

# (R)evolutionizing Political Communication through Social Media

Tomaž Deželan  
*University of Ljubljana, Slovenia*

Igor Vobič  
*University of Ljubljana, Slovenia*

A volume in the Advances in Public Policy and Administration (APPA) Book Series

**Information Science**  
**REFERENCE**

An Imprint of IGI Global

Published in the United States of America by  
Information Science Reference (an imprint of IGI Global)  
701 E. Chocolate Avenue  
Hershey PA, USA 17033  
Tel: 717-533-8845  
Fax: 717-533-8661  
E-mail: [cust@igi-global.com](mailto:cust@igi-global.com)  
Web site: <http://www.igi-global.com>

Copyright © 2016 by IGI Global. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or distributed in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, without written permission from the publisher. Product or company names used in this set are for identification purposes only. Inclusion of the names of the products or companies does not indicate a claim of ownership by IGI Global of the trademark or registered trademark.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Dezelan, Tomaz, editor. | Vobic, Igor, 1982- editor.  
Title: (R)evolutionizing political communication through social media /  
Tomaz Dezelan and Igor Vobic, editors.  
Other titles: Evolutionizing political communications through social media  
Description: Hershey : Information Science Reference, 2016. | Includes  
bibliographical references and index.  
Identifiers: LCCN 2015046889 | ISBN 9781466698796 (hardcover) | ISBN  
9781466698802 (ebook)  
Subjects: LCSH: Social media--Political aspects. | Political participation. |  
Communication in politics.  
Classification: LCC HM741 .R48 2016 | DDC 302.23/1--dc23 LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015046889>

This book is published in the IGI Global book series Advances in Public Policy and Administration (APPA) (ISSN: Pending; eISSN: Pending)

British Cataloguing in Publication Data

A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

All work contributed to this book is new, previously-unpublished material. The views expressed in this book are those of the authors, but not necessarily of the publisher.

For electronic access to this publication, please contact: [eresources@igi-global.com](mailto:eresources@igi-global.com).

# Chapter 7

## Political Communication and Twitter in Greece: Jumps on the Bandwagon or an Enhancement of the Political Dialogue?

**Stamatis Poulakidakos**  
*University of Athens, Greece*

**Anastasia Veneti**  
*Bournemouth University, UK*

### ABSTRACT

*Social media already serve as a new place for the development of a “public sphere”, hence the exchange of argumentation on issues of public interest. More specifically, Twitter has been rather frequently used by politicians and parties in their attempt to establish a new way of communicating with the electorate. Drawing on the concepts of public sphere and propaganda and by conducting content and thematic analysis on the tweets of the two biggest Greek political parties, New Democracy (ND) and the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), this chapter examines Twitter as a platform of information dissemination and dialogue. The aspiration of this study is to contribute to a growing volume of research that seeks to examine the potential of microblogging to animate political communication and to increase political participation.*

### INTRODUCTION

Internet has transformed the way political communication has been conducted in most parts of the world. Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) have provided politicians with a wealth of opportunities to campaign and communicate with their electorate in novel and creative ways. The use of internet for political communication purposes has been studied by many scholars including Hill & Hughes, 1998; Jones, 1998; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Livingstone, 1999; McChesney, 2000; Norris, 2001; Mcnamara, 2008; Vaccari, 2008; Schweitzer, 2008; Lev-On, 2011; Lilleker & Jackson 2010, 2011;

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-9879-6.ch007

Towner & Dulio, 2012). As any new communication practice, the use of ICTs in political communication has both triggered hopes of its potential democratic impact, as well as raised concerns for impending adversities. In particular, the studies dated prior to 2004 have designated the risks of such a development, pointing out the threats in social consistency and the debate over the digital divide (Hoffman & Novak, 1998; Wellman, 2000). Nonetheless, many of these studies were prior to the communication applications offered by Web 2.0. The advent of social media such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter led to a modernisation of political communication (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Carpenter, 2010). Politicians around the world have increasingly sought to capitalize on the new opportunities offered by the Web 2.0 applications and they embarked on new campaigning strategies, new modes of fundraising, mobilization and information gathering.

Studies that supervened the 2004 US presidential election (Macnamara, 2008; Smith & Rainie, 2008; Chen & Walsh, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009), which according to Xenos & Moy (2007, p. 704) was “a critical turning point” in the use of social media, have been more optimistic. The innovative and extensive use of social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and MySpace in the 2008 and 2012 U.S. presidential campaigns has been the watershed event for modern political communication. In the 2004 U.S. presidential campaigns, Vermont Governor Howard Dean successfully used the new applications for fundraising and mobilization (Trippi, 2004; Carpenter, 2010; Veneti, 2014). The Obama campaign in 2008 U.S. presidential elections created its own social networking site, My.BarackObama.com (MyBO) and the McCain campaign followed some time later with McCainSpace. Both MyBO and McCainSpace allowed individuals to create their own profiles, interact with others, donate funds, join groups and arrange events (Towner, 2012; Chadwick, 2008; Carpenter, 2010). Several studies on the use of social media in politics suggest that the new technologies provide a fertile new ground for new forms of public participation, political mobilization and information diffusion (Graham, Broersma & Hazelhoff, 2013; Smith, 2009; Lilleker & Jackson, 2010, 2011). Despite the flourishing use of ICTs in political campaigning, there are still questions over their substantial capabilities to empower democracy by fostering greater participation, encouraging political conversation and improving interactive information-sharing (Coleman, 2001; Jackson, 2007). As such, there is a pertinent need for more studies to examine if and how the new media have a democratic impact.

This chapter contributes to a growing volume of research that seeks to examine the potential of microblogging to animate political communication, increase political participation and provide a new repertoire of collective action (Castells, 2007, p. 255; Chadwick, 2008; Larsson & Moe, 2011; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Adi, Erickson & Lilleker, 2014). Twitter has been heralded as a new tool of online campaigning and electorate engagement. In Greece, during the last two years, Twitter has been rather frequently used by party members and press offices of the most significant political parties, in order to establish a new way of communicating with the electorate (Burgess & Bruns, 2012; Hutchins, 2011; Neuhaus & Webmoor, 2012; Ovadia, 2009, Heinrich, 2012; Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, & Logan, 2012; Small, 2011). In Greece, mainstream media are considered unreliable due to vested interests between the media moguls and politicians (Veneti & Karadimitriou, 2013), whilst at the same time there is a growing number of internet users which increases exponentially (OECD, 2015; “Greece”, 2015). Throughout 2014, there were 418.700 active Twitter users in Greece – 257.700 more than 2012- with 6 tweets per second (Trending.gr, 2015). Moreover, similar statistics showed that Greek Twitter users’ attention was primarily on socio-political issues such as #skouries, #occupyert, #ertopen, #killahp etc. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that Twitter provides Greek politicians with a novel digital tool that could go beyond traditional modes of communication and look more appealing to the electorate.

The Greek economic crisis, part of the on-going European debt crisis, has been amongst other things the result of a malfunctioning public sector, corruption, tax evasion and overly high structural deficits and debt-to-GDP levels on public accounts (Triandafyllidou, Gropas, & Kouki, 2013) for almost three decades. In May 2010, the Greek government signed the bailout treaty [Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)] with the “troika”, i.e. the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank (Poulakidakos, 2014; Varoufakis, 2014). In simple terms, this treaty offered guaranteed loans to Greece, but in return Greece should practice severe economic policies - among which austerity measures and deep structural reforms - so as to diminish the country’s fiscal debt. As a result of the crisis and the ensuing economic policies, the political realm in Greece has undergone significant transformations (Triandafyllidou et al., 2013). The two big political parties (PASOK, social-democratic party, and New Democracy, conservative right wing party), which used to gain the elections for a period of more than 30 years (since 1974), have both suffered significant losses and new political parties have emerged. Within this political context, the radical left wing party (SYRIZA) has dramatically increased its political power, from 4.6% of the electoral body in the 2009 general elections, to almost 27% in 2012, when it became the major opposition party. In January 2015, SYRIZA was the winner of the general elections, becoming the first ever left- wing party to win general elections in Greece. From the former dominant political parties, only New Democracy managed to ‘survive’ politically, as PASOK barely entered the parliament. As a result of the political climate, there are two main elements that characterize contemporary Greek politics:

1. During the last four years, public discourse in Greece has focused on the economic crisis, its causes and the ways to confront it. Despite the intense interest of politicians, journalists and citizens, the quantitative generalization of public discussions has not contributed to a qualitative enhancement of public discourse on vital issues of public interest.
2. Another feature is the intensity of the political debate between the newly established left political power of SYRIZA and the traditional right-wing New Democracy. This intensity is being augmented both by the crisis context and the ideological distance of these parties (left vs. right).

These two characteristics along with the predominance of a sentimental approach in the political discourse (Poulakidakos, 2014; Poulakidakos & Veneti, forthcoming) have resulted in the creation of a state of tension and polarization in the Greek society or as Doxiadis (2013) puts it, they have created a polarized public sphere.

In this chapter, we examine Twitter as a platform of information dissemination and dialogue by conducting content and thematic analysis on the tweets of the two biggest Greek political parties, New Democracy (ND) and the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) over a period of one month before the 2014 European elections. Elaborating on the concepts of public sphere and propaganda, we seek to examine whether the political messages ‘broadcast’ in Twitter contribute in a positive way to the public discussion on issues of public interest. We also examine whether these messages promote the exchange of rational argumentation instead of the sentimental approach on the crisis that conquers other- unilateral- media content; further to this, we discuss whether Twitter can be conceived as a new immaterial public space wherein prolific political discussions could possibly be generated.

## **TWITTER AND POLITICS**

Confronted with declining citizen interest and participation along with a burgeoning distrust of politicians (Rosanvallon, 2008; Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009), political parties in Western democracies have turned into the potentials of the new media in order to revive their relationship with the citizens. This relationship in free fall has also been affected by the citizen's scepticism towards the mainstream media (Ladd, 2012; Kamens, 2012). As both Habermas (2006, pp.421-2) and Dahlgren (2009) argued, the lack of opportunities for citizens' engagement in the political dialogue, the infotainment approach to political discussions and the exposure of the few selected media – favourite 'voices' contributed to the alienation of citizens from politics. Taking these into consideration, both citizens and politicians are increasingly bypassing the traditional modes of political communication and as Carpenter (2010, p. 221) elucidates, they "are utilizing the blogosphere as a way to participate and engage with others."

