

# **DIGITAL MEDIA AND THE GREEK CRISIS**

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# **DIGITAL MEDIA AND THE GREEK CRISIS: CYBERCONFLICTS, DISCOURSES AND NETWORKS**

BY

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# List of Abbreviations

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>ACTA</b>     | Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement    |
| <b>AN.EL.</b>   | Independent Greeks                     |
| <b>ANT1</b>     | Antenna Television Network             |
| <b>BBC</b>      | British Broadcasting Corporation       |
| <b>CCF</b>      | Conspiracy of Cells of Fire            |
| <b>CEO</b>      | Chief Executive Officer                |
| <b>CH.AY.</b>   | Golden Dawn                            |
| <b>CLP</b>      | Coalition of the Left and Progress     |
| <b>DIKKI</b>    | Democratic Social Movement             |
| <b>DIMAR</b>    | Democratic Left                        |
| <b>EAM</b>      | National Liberation Front              |
| <b>E.AR</b>     | E.AR-Greek Left                        |
| <b>EC</b>       | European Commission                    |
| <b>ECB</b>      | European Central Bank                  |
| <b>EIR</b>      | Hellenic Radio Foundation              |
| <b>EIRT</b>     | Hellenic Radio-Television Foundation   |
| <b>ELA</b>      | Revolutionary Popular Struggle         |
| <b>EL. STAT</b> | National Statistical Service of Greece |
| <b>ERT</b>      | Hellenic Radio Television              |
| <b>ET-1</b>     | Hellenic Television, Channel 1         |
| <b>ET-2</b>     | Hellenic Television, Channel 2         |
| <b>ET-3</b>     | Hellenic Television, Channel 3         |
| <b>EU</b>       | European Union                         |
| <b>EYP</b>      | National Intelligence Service          |
| <b>FB</b>       | Facebook                               |
| <b>FLOSS</b>    | Free/Libre and Open Source Software    |
| <b>GSEE</b>     | General Confederation of Greek Workers |
| <b>ICT</b>      | Information Communication Technology   |
| <b>IMF</b>      | International Monetary Fund            |
| <b>ISIS</b>     | Islamic State in Iraq and Syria        |
| <b>KKE</b>      | Communist Party                        |
| <b>LAOS</b>     | Popular Orthodox Rally                 |

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>MEGA</b>                  | Mega Channel                                       |
| <b>M15</b>                   | May 15, Spanish Movement of Indignados             |
| <b>ND</b>                    | New Democracy                                      |
| <b>NERIT</b>                 | New Hellenic Radio, Internet and Television        |
| <b>NSM</b>                   | New Social Movement                                |
| <b>NWO</b>                   | New World Order                                    |
| <b>ODG</b>                   | Observatory for Digital Greece                     |
| <b>OTE</b>                   | Hellenic Telecommunications Organizations          |
| <b>OWS</b>                   | Occupy Wall Street                                 |
| <b>PAK</b>                   | PanHellenic Liberation Movements                   |
| <b>PASOK</b>                 | Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement                    |
| <b>PIGS</b>                  | Portugal, Iceland, Greece, Spain                   |
| <b>RMT</b>                   | Resource Movement Theory                           |
| <b>RS</b>                    | Revolutionary Struggle                             |
| <b>RT</b>                    | Russia Today                                       |
| <b>rt</b>                    | retweet  |
| <b>SE</b>                    | Solidarity Economy                                 |
| <b>SMI</b>                   | Social Movement Industry                           |
| <b>SMO</b>                   | Social Movement Organization                       |
| <b>SMT</b>                   | Social Movement Theory                             |
| <b>SMS</b>                   | Social Movement Sector                             |
| <b>SNA</b>                   | Social Network Analysis                            |
| <b>SYNASPISMOS<br/>(SYN)</b> | Coalition of Left, Ecology and Movements           |
| <b>SYRIZA</b>                | Coalition of Radical Left                          |
| <b>TA</b>                    | Thematic Analysis                                  |
| <b>Troika</b>                | IMF, European Commission and European Central Bank |
| <b>US</b>                    | Unites States                                      |
| <b>WSJ</b>                   | The <i>Wall Street Journal</i>                     |
| <b>WWII</b>                  | World War II                                       |
| <b>WWW</b>                   | World Wide Web                                     |
| <b>YENED</b>                 | Armed forces Information Centre                    |
| <b>17 November (17N)</b>     | Revolutionary Organization, 17 November            |

