The Impact of Social Media on Press Freedom in Greece: Benefits, Challenges and Limitations

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Abstract: The purpose of the essay is to put light on the expansion of social media in news broadcasting in Greece, highlighting their impact on press freedom and freedom of expression. Taken for granted that the media in Greece (television, radio and print press) have created, except from their “traditional version”, social media profiles (facebook profile, twitter etc.) in order to disseminate the news, the essay investigates the interconnection between the aforementioned use of social media and press freedom. In addition, special focus is given to the challenges that appear from the emergence of social media as news platforms and to the debate that has occurred “for” and “against” this new role of them. Moreover, the essay puts light to some crucial questions that arise:
Do social media in Greece, as news platforms, extend freedom of expression and how do they accomplish that?
Does the fact that social media empower journalists to provide journalism in more ways than one through tweets, postings, and video and photo uploads, enhance journalists’ freedom of expression and, in a wider sense, the freedom of the press?
Has the invasion of social media in the news flow and coverage changed the media landscape in Greece?

Keywords: social media, press freedom, mass media, user-generated content, Greek media landscape

1. Introduction

There has always been a debate on whether Facebook posts, tweets on Twitter and other social media are journalism. And whether freedom of expression the way we understand it in press and in journalism could be extended to news flow on social networks. An important percentage of the scholars, theorists, journalists, public
opinion and people engaged with the subject support that social networks are just platforms in the same way newsprint is for print journalists. Moreover, they claim that social media and other digital platforms therefore extend freedom of expression.

Web sites, e-mail, blogs, tweets, videos and images, message alerts, instant messaging, Facebook, voice chat, and other Internet-based technologies have begun to overtake the traditional media as primary information sources for a growing share of the world population. These media enable media to create an open environment while speeding delivery of important information to the public. The web is rapidly evolving and is having impact on millions of people’s behaviors and opinions all over the world. Little more than a decade ago, all you could really do was read static content on web sites. Today, anyone can create rich and interactive content from anywhere in the world where there is a network connection and with any device.

It is indisputable that the rapid expansion of social media in news flow has set aside printed press and electronic media in Greece as news sources, a fact that has led the “traditional media” to a remarkable circulation and TV audience measurement decline.

Given this overview of ideas, the article discusses the impact of social media’s “invasion” in Greek news flow as far as freedom of expression in journalism is concerned. The focus lies on the benefits, challenges and opportunities for press freedom in Greece, that arise from the emergence of social media as news platforms, as well as on the limitations that have to be set in order not to overpass the border line between freedom of journalism and immunity.

The methodological approach used in the essay is the empirical primary research. Through a comparative research between concrete “traditional media” in Greece (two nationwide newspapers, their online and print editions that have high circulation and two nationwide TV stations with high audience measurement ratings) and their social media profiles, the essay analyses the typology of news content, the amount of news items printed, broadcasted and posted as well as the Greek audience’s engagement in the news flow. The comparison of the news flow between traditional and social media combined with the audience feedback is the basic tool used in the survey to evaluate press freedom in Greek media. The hypothesis set in the research is if the new role of social media, which empowers journalists and citizens to provide respectively journalism and information in more ways than one through tweets, postings, and video and photo uploads, enhance journalists’ and citizens’ freedom of expression and to what extent.

The essay is divided to two parts; the theoretical and the research part. The first provides a theoretical framework regarding the new role of social media as news platforms, their “invasion” in media landscape and explains why mass media engage in social networking as well as the transition process from freedom of expression to citizens’ journalism and freedom of press. Special focus is given on the Greek media
landscape, which has been transformed by the emergence of social media in the news flow and the new dimension given to press freedom. The second part is dedicated to the empirical research and the analysis (quantitative and qualitative) of the data gathered in order to reach to the final conclusions and closing remarks of the essay, regarding the impact of social media on press freedom in Greece.

2. The invasion of social media in media landscape

Social media is a way to transmit, or share information with a broad audience. Social media is a collective term that describes the means of communicating and engaging with people. It is something many people think as evolutionary, if not revolutionary, in helping people connect with each other in ways that are genuine, authentic and natural. Social media is not about the tools and the channels- the software or the technology. It is all about what people do with technology, the software, the tools and the channels: sharing pictures and video, collecting data, connecting with old friends, sharing with new friends etc.

Social media is more akin to a communication channel. It is a format that delivers a message. Like television, radio or newspaper, social media isn't a location that you visit. Social media is simply a system that disseminates information 'to' others. It can be difficult to obtain precise numbers for determining the Return On Investment from social media. How do you put a numeric value on the buzz and excitement of online conversations about your brand, product or service? This does not mean that ROI is null, it just means that the tactics used to measure are different. For instance, influence, or the depth of conversation and what the conversations are about, can be used to gauge ROI (Holloman, 2012:4).