Social media like Facebook and Twitter increasingly form part of everyday communication, social coordination and news consumption for citizens worldwide (Burgess & Bruns, 2012, p.384). Facebook and Twitter enable users to hook up with others in virtually any connected spot on earth. Within the interactive spheres of such networks, links are shared, information distributed and news are commented on a scale not seen before (Heinrich, 2012, p. 2; Hermida et al. 2012, p. 2). Internet technologies, collectively described as Web 2.0, have facilitated the involvement of audiences in the observation, selection, filtering, distribution and interpretation of events (Hermida et al., 2012, p. 2). Participation in these environments is becoming increasingly important as a means of communicating directly to the public in a professional capacity, especially during times of heightened political activity like elections (Burgess & Bruns, 2012, p. 384).

Twitter is one of a range of new social media technologies that allow for the online and instant dissemination of short fragments of data from a variety of official and unofficial sources (Hermida, 2010, p.297). Established in 2006 (Neuhaus & Webmoor, 2012, p. 48), twitter is a microblogging site (Hutchins, 2011, p. 238), which allows its members to publish direct messages of up to 140 characters (Ovadia, 2009, p. 202). Interest in politicians' use of Twitter took off when Barack Obama and John Edwards used it to let their supporters know where they were and of upcoming events during the Democratic Party primaries in the United States (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011, p.88). Twitter-involvement of political parties, based on the number of tweets, shows that contemporary parties are more likely to use Twitter extensively (Verweij, 2012, p. 10), raising the question of whether politicians feel that Twitter is a bandwagon they need to jump on. Alternatively, they might view Twitter as a strategic communication channel, a way of reaching key audiences efficiently and effectively (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011, p.86).

In particular, twitter has become a digital space for the conduct of public discussions about issues of common interest (Juris, 2012). Twitter's role as a platform which supports the ad hoc formation of large online publics debating such topics is aided in part by its underlying structure: the #hashtag system, in particular, makes it possible for users to follow and contribute to such public debates easily even if they have no established connections with (or even knowledge of) other participating users (Ovadia, 2009). Additionally, participants are able to direct public messages in Twitter terms, an @reply\*to any user whom they encounter during these debates, again without needing to formally "follow" or "friend" the recipient first. This positions Twitter as a site for the potentially rapid emergence of politically engaged publics that may include ordinary citizens, political actors and professional journalists (Burgess & Bruns, 2012, pp. 384-5; Grant et al., 2010, p. 580).

Several political and communication scholars have examined this new form of political communication (Lassen & Brown, 2011; Burgess & Bruns, 2012; Larsson & Moe, 2011; Small, 2011, Vergeer, Hermans & Sams, 2011; Graham, Jackson & Broersma, 2014; Adi, Erickson & Lilleker, 2014). What these studies denote is that there is not a unanimous way in which we can conceive the function and the effectiveness of twitter in the political field. The richness of the findings of these researches sheds light into the disparities that exists across countries with regard to the use of twitter by the politicians, the citizens' engagement in different socio-cultural contexts and the potential influence that the use of twitter may have in the electoral outcome.

## **TWITTER: AN IMMATERIAL PUBLIC SPACE FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE**

Since the mid-1990s, we identify growing discussions (Kahn & Kellner, 2005; Castells, 2009) on how the new media affect politics and the degree of the impact these might have on participatory democracy. For the scope of this study, we examine Twitter as a possible immaterial public space wherein fruitful political discussions could possibly be generated and citizens' engagement in political action may also be enhanced (Juris, 2012; Grant et al., 2010; Kirk & Schill, 2011). In order to contextualize our analysis of Twitter in political communication, we draw theoretically on the idea of public sphere. However, since the concept of public sphere is a very complex term which has been extensively used in various ways (Splichal, 2006; Marx Ferree et al., 2002), this research does not seek to offer an exhaustive review of this theoretical construct, but rather aims to focus on certain aspects of this theoretical framework, and its relevant debates, that best serve the purposes of this study.

Following Habermas' (1989) definition, in very generic terms, public sphere is a space where citizens come together and engage in a series of rational-critical debates. The 'bourgeois public sphere' (17<sup>th</sup> century onwards) refers to a kind of forum which is situated between the private sphere (economy and family) and the sphere of the public authorities (the state and the judiciary). Habermas' definition of the public sphere has undergone revisions and has been criticized on the ground that it represents a rather utopian and imaginative perception of the public dialogue procedure. Moreover, later studies (Murdock, 1992; Meyrowitz, 1985; Garnham, 2003) on the intersection between the public sphere and mass media highlighted the means and methods of manipulation of the public and its consequences. The emergence of the digital, interactive media and more specifically social media, like Twitter, introduced discussions regarding their ability to form a digital public sphere. Of course, most kinds of ICTs are influenced by economic interests and as Murdock (1993, p. 534) argues "They are, therefore, more usually viewed not as technologies of control or of freedom, but as the site of continual struggles over interpretation and use. At the heart of these struggles, lies the shifting boundary between the public and the private spheres. (...)". Nonetheless, the importance of Habermas's initial description of the public sphere lies in the definition of the ideal public sphere, which societies should approach, and not to his attempt of realistically describing an existing situation.

Based on the original concept of the public sphere (as introduced by Habermas), there are two elements which are important to our analysis of Twitter: firstly, (a) the public sphere entails a 'forum' which is accessible to as many people as possible (providing an opportunity for participatory communication), and secondly, (b) the debates taking place should be characterized by rational argumentation. The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1795/1983) also mentioned public sphere as the space for "public

use of reason” (referring here to mutual respect among the interlocutors, ability to negotiate and other principles of reasonable and just public debate). Furthermore, drawing on the work of Kirk & Schill’s (2011) about the new communication technologies as a digital agora, this study further argues that Twitter incorporates and synthesizes the essential elements which could possibly constitute this online application as a digital public sphere. Kirk & Schill (2011, p. 326) examine the digital agora created by citizen participation and in this sense “the agora resulted in a discursive space where citizens found voice, directly questioned candidates, and engaged each other in political discussions.” Up to date, the interactive nature of Twitter has triggered intense debates about whether its employment enhances or not political dialogue and political participation. Nevertheless, one should also take into account the substantial differences between participation and interaction as the one does not necessarily guarantees the other (Carpentier, 2012).

Twitter’s potential has been eulogized by many scholars. Kennedy (2008) argues Twitter has become a powerful tool for campaign reporting and mobilizing and Davis (2010) that it is a significant platform for the diffusion of news and information. Coleman and Blumler (2009, p. 80) argued that social media could offer a more intimate and conversational relationship between politicians and citizens, and Graham, Broersma and Hazelhoffas (2013) coined the term ‘connected representation’ explaining that Twitter make it possible for representation to be rooted in lasting connections between citizens and politicians and it also creates a sense of proximity, visibility and continuity. Praising the dynamic of Twitter, Carpenter (2010, p.222) claims that “Twitter has proven to be amazingly adept at two things: politically engaging the average citizen and empowering its users to participate as citizen journalists. [...]Twitter is a one-to-one and one-to many communications powerhouse available to anyone with a cell phone or computer. It is a link to real-time constituent consciousness, and it is marketed as a technology that directly taps into this collective consciousness.” Twitter has the potential to contribute to political conversation. First, followers are able to respond to others. This process is known as @replies. Honeycutt & Herring (2009) found that around 30 per cent of tweets were @replies. Another aspect of Twitter that is considered interactive is retweeting. Retweets are the re-posting of the tweets of another sender, similar to e-mail forwarding, therefore a way of maximizing the reach of a certain message. In addition, a retweet is a type of conversation: While retweeting can simply be seen as the act of copying and rebroadcasting, the practice contributes to a conversational ecology in which conversations are composed of a public interplay of voices that give rise to an emotional sense of shared conversational context (Small, 2011, p. 878). Moreover, retweeting particular messages- such as party self – promotional tweets- could also be seen as a persuasion or propaganda activity employed in order to influence people in a unilateral way.

Nonetheless, extensive literature identifies that there is considerable hesitation with regard to the potential of Twitter to foster the political dialogue while several scholars are rather coy regarding the over appraisal surrounding Twitter as a new tool of political communication. Magolis & Resnick (2000), having examined the effects of the Internet on American politics, they argued that the American political system tends to normalize political activity, and thus we witness new media in which old patterns of political behavior and information flows are played out. To further illustrate this case, Larsson & Moe (2011) having examined Twitter users in the 2010 Swedish election campaign stated that “ our findings indicate that Twitter falls somewhat short of the expectations held by those most optimistic on behalf of the democratic and disruptive potential of new web tools.” (p. 742). In the same line, Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers (2010, p. 1620) coined the term ‘vehicles for self-promotion’ to label the tweets they examined from Members of the US Congress. The term denotes a use of Twitter which resembles



more a one-way, top-down communication rather than a citizen engaging function. McNamara & Kenning's (2011) analysis of Australian politicians' use of Twitter further supports Golbeck et al. (2010) findings. McNamara & Kenning (2011) found that, apart from a few exceptions, politicians used social media as a one-way transmission of political messages, rather than citizen engagement indicating that much of "the social media content was comprised of election slogans, attacking opponents, and political rhetoric – much of it of a banal nature" (p. 9). Moreover, another important observation of their research is the correlation between "followers" and "following" as an indicator of reciprocal interest and listening. McNamara & Kenning (2011, pp. 9-10) argue that there is a vast discrepancy between followers and following for most politicians on Twitter; giving the example of the Australian Opposition Leader Tony Abbott who had 19,083 followers in the week before the election, but was following just 20 other Twitter users. Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, and Welpe. (2010, p. 4) who studied tweets related to the 2009 German federal election claimed that 'while Twitter is used as a forum for political deliberation, this forum is dominated by a small number of heavy users'.

## **INFORMATION, PROPAGANDA AND POLITICS**

Political parties have found in the new media- Twitter among them- new ways of managing and disseminating political views and information. Information management constitutes a strategy followed by political mechanisms, in order to enhance and maintain their cohesion, as well as to reproduce their power structures. "The control of information constitutes an effort of utmost importance for political powers in order to manage public opinion and maintain public control" (Tumber, 1993). Nowadays, a major part of information is actually misinformation, due to various interests -especially political powers and financially strong factors- that have created and formed its presentation (Webster, 2006, p. 162). Certain communication systems<sup>1</sup> transmit carefully managed information in order to influence public opinion. Such actions, basically driven by the vested interests between mainstream media and politicians, may well lead to propaganda (Lippmann, 1927; Jackall, 1995; Edelstein, 1997; Webster, 2006, p.168).

