunities provided by the Internet before and during the pandemic, while also relying on traditional media (Mattoni and Treré 2014). It shows what opportunities movements had for attracting and retaining attention by involving different techniques of traditional media (Donk, 2004). In addition, the thesis examines how the people on the other side, that is, the participants of the demonstrations, experienced the demonstrations before and during the pandemic. It is intended to find out whether online presence and social media can create a collective identity (Gerbaudo 2015) if it is not possible to demonstrate on the streets due to restrictions at the time of the pandemic. Also, whether the participants in the demonstrations are able to express their feelings (Jacobsson & Lindblom, 2013) as effectively in the online space as offline during the street demonstrations. With the help of in-depth semi-structured interviews, the thesis compares the difficulties experienced by the organizers of the demonstrations and the participants of the demonstrations. In terms of how they had to adapt to the situation caused by the pandemic, how they were able to change their action and media repertoire in such a way that the participants reacted positively to them and were able to maintain their motivation. The thesis compares how the two most important actors of the demonstrations fared when forced into the online space. The thesis tries to use the relevant information collected from the interviews to understand the phenomenon that developed during the pandemic, which made it possible to examine the effect and success of the online demonstrations and how the participants experienced the situation.

## 2. Research and questions

The thesis aims to illustrate the change in social movements in Poland in 2020 as a result of the "forced" digitalization created by the pandemic and the newly introduced restrictions. It looks into how the media and action repertoires has changed, and whether it is possible to evoke a collective sense in people with the occurred changes. An important question is whether "digital demonstrations" will achieve the intended effects that street presence allows? Can people be as "loud online" as they are in real life? Were they able to feel the collectiveness through online meetings and social media, or do they lose interest because there is no possibility of an offline demonstration? The thesis seeks to compare and understand the organizers and participants views and perceptions during the 2020 pandemic after tightening the abortion law by exploring a Polish case. With the help of the used literature and the interviews, the thesis looks for the answer to what kind of technical and organizational tasks had to be changed on the part of the organizers and what kind of behavioral changes occurred on the part of the participants due to the restrictions during the pandemic.

*RQ1: How has the action and media repertoire of protests of the Polish abortion law changed and adapted due to the pandemic?*

RQ1 seeks the answer to whether the media and action repertoire of the demonstrations has changed due to the restrictions during and after the pandemic, and if so, how. From the perspective of whether the organizers needed to make changes to reach and activate the participants.

*RQ2: What kind of behavior change did the pandemic cause in terms of activism/motivation in participants of the demonstrations?*

RQ2 seeks the answer to whether the perception and behavior of the participants in demonstrations regarding the changes of law, changed due to the tighter regulations during the pandemic and whether the "exile to the digital space" enabled the creation of collective behavior and actions.

# 3. Literature review

The study comprises an analysis of peer-reviewed articles on the topics of social movements, activism, digitalization, and pandemic.

## 3.1 Media and social movements

For the most part, various studies on social movements focus on how and in what ways people can be activated and motivated. According to Alice Mattoni (2013), personal encounters and conversations play a particularly important role among activists. However, it also highlights that face-to-face meeting are not enough to mobilize as many people as possible. There is also a need to involve the media and the internet. Today, computers, internet, and mobile phones can be found in almost all the households in developed countries. Which indicates that everything is given so that even those who would not necessarily join would be informed of certain movements. Mattoni (2013) distinguishes 4 categories dealing with media and social movements:

- Newspapers, television, and radio are examples of non-digital mainstream media.
- Online newspapers, social networking sites, and commercial blog platforms are examples of digital mainstream media.
- Alternative non-digital media: radio stations, street television, theater performances, leaflets, and posters
- Alternative digital media such as alternative informational websites and alternative blogging platforms

Mattoni (2013) claims that the conceptual frameworks that can convey the interconnectivity of the various elements on which media practices when it comes to social movements rest are necessary for the multifaceted communication processes that characterize current and future mobilizations around the world. However, previous mobilizations could also be reexamined from a communication perspective that considers the different levels at which media and movements interact, as well as the critically important similarities between the media's role in more recent and earlier protests.

Confirming this, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argue that the visibility of social movements requires the help of traditional media. However, new opportunities have

opened up and traditional media such as tv, radio, and newspaper have been pushed into the background alongside social media and hashtags. Castells (2012) proposes that digital technologies might strengthen the potential of individuals, activists, social movements, and others to challenge dominant forces and advance the public good in alternative ways. Despite its benefits, the internet will not render other forms of media obsolete. It is mostly used as a highly effective instrument for gathering and disseminating information for people who not only have the technical means but also know what they are looking for. The online opportunities such as facebook groups or online meeting will not be able to take the role of real meetings between social movement groups (Donk, 2014). Also, it should be noted that according to Etter and Albu (2020), the activity of online movements does not necessarily reflect reality, as social media algorithms can help convey events, groups, relevant articles to people, or on the contrary, make visibility difficult. Social media, according to Fuchs (2014), is a multi-layered phrase with many different connotations. Facebook is a platform for communication and the creation of communities, and it contains a lot of content (information). Although it is only a modest tool for collaborative work, it does entail at least three aspects of sociality: cognition, communication, and community. However, not all computing systems and web applications allow for direct human communication, in which at least two people exchange signals that are interpreted as meaningful. Facebook for example offers built-in communication facilities that are commonly utilized (mail system, comment walls, forums, and so on). There are more optimistic and, on the other side, more cautious perspectives, according to Castells(2014), the techno-optimistic viewpoint sees social media as having mostly good effects on politics and concludes that it strengthens democracy and the public sphere. Metaphors like "Twitter revolution" or "Facebook rebellions" are commonly used to describe it. Reinforcing this, Shirky (2008) argues that by using social media, people are absolutely free to share their opinions, avoiding censorship, and thus not silencing people even with their political views. This puts a power in the hands of the people that we have not experienced before. However, as Castells (2014) argues, the use of social media and freedom of expression can strengthen democracy. Although Malcolm Gladwell (2010), in response to the techno-euphoria surrounding social media, suggested that revolutionaries and rebels risk their lives and become victims of police or protestor violence. It would take strong social ties and friendships with other members of the movement to summon the fortitude to face these threats. Activism entails a significant amount of risk. However, a new word has been coined, slacktivism, which, according to the Cambridge dictionary, means "activity that

uses the internet to support political or social causes in a way that does not need much effort, for example creating or signing online petitions". Slacktivism, according to Jodi Dean (2005), leads to post-politics: "Busy people experience they are active politically — the technology will act for them, relieving their anxiety while ensuring them that nothing will change too much. Highlighting Marx(1997) ideology critique aims to remind us that everything in society is the result of human interactions, and that these interactions may be changed. It aspires to bring "issues into the self-conscious human form," i.e., to make people aware of the problems they face in society and the sources of those problems, which indicates that without actual realization of problems the change can not be achieved.