Social networking is certainly a fast way of disseminating information. News typically spreads like wildfire on Twitter before it hits the front page of most major news organizations. Of course, it's also a remarkably effective way to spread misinformation, so hopefully people don't start using it to take the place of more traditional media sources.

The internet and mobile technologies are at the center of the process of how people’s relationship to news is changing. In today’s new multi-platform media environment, news is becoming portable, personalized, and participatory. Portable because cell phone or iPad owners now access news on their devices. Personalized, because internet users have customized their home page to include news from sources and on topics that particularly interest them. Participatory, because internet users have contributed to the creation of news, commented about it, or disseminated it via postings on social media sites like Facebook or Twitter.

Moreover, people use their social networks and social networking technology to filter, assess, and react to news. And they use traditional email and other tools to swap stories and comment on them. A great majority of the public opinion get news
online, get news forwarded through email or posts on social networking sites and share links to news with others via those means.

3. Press freedom and freedom of expression in media

Ideally, a democracy presupposes the freedom of the press and a well-informed public opinion, that participates actively in the state's affairs in which it is integrated. The role of media is to bring accurate information to citizens, working as a messenger of news, a connection point with the world and a democratic counterweight. The media hold a vital role in the health of democracy.

In a pluralistic and democratic society, citizens can express their opinions. A free press and an informed public opinion are appointed as measures of quality of a democratic state (Noam Chomsky). The combination of a free press and an enlightened public opinion guarantee the quality of democracy. John Keane (The Democracy and Media) supports that that "the press and the public bring light to the modern world". Also Ignacio Ramonet (2000: 29) refers to the concept "democratic censorship" to embrace the removal, retention, cut, interdiction of information that, not to be distributed among citizens, it is as if it didn't exist. The machinery of modern communication tortures individuals, who, befuddled by the informative hallucination, the boom of events that came to them, are easy prey of news disorientation in a democracy. As the Copenhagen Criteria affirms, the EU makes press freedom one of the main criteria for accession; but still, since six of its countries occupy very low positions in the Reporters without Borders ranking, the European Union is not a homogenous whole regarding media freedom.

The blogosphere offers a freer space for expression and a temporary antidote to the self-censorship that is becoming more and more widespread in the traditional media. Thanks to the Internet we all are potential journalists, thus leading to infinite number of information sources, uncontrollable news reproduction, copyright infringement and broadened news democratization. Social media as tools of expression are a significant tool in the effort to build a more transparent, aware and open society. They offer citizens the ability to speak directly to others without the interference of the powerful – the state and the media, for instance – who control the conventional channels of communication.

The new tendencies which have been initiated by the new media are an increase in the quantity of news items, the creation of a new public sphere, the increased need for providers of news material and the creation of the so-called "citizen journalism".

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1 The concepts of “freedom” and “censorship”, the potential challenges to realize complete “freedom of expression” and the tools, in which freedom of expression can take place, were discussed the annual conference of the Berlin International Freedom of Expression Forum, entitled “Censorship and freedom in traditional and new media: The revolution of media as a tool of freedom of expression” that took place in Berlin February 28th- March 2nd 2012.
Through social media, people feel they have a greater sense of freedom of expression and/or of speech.

The freedom to express thoughts without censorship and the freedom of the press have been basic rights. However, the power to say or write whatever you see fit is proving a stern test of democratic ideals. Over time, other laws have been enacted – laws of libel, slander, contempt, privacy and confidentiality – to balance the greater good inherent in the right to free speech with the equally necessary rights of the individuals to protect themselves from falsehoods and malicious attacks.

When in 2003 the blogosphere started expanding, most professional newspaper journalists looked down on bloggers. They did not see the change that was coming. This relationship has been reversed now. In the network society, which has now emerged, every citizen is a potential "journalist". In front of a computer screen, a telephone or a touch screen, a person that knows how to make use of the Web 2.0 services does not think of himself any less than a professional journalist. On their part mainstream media do not stop encouraging internet users to act as journalists. They keep encouraging them to visit their websites through social media, to make comments and give feedback, which refreshes the media.

Network users are no longer a passive audience. The information consumer has stopped being passive. It is no longer enough to receive news, which others have compiled. The consumer also wants to create news material himself. We have passed from a society of spectacles to a society of viewers/creators and a new kind of person emerges: the 'professional amateur' (Ramonet, 2011:27).

In the world of Web 2.0 the ones who determine the news flow are no longer the journalists, but rather the social media users. According to Patrice Flichy, the rise of the power of amateurs signals a movement of mass transformation, especially in the news field. "Just like political democracy gives power to citizens who have no knowledge about state affairs, the new democratisation is based on people who can acquire essential skills thanks to their level of education and the new IT tools (Ramonet, 2011:28).