# Introduction

This project examines the influence of digital media on the contentious politics in Greece, as well as the political-economic sphere's impact on the formation of the digital mediascape. The research concentrated on the parallel evolution of the (debt) crisis and the digital communications in Greece, by examining four different online media platforms and covering a seven-year period (2008; 2011–2012; 2015). The research employed cyberconflict theory to situate online mediated conflict (sociopolitical and ethnoreligious cyberconflict) in a geosocio-political and historical context, indicating the dynamic relation between the online media and the offline world. This research suggests the use of online data for the examination of cyberconflict and updates the framework so as to efficiently support the study of social media platforms.

The research reflected the evolution of the sociopolitical debates and the political transformations that emerged in the Greek crisis context (anti-/pro- austerity debate to the euro-vs-drachma/or grexit discussion, the anti-/pro-governmental debate, and the anti-/pro-European discourse). The pre-crisis era and discourse online had already indicated the debates, which later, shaped the crisis discourse online and offline. Then, the SYRIZA network rides the mobilisation wave of *Aganaktismenoi*, offering a platform and promising representation of all the included actors. During the referendum, polarisation helped in the formation of less fluid identities online and offline, which further developed focusing on the division between the political Us and Them. In the crisis context, the Internet used a magnifying glass, pointing out conflict, opposition and supporting polarisation.

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## Chapter 1

# Digital Media in Greece: A Cyberconflict Approach

### **From the Internet Evolution to the Global Recession and Greek Digital Media**

Since the 1990s, the development of the Internet and its potential use in activism, social movements and protest (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002), the impact on politics (Castells, 2000a), on democracy (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Morozov, 2012), on the formation of identity, community and networks (Bennett, 2003; Castells, 2015; Rheingold, 2000; Turkle, 1997), on the public sphere (Dahlberg, 2006; Habermas, 1991; Nguyen, 2016; Papacharissi, 2002) and digital activism (Joyce, 2010; Karatzogianni, 2015) has grown. While there are many approaches to understanding the growth of the Internet, Karatzogianni (2015) discusses its association with activism, social movements and conflict, concentrating on four waves until 2015, in collocation with the historical and theoretical developments in digital activism in the last two decades (Karatzogianni, 2015).

The first phase concentrated on the period 1994–2001 (Karatzogianni, 2015, pp. 5–24) and according to Curran (2016), it was cloaked in romance, as it was characterised by optimism, and the Internet's potentiality for a social, political and cultural revolution. In this era, the story of the Internet is told as a Western story (2016, p. 48), while it is dominated by debates over anonymity, the notion of multiple selves (Turtle, 1999) and the rise of countercultures and gaming culture, which altogether with the FLOSS movement designating the emergence of the so-called Internet culture (Karatzogianni, 2015, p. 1). The Internet of that era promised the uncensored and multidirectional flow of communication, the equal and free access to information, the democratisation of communication and society (McChesney, 2013, p. 96). The Internet optimism of that period was criticised by many scholars, who highlighted dangers and limitations of this new technology by focusing on the 'digital divide' argument and inequality, on the centralisation of power, as well as on issues related to privacy and surveillance (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, Morozov, 2012, Mosco, 2014).

While the Internet had already transformed the mainstream mediascape, the second period came with the 2000s and the rise of social media, and in extension, debates around self-representations (Goffman, 1959), and user-generated content (Curran, 2016, p. 49). Focusing on the period 2001–2007, Karatzogianni (2015, pp. 25–64) explores the use of ICTs in war and conflict, as also the impact of the Internet on activism, which is now challenging the

dominant structures providing alternative imaginaries and structures for mobilisation (Karatzogianni, 2015, p. 2). Some of the most significant examples in this period included the use of ICTs in the 9/11 and the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, after the commercialisation of the Internet during the 1990s, this period leads to debates on the power of data, surveillance and later, digital capitalism (Curran, 2016).