## 3.2 Social movements during the pandemic

Jörg Haßler (et al. 2020) states that the online and offline emergence of social movements is no longer separable and together they can achieve the desired effect. However, the pandemic has fundamentally changed the norms we have known so far. With the onset of the pandemic, social movements have had to face limitations almost never seen before. Be it a curfew, a ban on gatherings, or any other restriction that has changed their average daily routine. Jörg Haßler (et al. 2020) collected data from Twitter and analyzed the comments. They argues based on the collected data, that due to the restrictions caused by the pandemic, the demonstrations were confined to the online space only. This has significantly changed the dynamics of the organization and execution of movements. Haßler (et al. 2020) explains that because movements cannot create newsworthy incidents in the offline realm under a lockdown, offline protest is no longer conceivable. They must stage media-savvy and controversial internet activities in order to attract media attention and attempt to rebalance the weighting of general problem attention.

 Before the pandemic, social media was mostly used in traditional ways, such as promoting events and inform people about the happenings (Sorce and Dumitrica, 2021). Because of the pandemic, activists have observed that social media has become even more active among users than ever before, as people suddenly had a lot of free time and were at home and used their phones more than before. According to Sorce and Dumitrica (2021) with the help of Qualitative framing analysis, it become clear while addressing the COVID-19 topic, digital alternatives present a major chance to promote collective identity and establish an activist atmosphere.

The studies analyzed show that social movements and activists can be studied from several perspectives. Whether it's how to encourage them to be active, how to reach potential participants most effectively, or how movements can be of interest to both traditional and online media. However, it is important to see that most of the research is about what tools can be deployed online but finding little information about how people feel about belonging together online and how, in a situation, both organizers and participants behave while they are "trapped in a digital space."  In current studies, there are gasps such as the impact of a pandemic on social movements, how grassroot organizations have changed action and media repertoires for keeping the activists motivated. In addition, there is little information to be found about what motivates the participants in the online space and how the attitude of the participants changes when the offline presence ceases.

# 4. Theory

In this section, the main theories that contribute to a suitable scientific base will be presented. The theory of activism, action and media repertoire of activism, social movements, and "quadruple A" were also selected.

4.1 Collectiveness and motivation

Collective identification, according to Gerbaudo (2015), reflects the technological advantages of social media, the cultural values linked with their use, and the predominant social experience forms in the digital age. The use of various social media interactive features, from profile images to status updates, likes, and comments, which are appropriated as means of community identification, can be understood as how social media interactivity shapes collective identity in this context.
However, this is not the only aspect that shapes collectiveness and creates motivation within the activists.
According to Jacobsson & Lindblom (2013) both emotional and cognitive motivation is needed for protest. Social movement participants constantly require emotional labor as a result of the moral standards of activists and prevailing social conventions. In order to

affect social change and create a world that better represents their moral standards, social movement activists assess and communicate their feelings. To successfully orchestrate attacks, erect blockades, better advance their cause, set positive examples, or engage in acts of civil disobedience, activists frequently learn to control their emotions.

## 4.3 Action repertoires

With the advent and spread of the internet, new opportunities have opened up for mobilizing people to take actions. It is easier to reach a large number of people and it is easier to pass on information. In addition, new techniques have emerged that can evoke people's collective action even online (van Laer & van Aelst, 2010). It can be distinguished between different techniques that were created thanks to the Internet and those that already existed but were shaped and adapted because of social media. New forms are referred to as "internet-based" because they are only possible because of the internet. Traditional social movement tools that have become easier to plan and coordinate thanks to the internet are referred to as internet-supported actions. The internet's creative role in developing new and updated strategies is extending social movements' action toolbox (pp. 1149.)

As another way of analyzing tools, Marsh (1977) ranked several social movement techniques from low (signing petitions, legal protests) to high (illegal demonstrations, violent action) thresholds. Signing petitions, for example, might be thought of as a low-cost approach because it requires little commitment and risk. However, to take part in a public demonstration, participants need some free time, possibly some money to cover their travel expenses, and they may face a violent encounter with police (van Laer & van Aelst, 2010).

Further analyzing this, according to van Laer and van Aelst (2010), they distinguish between different techniques between low and high threshold. Firstly, the low threshold acts will be explained.

One of them is the *donation of money*, which helps to raise resources. People do not have to be fully committed to the cause since donations can be made both offline and online. It doesn't require so much planning beforehand since this could be easily an act of the

moment. That follows the *consumer behavior*, which indicates that people can boycott different kind of products or shops to express their consensus with the cause. It also doesn't mean that people need to take risk while contributing, because they are free to choose any other product or companies to support either online or offline also. *Legal protest demonstrations* in a classical sense means street protest, although organizations provide precise information on time, place, and possibly even a practical field guide for activists to 'educate people on how to organize, their rights, and how to protect themselves from harm' via the internet. With the help of online presence, the mobilization could become easier (pp.1148)

Secondly, the high threshold acts can be differentiating as *transnational demonstration,* which according to Van Laer (2010) the help of the internet people mobilization improved over time and become more and more accessible regardless physical places and times. Which means, mess-mobilization turned into a phenomenon which collects activists for the same cause but at different places, with the aim to emphasize the importance of the cause. There are *sit-ins and more radical forms of protest.* McPhail and McCarthy (2005) argue that with the help of internet, the organizing part become easier and more than that, there is an opportunity to continuously document protestors' acts and interactions with the police using communication technologies.

Thirdly there are internet-based action with low threshold such as *online petitions*, *virtual occupations, emails* and so on (pp. 1156). As it was explained before the online petitions are highly popular, yet new forms have occurred. Activists tend to use social media sites as "petitions" to express and share their opinion by joining different kind of online groups where they can start conversations with those people who already share their point of views (pp. 1156). Virtual occupations and emails mean the people engage their time for the movement. According to Jordan & Taylor (2004) this is a "form of mass action hacktivism" which is still considered being legal, since people only send numerous emails to an organization or someone important for the case, or make sure that they are very active on a website which it can't handle and shuts down.