Information revolution has led to a plethora of available information for citizens (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001; Taylor, 2004). The persuasive power of the broadcasted information lies on: a. the sophisticated presentation of arguments (persuasion), and b. the use of symbols and techniques causing sentimental reactions (such as the one-sided presentation of evidence, the selective presentation of the aspects of a certain issue, even with lies, characteristics that lead to the domain of propaganda). In order to discriminate propaganda from persuasion, we need to study them as part of the systems (e.g. institutions, organizations, communication) to which they belong, rather than treat them as decontextualized phenomena (Marková, 2008, p. 49). For a most possible precise definition of propaganda, we locate it in the field of political discourse and political communication and distinct it from persuasion. Even though propaganda and persuasion may well co-exist (Marková, 2008), the latter is an effort of dissemination of views and opinions on behalf of the communicator, through interaction and satisfaction of the intentions of both the pursuer and the pursuee (Jowett & O'Donnell, 1995; Barker, 2002). On the contrary, propaganda makes (rather intense) use of the sentimental factor and seeks to persuade in order to serve the aims of the propagandist by disseminating a certain ideology or doctrine (Jowett & O'Donnell, 1995; Taylor, 2004, Poulakidakos & Armenakis, 2014; Marková, 2008).

Propaganda is being exercised in a more intense way during periods of crisis (Lehmann, 2003; Thussu & Freedman, 2003, p. 235). During such periods, a wide use of propaganda methods takes place (one-

sided presentation of events, mainly sentimental argumentation, generalizations) so as to influence the audiences in favor of certain interests. Given the fact that political elites form the developments during crisis periods, they need propaganda more than any other occasion, as a means of legalizing their decisions and practices before citizens. Main target of the political elites and the mainstream Media is not to inform wide publics on facts, but to mobilize their audiences in order to support specific policies (Thussu & Freedman, 2003), trying to legalize those policies in the eyes of the citizens (Allan & Zelizer, 2004). In addition, propaganda is a phenomenon adaptive to different social contexts. Hence, it is adaptive to the media it utilizes, trying to take advantage of their structure and operational culture, so as to serve its purposes (Miotto, 1953; Ellul, 1973; Hiotis, 1986).

Propaganda is a part of contemporary reality. It constitutes a rational, mainly political, communication process, exercised through the dissemination of information via the Media (Poulakidakos 2014, Poulakidakos & Armenakis, 2014). It can actually be considered as a foundation element of the “construction” of social, political and financial “realities” and of the exercise of influence -in favor of the propagandist- in a unilateral way to the views, opinions and behaviors of the subjects that act within these realities (Doxiadis, 2013). Propagandistic methods which have been implemented throughout the centuries are characterized by a Manichean rationale for viewing the world. Thus propaganda divides the world in “good” and “bad” people, in “friends” and “enemies”, in “us” and “them”, in “solutions” and “dead ends”, in “progress” and “regressiveness”. In this sense, propaganda seeks to influence people in a unilateral way (Poulakidakos, 2014). The more public opinion constitutes a factor that influences politics, including the race of political parties to gain public acceptance and support, the more intense will be the need for persuasion of the civilians in terms of the acceptance of political decisions or even already implemented policies (Corner, 2007).

According to Snow (2002, p.40), basic propaganda characteristics are its “intentional communication practice, planned to influence the behavior of the target audience and the dissemination of unilateral information. Propaganda techniques include the selective publication of evidence or partly presented facts; they stress out threats or dangers; they “demonize” the enemy and interpret the facts in very specific ways; they take advantage of methods and arguments aiming at both the rationale and the sentiments of the receivers (Theodorakopoulos, 2006). Among the variety of propagandistic methods, we underline some basic characteristics (Corner, 2007, pp. 674-675):

1. Dissemination of specific- usually unilateral- information.
2. The use of exaggeration aiming at the distortion of either positive or negative (for the propagandist) information.
3. The direct or indirect evocation to fear, hope or desire (evocation to feelings).
4. The use of rhetoric frames so as to promote generic notions (e.g. trust, discreetness) and to organize the meaning and values in ways beyond rational argumentation

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To understand how social media are being used in political communication in a contemporary context, two types of research questions were developed for this study, one relating to quantitative factors (how many), and one relating to qualitative factors (in what way). Based on the above mentioned theoretical framework our main research questions are:

**RQ1:** Do the tweets of New Democracy (conservative party) and SYRIZA (left wing party) promote the public dialogue within Twitter on issues of public interest?

**RQ2:** Do the tweets of the two Greek political parties, New Democracy and SYRIZA, contain propagandistic characteristics?

These two main research questions are further analyzed in several quantitative and qualitative additional research questions. The quantitative questions seek to examine how many retweets has a specific tweet and how many users have characterized it as a favorite. The qualitative research questions, deal with the existence of propagandistic elements in the tweets, such as the use of specific linguistic schemata (metaphors, transfers), the demonization of the political rival, the appeal to fear or to hope, the existence or not of logical argumentation and the different thematics that the tweets focus on.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The current research is conducted through the combined use of quantitative content analysis and thematic analysis, since our analysis focuses on both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the political discourse within Twitter. Content analysis transforms content of quantitative and qualitative nature into a form of data with either qualitative or quantitative form. It can be briefly defined as the systematic, based on scientific criteria, quantitative or qualitative analysis of the characteristics of various messages (Berelson, 1952; Kiriazi, 2001; Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1). It constitutes a systematic, reproducible technique of transforming the words of a text<sup>2</sup> into fewer categories of meaning, based on specific codification rules (Stemler, 2001; Miller & Brewer, 2003), allowing the researchers to examine big amounts of data through a systematic methodology (Poulakidakos, 2014).

The primary target of content analysis is the systematic research of the content of the unit of analysis (text, image, news item, advertisement, web page etc.). Thus, the content is being examined in a holistic way and the categories used to encode the text are clearly defined, so as to enable the repetition and control of the whole procedure. Researches making use of content analysis focus on the main thematics of a text, their comparative meaning, the “space” and time dedicated to these thematics and other content characteristics that respond to the main research question and the research hypotheses (Berelson, 1971). Quantitative content analysis is conducted with the use of a coding protocol<sup>3</sup> and aims at the production of quantitative data out of a specific sample. The development of the coding frame was the result of a combined approach to developing an organizing system for the data.

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes a data set in detail (Aguinaldo, 2012; Ponnamp & Dawra, 2013). However, it frequently goes further than this by interpreting various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It can be used within different theoretical frameworks, and can be used to do different things within them. Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants (Attard & Coulson, 2012, p. 501; Ponnamp & Dawra, 2013, p. 30), or, it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The most important element in the conduction of thematic analysis is the theme. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of pat-

tered response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The ‘keyness’ of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures, but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). The goal of thematic analysis is simply to paraphrase and summarize the dataset as a whole or in part in relation to particular research questions. Analysis typically involves steps that a) identify the content of the data, b) reduce redundancy, and c) group data into representative categories that articulate or describe a particular social phenomenon (Aguinaldo, 2012, p. 768; Sanderson, 2013, p. 494). The final themes for analysis emerge through a systematic process of studying, coding and analyzing the research data in accordance to the theoretical background supporting the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Aguinaldo, 2012, p. 768; Attard & Coulson, 2012; McParland & Whyte, 2008, p. 613). A thematic analysis approach can be extended at the latent level of a text going beyond the semantic content of the data, and starting to identifying or examining the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations and ideologies that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Thus, for latent thematic analysis, the development of the themes themselves involves interpretative work, and the analysis that is produced is not just description, but is in- depth and already theorized (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

The main research questions will be answered through the use of quantitative content analysis and qualitative thematic analysis on the tweets of specific twitter accounts administered by the parties of New Democracy (governing party at the time of the research, ND) and SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left, major opposition party at the time of the research) for the pre-electoral period of the 2014 European and Municipal elections in Greece, namely from April 24<sup>th</sup> to May 24<sup>th</sup> 2014 (N= 437). With the complementary use of these two methods, we seek to quantify the characteristics of the examined tweets and embed them at the same time into the political context of the pre-electoral period. The accounts we examined are: @PrimeministerGR and @statheramprosta of ND, and @a.tsipras of SYRIZA. Our coding unit is the tweet (see Appendix 1). The elaboration of the quantitative results was conducted with the use of SPSS 22.0. The statistic tests used for testing the statistical significance of the results are chi-square and Fisher’s exact tests (Gnardellis, 2003; Siomkos & Vasilakopoulou, 2005). The test used to measure the inter-coder reliability is the North, Holsti, Zaninovich and Zinnes test (North et al., 1963).<sup>4</sup>

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In order to make clear how the different methodological approaches, employed here, have contributed to this scholarship, our findings are presented as follows: firstly, we present the quantitative data produced by the content analysis. In this section, findings mainly refer to the nature of the tweets, a numerical depiction of the activity in Twitter (tweets and retweets) as well as a presentation of the various propagandistic characteristics that were found in the political discourse that was developed in Twitter. Secondly, we present the data produced from the thematic analysis. In this section, the focus lies on the qualitative dimension of the political discourse.

### **Online Activity (Retweets and Favorites) and the Nature of Political Tweets**

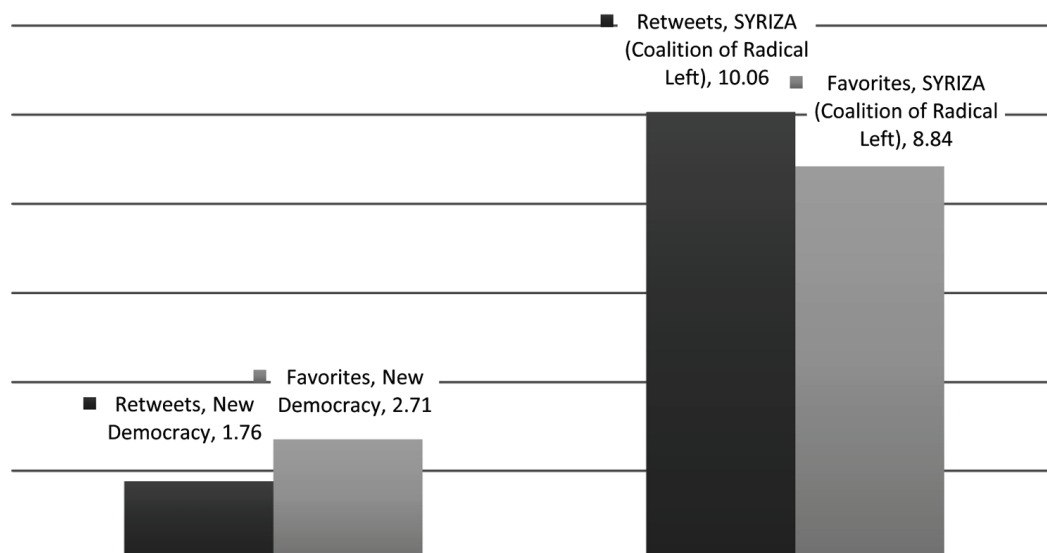
Starting with the quantitative research questions, our results demonstrated a rather limited dissemination of the political messages of the tweets of the two contemporary biggest parties (based on the electoral results of the national elections 2012 and 2015) in Greece. Given that the accounts of both parties have several

thousands of followers (34.6k for @a.tsipras (the party leader of SYRIZA) and 81k for the two accounts administered to the political party of New Democracy, @PrimeministerGR and @statheramprosta) the retweets and favorites of the published tweets appear extremely low. Contrary to what Kirk and Schill (2011, p. 326) describe in their study of the 2008 US presidential elections, Twitter in Greece was not transformed into a participatory space. American citizens used the new communication technologies to receive messages and information and most importantly they were engaged both with the candidates and with each other in discussions about their nation’s future (Kirk & Schill, 2011). The low retweet rate in the Greek case is an indication that an exploitation of the new platform for civic engagement and further dissemination of political messages by the citizens/followers was not so successful, especially compared to other occasions, such as the Greek indignants, where the retweeting rate appeared to be much higher (Theocharis, Lowe, van Deth, & Garcia-Albacete, 2015, p. 215). This implies that low retweeting is not necessarily connected to a generic “Greek culture” of Twitter use, but rather connected to the reasons and the aim of the use.