We leave behind us a media-centred system and are heading towards a subject-centred system, where each internet user is able to communicate with texts and images, to exchange, share and enrich news, a system where a multitude of people will in turn communicate, participate, discuss, contribute and share. This way the development of social networks refreshes the democratisation of news.
4. When social media meet the mainstream media in Greece

4.1. Press freedom in Greece

Article 14 of the Constitution of Greece (The Constitution of Greece, 2008) includes provisions for freedom of speech and the press, and citizens have access to a broad array of privately owned print and broadcast outlets. Both public and private media in Greece are largely free from government restrictions, but state-owned stations tend to report with a progovernment bias. There are several independent newspapers and magazines, including some that are critical of the government. Broadcasting is largely unregulated, and many broadcast stations are not licensed. Approximately 44 percent of the population accessed the internet on a regular basis. (Freedom of the Press, 2011).

Currently, Greek media is fairly unregulated in comparison with other European countries. Article 14 of the Greek Constitution states that “Press is free. Censorship and all other preventative measures are prohibited” (Hellenic Resources Network, 2009). In addition, foreign media outlets are allowed press freedom while operating in Greece (Press Reference, 2010). The rights for print media in Article 14 do not extend to broadcasting media. As stated in Article 15 of the Constitution, “Radio and television shall be under the direct control of the State” (Hellenic Resources Network, 2009). Despite this, broadcast media has still experienced relative freedom from government control since 1989, when Greek parliament legalized the private ownership of radio and television stations (Press Reference, 2010).

Broadcast media is regulated by a number of independent institutions, not the Greek government. These include National Broadcasting Council, the National Council for Radio and Television (NCRTV), the National Telecommunications and Post Commission, the TV Audience Research Control Committee, and Safenet (European Journalism Centre 2010). As a member of the European Union, Greek television must also conform to the standards established by the EU’s “Directive Television without Frontiers” (Press Reference 2010). Given the decentralised nature of broadcasting regulation, many in government currently feel that a national media policy would create order and accountability.

According to the 2011 annual report of the Reporters Without Boarders, within the European Union, the index reflects a continuation of the very marked distinction between countries such as Finland and Netherlands that have always had a good evaluation and countries such as Bulgaria (80th), Greece (70th) and Italy (61st) that fail to address the issue of their media freedom violations, above all because of a lack of political will (Reporters Without Borders, 2011-2012).

But since the start of the crisis in 2010, 30 per cent of journalists are now unemployed, and many dailies are now out of print due to dwindling circulation. At the country’s second most widely distributed paper, left-wing Eleftherotypia, has
closed down. The situation is similar at smaller newspapers like Avriani, Express, Xenios, Epikinonia, Kitrinomavri Ora, sports daily Filathlos and private television station Alter, where hundreds of journalists have not received paychecks in the last six months. The number of unemployed journalists and reporters increase by the day.

According to a recent gallop, carried out by VPRC and the assistant professor Chris Vernadakis, that saw the light of publicity on February 15th 2012, there has been a significant change in the use of mass media. However, 47% of the Greek population continues to use television as a news source. However, the use of the Internet as a news source is rapidly increasing and is already ranking at second place with 19%, despite the fact that almost half of the citizens have no Internet access. Newspapers (18%) and radio (14%) are gradually falling behind in the news field, while the percentage of television use has significantly decreased compared to the previous years (Newspaper Eleftherotypia, 15/2/2012).

There has been a huge turnover on the classification of the Greek mass media accountability. The Greek public opinion believes that news is disseminated “a little to completely differently” through traditional media (radio, television and newspapers), which indicate low percentages of reliability (35% for the newspapers, 40% for radio, 34% for television). On the contrary, the reliability of the internet as a mass medium is high (38%, given the fact that 51% of the public opinion does not use internet. In other words, internet’s informative reliability is almost general).

For the Greek public opinion, the credibility crisis of traditional media has clear causes. 77% of the public opinion believes that traditional media are not independent and their information content is not independent from the financial interests of the media owners. Additionally, 80% of the people believe that traditional media are not independent from political power and the politicians. Economic and political intertwining, as far as the function of the “traditional” media is concerned, is embedded in the consciousness of the Greek public opinion. This is the basic reason why readers keep away from the media.

It is worth mentioning that 58% of the Greek people believe that the way Greek TV has covered the financial crisis and its impact is closer to the views of the government and only 18% of them believe that it is closer to the views of the society. For the newspapers the percentages are 52% and 19% respectively whereas for the radio are 32% and 28% respectively. However, internet is the absolute winner since 75% of the users believe that it represents more the views of the society rather than the views of the government (Newspaper Eleftherotypia, 15/2/2012).
4.2. The use of social media in Greece

According to InNews (the first-ranked Greek electronic indexing company), there are 1.5 million users of Facebook in Greece (tovima.gr, 2011). Fascinated by social media and ready to make great cuts to their telecommunication needs is what Greek consumers have stated in a survey recently conducted by the IBM Institute for Business Value (IBV) among 13,000 people in 24 countries. The most interesting finding of the IBM survey is that 9 out of 10 Greeks have turned social media into primary communication media since they make use of them on a weekly basis. Moreover, this trend concerns mostly young people, since 84% of consumers aged under 25 use online social networks even on a daily basis, whereas the use of online videos is also significantly high, with 46% of consumers streaming or uploading videos to YouTube and other websites on a daily basis. The results of the survey show that the main source of information for Greek consumers is searching the Internet (for 73% of consumers that participated in the survey), while 64% of consumers prefer the suggestions made by relatives and friends. The second most popular source is the social networking media (60%, 71% for the age group under 25), such as blogs, discussion groups and knowledge sharing sites (Chekimoglou, 2011).