The third period starts in the late 2010s and is characterised by the diffusion of smartphones, the power of data and the impact of digital media in every aspect of contemporary life (Curran, 2016). The use of ICTs by social movements, dissidents and non-state actors, indicated the impact of digital media on mainstream politics (Karatzogianni, 2015, pp. 66–120). Among others, some of the indicative examples of that era included the Obama campaign, the Green Movement and the origins of the anti-austerity movement, as it appeared in the context of the EU debt crisis and the southern EU countries (Karatzogianni, 2015, pp. 66–120). The fourth phase ran from 2010 to 2014 (Karatzogianni, 2015), after the WikiLeaks collateral damage release encompassing a wave of social media-enabled mobilisations, such as the so-called Arab Spring, the Occupy movement, the Indignados all the way through to the Snowden revelations, which considerably influenced the debates surrounding surveillance and privacy, raising concerns about the use of ICTs by digital activists (Karatzogianni, 2015, pp. 2–4). These phases describe how the Internet developed, promising to revolutionise contemporary society and the political environment, the rise and spread of digital activism and the mainstreaming of digital activism during the anti-austerity protest wave in the global recession era. Later on, Facebook scandals and the Cambridge Analytica case raised further questions on privacy, surveillance, the power of data and the impact on contemporary democracy (Berghel, 2018; Fuller, 2019).

Starting from 2008, the global crisis was characterised transnationally by several cycles of social and political turmoil starting with the OWS (Occupy Wall Street) in the US, which was spread and adapted in different countries and contexts, to the Arab Spring and the Spanish Indignados, and digital media indicated multiple ways in which they supported the development of collective actions and networks of resistance. At the same time, dissent events in Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Palestine, China and elsewhere (Christensen, 2011) displaced the focus from the use of Internet and its potential role in politics, communication and so on, to online conflict, digital activism, the emergence of the i-culture and the networked individual in the networked society (Castells, 2000a). The use of social media in events of dissent, revolts and occupations indicated the role of digital media and social media as an organisational and communication tool, locating the theoretical debates on the issue within the framework of social movement and public sphere theory.

While there is a very rich literature as regards the causes and the impact of the global recession and the capitalist crisis of 2008 (Douzinas, 2013; Katsikas, 2012; Plender, 2003; Posner, 2011), in Greece this resulted to what became known as the debt crisis. Later, in the Greek context, the debt crisis was also

discussed in political and social terms (Douzinas, 2013; Michael-Matsas, 2010). Therefore, throughout this study, the term crisis, as regards the Greek context, is used to describe the multidimensional ‘crisis’, which started after the global recession as a debt crisis, but soon, further evolved and developed as multiple manifestations of ‘the crisis’, which altogether developed with new crisis events up to 2015, deeply affecting every social and political structure in Greece. In this context, digital and social media has been examined as a tool of everyday use, which promotes the formation of online and offline networks, complementing offline everyday communicational practices and focusing on communities and networks. Beginning with the global recession, and later the Eurozone crisis of 2008 to the migration or refugee crisis of 2014 and so on, digital media are understood as having a significant impact on the transformation of digital networks into a digital public sphere (Karatzogianni, Nguyen & Serafinelli, 2016). While the debate on public sphere and the digital public sphere is not new (Dahlberg, 2006; Habermas, 1991; Nguyen, 2016; Papacharissi, 2002), the way that networks influence crisis, migration, culture and conflict in the digital public sphere are some of the most contemporary research considerations (Karatzogianni et al., 2016).

The global recession of 2008 brought the discussion as regards capitalism into the spotlight (Plender, 2003; Posner, 2011), while the so-called Arab Spring, the Occupy movement and the movement of the squares, in Mediterranean countries, expressed the necessity for democracy while the rise of far-right politics, highlighting the dangers raised by neoliberal politics (Gould-Wartofsky, 2015, pp. 212–3). In this frame, radicalisation and violence, the rise of extreme or populist politics as observed both in the online and the offline space, are not unexpected phenomena and can be historically predicted and justified. Nonetheless, in this context, the use of digital media is an interesting point of investigation, especially focusing on the advantages and disadvantages of such technologies, as well as on the linkage between capitalism and the information society (Fuchs, 2014a; Tsatsou, 2014). At the same time, the evolution of social media, and their contribution on the radicalization of politics, the rise of populism and far-right politics in EU and US, as well as the rise of religious and white extremism, further highlighted concerns regarding the use of social media. The global recession indicated that the impact of digital media in contemporary social movements and collective actions should be understood by focusing not only on the digital media per se but also on the context in which these are used.