According to Figure 1, the average number of retweets for New Democracy is 1,76 per tweet and for SYRIZA 10,06. The same very low numbers, compared to the total number of followers of these accounts, appear in the favorites category too, i.e. the cases in which a follower marks a specific tweet as favorite. The average favorite bookmarks per tweet is 2,76 for the two New Democracy accounts and 8,84 for the account of SYRIZA’s leader Alexis Tsipras. These numbers demonstrate a lack of ‘secondary’, user generated, dissemination- conducted by the followers- of the political messages of the two parties.

A first parameter to be examined is to whom each tweet refers. As shown in Figure 2, New Democracy’s tweets focus exclusively on its own actions or political views, while SYRIZA’s tweets refer primarily to its own actions and political views (48,9%), secondarily to opposing parties (31,7%) and thirdly to the people- voters (15,6%). These findings can partly be explained by the fact that ND –at that time, the governmental party- was primarily interested in highlighting the governmental achievements, whilst SYRIZA, being the opposition party, wished firstly, to persuade the electorate of its own political views and secondly, to underline the inability of the government.

*Figure 1. Re-tweets and favorites average per tweet, per party (t-test p. value= .000)*



In addition, the tweets of the two parties seem to differ significantly in terms of their either positive or negative character. According to Figure 3, New Democracy tweets mostly in a positive way (73,8%), since it presents its own views, whereas SYRIZA tweets in all different ways in almost balanced percentages (positive, negative and neutral), since a significant part of its communication strategy in Twitter seems to be the negative reference to its political rivals.

The difference of the Twitter political discourse between New Democracy and SYRIZA is visible in the case of the debating/downgrading of political rivals as well. According to Figure 4, only SYRIZA appears to adopt a negative rhetoric towards its political rivals in about one third of its tweets.

Figures 2, 3 and 4 depict quite clearly the diachronically established difference in the political discourse between governing parties and opposing parties. Governing parties seek primarily to promote their own achievements, using a mostly “positive” rhetoric focused on their own political views and practices, while their opponents’ rhetoric seeks to undermine the governing incumbents, since the institutional roles of political parties define the formation of their political discourse as well (Van Dijk, 2001).

### Propagandistic Characteristics of Tweets

Another characteristic of propaganda in discourse is the use of linguistic schemas, such as transfers and metaphors,<sup>5</sup> which are used to promote generic notions (e.g. trust, mistrust, discreetness) and to organize the meaning and values in ways beyond rational argumentation (Theodorakopoulos, 2006; Corner, 2007). According to Figure 5, SYRIZA appears to use such linguistic methods in the majority of its tweets (51,1%), whereas New Democracy relies on such linguistic schemas in the 36,1% of its tweets.

Figure 2. Whom do the tweets refer to? (per party) (chi square p. value= .000)

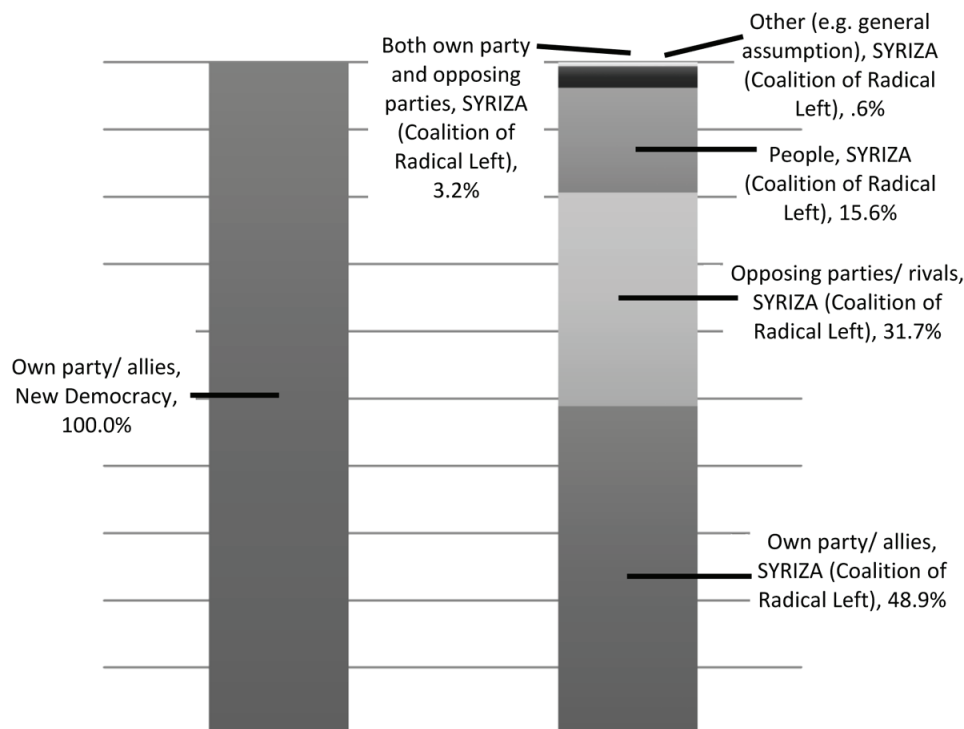


Figure 3. Positive or negative character of the tweet per party (chi-square  $p$ . value= .000)

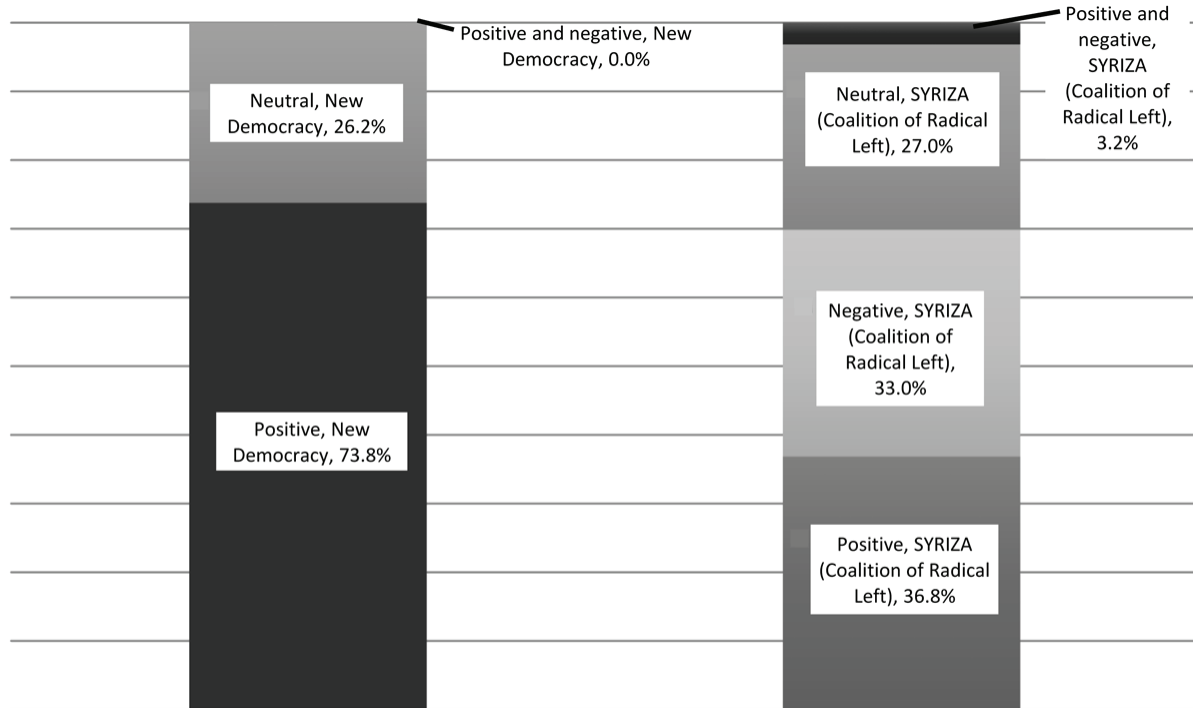


Figure 4. Does the tweet try to debate/”downgrade” political rivals? (per party) (Fischer’s exact test  $p$ . value= .000)