Faced with the financial crisis, some media organizations in Greece have closed down, while the majority of those remained in function have turned their attention to social media as a useful tool for news dissemination and direct and low-cost access to public opinion.

5. Exploring 4 Greek mass media: between the mainstream and the social media profile

5.1. The case study profile

In order to investigate the interconnection between social media in news flow and press freedom, it should have been necessary to explore the Greek media landscape as a whole. Taken-for-granted that this was impossible to be included in the limits of a specific survey, we chose to present a case study regarding four nationwide mainstream mass media, two newspapers with high circulation and two television channels with high audience ratings. The survey was conducted in February 2012 and the methodological approach used was the empirical research.

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2 The IBM Institute for Business Value survey aimed at understanding consumers’ priorities concerning their expenses, the experiences gained from communication products and services, information sources for products and services and their attitude towards telecommunication providers. The survey was conducted in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Greece, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Japan, India, Spain, Italy, Canada, China, Mexico, South Africa, South Korea, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russia and Sweden.
Through a comparative research between concrete “traditional media” in Greece (two nationwide newspapers “Proto Thema”(which means “The Lead Story”) and “To Vima” and two nationwide TV stations MEGA TV and ANTENNA TV) and their social media profile the survey tried to bring to the surface the benefits of the social media on press freedom while it presented the limitations and conditions under which press freedom in Greece is safeguarded. The criteria, upon which the selection of the 4 media was made, were the nationwide cover of the aforementioned media, their high circulation-readership and the high viewership-audience ratings as well as the “co-existence” of their “traditional” profile and the social media profile. The newspapers “Proto Thema” and “To Vima” are Sunday newspapers. The second (“To Vima”) used to have a daily circulation as well but the financial crisis, that has affected the Greek media since 2010, led to the interruption of its daily circulation.

The essay analyses the typology of news content, the amount of news items printed, broadcasted and posted as well as the Greek audience’s engagement in the news flow. The comparison of the news flow between traditional and social media combined with the audience feedback is the basic tool used in the survey to evaluate press freedom in Greek media. The hypothesis set in the research is if the new role of social media, which empowers journalists and citizens to provide respectively journalism and information in more ways than one through tweets, postings, and video and photo uploads, enhance journalists’ and citizens’ freedom of expression and to what extent.

Before moving on to the empirical research, it would be useful to present the basic characteristics of the mass media that were analyzed as well as their ranking in the audience’s preferences in order to justify our selection.

According to the Greek Newspaper Circulation Nationwide Bulletin\(^3\), the newspaper “Proto Thema” sold 178,380 issues on February 19, 2012, and 177,160 issues on February 26, 2012. The newspaper has a webpage too, “www.Protothema.gr”. “Protothema.gr” is ranked #3,704 in the world according to the three-month Alexa traffic rankings, and about 33% of visits to it are bounces (one pageview only). An estimated percentage 87% of this site's visitors are in Greece, where it has attained a traffic rank of 19. Protothema.gr is particularly popular among users in the city of Piraeus (where it is ranked #10). The site is based in Greece (Alexa, 2012). Based on internet averages, protothema.gr is visited more frequently by males who are in the age range 35-44 and are college educated.

\(^3\) The Greek Newspaper Circulation Nationwide Bulletin
http://www.argosmis.gr/argospor.nsf/30grDailyNew/F51860A75CE20731C22579AC0050CCF3?OpenDocument,
According to the Greek Newspaper Circulation Nationwide Bulletin⁴, the newspaper “To Vima” sold 106,570 issues on February 19, 2012, and 113,840 issues on February 26, 2012. The newspaper also has an electronic edition “www.tovima.gr”. “Tovima.gr” is ranked #5,425 in the world according to the three-month Alexa traffic rankings. Compared with internet averages, this site’s audience tends to be between the ages of 25 and 55; they are also disproportionately childless, highly educated men. Approximately 82% of its visitors are in Greece, where it has attained a traffic rank of 32. Approximately 42% of visits to Tovima.gr are bounces (one pageview only), and its visitors view 3.4 unique pages each day on average. Based on internet averages, tovima.gr is visited more frequently by males who are in the age range 35-44, have no children and are college educated. (Alexa, 2012).

Moving on to the TV field, the two most successful private channels are Mega and ANT1 (Antenna), according to Nielsen Audience Measurement Greece. For the period from 13 to 26 February 2012, Mega Channel was ranked first⁵ and ANT1 was ranked second.⁶ Both of the aforementioned TV stations have WebPages and web TV.