Fourthly we can distinguish the last category as internet-based action with high threshold. These actions are possible only because of the advent of internet but requires more than just signing a petition for example (van Laer & van Aelst, 2010). *Protest websites* main purposes are collected information and offer support through them. The site's name could resonate the cause to raise awareness and make it possible to have a full campaign for the causes. *Culture jamming* "changes the meaning of corporate advertising by artistic

techniques that alter corporate logos visually and by giving marketing phrases new meaning" (Stolle et al. 2005, p. 10). This technique can be very visible with the popularity of different kind of social media sites such as Instagram or TikTok using the power of humor and short videos. Lastly *hacktivism* which can mean automated email floods, website defacements that change the source code of targeted websites, and the use of harmful software like viruses and worms are all examples of cyber-attacks. These are all actions that cross the line between what is considered lawful and what is considered illegal Van Laer (2010).

However, it is important to point out that these action repertoires largely require the use of the internet, which, if not available, will not achieve the desired effects. The action repertoire used for social movements did not mention classic, offline methods such as posters, flyers, face-to-face meetings and so on. According to Van Laer (2010), it is likely that classical techniques will not be able to replace the new opportunities offered by digitalization but will complement and reinforce each other with continuous renewal.


4.4 Media repertoires

According to Mattoni and Treré (2014) social movements and demonstration organizations aspire for media attention and, if feasible, good publicity, which can be critical in influencing people's hearts and minds, and ultimately policy decisions. Some groups are quite effective in interacting with the media, others achieve media resonance to a limited level or only in rare instances, and still, others fail. If they fail, however, it does not necessarily imply that their cause is doomed. They may attempt to create their methods of communication in order to propagate their message, redefine their goals and demands, shift their modes of action, and/or refocus their media strategies to become more appealing to the media, or sections of it. According to Mattoni (2012), the definition of "activist media practice" can be examined from two perspectives. First, activists use the tools available to them within their own limits, such as phones, laptops, or more traditional methods, posters to get their message out to the outside world to generate content. The second is to involve journalists so that their message can reach a wider audience, but it also could mean a controlled or edited appearance in the media.

Supporting these, there are two other concepts to examine media practices. *Mediation* (Couldry, 2008; Silverstone, 2002) can be characterized as a social process in which media facilitates the flow of discourses, meanings, and interpretations in societies. Mediation is

a broad term that encompasses a variety of activist media practices that support and surround social movements by focusing on the flow of media creations, circulation, interpretation, and recirculation (Couldry, 2004, 2008). Activists use and adapt media technology for their own objectives through reconfiguration, whilst social movement actors use *remediation* to build new meanings from existing cultural works and media products (Lievrouw, 2011). This will make it possible for activists to incorporate new elements or change their existing strategies. Be it the involvement of social media such as creating special Facebook groups, making a TikTok channel, moving to new platforms, the creative involvement of mainstream media, using mailing lists, or even engaging with traditional media.

4.5 The quadruple 'A'

According to Donk (2004) social movements and demonstration organizations aspire for media attention and, if feasible, good publicity, which can be critical in influencing people's hearts and minds, and ultimately policy decisions. Some groups are quite effective in interacting with the media; others achieve media resonance to a limited level or only in rare instances, and still, others fail. If they fail, however, it does not necessarily imply that their cause is doomed. They may attempt to create their methods of communication in order to propagate their message, redefine their goals and demands, shift their modes of action, and/or refocus their media strategies to become more appealing to the media, or sections of it. However social movements and the media are both involved in attempting to draw attention to themselves. To understand the connection better between social movements and media, it is crucial to highlight the differences of their audiences.

4.5.1 Attention

Social movements strive to persuade people primarily through personal interactions, expecting that the growing number of individuals who support the cause would eventually make a difference or alter people's minds and hearts. However, the chances of this happening until structural changes are made are minimal (Donk et al.,2014)
However, not all movements aim for widespread public recognition. They prefer qualitative mobilization methods (Rucht 1988). They seek a dramatic impact on a small number of people by relying mostly on face-to-face engagement. Many other social

movement groups rely on public attention and support to impress and influence policymakers who might otherwise dismiss their goals and arguments. These organizations favor quantitative mobilization in order to reach as many individuals as feasible. However, in order to gain attention, according to Donk (2004), it is also necessary to involve the mass media, as face-to-face meetings do not have the right impact and cannot reach as many people as they can with the help of TV, radio, or the internet. Techniques used to raise awareness include very fierce, spontaneous expressions of emotion from protesters that receive media attention and, in addition, allow people to better identify with the problem when they see the emotions. The other option is when people consciously show their anger, thereby reinforcing in other people how they feel and how committed they are to the cause. Both options are desirable for the media, as they produce content for them, and participants get their message across to as many people as possible.

### 4.5.2 Media

The goal of mass media is to reach as many people as possible, whether they are TV viewers, newspaper readers, radio users, or online magazine and website users. However, it is not that simple, as it is important to be up-to-date, fast, and thematic and to follow the rules in the communication (Donk et al. 2004). In this way, the media differs significantly from social movements, which, in most circumstances, seek not only attention but also support and commitment. In contrast to movements, the media is rarely, if ever, involved in political battles. As a result, they rarely have a clear opponent. Instead, they operate from the perspective of providing a service within the context of economic rivalry (pp. 29). According to Donk (2004) without the media, a substantial portion of the population is unaware of a movement. As a result, its impact would be limited to its immediate surroundings. As a result, social movements find the media to be immensely appealing.

### 4.5.3 The quadruple 'A': abstention, attack, adaptation, alternatives

As Donk (et al. 2004) expresses, movements frequently argue that the media does not accurately portray them, particularly when it comes to their motivations for protest. Abstention, attack, adaptation, and alternatives are four simple reactions to such frustrating experiences that can be depicted by a quadruple 'A'.

*Abstention* stems from a sense of resignation brought on by unfavorable experiences with the mainstream media. It suggests a retreat from attempts to influence the media and a return to inward-directed group communication, similar to abstention from voting (pp.31). The second reaction is *attack*, which is a direct critique of, and occasionally even violent action against, the media. Activists who believe they have been overlooked or grossly portrayed by the media can submit a letter to the editor, launch a petition against unfair treatment or neglect, or contact a more or less established competing medium that they believe would do a better job (pp.31).