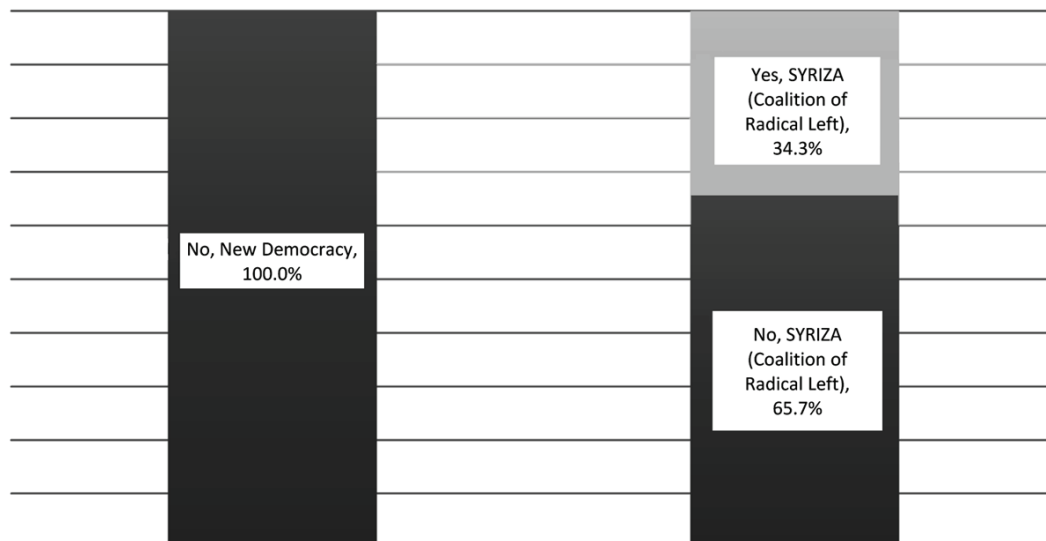
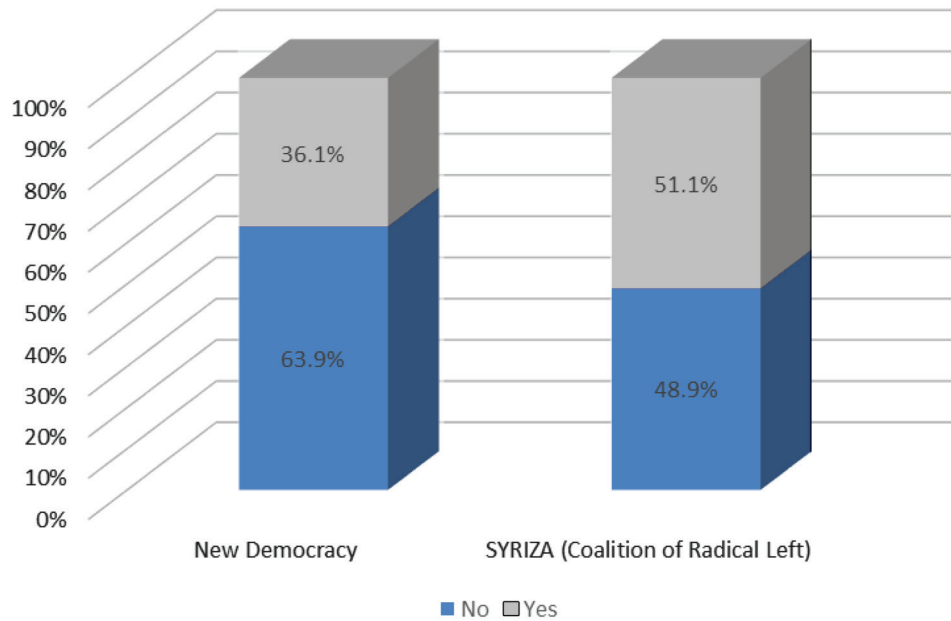


Figure 5. Use of transfers and metaphors per party (chi-square p. value= .005)

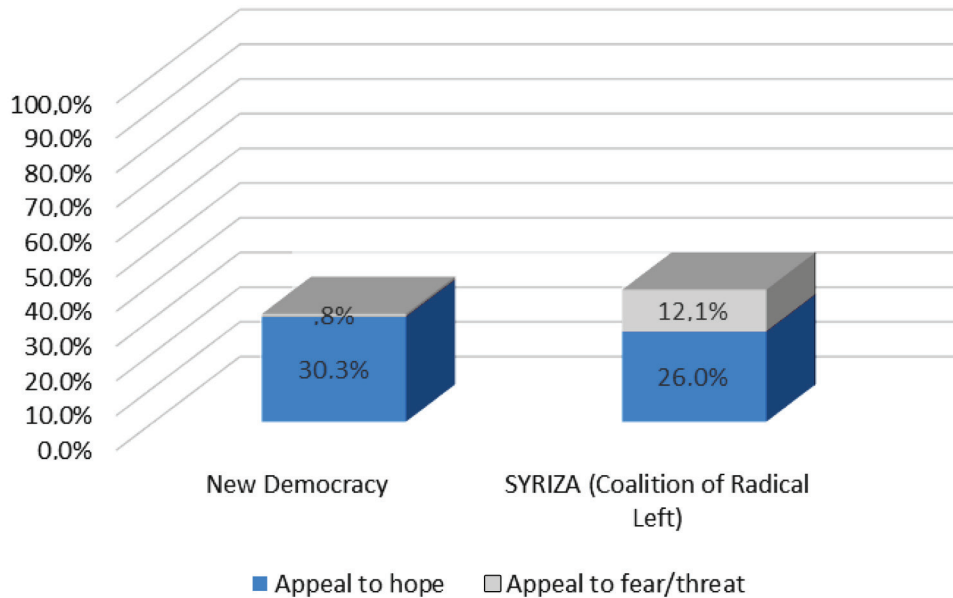


Among the most frequently deployed propagandistic methods are the “appeal to hope” and the “appeal to fear/threat”,<sup>6</sup> aiming at the evocation to the feelings of the voters (Snow 2002, Corner, 2007), usually in terms of a better or worse/dystopic future. On one hand, both parties seem to make use of “hope” in quite similar percentages (ND 30,3%, SYRIZA 26%) (see Figure 6). Though these percentages do not appear to be very high, the “appeal to hope” can still be traced in a rather significant percentage of the total amount of the tweets we examined. On the other hand, “appeal to fear/threat” can be traced almost exclusively in the tweets of SYRIZA (12,1%). This fact reflects the positive rhetoric followed by New Democracy, since as shown in Figure 3, the governing party prefers to promote its own work and the positive perspectives of Greece, according to its own argumentation. On the contrary, SYRIZA makes use of the “appeal to fear/threat”, though in significantly lower percentage compared to the “appeal to hope”, since among its aims was the downgrading of the government. An overview of the total use of “hope” and “fear” shows that these two basic sentiments alone are being used in more than 30% of the tweets of the New Democracy accounts and in almost 40% of the SYRIZA’s presidential tweets, implying a rather frequent appeal to these two fundamental sentimental states.

Another aspect of propagandistic discourse is the use of unilateral rational argumentation, by the selective presentation of data or other rational arguments on behalf of the propagandist.<sup>7</sup> Similar to previous research findings concerning the use of “rational” argumentation on behalf of governing and opposing parties (Poulakidakos, 2014), the governing party of New Democracy appears to make use of unilateral rational arguments in a far greater percentage than their political opponents of SYRIZA. Almost 30% of the tweets of New Democracy appear to have a “rational” character, whereas a mere 2,5% of the tweets of SYRIZA can be characterized as rational. In that way the major opposition party appears to rely heavily on the sentimental discourse, a result that coincides with previous empirical findings on the



Figure 6. “Appeal to hope” and “appeal to fear/threats” per party [Fischer’s exact test *p. values*= .402 (hope) & .000 (fear/threats)]



political discourse of the leftist parties in Greece (Poulakidakos, 2014) (see Figure 7). It is important to note that the total amount of tweets of both parties are characterized by a unilateral rationale, since both rivals try to either promote their own party’s “advantages”, or criticize the opponents’ disadvantages.

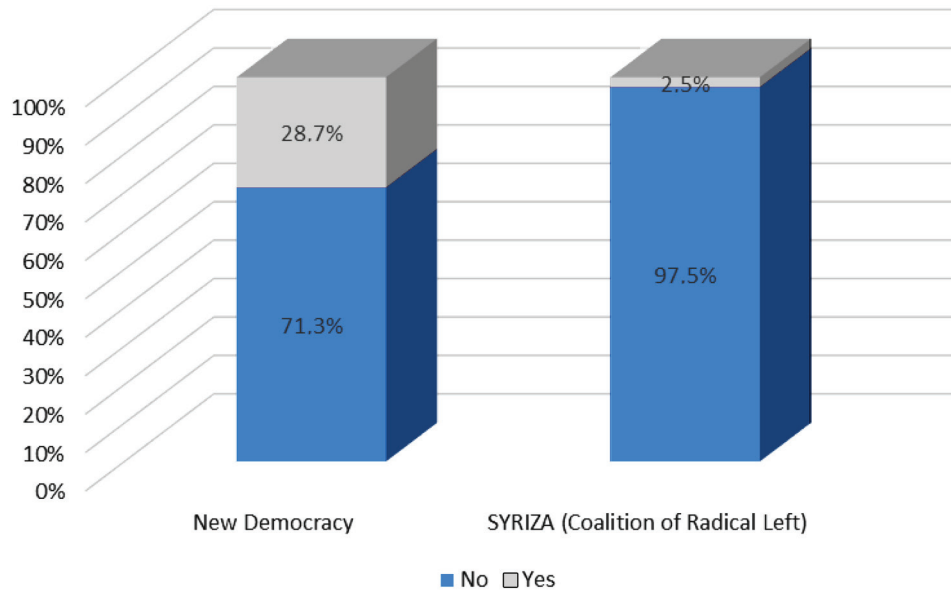
### Thematic Analysis: Public Dialogue and the Main Themes Emerging from the Tweets

The thematic analysis we deployed for the analysis of the main themes, (Aguinaldo, 2012; Ponnam & Dawra, 2013) emerging from the tweets of the two parties, provided us with some significant results related to the communicational strategy of the two parties within Twitter, and our main research question on the existence or not of propagandistic elements in the political discourse of the two parties expressed through their tweets. Once again, we have to note, that the unilateral, hence propagandistic character of the tweets is more than evident in the examined tweets. In Table 1, we can see the main thematics that emerged from the examined tweets. These thematics are analysed in relation to the parties’ communication strategies in this section.

Table 1. Thematics emerging by the examined tweets

|               | Presenting their Own Achievements/Proposals | Presenting their Own Pre-Electoral Activity | Appealing to the People | Downgrading/Accusing Political Rivals |
|---------------|---|---|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| New Democracy | √   | √   | X                       | X                                     |
| SYRIZA        | √   | √   | √                       | √                                     |

Figure 7. Use of unilateral rational argumentation per party (Fischer's exact test  $p$ . value= .000)



The governing party of New Democracy appears to focus on two basic themes: First the positive perspectives of the Greek economy (as result of the government's policies), through the account @statheramprosta (steadily ahead) - the central catchphrase of New Democracy's pre-electoral campaign. In a way, these tweets could have also served as an attempt by the government both to reverse the negative public image and to set the stage of the electoral campaign. Second, the pre-electoral activity of the Prime Minister Antonis Samaras through his personal twitter account @PrimeministerGR, since almost the sum of the twitted messages refered to the places and the events that the PM visited and gave speeches as part of his pre-electoral program. Research in Germany has indicated that Twitter was used as a tool by members of the Reichstag for informing both the electorate and the media, delivering particular messages and setting the agenda of a campaign (Jung Herr, 2009).