The MEGA TV channel was the first private television channel in Greece launched on air in 1989 and has since become one of the most popular private TV stations. According to Nielsen Audience Television Measurement Company, MEGA TV was ranked first in viewership with percentage 24.1% from 13th until 19th of February 2012 and 22.7% from 20th until 26th of February 2012 (Nielsen Audience Measurement, 2012).

Megatv.com is ranked #8,632 in the world according to the three-month Alexa traffic rankings. The site is particularly popular among users in the city of Kérkira (where it is ranked #15). The site’s visitors view 3.5 unique pages each day on average. Visitors to Megatv.com spend approximately 57 seconds on each pageview and a total of four minutes on the site during each visit. Compared with all internet users, its audience tends to be users who browse from home; it also appeals more to childless men and college graduates between the ages of 25 and 45. Based on internet averages, megatv.com is visited more frequently by males who are in the

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⁵TV Audience Measurement for MEGA : 24.1% (13-19/2/2012) and 22.7% (20-26/2/2012), Nielsen Audience Measurement, http://www.agb.gr/gr/data/default.htm  
According to Nielsen Audience Television Measurement Company, ANTENNA TV was ranked second in viewership with percentage 18.1% from 13th until 19th of February 2012 and 19.2% from 20th until 26th of February 2012 (Nielsen Audience Measurement, 2012). Antenna.gr has a three-month global Alexa traffic rank of 12,495. The site is based in Greece. Relative to the overall population of internet users, its audience tends to be childless; they are also disproportionately men and college graduates under the age of 45 who browse from home. Visitors to Antenna.gr spend approximately 48 seconds on each pageview and a total of four minutes on the site during each visit. Approximately 32% of visits to the site are bounces (one pageview only). Based on internet averages, antenna.gr is visited more frequently by males who are in the age range 25-34, have no children, are college educated and browse this site from home (Alexa, 2012).

5.2. The research findings

The evaluation of the results is qualitative and qualitative in nature and based on data processing that was obtained by the monitoring of the daily news coverage of prime time evening news bulletin of MEGA TV and ANTENNA TV and of the news flow on their social media profiles during the sampling period, from 13 to 26 February 2012. As far as the newspapers, “To Vima” and “Proto Thema”, are concerned, the data was obtained by the monitoring of the daily news coverage of their online editions and of their Sunday printed edition from 13 to 26 February 2012.

The methodology of assessing the 2 newspapers, “To Vima” and “Proto Thema”, and the 2 TV stations, Mega TV and Antenna TV, both their “traditional” and their social media profiles, were based on the typology and the genre of the news items that were transmitted or posted by the journalists, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the readers’ and viewers’ feedback and engagement during the sampling period.

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>242</td>
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<td>113</td>
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<td>141</td>
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<td>2313</td>
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<td>27</td>
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7 In the print edition of the newspaper ‘TO VIMA’, the section of culture is in a separate insert issue.
Table 2. *TO VIMA: Facebook & Twitter*

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Table 3. Newspaper “PROTO THEMA” & online edition “PROTOTHEMA.GR”

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<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>26/2/2012 (print edition)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL NEWS ITEMS</td>
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<td>713</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>73</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL AUDIENCE FEEDBACK (no feedback from print edition)</td>
<td>4634</td>
<td>2163</td>
<td>2410</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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8 There is no separate section under the title “Education” in the online edition “Protothema.gr”. All news items regarding “Education” are included in the section “Social Issues-Greece”.

9 In the online edition of the newspaper “Proto Thema”, “Protothema.gr”, the section Science includes news items regarding Health, Life, Child, Technology.

10 All news items regarding media are in a separate webpage www.thematv.gr
Table 4. “PROTO THEMA”: Facebook & Twitter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>POLITICS</th>
<th>ECONOMY</th>
<th>SOCIAL ISSUES</th>
<th>INTERNATIONAL</th>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
<th>CULTURE</th>
<th>SCIENCE</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENT</th>
<th>SPORT</th>
<th>MEDIA</th>
<th>OPINIONS</th>
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<td>90</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>54</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/2/2012-26/2/2012 (FACEBOOK)</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>96</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td>208</td>
<td>325</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
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Table 5. *MEGA TV*

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<th>ECONOMY</th>
<th>SOCIAL ISSUES</th>
<th>INTERNATIONAL</th>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
<th>CULTURE</th>
<th>SCIENCE</th>
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<th>SPORT</th>
<th>MEDIA</th>
<th>OPINIONS</th>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>68</td>
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<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL NEWS ITEMS</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>70</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL AUDIENCE FEEDBACK</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>

Table 6. *MEGA TV/ TWITTER*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>POLITICS</th>
<th>ECONOMY</th>
<th>SOCIAL ISSUES</th>
<th>INTERNATIONAL</th>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
<th>CULTURE</th>
<th>SCIENCE</th>
<th>ENVIRONMENT</th>
<th>SPORT</th>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL NEWS ITEMS</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL AUDIENCE FEEDBACK</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MEGA TV/ FACEBOOK
ANTENNA TV/ FACEBOOK/TWITTER

MEGA TV has a separate news profile on Twitter but not on Facebook. The Mega Channel Facebook profile uploads only announcements of the forthcoming programs and “comments”, “likes” and “shares” from the audience.

