Marcin Galent

How a Digital Revolution Dismantled the Borders of the British Polity During the Brexit Referendum Campaign.

In 2017, Oxford Dictionaries declared the term 'post-truth' as their international word of the year for 2016. The inspiration for this decision was a conviction triumphantly expressed by one of the main managers of the campaign to leave the Union European Union. He had stated that in contrast to the supporters of the Remain cause, who focused their discourse on hard facts and expert opinions, the campaign for Brexit cause chose a strategy based on the impact on emotions.

Suddenly, public discourse became filled with words previously used only by hermetic groups of specialists and geeks, such as: bots, netbots, fake news, deep fake news, psy ops, micro targeting, psychography, blind posts, big data, astroturfing, etc. Today, one can admit that the Brexit referendum campaign became a testing ground for the effectiveness of new political communication techniques that have had a huge impact on the presidential election in the USA and subsequent political campaigns in Europe and all over the world. Since then, these phenomena have become the subject of careful scrutiny by many researchers, journalists, and experts, thanks to which, social self-awareness and expert knowledge about the types and shapes of these profound transformations of the public sphere in the contemporary world has grown significantly.

Alas, it has turned out that the hopes and ideas associated with the development of communication mediated by digital developments, instead of serving social emancipation through rationalization of social communication understood in the Habermasian spirit, has given way to fears of manipulation, unauthorized interference, and irrationalisation of the decreasingly transparent public sphere. Moreover, in the course of the referendum campaign, new challenges related to the determination of polity boundaries arose. There are many reasons to claim that during the campaign, many of the very active actors involved operated illegitimately by breaking the fundamental concept of political citizenship, but also by not obeying many specific rules regulating political campaigning. These actors not only acted from outside of the UK, but they were also able to bypass British electoral law when carrying out their operations. It turned out that a huge share of the social communication in the UK took

place on platforms located outside of the country. Thereby, this aspect of British polity has become a subject to processes of institutional deterritorialisation and debordisation.

The presentation will focus on these two specific developments, as well as the consequences they have for the condition of the contemporary public sphere and democratic representation.