These tweets focus on presenting the prime minister having meetings with key different financial, political and social actors, as well as with citizens' organizations. Among others the prime minister - according to the tweets of his official account - took part in a conference organized by the Greek Organization of Tourist Enterprises; had a discussion with several women from the city of Lamia; attended several national highway construction sites, which were presented as closely connected to the development of the Greek economy; visited an echelon of Frontex based on the island of Lesbos; attended several political events of his own party in order to express his support for his party's candidates and inspected the central police administration of Epirus. These tweets, announcements contained audiovisual material from all the prime minister's pre-electoral public appearances, seeking to promote the basic axes of the party's political views, expressed mainly by the PM himself.

The other official account set up by New Democracy @statheramprosta focused mainly on the achievements of the current government and the already tangible results of the policies implemented during the last two years of the New Democracy administration. In order to appear even more convinc-

ing the tweets re-produced comments on Greece and the Greek economy made by mostly foreign actors praising the positive perspectives of Greece, which is in the neat of overcoming the financial crisis. Such tweets are: “The European Commission foresees development and lower unemployment”, “there is an increased interest for investments in Greece”, “positive reference to the Greek economy by Wall Street Journal”, “14,8 bn. Euros invested in Greece by foreign funds”, “prediction of 40 million tourists to visit Greece during 2025!”, “2014 will be the year that Greece will escape the crisis”. These stand as the most characteristic tweets of a handful of similar messages focusing first and foremost on the financial sector, since the public discourse has been conquered by the discussion concerning the overcoming of the financial crisis. Should we want to further elaborate on the different thematics of the positive financial perspectives, we could argue that these belong to three different categories: the tweets having to do with the tourist development of Greece, the positive comments on behalf of key political, financial and journalistic actors both from Greece and abroad and the politics, which will be followed so as to diminish the austerity measures.

SYRIZA’s tweets appear to have a rather multidimensional focus: Firstly, they try to promote the pre-electoral activity of the party leader, who at the same time was a candidate for the European Commission presidency. Secondly, they promote several basic policies that the party will seek to implement, if SYRIZA take the cabinet. Thirdly, SYRIZA seeks to attack both the governmental policies and the prime minister himself as well as the foreign political actors that supported the austerity policies. Finally, the party seeks to address the voters, especially the young ones, in order to support SYRIZA through their votes with the aim to cease the implementation of austerity policies. It is important to note that the majority of the tweets are quotes taken from A. Tsipras’s speeches during his pre-electoral campaign.

The first dimension, being a common one with the tweets of New Democracy, refers to the tweets that “follow” Alexis Tsipras during his tour around Greece and Europe, since he was a candidate for the Presidency of the European Commission as well. Graham et al., (2013) in their analysis of political tweets during the 2010 U.K. General Election have argued that Twitter is frequently used as a promotion tool for the politician, the party and/or its performance. Hence there are tweets presenting the different stops of the tour, still in quite a few cases promoting the leftist ideological identity of the party. Instead of saying “today we are in Portugal”, the relevant tweet says that “today in Portugal at 21.30 we celebrate the 40-year anniversary of the Carnation Revolution”, or “speech at Charles University. We discuss with the youth about the Europe of austerity and the response of the new generation”, and “In Brussels for the 99% of Europeans, we understand their concerns and we’ll bring them to the @EVNDebate tonight”.

The second aim of SYRIZA’s tweets is to present the most important policies that the party supports that should be implemented so as to improve the financial situation of those in need because of the crisis. Such tweets are: “We put an end to uncertainty and insecurity. We restore the lowest salary at 751 euros for everyone”, “we put an end to austerity in order to re-gain democracy. To build our own Europe”, “we will restore pensions, starting from the lowest ones. Free public education and health system”, “A public social insurance system”, “tax reduction of small and middle incomes”, “financial support programmes for the farmers”, “favorable settlements for the debts to the banks and the public sector”. These tweets on the implementation of specific policies in support of the lower incomes are escorted by a series of tweets promising the guarantee of the public character of several public assets, such as water, electricity and public access to the beachside. These last policies aim at the same time at downgrading the privatization program of public resources boosted by the government of New Democracy.

As we saw in our quantitative results, one of the most important points of SYRIZA's tweets is the downgrading of its political rivals, allegedly the governing party of New Democracy, the Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, as well as their political and financial allies, such as Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schauble. What is noteworthy is the fact that due to Twitter's nature (limitations of 140 characters), we witness mostly superficial attacks as opposed to substantial critical arguments on issues (Graham et al., 2013). There are indeed many tweets attacking all those political rivals either in person or through the implemented austerity policies. Such tweets are: "The new memorandum is Samaras' secret program", "in the aftermath of Thatcher, Merkel and her allies say there is no alternative to austerity. They will be refuted in these elections", "they threaten Greek people with harsh punishments in case they don't support Mr. Samaras and the far-right group of his colleagues", "turn off the TV sets. Through their propagandistic news bulletins they try to rescue the political and financial system of corruption", "Go back, Mrs Merkel, Mr. Schauble, ladies and gentlemen of the conservative nomenclature of Europe. Greece is not a guinea pig", "Mr. Samaras is afraid to confront the problems he created", "they take us back to the Miserables of Victor Hugo and Jean Ajean, being proud at the same time. They call it reformation and progress", "does Mr. Samaras agree that people's needs and the resolution of the humanitarian crisis come in the first place and the loaners follow?". These stand among the most characteristic tweets attacking the political rivals of SYRIZA, the conservative political and financial status quo in Greece and Europe.

The fourth important thematic of SYRIZA tweets is the address to the voters and especially young people of Greece and Europe so as to overthrow, with their votes, the conservative governments and the austerity policies throughout Europe. Such tweets include: "On May 25<sup>th</sup> we vote for @EsquerdaNet @syriza\_gr and @europeanleft to re-gain our lives", "the vote of the young people is very important in these elections. They vote for their future against the policy, which dramatically raised unemployment", "the young people must take the situation in their hands and defy the policies that attacked democracy and created unemployment", "give one and only order to the government of vassalage: GO AWAY! One and only order to the neo-liberal powers throughout Europe. GO AWAY", "we want you on our side. On the streets. At the three ballot boxes. For the great overthrow. Victories everywhere", "we do not forget and we should not forget: The people is powerful when they are united and decided", "the Greek people aims, through their vote, to overthrow the ones that during the last 4 years deceive and humiliate them", "you scare them, we @syriza\_gr, scare them. You and us together, people and @syriza\_gr together, we terrify them". These tweets stand as some of the most characteristic ones in terms of addressing the voters to join SYRIZA in its attempt to overthrow the austerity policies and the corrupt elites of the past. Table one attempts a categorization of the main themes emerging from the tweets of both parties we examined.

## **CONCLUSION**

Though it would have been naïve to consider that a sporadic or fragmented engagement in a political discussion on Twitter equates the nascence of a grounded civic participation, it is indeed important to accept that such discussions can enhance participation. However, it is equally significant to consider the quality of this participation in terms of the kind of interaction between citizens and politicians as well as the type of discourse that is being developed in Twitter.

Based on the data of the research that was conducted, despite the fact that Greek politicians use Twitter extensively, it seems that this has not changed much of the old trends of communicating politics. In the same line with other studies such as that of Margolis & Resnick (2000), McNamara & Kenning (2011), Larsson & Moe (2011), neither the examined Greek politicians and parties nor their constituents exploit the new platform in order to immerse themselves in an interlocutory environment. Rather, what is apparent from the thematic analysis of the data is the unfolding of perpetual parallel monologues. In terms of responses and conversations, most of the politicians on Twitter used their tweets in order to broadcast their messages rather than respond or engage in conversation. The great bulk of tweets focused on: attacking the opponent, promoting the party, the politician or particular policies, setting the agenda for the electoral campaign, fostering campaign slogans or election promises. What is noteworthy is that –in the examined sample of tweets- there were no personalised responses.

In addition, New Democracy's and SYRIZA's communication through Twitter includes propagandistic characteristics, since the parties did not avoid the promotion of unilateral views, mainly of sentimental and of logical rationale, so as to promote their political views. Well established and diachronic propagandistic methods – such as the dissemination of unilateral information, the use of rhetoric schemas, so as to either promote own party's views, or downgrade the political opponents, the effort to appeal in either positive (e.g. hope) or negative (e.g. fear/dead-end) sentiments- appeared quite frequently in the tweets of the abovementioned political parties in Greece. Moreover, the conduction of parallel monologues and the extreme unilaterality rate of the expressed views on behalf of both parties prove that the abilities of the medium are not the sole factor needed to improve the quality of political public discourse. The most decisive factor is the way users take advantage of each new technological potential. In our case, Greek political parties seem to fail – at least up to now – to understand the interactive character of the new medium, since they engage in a dissemination of political information under the rationale of the traditional one-way political rhetoric. The modernization of political discourse and the promotion of political – civic dialogue in the digital public space require a fundamental change in the approach of the political discourse itself by its main carriers, the political parties.

In spite of the possibilities offered by the interactive nature of Twitter, Greek political parties appear to be short of ideas so as to take advantage of this emerging potentiality and boost political dialogue and citizen participation, through the exchange of logical and substantial argumentation with the citizens. In a broader context, we could argue that the politicians' failure to profit from the capabilities of Twitter is also linked to the wider political circumstances. On the one hand, New Democracy (governing party at the time of this research) was anxious to maintain its political and electoral power (taking into consideration its low popularity status due to the imposition of austerity measures). On the other hand, SYRIZA emphasized the weaknesses and incapability of the government and was struggling to create and highlight a leadership profile along with the introduction of alternative methods of governance that would bring an end to austerity and economic asphyxia. Following the pre-electoral period, a spirit and climate of hostility dominated Twitter to the extent that both parties were so much absorbed by their need to promote themselves and eventually neglected the necessity of igniting fruitful political discussion and the engagement with the public.

Based on a combination of research methods (quantitative content analysis and qualitative thematic analysis), we managed to address the research objective of this study, that is to assess the use of Twitter by Greek political parties. We tried to highlight how Greek politicians used Twitter as a one-way diffu-

sion of messages. They failed to exploit it as a forum of participatory communication where they could have the chance to engage in a (possibly) prolific dialogue with the citizens. Currently, the employment of Twitter by the Greek politicians is more a jump on the bandwagon rather than a digital public space where political dialogue can be enhanced. Nevertheless, the fact that our examination took place during a very polarized pre-electoral period strengthens our belief that further research that would include a longer period would greatly contribute to a better understanding of the use of Twitter by Greek political parties. The use of Twitter in political communication remains a very important field for future examination. Taking into account the new practices and structures that have been developed with the advent of the new media, further and comparative research amongst different contexts and countries could contribute with interesting insights regarding the employment of Twitter in political communication.