ANTENNA TV does not have a separate news profile on Facebook and Twitter (like MEGA TV). On the two social media profiles, there are only announcements of the forthcoming programmes (except from news editions) or comments for the programmes that have been already broadcasted.

It is noteworthy that both MEGA TV and ANTI TV have their web TV page where viewers can watch news items and can post their comments and feedback. In this article, our case study refers only to the TV stations’ social media profiles and is not extended to their web TV pages.

The basic research findings are the following:
“Tovima.gr”, the online edition of the newspaper “To Vima”, has 7,418 “friends” on Facebook and 9,859 followers on Twitter. The sub-categories, “Vima Finance”, “Vima politics” have 326 followers and 442 followers on Twitter respectively and “VimaGr” has 12,766 followers. During the period from 13th to 26th of February 2012 a total of 357 news items/articles were published on the 2 print
editions (19th & 26th of February) and 1600 news items/articles were uploaded on the online editions.

The Facebook profile of “Protothema.gr”, the online edition of the newspaper “Proto Thema”, has 28,564 “likes” on Facebook and 26,679 followers on Twitter. During the period from 13th to 26th of February 2012 a total of 155 news items/articles were published on the 2 print editions (19th & 26th of February) and 1578 news items/articles were uploaded on the online editions. According to the statistics from Google Analytics, during February 2012, protothema.gr had 2,189,537 absolute unique visitors, 10,787,770 single visits and 39,976,905 page views (Proto Thema, 2012).

The Facebook profile of “Mega TV” has 153,466 “likes” and 12,725 followers on Twitter. Although there is no separate Facebook profile for the news section, there is a separate Twitter profile for the news with 8,359 followers. During the period from 13th to 26th of February 2012 a total of 268 news were broadcasted on the prime time evening news edition and 50 news items were posted on Facebook and “tweeted” on Twitter.

The Facebook profile of “Antenna TV” has 86,685 “likes” and 19,430 followers on Twitter. During the period from 13th to 26th of February 2012 a total of 278 news were broadcasted on the evening news broadcast and very few news items were posted on Facebook and “tweeted” on Twitter. Although Antenna TV has an extremely updated live streaming web page, where anyone can find all news broadcasts—not only prime time evening news bulletin-, the station’s social media profiles do not have a remarkable news postings.

The empirical research focused on two main axes:

1. The journalists’ freedom of expression, so as to give an answer to the question if the introduction of social networking in mass media has enhanced press freedom.
2. The audience’s engagement through their feedback, so as to give an answer to the question if the introduction of social networking in mass media has enhanced citizen journalism and, in a wider sense, press freedom.

As far as journalists’ freedom of expression is concerned, the research shows that they publish different articles on the newspapers’ print editions and they post different articles on the newspapers’ social media profiles. The journalists’ articles on social media reflect mostly their opinion about one subject rather than just present the news and the facts without any journalistic analysis. If we look at the news items posted on the two newspapers’ social media profiles, we will realize that they cover different thematic sections than the ones published on print editions and they include their authors’ opinions so as to get feedback from their readers. The Sunday editions of “To Vima” and “Proto Thema” are obliged to include the
journalistic material of the whole week and this “impose” the publication of the most important news items rather than just the journalists’ opinions.

Mega TV and Antenna TV post on Facebook the main news headlines, without posting the reports that are broadcasted on their prime time evening news editions, whereas on Twitter there is a continuous news flow. As the newsroom director has the final say on which news are to be published, journalists do not have the opportunity to comment on their news stories (they do it on their personal Facebook and Twitter profiles, where they re-post their news stories so as to engage with their audience). Journalist Tweets sorts journalists’ Twitter content into useful, manageable conversations - providing a real-time reporting.

As far as the audience’s engagement in news flow is concerned, the findings are the following:

By coding the news items into thematic sections, the research was able measure the flow of attention between topics of interest. Engagement can be read in clicks. The sections “Politics” and “Social Issues” have a highly active and engaged audience in terms of comments, shares, “likes”, “tweets” and “re-tweets”, suggesting a high level of alignment between content posted and attention Greek audience are willing to provide.

Audiences differ in their willingness to consume and share information on Twitter and Facebook. This is evident by the number of news items re-tweeted or shared. We cannot measure the Greek audience engagement in the prime time evening news editions of Mega and Antenna but we can measure their audience ratings to see the stations’ penetration to people.

A large number of Followers does not necessarily translate into action (they do not write their own opinions. They just express if they like the specific news item or not). An active audience or a large following does not necessarily promise an engaged one. The data shows that the larger an audience, the harder it is to maintain high levels of engagement metrics such as clicks and re-tweets.

