Political Marketing and Social Media in Greece of 2019

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Abstract: Social media is one of the new forms of communication with the public and their use has been extended to a political level. Their features, such as the ability to create dialogue, quick personalized contact, and better targeting have made them one of the main channels of communication for political and non-political promotion purposes. Nowadays, their increasingly important role in elections is more than evident. On the one hand, political behavior is largely related to the influence of communication to refer to the exchange of messages between individuals or groups for the purpose of information transfer and mutual influence. On the other hand, at political level, political groups or candidates seek ways to communicate as effectively as possible with the public in order to cope with intense competition. In this context, social media tools are used in order to transmit information to the voters. In addition, in Greece, the influence of social media on political participation and political behavior has not been extensively researched. For this reason, this paper examines the influence of social media on political participation and behavior, using a questionnaire for the electoral period from 5th May until 5th June. The results show that the interest of users of social media in politics is modest, despite the fact that politics are quite important to them, as well as the influence of promotional messages on users can be described as above average. Respondents believing that political promotional messages placed on social media can shape political reality.

Keywords: Social Media, Political Participation, Greek Elections.

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Introduction

Democracy and democratic processes are directly dependent on citizens who evaluate candidates' qualifications and their political proposals effectively. The media participates

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in this process by reporting the differences between the candidates, and providing
information as an observer of the events. Despite the important role of news media that
connect citizens with politics, their media influence cannot be accurately quantified as a
size (Esser & Pfetsch, 2013). In the past, several researchers have questioned whether the
media is influencing political behavior (McNair, 2017). As an extension of this debate to
the present day, the influence of social media, which redefines the dynamic of seeking,
receiving and receiving political information, is examined.

Generally, marketing is widely used by businesses in every industry to make products or
services known to the general public as well as trying to convince them of the uniqueness
and benefits of each product or service. Political marketing is not much different from the
aforementioned approach and use of marketing in businesses. Social media represents the
latest addition to the evolution of the media and information transfer. The media can also
highlight specific aspects of the news in detail, shaping positive or negative attitudes
(McNair, 2017), as well as influencing how the public evaluates political developments by
reporting specific data in citing developments (Enli & Skogerbo, 2013). However, the
advent of the Internet has separated the media environment and evolved ways of
providing information. The proliferation of choices enables the public to receive their own
news from ideologically consistent sources that reflect pre-existing public behavior
(Stroud, 2011). Public entertainment choices have also multiplied, further restricting
media accessibility for political reasons, as the majority of the public prefers
entertainment over political information (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013). In this context, the
present study examines the influence of social media on political participation,
mobilization or empowerment of political interest but also on the contribution of social
networks to the political process.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Political Marketing

Political marketing is not the same as political communication, although political
marketing cannot exist without communication processes. Marketing strategies include
techniques such as research, voter segmentation, and direct or indirect message display.
The use of marketing strategies is based on understanding what the customer needs and
wants, in this case the voter (Stromback, 2011). Today, politicians use marketing to
understand voters and adjust their behavior accordingly (Lees-Marshment, 2009).
However, it is argued that it is important for politicians to treat voters not only as
consumers but also as citizens (Lees-Marshment, 2009). The main objective of political
marketing is to meet the needs of voters and what they want (Lees-Marshment, 2009).
The factors that influence political marketing are the political system of each country that
shapes the way that political marketing is implemented, the political environment with all
the possible links within it, and finally the media where politicians communicate with the
public (Stromback, 2011). Web sites and social media offer additional opportunities to
promote political views. On these platforms it is possible to reach out to voters who have
not yet decided, while mobilizing supporters of the candidate or party in question,
although usually the citizen has to seek and pay attention to the information. In political
marketing it is also important to determine what the goal is, whether the target is a solid
supporter or voters who are unsure of what to support.
Political behavior is largely related to the production of influence and the "imposition" of power by the political system (Shachar, 2009). Communication on the other hand refers to the exchange of messages between individuals or groups for the purpose of transferring information and mutual influence. Therefore, by combining the above definitions, we conclude that political communication refers to the strategic planning of communication with the main purpose of shaping specific attitudes from the public (Shachar, 2009). More specifically, political marketing involves the use of images, text and symbols of each ideology or party to promote and promote the party or its candidates. Still, according to Marland and Giasson (2013), political marketing not only involves political advertising through the transmission of political messages but follows all those steps-steps that are followed for a product such as identifying and placing it on the market. in relation to competition. Other academic sources such as Henneberg's and O'Shaughnessy's (2009) research include political marketing in addition to party communication through the media and communication with potential sources of funding such as sponsors and potential partners. businesses. On the contrary, Shachar (2009) approaches political marketing as the process of marketing research and environmental analysis in order to record the needs of the common target and to achieve their coverage in return for their vote. According to Moufahim and Lim (2009), political marketing seeks to address the concerns and objections of citizens through the strategic planning of a political campaign in order to make the desired decision. Finally, as Smith and Speed (2011) point out, there can be no commonly accepted definition of political marketing, and this is because of the diversity of political science.