## REFERENCES

- Adi, A., Erickson, K., & Lilleker, D. (2014). Elite Tweets: Analyzing the Twitter Communication Patterns of Labour Party Peers in the House of Lord. *Policy & Internet*, 6(1), 1–27. doi:10.1002/1944-2866.POI350
- Aguinaldo, P. J. (2012). Qualitative analysis in Gay Men's Health Research: Comparing Thematic, Critical Discourse, and Conversation Analysis. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 59(6), 765–787. doi:10.1080/00918369.2012.694753 PMID:22853179
- Allan, S., & Zelizer, B. (Eds.). (2004). *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Attard, A., & Coulson, S. N. (2012). A thematic analysis of patient communication in Parkinson's disease online support group discussion forums. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(2), 500–506. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2011.10.022
- Barker, D. C. (2002). *Rushed to Judgment. Talk Radio, Persuasion and American Political Behavior*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Berelson, B. (1952). *Content Analysis in Communication Research*. New York: Free Press.
- Berelson, B. (1971). *Content Analysis in Communication Research*. New York: Hafner Publishing Company.
- Bimber, B., & Davis, R. (2003). *Campaigning online: The Internet in U.S. elections*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Blumler, J. G., & Kavanagh, D. (1999). The Third Age of Political Communication: Influences and Features. *Political Communication*, 16(3), 209–230. doi:10.1080/105846099198596
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Burgess, J., & Bruns, A. (2012). '(Not) The Twitter election: The dynamics of the #ausvotes conversation in relation to the Australian media ecology'. *Journalism Studies*, 6, 384–402.
- Carpenter, A. C. (2010). The Obamachine: Technopolitics 2.0. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 7(2-3), 216–225. doi:10.1080/19331681003765887

## **Political Communication and Twitter in Greece**

- Carpentier, N. (2012). The concept of participation. If they have access and interact, do they really participate. *Revista Fronteiras – Estudos Midiáticos*, 14(2), 164-177.
- Castells, M. (2007). Communication, power and counter-power in the network society. *International Journal of Communication*, 1(1), 238–266.
- Castells, M. (2009). *Communication Power*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Chadwick, A. (2008). Web 2.0: New challenges for the study of e-democracy in an era of informational exuberance. *I/S: A Journal of Law and Policy for the Information Society*, 5(1), 9–41.
- Chen, P., & Walsh, L. (2009). E-election 2007: Political competition online. *Australian Cultural History*, 28(1), 47–54.
- Coleman, S. (2001). Online campaigning. In P. Norris (Ed.), *Britain Votes 2001*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/parlij/54.4.679
- Coleman, S., & Blumler, J. G. (2009). *The Internet and Democratic Citizenship: Theory, Practice and Policy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511818271
- Corner, J. (2007). Mediated politics, promotional culture and the idea of “propaganda”. *Media Culture & Society*, 29(4), 669–677. doi:10.1177/0163443707078428
- Dahlgren, P. (2009). *Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication and Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Davis, A. (2010). *Political Communication and Social Theory*. London, UK: Taylor & Francis.
- Doxiadis, K. (2013). Political Discourse in Contemporary Greece. Network for Political Discourse Analysis: Working Texts, 1, 1-22.
- Edelstein, A. (1997). *Total Propaganda: From Mass Culture to Popular Culture*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Ellul, J. (1973). *Propaganda, the Formation of Men's Attitudes*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Garnham, N. (2003). *Emancipation and Modernity*. Athens: Kastaniotis.
- Gnardellis, Ch. (2003). *Applied Statistics*. Athens: Papazisis.
- Golbeck, J., Grimes, J. M., & Rogers, A. (2010). Twitter use by the US Congress. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 61(8), 1612–1621.
- Graham, T., Broersma, M., & Hazelhoff, K. (2013). CLOSING THE GAP? Twitter as an instrument for connected representation. In R. Scullion, R. Gerodimos, D. Jackson, & D. Lilleker (Eds.), *The Media, Political Participation and Empowerment*. London: Routledge.
- Graham, T., Jackson, D., & Broersma, M. (2014). New platform, old habits? Candidates' use of Twitter during the 2010 British and Dutch general election campaigns. *New Media & Society*, 1–19. doi:10.1177/1461444814546728

Grant, J., Moon, B., & Busby Grant, J. (2010). Digital Dialogue? Australian Politicians' use of the Social Network Tool Twitter. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 45(4), 579–604. doi:10.1080/10361146.2010.517176

*Greece: Internet Usage and Marketing Report*. (n.d.). Retrieved January 27, 2015, from Internet World Stats website, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/eu/gr.htm>

Habermas, J. (1962/1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Habermas, J. (2006). Political communication in media society: Does democracy still enjoy an epistemic dimension? The impact of normative theory on empirical research. *Communication Theory*, 16(4), 411–426. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00280.x

Heinrich, A. (2012). Foreign reporting in the sphere of network journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 1-10.

Hermida, A. (2010). Twittering the news: The emergence of ambient journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 4(3), 297–308. doi:10.1080/17512781003640703

Hermida, A., Fletcher, F., Korell, D., & Logan, D. (2012). Share, Like, Recommend: Decoding the social media news consumer. *Journalism Studies*, 1–10.

Hill, K., & Hughes, J. (1998). *Cyberpolitics: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Hiotis, A. (1986). *Propaganda: Methods and Technique*. Self Published.

Hoffman, D., & Novak, T. (1998). Information access: Bridging the racial divide on the internet. *Science*, 280(5362), 390–391. doi:10.1126/science.280.5362.390

Honeycutt, C., & Herring, S. C. (2009). Beyond Microblogging: Conversation and Collaboration via Twitter. In *Proc. HICSS 42*. IEEE Press.

Hutchins, B. (2011). The acceleration of media sports culture: Twitter, telepresence and online messaging. *Information Communication and Society*, 14(2), 237–257. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2010.508534

Jackall, R. (1995). *Propaganda*. London: Palgrave. doi:10.1007/978-1-349-23769-2

Jackson, N. (2007). Political parties, the Internet and the 2005 General Election: Third time Lucky? *Internet Research*, 17(3), 249–271. doi:10.1108/10662240710758911

Jackson, N., & Lilleker, D. (2011). Microblogging, constituency service and impression management: UK MPs and the use of Twitter. *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 17(1), 86–105. doi:10.1080/13572334.2011.545181

Jones, S. (Ed.). (1998). *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-mediated communication and Community*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Jowett, G. S., & O' Donnell, V. (1995). *Propaganda and Persuasion*. London: Sage.

Jungherr, A. (2009). Twitternde Politiker: Zwischen buntem Rauschen und Bu" rgererna"he 2.0. In C. Bieber, M. Eifert, T. Groß, & J. Lamla (Eds.), *Soziale Netze in der Digitalen Welt: Das Internet zwischen Egalitaerer Beteiligung und Oekonomischer Macht* (pp. 99–127). Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag.



## **Political Communication and Twitter in Greece**

- Juris, S. J. (2012). Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: Social media, public space, and emerging logics of aggregation. *American Ethnologist*, 39(2), 259–279. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1425.2012.01362.x
- Kahn, R., & Kellner, D. (2005). Oppositional politics and the Internet: A critical reconstructive approach. *Cultural Politics*, 1(1), 75–100. doi:10.2752/174321905778054926
- Kamens, H. D. (2012). *Beyond the Nation-State: The Reconstruction of Nationhood and Citizenship*. London, UK: Emerald Group. doi:10.1108/S1479-3539(2012)18
- Kant, I. (1983). To perpetual peace. In I. Kant (Ed.), *Perpetual peace and other essays on politics, history, and morals* (pp. 107–144). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett. (Original work published 1795)
- Kennedy, J. (2008). Twitter and Digg to introduce social media to U.S. election coverage. *Silicon Republic*. Retrieved September 11, 2014, from <http://www.siliconrepublic.com/news/article/11712/new-media/twitter-and-digg-to-introduce-social-media-to-uselection-coverage>
- Kirk, R., & Schill, D. (2011). A Digital Agora: Citizen Participation in the 2008 Presidential Debates. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(3), 325–347. doi:10.1177/0002764210392167
- Kyriazi, N. (2001). *Sociological Research: Critical Evaluation of Methods and Techniques*. Athens: Greek Letters.
- Ladd, M. J. (2012). *Why Americans Hate the Media and How It Matters*. Princeton University Press.
- Larsson, O. A., & Moe, H. (2011). Studying political microblogging: Twitter users in the 2010 Swedish election campaign. *New Media & Society*, 14(5), 729–747. doi:10.1177/1461444811422894
- Lassen, D., & Brown, A. (2011). Twitter: The electoral connection? *Social Science Computer Review*, 29(4), 419–436. doi:10.1177/0894439310382749
- Lehmann, I. A. (2003). Exploring the Transatlantic Media Divide over Iraq: How and Why U.S. and German Media Differed in Reporting on UN Weapons Inspections in Iraq, 2002–2003. *Press/Politics* 10(1), 63–89.
- Lev-On, A. (2011). Campaigning online: Use of the Internet by parties, candidates and voters in national and local election campaigns in Israel. *Policy & Internet*, 3(1), 1–28. doi:10.2202/1944-2866.1045
- Lilleker, D. G., & Jackson, N. A. (2010). Toward a more participatory style of election campaigning: The impact of Web 2.0 on the U.K. 2010 general election. *Policy & Internet*, 2(3), 69–98. doi:10.2202/1944-2866.1064
- Lilleker, D. G., & Jackson, N. A. (2011). *Political campaigning, elections and the Internet: Comparing the U.S., U.K., France and Germany*. New York: Routledge.
- Lippmann, W. (1927). *The Phantom Public*. New York: MacMillan.
- Livingstone, S. (1999). New media, new audiences. *New Media & Society*, 1(1), 59–66. doi:10.1177/1461444899001001010
- Macnamara, J. (2008). The internet and the public sphere: The 2007 Australian e-electioneering experience. *Media International Australia*, 129, 7–19.