There are numerous types of engagement, and each comes with a potential consequence. Comparing the numbers of “followers”, “visitors” and page viewers to the “comments” and “shares” of the 4 Greek media, the conclusion is that the Greek audience may always pay attention to the media’s content, but many of them never repost or share it. Moreover, many followers rarely click on the links/posts/tweets, but constantly share the media’s content with their networks.

Facebook posts and Tweets about local and political news stories are Greek viewers’ and readers’ most engaging type of content.
The research showed clear content-based and behavioral differences between audiences: users choose to follow news accounts based on the type of content being posted by the account.

Furthermore, there are an extremely high number of comments on the online media’s editions and comments and tweets on news items posted on the media’s social profiles. Furthermore, news items that are popular and the most read are reposted or retweeted to other social media users. The feedback from the audience, with “Likes”, “Comments”, “Tweets”, “Replies” and “Retweets”, proves the interest citizens show in participating actively in news flow and news dissemination. The number of comments, shares, and retweets are an important indicator for measuring press freedom due to the fact that the audience’s opportunity to freely express their opinions enhances that freedom.

The remarkable is that the audience/ readers are keener on Twitter, because its speed and immediacy gives them the opportunity to interact and express their opinions at the same moment a news story is broken on Twitter or Facebook.

According to the research findings, the 4 nationwide print and electronic media have embraced the 2 most popular and powerful social media tools, Facebook and Twitter, in an attempt to create an audience base, reach a large audience quickly, effectively and efficiently and develop an interactive relationship with them. The analysis of the 4 mainstream media’s engagement on Facebook and Twitter indicates that news stories are one of the most engaging types of content for these media’s audience.

As the research shows, a great majority of the Greek people, who get their news online, use social media to interact and express their personal views. In addition, the survey reports that these users contribute to the creation of news, commented about it, or disseminated it via postings on social media sites.

Social media is an affordable way to promote tune-in. Evidence of these results can be seen in the engagement that scheduling posts produce in these social networks, with users commenting that they are planning to watch it, or that these notifications lead them to comment on the news posted.

What we can conclude form the survey is that social media are not only important for citizen journalism, but for reaching out to the readers as well. The four mainstream media are exploring the use of social media to drive traffic; the majority of their web traffic comes from social media. Social media, specifically Twitter, has become a critical tool for newspapers to connect with their readership, scaling networked information dissemination to levels that were simply not possible beforehand.
6. Conclusions

The digital revolution and the social networking evolution have affected the world of mass media. At the same time, a debate has arisen if Facebook posts or tweets on Twitter are journalism. Social media and social networks are just platforms in the same way newsprint is for print journalists. Through breaking news on Twitter or recommending a news story on Facebook, social media are becoming ever more ingrained in journalism and are recognized by the community as a primary source for news stories. Social networks operate bidirectionally, as they are simultaneously both a delivery platform and an information source.

On the other hand, there are many voices opposing to the aforementioned statement. Richard Sambrook, the director of the BBC Global News Division, belongs to those journalists who believe that Facebook posts or tweets on Twitter are journalism are not journalism. “You get a lot of things, when you open up Twitter in the morning, but not journalism. Journalism needs discipline, analysis, explanation and context, he pointed out, and therefore for him it is still a profession. The value that gets added with journalism is judgment, analysis and explanation - and that makes the difference. So journalism will stay - he was optimistic about that. However, journalists must understand one rule: if you believe you are in competition with the internet, find your way out. Collaboration, openness and link culture are rules, you can't deny at the moment”, he claims (The Guardian, 2009).

Oriented in the same direction, the commentary editor of Reuters, Jonathan Ford, supports that it is quite hard for a news agency such as Reuters to take social media into account. And social media has developed in the financial sphere, too. Reuters, Kelly pointed out further, is interested in blogging to set up a community offering specific trade news and information - because in the financial community, social media has started to play a role. People such as the economy expert Paul Krugman or bankers who had already made it, he said, started to shared knowledge with the public and pulled them into a financial debate to regain trust. On Twitter this remark was live-commented by Dr. Graham Wilson with the tweet: "Bankers using blogs to regain trust in themselves. In whose mind?” (The Guardian, 2009).

Despite the opposing views, mainstream media, all over the world, are adopting social media especially with blogging, Facebook and Twitter. It is indisputable that the rapid expansion of social media in news flow has an impact in the Greek media sector as well. Actually, it has set aside printed press in Greece as news source, a fact that has led the “traditional media” to a remarkable circulation decline.

Given the research findings, the questions that have been set as a hypothesis of the research and need answers of substance are the following:

1. What are the benefits and challenges of social media’s invasion in the Greek traditional media news flow?
As far as benefits are concerned, social media are a valuable tool to get feedback from the Greek audience about the news that disseminate and improve the way traditional media disseminate news. It turns the information on a static webpage into content that is shareable in a way impossible to replicate on any other platform. If social media tools are managed well, they can lead to usable and useful user generated content.