The third sort of reaction is *adaptation*, which is defined as the acceptance/exploitation of the mass media's standards and criteria in order to positively affect coverage. This tactic is mostly used by the more "established" movement groups. In its most evolved form, it may entail hiring a professional journalist or perhaps forming a distinct public relations unit that understands how to play the established media game (pp.32).

The search for *alternatives* is the fourth form of reaction, in which social movements strive to build their own independent media (or public forums of communication) to compensate for the existing media's lack of interest or bias (pp.33).

## 5. Method

This section presents the chosen method and the process of selecting subjects for in-depth semi-structured interviews.

### 5.1 Qualitative research method

The aim of the thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the behaviors and acts of the organizers and the participants of the protests, therefore qualitative research is the most suitable method. It was chosen for the thesis since this method is the best way to get to know the motivation, feelings, and opinions of the respondents (Brymann, 2018).

The use of the quantitative method was not the aim of the research, as it would not have contributed to its validity. The qualitative research method enabled me to obtain relevant and personal experiences by interviewing the interview subjects, which helped me to better understand the motivation of the participants and their perception. Also, the organizers could tell with details about how they had to address people in the days before the pandemic and how the demonstrations changed during the pandemic. This useful

information could not or would have been difficult to find out with other research methods, since the interviews within the qualitative research method are the most personal and the most obvious in terms of the topic of the thesis. Since it was possible to establish a relationship of trust between the interviewer and the interviewees, but for example, with a questioner would not have been possible and this would have reduced the value of the answers.

5.2 Semi-structured interview

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were chosen for the thesis because they provide the opportunity to flexibly change the questions with the interviewees and to follow up the emerging and relevant answers with further questions. Through semi-structured interviews it allows us to truly get to know the different perspective of the relevant people. Given the sensitivity of the topic, the ability to observe small nuances in speech really adds to the authenticity of the interviews (Bryman, 2018). Conducting the interviews allowed the interviewees to give truly personal answers to the questions that concerned them more within the framework of the topic, and these led to new, relevant questions, to which they could give detailed answers. This method contributed to the validity of the interviews (pp.,470).

In addition, the interviews provided an opportunity to get to know the subjects' feelings, concerns, and opinions better. The semi-structured interviews gave the freedom to have a flexible conversation while staying on topic and focusing on the most important facts according to the subjects. Considering the sensitivity of the topic, the interviewees honestly expressed how they were affected by the law amendment, which contributed to the depth of the interviews. It should also be noted that the interviews were conducted in English and Hungarian through Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The national and gender diversity of the interviewees allowed several aspects to enrich the thesis

5.3 Sample and selection

This chapter is intended to show where and how the selected interviewees were approached and based on what criteria they were selected. The fulfillment of the criteria contributed to the reliability of the thesis (Bryman, 2012). The interview questions were prepared based on prior knowledge and the theories used in the thesis. The first questions served to get to know the subjects in general so that the reader can put their person in perspective. They introduced themselves and then answered whether they had previously participated in other

demonstrations, whether they declared themselves activists, what role they played in a demonstration (participant or organizer), and how they felt about the amendment of the abortion law. After that, the interviewees were asked different questions, depending on whether they were organizers or participants. The organizers' questions focused on how people were involved in the demonstrations before and during the pandemic, what tools they used to raise awareness, and what techniques they had to change because of the pandemic. On the other hand, the participants were asked questions about how they found out about the demonstrations, how it changed (if it changed) during the pandemic, how they felt about the demonstrations, did they consider the online meetings valuable (*See the appendix for the exact questions*). The questions addressed to the two groups were asked differently, but they still reflect on each other and complimented them. With their help, parallels could be drawn to understand the situation and be able to answer for the two research questions.

5.3.1 Ethical consideration

Regarding the ethical consideration (Bryman, 2012) the participants have been informed about the topic when they were contacted through Facebook groups, messenger, or email. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, I made sure that the interviewees were aware of what information I would need in connection with my thesis, so I gave them the opportunity to ask questions and share any concerns they may have before the interview. After the first contact, we arranged a time for the interview. The interview took place online via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Before starting each interview, I asked the interviewees whether they consent to use their first names in the thesis or rather not. Also asked if there is any sensitive information that I cannot share. The subjects all consented to the use of their first names and to the use of the stories and information they shared.

5.3.2 Grassroot organizations

The paper uses semi-structured interviews with representatives of grassroot organizations such as "Strajk Kobiet UK", "Dziewuszki Dziewuszkom", and a local organization in the city called Białystok. The groups were contacted on Facebook on their official pages.
**Dziewuszki Dziewuszkom**, Gals for Gals in English has been established in 2016, started as a Facebook activist group, as a reply for the abortion ban (Rak, 2018.) Since the organization has been active since 2016, Aleksandra has relevant knowledge and

comparison between the two series of demonstrations. One, which was called Black Monday in 2016, and then the next wave of protests in 2020 during the pandemic. *Aleksandra* participated in the founding of the organization and continues to play an important role. Her answers can be considered relevant and reliable, which contributes to a deeper understanding of behavioral changes in activists due to the pandemic and forced innovations on the part of the organizers.

**Strajk Kobiet UK**, a local organization in Great Britain, formed from the solidarity of the Polish Grassroot organization - Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet- consists of local Polish women. Interviewee *Agnieszka*, who actively participated in the 2016 Black Monday protests in Poland, was relocated to the UK. As a result of the 2020 law amendment in Poland, she founded her Facebook page, which started virtually during the pandemic, but she also organized several personal protests as far as local regulations allowed. The interview revealed relevant data about changes in online activity during the pandemic.

**Młoda Lewica** is a left-wing youth association working for a progressive, fair future. *Zosia* is the representative of the city of Białystok. She is responsible for the Facebook page and group and also performs organizational tasks. The group was founded in 2019 and they stand up for various social causes, be it equality or the amendment of the abortion law. Her experiences, which were revealed during the interviews, contributed to the variety of the thesis because I was able to gain insight into the operation and difficulties of a small-town organization during the pandemic.