1.2. Social Media and Politics

Technological developments and the introduction of new technologies and forms of communication in many areas over the last decade have shaped a new class of things that every group or individual must follow in order to communicate and transmit information online. Social media is one of the new forms of communication with the public and of course their use has also expanded to the political level. Their features such as the ability to create dialogue, fast personalized contact and the best possible targeting of the common target have made them one of the main channels of communication for political and advertising purposes to influence public opinion and voters, and gaining supporters (Yousif & ALSamydai, 2012). These changes and the opportunities offered by social media have helped to develop the media so that citizens with common interests can connect, interact through discussion, and convey ideas and information in order to achieve their personal goals (Shirky, 2011).

Today, digital technology is an increasingly important tool for the political campaign of candidates and parties. As politicians and political parties increase the use of social media to provide political information, the ability of citizens to use this medium for political participation is increasing. Political parties use the Internet for political campaigns, regardless of their size (De Ronde, 2010). The websites give the parties the opportunity to communicate directly with their supporters and the general public and to provide information on political actors and their current affairs. In addition, political parties' use of the Internet has evolved significantly in recent years through the use of multimedia and the exploitation of site features. Although the use of social media is not aimed solely at young voters, much of the young public is only informed by them. The overall objective is
to make it easier or more attractive for young people to get in touch with politicians / political parties, eliminating obstacles to their participation in politics. The emphasis is on the nature of communication and not on content. One of the first examples of using social media in politics is the 2008 US presidential election where candidates using social media had the opportunity to interact with voters in a completely different way than in the past (Vitak et al., 2011). Social media, such as YouTube and Facebook, have provided a highly visible environment for interacting with voters and promoting policies. In addition, these social networking sites allowed users to interact with each other on political issues, with 65% of users between the ages of 18 and 29 dealing with at least one of the five political candidates during the election campaign, including participation in a political group or finding information about a candidate (Smith, 2009). Similarly, Effing, Hillegersberg, and Huibers (2011) found that politicians with greater involvement in social media received more votes in the Dutch national elections. In particular, a significant positive correlation was found between the use of social media and the number of votes in nine of the 16 parties. Therefore, provided that the candidates’ use of social media is well designed, it has the potential to significantly increase their exposure, especially to younger audiences.

Subsequently, several research efforts have examined the association of social media and the Internet with political participation. Norris (2003) examined the relationship between the Internet and politics, examining how the online presence of political parties influenced democratic processes in Europe. The results showed that in the case of some European parties, political sites were used to disseminate information, but also as platforms where discussions between citizens and party candidates could take place. However, only a small percentage of internet users actually visited these sites. Overall, the findings have shown that access to interactive political sites does not necessarily lead to increased levels of political participation. Instead, the benefit of these sites is that they give citizens already involved the opportunity to learn more and participate more directly in political discourse.