Greece was among the most notable examples of countries affected by the global recession, which had a significant impact on the rise of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion (Malkoutzis, 2011; Mylonas, 2014), and the collapsed political system, resulting in intense reconfiguration of the social and political environment. At the same time, the intensification of resistance and solidarity networks, the development of the third civil society sector as well as the radicalisation of politics, indicated the potentiality of digital media in the Greek context, pointing out the necessity for further research into the issue. During the last years there were several researches that concentrated on the

Greek digital media environment, focusing on the use of digital and social media platforms (Theocharis, 2011), on political parties, communication and voting (Coursaris & Papagiannidis, 2009; Papagiannidis, Coursaris & Bourlakis, 2012; Papagiannidis & Manika, 2016), on the crisis and the media (Kaitatzi-Whitlock, 2014; Mylonas, 2014; Touri & Rogers, 2013; Tzogopoulos, 2013) on digital divide (Georgopoulou, 2014), surveillance (Samatas, 2015) or even protests and mobilisations (Theocharis, Lowe, & Van Deth, 2014). However, while the Greek digital media environment has been extensively examined, concentrating on different issues and sub-themes, there is still a need for an extensive research linking the media background environment, as this shaped according to the sociopolitical and historical background, to the transition to the digital media era, and its development in the crisis context.

Starting from this point, this project aims to provide a longitudinal and in-depth examination of the digital media in Greece. The aim of this research is to investigate digital media in Greece within the crisis context, and at the same time, to contribute to the contemporary debate regarding the influence of digital media on contemporary social movements (Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Karatzogianni, 2006, 2015; Melucci, 1980; Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2009). Another major aim of the project is to evaluate the contribution of digital media to the 'democratic function' in contrast to the crisis limitations and the global recession (Fuchs, 2011). The project examines whether and up to which level the usage of digital media has challenged the dominant (mainstream and traditional) media system, and by extension the dominant discourse. The objectives of this study embrace the in-depth examination of the usage of digital media and the impact of the so-called anti-austerity movement. The study focuses on cyberconflict, digital activism and the use of digital media in Greece between 2008 and 2015, by looking into key digital platforms using digital research methods. The research was developed through the study of Indymedia and YouTube, using thematic analysis, so as to identify sociopolitical tensions and conflicts that pre-existed in the crisis context. Further, this research applies Social Network Analysis (SNS) and studies the dominant actors, online coalitions and discourses as these were posted in Facebook during the Greek Indignados, or the so-called *Aganaktismenoi*. Finally, through social network and semantic analysis, the study developed an in-depth look at the use of Twitter during the Greek Referendum.

Finally, an overall objective of the research is to contribute to the field both by looking at a single case study in depth and longitudinally over a long period of time across multiple digital platforms and, also, by using a combination of research techniques and extending cyberconflict as a framework. One of the goals of this research is to update and enrich the cyberconflict theory so as to efficiently support the study of social media mediated conflict. At the same time, taking into consideration the latest discussion and critiques as regards digital research methods, another goal of this research is to test the use of such methods for researching cyberconflict. Until now, the use of these digital

research methods' material is unprecedented in previous applications of this framework.

## **Overview of the Project**

Greece, as a significant empirical case affected by the global recession, is potentially well set as a case study to examine the contributions of digital media and their use in the crisis context. The analysis of digital media here concentrates on the individual, on the collective actions and social movements, and finally, on socio/political/economic cyberconflict and its linkage to the offline world. At the final stage, the project provides an insight into the digital media impact on political polarisation and radical politics.

The main questions on which the research concentrate focus on how the digital media influence contentious politics and the political transformations in Greece between 2008 and 2015 and, also, on how the political-economic sphere, and the crisis context, influence the formation of the digital mediascape. Looking on the use of digital media in the crisis context, the study examined specific periods and waves of protest, concentrating on the use of digital media platforms by individuals, groups and political movements. Then, looking on digital media and social movements, the study investigates how cyberconflict and digital activism evolved in Greece, by examining and identifying online networks, online coalitions to the offline world and vice versa.