Based on the answers I received from them, I was able to get relevant pieces of information from 3 different grassroots organizations about how their action and media repertoire changed during the pandemic, what new online and offline solutions they had to use in order to be able to maintain the interest of the activists and actively make their voice heard even under the restrictions.

| Agnieszka | **Strajk Kobiet UK** | May 05 0:40 |
| Aleksandra | **Dziewuszki Dziewuszkom** | May 11 0:43 |
| Zosia | **Młoda Lewica** | May 23 0:48 |

*Table 1 Interviews with representatives of grassroot organizations*

5.3.3 Activists / participants

The criterion for selecting the activists/participants was that they joined the Black Monday protests in Poland in 2016, as well as during the 2020 wave of protests. Thus, they had the

opportunity to compare the difference between the two demonstrations, both in terms of communication, personal presence, and collective actions.

In addition, protesters could have relevant views on how their attitudes changed when the only way to make their voices heard was in the digital space, as street rallies were banned due to the pandemic. For the interviews snowball sampling (Bryman, 2012) was used to get in contact to relevant interview subjects and as well people were recruited in Facebook groups. In total there are four interviews with activists/participants: **Tibor, Máté, Kasia, and Katarzyna.**

| Tibor | May 11 0:32 |
| --- | --- |
| Katarzyna | May 13 0:30 |
| Máté | May 16 0:29 |
| Kasia | May 20 0:36 |

*Table 2 Interviews with participants*

5.4 Data analysis

The primary data from the interviews were transcribed and themes were identified. When analyzing the interviews, two main categories were distinguished. The first being the organizers and the second being the participants. Based on the key ideas observed during the coding process, three themes emerged, which could be applied to both main categories. This made it possible to identify key themes and compare similarities and differences in the given subcategories (Bryman, 2012.). The interviews were conducted via Zoom and Microsoft Teams, which were recorded. Then the interviews were transcribed. The interview questions enabled a structured analysis, as each interview began with a general introduction, followed by questions about the conditions before and during the pandemic. First, based on the information revealed in the introduction, I was able to distinguish two groups. The first group is those who claim to be activists, and the other group is those who have participated in demonstrations, but it is not part of their lives. These answers helped me better understand the motivations and perspectives of the interviewees regarding

collectiveness and demonstrations and created the first theme which called activism and motivations.

Then, after the introductory questions, the two distinct groups were given questions about the times before the pandemic. On the part of the organizers, the use of action and media repertoires and also techniques how to attract people's attention, while on the part of the participants, the interviewees were given questions about how they learned about the demonstrations before the pandemic. This way made it possible to reflect on the information as a dialogue between the two parties.

Following this, the third theme was about the times during and after the pandemic. In this chapter, the arising problems and difficulties were mentioned and explained. How the pandemic changed the techniques presented in the previous chapter and how it forced the organizers to make changes and how the participants of the demonstration reacted to them.

# 6. Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of the interviews, the findings are analyzed based on the previously described theories, and the research questions will be answered with these data. It was divided into 3 themes, the first is the motivations of activism and how the subjects are connected to social movements, the second shows the activism before the pandemic, and the third part shows how the organizers changed their action and media repertoires and the participants attitudes changed during/after the pandemic.

6.1 Activism and motivation

The interviewees can be divided into two groups. One group consists of those who, even before the outbreak of the abortion protests in Poland, actively stood up for other causes, such as LGBTQIA rights, climate change, or other social problems. The other group consists of those who felt the need to raise their voices, especially during the series of demonstrations in Poland.

In terms of the motivation of the interviewees who previously stood up for social issues was not only that they did not agree with the handling of the given case or situation, but

also wanted to actively do something about it and make their voice heard. They felt it was important to be socially responsible.

Zosia who is coming from the most conservative city based on the voting results, Białystok, recalled what motivated her:

"It is really hard to live here because I support human rights, am part of the LGBTQIA group and I'm not the perfect person for the right wings. I want to be a doctor and help people, however, raising my voice is risking my future because I can not be a doctor if I got arrested. I feel the responsibility for actions for women's rights, although we don't have many activists in my town because it is risky."

Máté, who has been working and living in Poland for three years, said the following:

"Already during my university years, I went to demonstrations on the topic of higher education and took part in domestic political demonstrations in Hungary. I mainly stood up for cases that affected me personally. I got involved the polish demonstration for personal reasons also. I have a polish girlfriend who is significantly involved in the case. Even though I personally do not support abortion, I believe that everyone has the right to decide on their own body. If we were to find ourselves in such a situation, of course I would like to discuss the options with my partner, but the final decision remains hers, since we are talking about her body."

Kasia, who recently finished high school and is preparing to go to university, and is also from Białystok replied:

"In 2019, I went to a protest against climate change and have been fully engaged ever since. I became a member of several organizations, mainly interested in human rights and climate change. When I found out that the amendment to the law was accepted, I was devastated and afraid, I didn't want to live in this country anymore. I felt the obligation to join the protests immediately."

However, among those who have not participated in any social movement before, it can be observed that there is a lack of motivation and that they did not feel that the issues were important to them and rather wanted to stay out of them. The first engagement began with demonstrations to amend the abortion law in 2016 at the so-called Black Monday demonstration, which followed the 2020 demonstrations.

Tibor has been living and working in Poland for more than ten years answered:

"I was never an activist type, there were initiatives that interested me, but if I didn't know enough about the case or wasn't involved, I didn't want to join, because I felt that it didn't belong to me and I had no right to

say in it. However, I have many female colleagues who were affected by the change in the law and I understood from them what this will mean. I am also involved in some way, so I felt that it was worth standing up for this cause. I joined them in the demonstrations."

Katarzyna was doing PhD studies in Sweden during the Polish protests, this is how she was describing her motivations and feelings:

" I am not an activist myself, so I have not been involved in any activity like that before, however, the change of law made me really sad and I do believe that we all should have the freedom of choice, even though I wouldn't have an abortion myself. I truly believe that was a step back on women's rights in Poland. I also work in a very male-dominated profession, so I know discrimination against women does exist."

Supporting Jacobsson & Lindblom (2013), the interviews revealed from the beginning that their motivation mostly stems from the fact that the interview subjects had very strong emotions about the change in the law or in any other social issue they experienced previously. They mentioned anger, fear, and sadness, among others. These were strong emotions that encouraged activists to stand up for the cause or causes and make their voices heard. They felt that the protests they participated in were matters that reflected their values. Despite the fact that the interviewees come from different backgrounds and nations, in terms of their motivation, it can be observed that the most important thing for them was that they did not agree with the given situation. The situation evoked deep emotions from them and they felt that they could not leave it unsaid that without them, without the people, the leaders made such a drastic political decision. During the demonstrations, the interviews revealed that it was a great motivation to see that not only did they feel this way about it, but also strengthened the feeling of collectiveness.
Of course, for those who are either organizers or particularly active activists, the commitment comes from a long time ago. The interviews revealed that the organizers do not consider themselves "bosses" or leaders, since they are grassroots volunteers who felt that "just" participating in the demonstrations was not enough.