Gurau and Ayadi (2011) presented similar findings when examining the communication strategies of the two main candidates during the 2007 French presidential elections. In the context of discussions and emails, candidates only communicated with a small percentage of the population using these methods (eg only 13% of French people participated in an online political forum). The Internet has proved to be a useful political tool for some citizens, but it has not encouraged a large number of people to participate in the electronic political process.

1.3. Social Media and Political Participation

The fact is that at the political level, politicians and political parties are increasingly using social media to reach out to the public. According to Enli and Skogerbo (2013), politicians in Norway report that they use social media for democratic dialogue but in fact do so to a small extent.

Particular attention has been paid to the use of Facebook by politicians, with several research efforts being carried out in various countries, mainly during the elections. The results of these surveys have shown that Facebook users who are politically connected and exposed to political information are more likely to engage in political activities (Tang & Lee, 2013; Mahmood, Bhutta & Ul Haq, 2018). Subsequently, a positive relationship has been found between the use of Facebook for political purposes and participation policy (Vitak et al., 2011; Mahmood, Bhutta, & Ul Haq, 2018). In addition, another study found
that there was a positive relationship between the intensity of engagement with individual Facebook groups and the levels of citizen participation (Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009). Furthermore, in a study comparing Facebook with other social media, Facebook users were found to be more politically informed than users of other media (Pasek, More & Romer, 2009). According to these results, Facebook can be transformed into a highly political platform, with its influence on political participation being an important research topic.

In particular, it is important to consider how politicians use Facebook and social media and not just whether they have profiles or not, as maintaining a profile does not mean engaging the public at the same time (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Bond et al., al., 2017). Still, it is likely that factors that have prevented political leaders from communicating directly with citizens online in the past may influence how they use Facebook and social media today (Bond et al., 2017). Politicians may not know how to use the media properly, they may be skeptical of the dangers that may accompany it, or they might just use Facebook to share entertainment information instead of taking advantage of opportunities to interact with citizens. In addition, even if politicians use Facebook and social media to interact with citizens on a regular basis, this may not increase political participation and depend on the means and manner / tone of communication (Bond et al., 2017). Therefore, different social media can have different influence on political participation, with variations depending on the mode of communication.

2. Research Methodology

This primary research is characterized as quantitative and is carried out using a questionnaire, a tool common to similar research efforts (De Vaous, 2007). The overall objective of the research is to investigate the impact of social media on the political participation of Greek citizens. Based on the purpose of the research, the research design focused on seven key research questions:

1. What is the public's view of promotional political messages through social media?
2. How do people view the credibility of promotional political messages through social media?
3. How do citizens view the impact of promotional political messages through social media on their readers' political views?
4. How do citizens view the impact of promotional political messages through social media on their readers' political choices?

2.1. Data Collection Tool

In the present study, the questionnaire was selected as the research data collection tool. The questionnaire was based on the study by Yousif and ALSamydai (2012) on the influence of political promotional messages through social media on citizens' political beliefs. Specifically, the original questionnaire was in Greek (Appendix) and compared to the research of Yousif and ALSamydai (2012) questions were added regarding the general preferences and behavior of users to make a more holistic description of the research object. Finally, the questionnaire contains 2 sections with the first addressing user behavior on social media, followed by questions about political participation. Respondents
are measured on several scales. The scales used are categorical as well as 5-point Likert-type scales (where 1 = Not at all, 5 = Very often). The questionnaire selected for conducting and collecting the primary data survey data was tested for its apparent reliability with the results demonstrating high reliability of the questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political interest</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact on political situation</td>
<td>.741</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about promotional messages</td>
<td>.738</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>.814</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on political beliefs</td>
<td>.490</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on political choices</td>
<td>.704</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2. Sampling and data analysis

The target population in the present study was social media users and the sample of the survey was a convenience sample of 306 people. The convenience sample refers to the selection of respondents based on their ease of access to the researcher (Bryman & Bell, 2015), and was selected for the fastest and most economical collection of the sample as quickly as possible and based on the availability of the largest sample possible. Therefore, it was the characteristics of the present research effort that essentially defined the way the sample was collected, with the respondents choosing to be on the basis of ease of access to the sample and to be characterized as convenience sampling. The data analysis of the raw data research was performed using SPSS 23.0 statistical analysis program. Frequency tables and bar charts were used to analyze the data and present the results.