The research of digital media in Greece is developed under the theoretical umbrella of cyberconflict theory, starting with a review of the theoretical framework (Chapter 2). Following the cyberconflict framework, a review of the historical and sociopolitical background of Greece is provided (Chapter 3), before proceeding to the methodological design of the project (Chapter 4). Then, the next three chapters concentrate on the empirical data and the findings (2008 Indymedia and YouTube in Chapter 5; 2011–2012 Facebook and Twitter in Chapter 6; 2015 Twitter in Chapter 7). The findings from the three studies are discussed comparatively in the final and concluding chapter of the research (Chapter 8).

In more detail, the first chapter, the introductory chapter of this project, provides the contextualisation of the research (Chapter 1). The first step in this process was to locate the study of the case of Greece into the debate on digital media and their association/use in the global recession context, before providing an overview of the research. The second chapter presents cyberconflict theory and additional theoretical debates, based on which the research developed. This theoretical framework borrows elements from three overlapping theories and supports the examination of online mediated conflict (Karatzogianni, 2006). However, this framework was created for the examination of pre-social media events, and therefore this research was enriched further so as to support the examination of social media usage in the examined cases. Thus, starting from the basic components of cyberconflict, the social movement theories and the

framework are enriched with additional theoretical debates on contemporary forms of collective action, *concentrating on the transformation of collective action to connective action by using Bennett's theory of connective action*. Then, the next component of cyberconflict, media theory, is discussed focusing on digital media, elaborating on the way that online data can be utilised, before drawing conclusions on the way that this framework is applied for the study of the Greek case.

In Chapter 3, a review of the historical and sociopolitical background of the examined case is provided. This includes an overview of both the mainstream political parties, as these were shaped before and during the development of the crisis, an insight into the most significant social movements in Greece and the extra-parliamentary left and right, with reference to the examination of the anti-austerity movement developed. It should be noted that these points were discussed in the same section for reasons of structure, offering an insight into the non-mainstream or parliamentary politics of the examined case. To preclude additional concerns, this is a structural decision to enable the discussion of extra-parliamentary groups, and it does not imply any ideological association between the extreme left and right. Finally, the understanding of the Greek case is completed through an overview of the Greek mediascape, including a review of the evolution of both the traditional and digital media sectors. Chapter 4 presents the research design and how the research was conducted. The research design of the project was built focusing on digital research methods and associative characteristics with the cyberconflict framework. Next, the research lays out the techniques and the research tools used in the project, providing a justification for the theoretical and computational tools, and a timeline relating to the selection of the analysed cases and platforms.

The empirical examination of digital media in Greece starts with the case of the December Riots and data collection from two different online media platforms (Chapter 5). This chapter provides an understanding of the early days of digital media and its association with collective action, and at the same time, it analyses the use of digital media during the December Riots, as a prelude to the crisis that was about to break out. Next, the research focuses on digital media in the crisis context, examining the usage of Facebook in the anti-austerity mobilisations of 2011 (*Aganaktismenoi*) and the SYRIZA Online Diaspora, as shaped until 2015, January elections when SYRIZA came to power (Chapter 6). After giving the sociopolitical and historical contexts of the two examined cases, the methods, sampling and the analysis techniques are provided. What follows is the overall understanding of the two examined cases, focusing on the identified networks and the overall graph metrics. At this point, the overall graph statistics of the two networks are discussed in the same section, for structural purposes, without suggesting any comparison between the two cases. Instead, what is provided here is a more general descriptive and statistical-oriented understanding of the two networks. Then, each of the two cases is discussed separately culminating in the analysis and the findings of each case. The third and lastly examined platform of the project is Twitter and the so-called 'Greferendum' in June/July 2015 (Chapter 7). Following the same

pattern, as the previously analysed platforms, the study of Twitter begins with a description of methods, sampling and analysis techniques used for the specific platform. Next, the examination of Twitter concentrates on the two conflicted ideological and political fronts and the review of the examined case with the analysis of online data and the identification of networks and discourse. In Chapter 8, I offer a discussion of the main findings of the research, the contribution to the field of digital activism, and the limitations and suggestions for future research.