6.2 Activism before the pandemic

The lack of restrictions before the pandemic made the organization of demonstrations and movements much easier and smoother than after. Although the organizers used social

media platforms and relied heavily on them, they had the freedom to even organize personal meetings, rallies, or marches without any particular difficulties even spontaneously.

With the advance of social media, they easily reached a high number of people who were relevant from the point of view of the given cases. The interviews revealed that the most popular platforms are Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Events have been created on Facebook from fan pages, which basically already have a base of followers, and Instagram is used more for sharing facts and pictures and taking advantage of the opportunities provided by hashtags and cross-promotion. On Twitter, they share current news, respond to various relevant tweets, and even start discussions. According to van Laer & van Aelst (2010) thanks to social media and the Internet, the action toolbox has changed and developed. Collective action can form in people online as well since social movements form communities with fan pages and Facebook groups. Supporting this, Gerbaudo (2015) believes that the online presence is so strong that people create real communities on social media platforms, thereby becoming more deeply and long-term committed to social movements.

Zosia believes that it is easier to find young and progressive people through social media than on the streets or main square of their small town. Offline methods were also tried, such as putting up posters and handing out pamphlets to passers-by, but this was considered a waste of time rather than effective. Despite this, she believes that word-of-mouth information can still thrive if it reaches people who are already interested.

Aleksandra, who plays one of the key roles in the "Dziewuszki Dziewuszkom" grassroots organization, remembers the days before the pandemic like this:

"The grassroot organization started online from the beginning, so we knew that we could reach the most people online. We relied on social media the most, we have a fan page on Facebook, as well as a group. We publish important news and events on the page, while the group also has room for free and spontaneous discussion of relevant topics. This is how we try to build the community. Of course, we also involve the local media, who write about the events, so that our news can reach even more people."

However, both agreed that face-to-face meetings have the greatest power. Whether it's an internal organizational meeting, where they have the opportunity to brainstorm together, or even meetings that are open to everyone. They believe that those who want to stand up

for a case will commit to grassroots organizations more easily and more seriously if they could feel that they belong to a group of people who think the same way and hold the same views as them.

Agnieszka, who is the leader of "Strajk Kobiet UK", also agreed with the previous ones.

"Obviously we also rely on social media, but personal meetings are very important. Also, what I would highlight is the good relationship with journalists. We can reach many more people if they write articles about us or mention us on TV or radio, about our goals and about, for example, when our events will take place. We reach the older generation much more easily in this way, such as using Instagram. Young people are more active on social media, who share, like, and comment on our posts."

According to the claims of the three organizers, it can be observed that the strategies are similar. By mixing social media and traditional media, they reach as many relevant people as possible. With the involvement of the mass media, the demonstrations can receive not only local but also global attention. This can open doors for the social movement, which can start cross-country demonstrations and thereby increase people's commitment to the case. And international attention can influence the perception of the given case and the reactions of decision makers (Donk et al. 2004).

Of course, the mass media also have an interest in reporting on the demonstrations. As already mentioned, the demonstrators express their feelings openly at the demonstrations, even in a radical way, which is definitely appealing to the mass media, as it can be used to produce great content. However, these groups cannot rely only on traditional media, since if they become a victim of censorship, or if they are interviewed by a channel with a different political orientation, they can portray the given social movement in a completely different light (pp.29).

The interviewees all mentioned that thanks to the established good relationship, they often appear in local newspapers and TV, and it is not uncommon for them to be interviewed on the radio. As Donk (2004) expresses, "quadruple A" as a technique can also be used for the present organizers. During the interviews, they mentioned that, of course, negative content also has been created by pro-choice or media with conservative views, but they believe that it is not worth attacking the media, but it is worth adapting. They are aware that they cannot or do not influence enough conservative media or the opinions of pro-life groups. Therefore, it is more useful if they also look for alternatives, which can even be

their own channels, since there is a chance for videos or articles to go viral and reach the masses.

In addition, they try to create a community where people can freely express their concerns about specific matters and talk to people who share their views. It is important that relevant and up-to-date information is shared on the platforms, the authenticity of which can be verified.

Supporting Gerbaudo's (2015) theory, social media channels and Facebook groups also played an important role in the analyzed cases, where communities were formed despite the fact that people did not necessarily meet each other but only shared the same views. It is also crucial to see that the community must be maintained, because if people are committed to these groups and agree with the cause, then they will most likely participate much more willingly and enthusiastically, specially in personal meetings or demonstrations. All three believe that the greatest strength of the community is offline, that is, in person, but an online presence is inevitable and very important. Both online and offline presence was decisive in these periods and one seemed unthinkable without the other.

If we look at it from the perspective of the participants, they all agree that they learned about most demonstrations before the pandemic through social media. Most of them already followed the suitable Facebook pages due to their involvement and interest and were also included in thematic groups. Some of them mentioned, that they were following online newspapers or websites. Also, what was highlighted was that they heard about the events from acquaintances, colleagues, or friends and therefore joined. Most of them also participated in spontaneous demonstrations, which they even heard about for the first time that day, and also went to follow-up demonstrations later on. They answered that even if they liked a post, they didn't feel like they were doing anything for the cause. However, when they saw how many people were on the streets, they felt that they had power and that they could achieve change together.

Máté remembers a political demonstration he participated in before the pandemic by mainly following online newspapers, where articles updated minute by minute appeared. He then switched to Facebook, where he watched a live video of the events, where it was mentioned that an officially announced demonstration would begin in the afternoon,

whereas many people as possible were expected to join. That's how he joined a protest, but he didn't unmark a single event on Facebook to participate, because he was afraid that he would leave behind a digital footprint that could jeopardize his job and future or raise questions about his political affiliation.

6.3 Activism during and after the pandemic

With the onset of the pandemic, the life we had known until then changed. We had to follow a lot of new rules. Whether it's wearing a mask, keeping distance from each other, or banning gatherings. People had to adapt not only physically, but also mentally to the emerging restrictions. The pandemic has changed our everyday life as we knew it before. Forced digitalization arrived, people started working from home, could not go to school, and their entertainment and communication options also changed. We have become dependent on the internet, social media, Zoom, and other platforms in a way unknown until now.