3. Data Analysis

Table 1 and Figure 1 show that political messages on social media are rated higher for their impact on political situation (M = 3.15, SD = .863) following by a raise on political interest (M = 2.99, SD = .837) and an influence on beliefs about promotional messages (M = 2.79, SD = .675). On the contrary, political messages on social media are rated lower for their impact on political beliefs (M = 2.03, SD = 1.22).
Additionally, as can be seen from the Pearson parametric test (Table 2), statistically significant correlations were found between “political interest” and “influence on the political situation” ($r = .452$, $p < .01$). Therefore, the higher the political interest of citizens, the higher they believe that the political situation is influenced by social media. Moreover, “influence of political situation” and “beliefs on promotional messages” present a positive correlation ($r = .368$, $p < .05$). Therefore, the more positive the view of political promotional messages on social media, the higher the influence of the political situation on social media. The “influence of political situation” and “reliability” of political messages on social media present also a positive correlation ($r = .224$, $p < .05$). Therefore, the higher the credibility of political messages on social media is considered, the higher the influence of the political situation on social media. Finally, “influence on political views” and “influence on political choices” ($r = .352$, $p < .05$) have a positive relationship. Therefore, the greater the influence of social media on political considerations, the higher the influence on political choices.

**Figure 1: Impact of political messages on social media**

**Table 2: Correlations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Political interest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.452**</td>
<td>.202</td>
<td>-0.91</td>
<td>-0.059</td>
<td>-0.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Impact on political situation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.368*</td>
<td>.224*</td>
<td>-0.045</td>
<td>-0.106</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Beliefs about promotional messages</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.032</td>
<td>-0.094</td>
<td>-0.085</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reliability</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.103</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Impact on political beliefs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.352**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Impact on political choices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**
Conclusion

The current research lead on important findings regarding the influence of social media on political participation in the Greek political scene. Overall, the findings showed that almost all participants had a Facebook account, with YouTube and Instagram following. Subsequently, most of the sample devotes one to two hours, with one third spending more than three hours a day on social media. The majority of respondents contact social media with close friends and friends regarding the reasons for using Social Media, most of the sample uses them to keep in touch with friends / family and then for information. Then it was mentioned that the means by which political messages can be better promoted are television and social media and events.

Subsequently, the results have shown that the social media users’ interest in politics is moderate although the policy is quite important to them. This result can be said to be expected if we consider that the majority of the public consists of citizens who are not actively involved in politics but are nevertheless interested in political developments in the country. As to whether political promotional messages on social media are affecting their users, influence may be moderately influenced by respondents believing that political promotional messages placed on social media can shape political reality. This result is in agreement with several previous research efforts such as those of Yousif and AlSamyadai (2012), Vitak et al. (2011) and Weeks et al. (2017).

In terms of people’s view of promotional political messages through social media, it can be described as moderate, with respondents reporting that they have received political promotional messages on social media from election candidates. Therefore, like any other promotional message, political promotional messages are not very desirable by users. Furthermore, the credibility of political promotional messages on social media is considered as low as the influence of political political promotional messages on social media in the respondents' views. Subsequently, the influence of promotional political messages through social media on their readers' political choices was rated as low while respondents believe that political promotional messages on their social media influenced the final selection of candidates. Therefore, the effectiveness of promotional policy messages on social media is considered to be low.

In conclusion, social media influences political participation and the political views and decisions of citizens, with this influence being perceived as low by users of social media. However, further research is needed to cross-check the results but also to export new results in an election period when political promotional messages are more frequent.

References