- Margolis, M., & Resnick, D. (2000). *Politics as Usual: The Cyberspace Revolution*. London: Sage.
- Marková, I. (2008). Persuasion and Propaganda. One or two processes? Persuasion, propaganda and rhetoric. *Diogenes*, 217(1), 37–51. doi:10.1177/0392192107087916
- Marx Ferree, M., Gamson, W. A., Gerhards, J., & Rucht, D. (2002). Four models of the public sphere in modern democracies. *Theory and Society*, 31(3), 289–324. doi:10.1023/A:1016284431021
- McChesney, R. (2000). *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. New York: New Press.
- Mcnamara, J., & Kenning, G. (2011). E-electioneering 2010: Trends in social media use in Australian political communication. *Media International Australia*, 139, 7–22.
- McParland, L. J., & Whyte, A. (2008). A thematic analysis of attributions to others for the origins and ongoing nature of pain in community pain sufferers. *Psychology Health and Medicine*, 13(5), 610–620. doi:10.1080/13548500701842966 PMID:18942015
- Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No Sense of Place. The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, L. R., & Brewer, J. D. (Eds.). (2003). *The A-Z of Social Research*. London: Sage.
- Miotto, A. (1953). *Psicologia della Propaganda*. Florence: Editrice Universitaria.
- Murdock, G. (1992). Citizens, consumers and public culture. In M. Skovmand & J. C. Schroder (Eds.), *Media Cultures. Reappraising Transnational Media* (pp. 17–41). London, New York: Routledge.
- Murdock, G. (1993). Communications and the constitution of modernity. *Media Culture & Society*, 15(4), 521–539. doi:10.1177/016344393015004002
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2002). *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. London: Sage.
- Neuhaus, F., & Webmoor, T. (2012). Agile ethics for massified research and visualization. *Information Communication and Society*, 15(1), 43–65. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2011.616519
- Norris, P. N. (2001). *Digital Divide, Civic Engagement, Information Poverty and the Internet Worldwide*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139164887
- North, R., Holsti, O. R., Zanninovich, M. G., & Zinnes, D. A. (1963). *Content analysis*. Northwestern University Press.
- OECD: *Selected Indicators for Greece*. (n.d.). Retrieved January 27, 2015, from OECD website, <http://data.oecd.org/greece.htm#profile-innovationandtechnology>
- Ovadia, S. (2009). Exploring the potential of Twitter as a research tool. *Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian*, 28(4), 202–205. doi:10.1080/01639260903280888
- Ponnam, A., & Dawra, J. (2013). Discerning product benefits through visual thematic analysis. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 22(1), 30–39. doi:10.1108/10610421311298669

## **Political Communication and Twitter in Greece**

Poulakidakos, S. (2014). *Propaganda and Public Discourse. The presentation of the MoU by the Greek Media*. Athens: DaVinci Books.

Poulakidakos, S., & Armenakis, A. (2014). Propaganda in Greek Public Discourse. Propaganda Scales in the presentation of the Greek MoU-bailout agreement of 2010. *Revue des Sciences Politiques*, 41, 126–140.

Poulakidakos, S., & Veneti, A. (forthcoming). The sentimental element in public discourse as a factor of formation of polarization in Greece. In F. Morandau & D. Stefenel (Eds.), *Understanding local and global trans-formations across cultures. Research and practice in social and human sciences*. Academic Press.

Pratkanis, A., & Aronson, E. (2001). *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*. New York: Owl Books.

Rosanvallon, P. (2008). *Counter-Democracy. Politics in an Age of Distrust*. Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511755835

Sanderson, J. (2013). From Loving the Hero to Despising the Villain: Sports fans, Facebook and Social Identity Treats. *Mass Communication & Society*, 16(4), 487–509. doi:10.1080/15205436.2012.730650

Schweitzer, E. J. (2008). Innovation or normalization in e-campaigning? Structural analysis of German party Websites in the 2002 and 2005 national elections. *European Journal of Communication*, 23(4), 449–470. doi:10.1177/0267323108096994

Siomkos, G. I., & Vasilakopoulou, A. (2005). *Implementation of Analysis Methods in Market Research*. Athens: Ath. Stamoulis.

Small, T. (2011). What the hashtag? A content analysis of Canadian politics of Twitter. *Information Communication and Society*, 14(6), 872–895. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2011.554572

Smith, A. (2009). *The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008, Pew Internet & American Life Project*. Retrieved September 11, 2013, from <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/6--The-Internets-Role-in-Campaign-2008.aspx>

Smith, A., & Rainie, L. (2008). *The internet and the 2008 election*, *Pew Internet & American Life Project*. Retrieved September 11, 2013, from [http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/252/report\\_display.asp](http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/252/report_display.asp)

Snow, N. (2002). *Propaganda Inc.: Selling America's culture to the world*. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Splichal, S. (2006). In search of a strong European public sphere: Some critical observations on conceptualizations of publicness and the (European) public sphere. *Media Culture & Society*, 28(5), 695–7147. doi:10.1177/0163443706067022

Splichal, S. (2011). *Transnationalization of the Public Sphere and the Fate of the Public (Euricom Monographs)*. Hampton Press.

Stemler, S. (2001). *An Introduction to Content Analysis*. ERIC Digest. ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation College Park MD. Retrieved December 6, 2011, from <http://www.ericdigests.org/2002-2/content.htm>

- Taylor, P. (2004). *War and International Relations in the Information Age*. Athens: Papazisis.
- Theocharis, Y., Lowe, W., van Deth, J. W., & Garcia-Albacete, G. (2015). Using Twitter to mobilize protest action: Online mobilization patterns and action repertoires in the Occupy Wall Street, Indignados, and Aganaktismenoi movements. *Information Communication and Society*, 18(2), 202–220. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2014.948035
- Theodorakopoulos, Ch. (2006). *Propaganda the Glorious*. Athens: Sideris.
- Thussu, D. K., & Freedman, D. (2003). *War and the Media: Reporting Conflict 24/7*. London: Sage.
- Towner, L. T., & Dulio, A. D. (2012). New Media and Political Marketing in the United States: 2012 and Beyond. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 11(1-2), 95–119. doi:10.1080/15377857.2012.642748
- Trending.gr. (n.d.). *Power by Monitor*. Retrieved April 18, 2015, from <http://trending.gr/>
- Triandafyllidou, A., Gropas, R., & Kouki, H. (Eds.). (2013). *The Greek Crisis and European Modernity*. Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1057/9781137276254
- Trippi, J. (2004). *The revolution will not be televised: Democracy, the Internet and the overthrow of everything*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Tumasjan, A., Sprenger, T. O., Sandner, P. G., & Welpe, I. M. (2010.) *Predicting elections with Twitter: What 140 characters reveal about political sentiment*. Paper presented at the Fourth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, Washington, DC.
- Tumber, H. (1993). Taming the Truth. *British Journalism Review*, 4(1), 37–41.
- Vaccari, C. (2008). Surfing to the Elysee: The Internet in the 2007 French Elections. *French Politics*, 6(1), 1–22. doi:10.1057/palgrave.fp.8200139
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). *Political discourse and ideology*. Paper presented at Jornadas del Discurso Politico, Barcelona, Spain.
- Varoufakis, Y. (2014). *The Birth of Memorandum Greece: A chronicle of the crisis*. Athens: Gutenberg.
- Veneti, A. (2014). Campaigns, Virtual. In H. Kerric & G. J. Geoffrey (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Social Media and Politics* (pp. 214–218). London, UK: Sage.
- Veneti, A., & Karadimitriou, A. (2013). Policy and Regulation in the Media Landscape: The Greek Paradigm Concentration of Media Ownership versus the Right to Information. *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, 1(3), 439–457.
- Vergeer, M., Hermans, L., & Sams, S. (2011). Online social networks and micro-blogging in political campaigning: The exploration of a new campaign tool and a new campaignstyle. *Party Politics*, 477–501.
- Verweij, P. (2012). Twitter links between Politicians and Journalists. *Journalism Practice*, 1-12.
- Webster, F. (2006). *Theories of the Information Society* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.

Wellman, B. (2000). Physical place and cyberspace: The rise of networked individualism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 25(2), 227–252. doi:10.1111/1468-2427.00309

Xenos, M., & Moy, P. (2007). Direct and differential effects of the internet on political and civic engagement. *Journal of Communication*, 57(4), 704–718. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2007.00364.x

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> As communication systems we consider Mass Communication Media, such as Press, Radio, Television, Cinema, and all applications allowing mass or private communication within the internet environment (news sites, various content sites, social media, applications such as e-mails and chat applications). Our focus is mainly in communication systems based on commercial rationale which end up offering infotainment through the dissemination of information that serves specific interests of sponsors, advertisers, public relations and the intense information management by political actors, corporations and other factors.
- <sup>2</sup> The term “text” is not being used here with the specific essence of written discourse, but includes many different forms of communication, which might be meaningful such as interviews, letters, diaries, fiction stories, proceedings, audiovisual content etc.
- <sup>3</sup> The full coding frame used for the current research can be found in the appendix. In the results we present the main findings of our research, focusing on the variables of the coding frame that appeared to be of greater importance for the presentation of the pre-electoral use of twitter. Hence, several variables, e.g. the week of the tweet, have been omitted in the presentation of the results, due to their lack of importance regarding the presentation of the pre-electoral twitter ecology.
- <sup>4</sup>  $R = 2(C1,C2)/C1+C2$ , with 70% as the lowest level of credibility. The conduction of the test on both coders provided us with an average of 80% inter-coder reliability.
- <sup>5</sup> Metaphor examples: “the new austerity measures will be a pogrom against the greek society” (@a.tsipras). “(Mr. Samaras) amputates democracy...” (@a.tsipras). “Landing of millions of British tourists this year in Greece” (@statheramprosta). Transfer examples: “They take us back to the Miserables of Hugo and Jean Ajean” (@a.tsipras). “Greece walks the road of Chile and Pinochet” (@a.tsipras).
- <sup>6</sup> Appeal to fear example: “You have agreed for lay-offs in the public sector, reduction of pensions, privatization of everything” (@a.tsipras). Appeal to hope examples: “2014 will be a year that Greece and Europe will exit the crisis” (@statheramprosta). “A ray of hope for Greece, according to German economist” (@statheramprosta).
- <sup>7</sup> Selective rational argumentation examples” “Focus mag.: EIB supports small businesses in Greece with 50 million euros” (@statheramprosta). “10,3 bn. Euros surplus in the 2013 travel balance” (@statheramprosta). “30000 new jobs in the next two years” (@statheramprosta).

## **APPENDIX**

### Variables of the coding frame

1. Name of the account
2. Party-owner of the account
3. Week of tweet
4. Is it an original tweet or is it a retweet?
5. If a retweet, is it retweeted from another party related account or from an account not belonging to the party?
6. How many times is the tweet re-tweeted?
7. How many times is it marked as “favorite”?
8. Whom does the tweet refer to? (own party/ party allies, political rivals, people)
9. Is the tweet positive or negative?
10. Does it try to debate-“demonize” the political rivals?
11. Does it use transfers, metaphors and other linguistic schemas?
12. Does it include appeal to hope (e.g. bright future)?
13. Does it include appeal to fear/threats (e.g. dark future)?
14. Does it include rational argumentation with the use of data?