This is how Aleksandra answered the question about what the pandemic has changed:

"We started using social media as much as possible. The number of our followers started to increase; the activity was outstanding at first. We received a lot of comments and likes on our posts. We held face-to-face meetings as long as we could despite the restrictions. However, as the rules became more and more strict, we also had to change our strategy. It was no longer possible to hold a demonstration in the street since there was a limit on the number of people we could gather. We figured out that we would distribute masks to passers-by, so we could be on the street legally. And while distributing masks, we held information about abortion and distributed brochures about the situation. Of course, we followed the rules and kept our distance, but this was the only way we could reach people."

According to Mattoni (2012), the media practices - as mentioned by the interviewees- they generated content themselves. They made videos, wrote and shared articles, and provided information to the protesters that could be useful, for example, how to avoid police brutality. They also tried to be informative and attract attention to their limit and resources. Although with the help of remediation, they also incorporated new elements into their existing strategy. They started holding online zoom events, some were more formal, round table discussions, some dealt with other social issues, such as body positivity or human rights, and there were also online protests that were about allowing members of an existing community to express their solidarity towards each other.

Zosia also similarly saw the events:

"Everyone was at home, they couldn't do anything, so the online activity increased noticeably. A lot of people joined the movement after the pandemic and the regulations were introduced. At the beginning there were about 25 of us, at the peak point we had about 100 members. However, this sudden interest didn't last long. As the rules got tighter, people lost their initial enthusiasm. I know they wanted to do something about the abortion law, and of course, the easiest thing to do is to like a page and leave a comment. But that's not enough. They felt that we could not stand together for the common cause online and by the end there were only 6 of us left in the local group."

Aleksandra, Zosia and Agnieszka agreed that it was worth organizing online events at the beginning of the pandemic and demonstrations. A relatively large number of interested people took part in the first zoom meetings, and people who do not live in Poland but wanted to hear up-to-date information about the demonstrations and what is happening in the country had the chance to join this way. This provided an opportunity for cross-country mobilization to begin. The organizers tried to combine and reinterpret already known and used digital media technologies rather than create a new meaning for them with the help of remediation (Lievrouw, 2011), so the idea of online demonstrations via Zoom or Microsoft Teams was realized. However, as time went on, the number of offline demonstrations decreased, and people lost interest in the online event. All three reported significant inactivity on social media and online events. They tried to share more interesting articles, to get people more involved, to talk about topics that are not only about the abortion law, but also related to it, even about women's rights or other social problems, but at one point they all felt that there was no point in continuing this because it was so few people are interested in them. Since everything happened online, all the news appeared online and people's activity on social media increased, it was difficult to catch and keep them because there were so many impulses for everyone. It was even difficult to get their articles to appear on people's timelines, as it was very saturated with other news.

Aleksandra reported on the petition collection as follows:

"We started collecting signatures on the street, but since we met very few people, it was almost pointless. In the meantime, we also shared the form online, which people downloaded, printed, and mailed to us. So far, we have not come across this. The number of signatures we hoped for, eventually came together. This

was an interesting experience since before the pandemic we did the classic signature collection, but we didn't necessarily think that it could still be successful. In some things, people's attitudes changed, and they handled the difficulties associated with the pandemic situation more flexibly."

The action repertoire changed, and low-threshold actions (Marsh,1977) began to recede into the background and transform. It was not physically possible for people to collect signatures on the street, so it was adapted to the situation and people started sending in the signed forms by post. Also, more and more people joined high-threshold actions, the participants of the demonstration at the peak point were not interested in whether the demonstration was legal or reported to the police, and none of the interviewees mentioned the fear of COVID-19, they just wanted to participate anyway.

Following the amendment of the law, a series of demonstrations of unprecedented size and number began across the country. The biggest demonstration was in Warsaw. People found out about this demonstration through the website, where they could find out about the planned events from a calendar, and online channels. It was not possible to involve traditional media because the events happened so quickly. Unannounced events also took place in most cities where demonstrations were also held.

This is how Kasia experienced the period during the pandemic:

 "...when the change in the law was announced, by then my classes were already online, and I couldn't pay attention at all. My attention shifted so much to the demonstration and my risked future since it was such a hot topic that it was on every platform I followed. I felt that I had to join the demonstrations. These demonstrations were no longer reported to the police because everything happened so quickly. My mom was afraid that I would be a victim of police brutality or nationalists. Fortunately, nothing happened, and I felt the power of the people. I believed for a moment that we could change the law together and express that we disagree with it. Unfortunately, it didn't turn out that way, but the show of solidarity gave me hope."

Tibor became much more active during the pandemic and started commenting more on Facebook and became more engaged. He tried to change people's opinions and convince them of his truth. He believes that this is not necessarily healthy and tried to change this attitude after the pandemic subsided. Eventually he realized that commenting and sharing posts was not the same as protesting in the streets with hundreds of thousands of people. For him, Facebook is a virtual reality where people like and comment while lying on the couch, where he couldn't feel visible and powerful.

"...I didn't see a report on TV about how 1,200 people liked a post and it brought about any change, but I saw many interviews about people protesting in the streets. It became more and more difficult to follow the demonstrations, I started to lose interest and the government also tightened the pandemic restrictions. I heard there were online events, but I didn't attend any. I think even a comment makes more sense and can reach more people than a zoom meeting, I felt, joining an online protest was more depressing than do nothing."

Máté felt that with the onset of the pandemic, amending the abortion law slowly fell off the agenda and became less and less important. He was less and less active online and began to lose his involvement. When he was at the demonstration, he felt the power.

" I felt that I was a member of a group that I knew shared the same values as me. It gave me a good feeling to be a part of such a movement, which many people condemn, and many people disagree with. I felt that our words could make change happens like this, together."

Katarzyna explained similar feelings. She felt that people could not be as powerful online as they were on the streets. Although she has not lost interest in the case itself, she is still as against it and as angry as she was at the beginning, but she slowly started to unfollow the movements on Facebook and Instagram.

"I felt that the focus of attention on these pages had changed. They began to prioritize and criticize politics more, and they began to talk about other social issues that did not necessarily have anything to do with abortion, but I think they experienced an increase in activity on their pages and wanted to use it. Most of my acquaintances and friends also did the same, they stopped following these pages. In my opinion, if they don't shift the topic to the others, there would be more interest even now. I got so fed up with social media at some point I even stopped using my Instagram and Facebook accounts and only opened them maybe once a week."

All interviewees, regardless of whether they were organizers or participants, agreed that they felt most empowered when they participated in street demonstrations. The opinions of the respondents are divided, some of them think that social media and traditional media are good tools to draw attention to the problems and emphasize to the government that they do not agree with the decision, but others see that these are only tools for people to reassure themselves that they are doing something, but there is no real action behind it. As van Laer & van Aelst, (2010) mentioned, internet-based actions are able to arouse the feeling of collective in people, however, analyzing the data collected from the interviewees, people did not agree with this. They feel that the Internet is a good tool, but not enough. They lost interest without the offline demonstrations and became less committed to the cause.

However, they all said that if there was another demonstration against the amendment of the abortion law, they would join, despite the fact that they are no longer as active online. They don't feel the power of the community, they don't feel that they can be "loud enough" online, no matter how hard they try.

# 7. Conclusion

In this chapter, the research questions are answered using the previously described theories and the analysis of the interviews.

7.1 Research question one

Overall, the interviews revealed that with the start of the pandemic, the organizers had to change their structure and the techniques and repertoires they had used until then. It was important that they quickly adapt to the new situation. In response to RQ1, their action repertoire has changed (Van Laer 2010), they have not had the opportunity to perform as many offline actions as before the pandemic. For example, they couldn't collect signatures on the street, demonstrations became illegal and covid rules required people to keep their distance. Confirming this, according to Van Laer (2010), classic techniques cannot compete with the new ones, thus the need for continuous renewal and the use of opportunities provided by online media.

It became clear that both organizers and participants preferred personal meetings and demonstrations for as long as possible. As soon as this was no longer possible, they had to resort to methods. They relied on their social media strategy the best, according to Mattoni (2012), "activist media practice" from one perspective means that activists use their existing tools, that is, they can draw attention to themselves through their already established base, for example through their social media channels, but it was also proven that people got lost in the abundance of information that was created due to the increased online presence, so they had to resort to more drastic and denser posting.

New techniques were adapted with the help of remediation (Lievrouw, 2011), such as online demonstrations via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. In addition, other attention-grabbing talks were held with the help of these online tools. The try of new techniques as a tool to

keep activists motivated, such as digital demonstrations, which seemed popular in the early days, but as time went on, the number of participants also decreased.

In addition, the involvement of traditional media was also very important in these times. The organizers emphasized during the interviews that a good relationship with journalists is at least as important as a popular Facebook page.

## 7.2 Research question two

To reflect on RQ2, it was also revealed that in the early days the participants of the demonstrations responded well to these changes and the organizers reported unprecedented activity. The number of participants in the demonstrations was exceptionally high, and so was the commitment of the participants. They followed articles and social media posts with attention, liked, shared, and commented on posts. However, as time passed and pandemic restrictions tightened, offline demonstrations became impossible and prohibited.

As time went on, people began to lose their motivation. Although they had the opportunity to participate in online meetings or share their opinions in various thematic groups, they did not feel that they would achieve anything with these actions. According to Gerbaudo (2015), online presence can shape the collective identity and keep activists together in different ways, such as belonging to a common Facebook group, commenting, etc., however, the rules due to the pandemic have made all other ways to create/maintain a collective feeling very difficult with an only online presence. Their attention was diverted. They did not feel the collective identity that they did during the demonstrations, so even though the anti-abortion law amendment was important to them, they did not remain committed. According to Jacobsson & Lindblom (2013) activists need to be able to communicate and express their feelings for the given cause, however, it follows from the interviews that the activists did not feel "loud" enough online and lost their interest.

## 7.3 Conclusion

Based on what has been analyzed, it can be concluded that online tools really help in the creation of social movements, but they are not enough to maintain interest and full commitment and neither organizers or participants cannot rely on only online presence. The pandemic changed people's attitude towards social movements, which the organizers

tried to adjust to and come up with new strategies for, however, based on the analyzed data, this turned out to be insufficient.

By the time the austerity due to the pandemic ended, new social and economic problems appeared, such as the war in Ukraine or extremely high inflation. These contributed to the fact that the focus of the social movements changed, and they are currently focusing on these topics.

## 8. Limitation

Of course, the thesis has limitations. First, the analyzed case took place two years ago, so it is likely that the interviewees do not necessarily remember small details that could help the accuracy of the analysis. Also, due to the sensitivity of the topic, the loss of the right to legal abortion affects several interviewees personally, which causes them to be extremely disappointed and they may be inclined to criticize the political decision which is not necessarily the focus of the thesis however it is a very important indicator of the current situation. In addition, during the sampling, it turned out that the people I interviewed are part of the smaller group who dare to take on their opinions and are not afraid to give an interview. In this way, I was only able to reach activists and participants who were relatively actively involved in the demonstrations, and I was not able to reach the "average person on the street" even with snowball sampling.

## 9. Further research

Further research could involve more interviewees thus providing more accurate results. Conducting deeper and longer interviews could contribute to a more accurate analysis of how, on the one hand, the organizers of the demonstrations and those who manage social media channels have adapted to the forced digitalization due to the pandemic. On the other hand, about how the activists experienced this period and how they fought against being confined to the online space. In both cases, it can be

interesting to examine and compare what caused the loss of motivation. Were the organizers affected by the decrease in spectacular activity on their pages, or did they also feel that their online actions are worthless if they are not accompanied by offline actions? Also, a more detailed examination of the changes in the action and media repertoire is recommended.

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# Appendix

Interview Guide
1. introduction
/ Name, age, where are you from, job, school/
    1. Have you been part of any activism/ protest which is not connected to the abortion protests?
    2. Can you describe how did you react to the change of law regarding abortion?
    3. What roles do you play in the movements?

If organizer:

- How did you involve people in the protest before the pandemic?
- How much are you relying on social media? Which is the most popular social media account?
- What is the main goal of the protests?
- What changed during the pandemic? What did you have to develop?
- Did you use any new ways to involve people and keep their interest high?
- Did you lose or gain more interest from people? How?
- Did you organize any online events/zoom calls?

If participant:

- How did you hear about the movements before the pandemic?
- How did you hear about the movements during the pandemic?
- During the pandemic, did you join the street protests? Why yes/ no
- Did you feel any change during that period?
- Did you become more active online regarding the movements? (More comments on social media, joined online events)
- Did you feel that you are as powerful/visible online as on the streets?