Greek TV programmers, directors and journalists need to tie their over-the-air product and web content together using social media. Many people in Greece have a smartphone and these devices use programs called apps. Twitter and Facebook have apps that run on these devices that deliver messages containing text, pictures, video and links to websites. Tweeting and posting to Facebook pages are not limited by time constraints or bandwidth allowing TV stations to distribute information quickly and efficiently to people following the TV station pages. Greek users are increasingly using social networks to find and share content, and the tools for doing so are becoming more widespread and easier to use. This helps increase the shelf life of programming, as content can remain relevant to various online communities well beyond a broadcast date. Thus, an extension of the value of the programme is achieved by facilitating the discovery and consumption of evergreen content by interested online communities beyond the broadcast.

The social media of the two main Greek TV stations have succeeded in raising awareness and creating buzz around programming and news disseminating so as to promote viewers’ tune-in. In addition, the real-time broadcast experience is enhanced by facilitating live interaction among audience members; the distribution of content is increased through followers’ social networks. Using social media, TV stations enhance press freedom by supporting audience engagement in the news process, invite feedback and generate interest. It is a platform for audience members to interact with one another during the news flow and express their personal opinions. Through this “audience interactive network”, citizens can post news too and, at the same time, journalists are more flexible to write their articles or news items.

The involution of social media in the Greek media news flow, signals new challenges and opportunities, as far as press freedom is concerned. As it seems, nowadays, social media are probably the most powerful tool the Greek audience has ever been given. They can choose and share the portions of the old media they wish and they are the ones who really control the distribution of audio, video, and text.

The adoption of advanced technologies will be of benefit for all parts involved, reducing production costs and increasing the editing and publishing speed, thus highlighting journalists’ material in Greece. The most important thing is the fact that our switch to new technologies will establish bridges of cooperation with media corporations, with an emphasis on social networks and extroversion.
In the past, journalists used to research and report, documenting their views and sources. By contrast, over-information today, the dispersion of sources, the higher speed and the ability to copy or re-write a news item are the new trends that prevail. At the same time, the advantages of social media include the increased independency and democratic production and consumption of information, which is strongly relate to freedom of expression and freedom of press.

2. Has the invasion of social media in journalism and news flow affected press freedom in Greece?

As the research results show, social media act as news platforms in Greece and they extend freedom of expression and, widely, freedom of press. How is that accomplished? Through social networking, journalists can publish freely what their editors could not for specific reasons (commercial, political, professional, or otherwise). Social networks and digital platforms allow journalists to publish from anywhere for a much more wide audience. Additionally, social media are timeless and limitless, and enable authors (either journalists or citizens) to create multi links for their stories and opinions.

Every citizen of the new networking society has the potential to be a “journalist” as far as he knows the use of simple tools such as the blogs, Facebook or Twitter, tools that offer him enormous power. Some people believe that, in the near future, the “journalism without journalists” will gain ground and that will safeguard the freedom and independence of the press. The new market conditions and the demands in news flow are changing the rules in the news field so drastically. Mainstream and traditional media have embraced social media and use them as a tool to disseminate news faster and with less production cost. Therefore citizen journalism is flourishing and that is why it has to be taken into account. However, web 2.0 should not be considered as a news source – although the majority of mainstream media in Greece have a Facebook or a Twitter correspondent researching the micro-blogging platform.

While the traditional methods of publishing, broadcasting and communicating exist, these are quickly being surpassed by modern methods using modern technology. This transition is arguably ‘enhancing’ freedom of expression for many people, allowing quicker and higher production and flow of information to larger audiences, with more ease than ever before.

The journalists and media owners do not “own” the news anymore. There is a transformation for the journalist from being the gatekeeper of information to sharing it in a public space. What is evolving though is a new objectivity. Objectivity and reliability had always been an idea important for the news. This idea was supposed to deliver journalism that people can trust. But in the new media age transparency is what delivers trust. News today still has to be accurate and fair, but it is as important for the readers, listeners and viewers to see how the news is produced, where the
information comes from, and how it works. The emergence of news is as important, as the delivering of the news itself.

3. Are limitations set?

Setting the limits of the social media’s role in news flow and dissemination is a very delicate and controversial issue in Greece. It is a fact that social media empower journalists to provide journalism in more ways than one through tweets, postings, and video and photo uploads, enhance journalists’ freedom of expression and, in a wider sense, the freedom of the press.

Thanks to the Internet Greek people, who know the use of web 2.0, are potential journalists. These changes of the concept of journalism in the era of social media (bottom-up information, easy access etc.) have given rise to matters that must be taken seriously into account: Greek media organizations have to re-think their methods of surveillance and control as technology improves. The crucial limit that has to be set is the safeguarding of information quality being published or opinions being expressed from deteriorating as a result of the thousands of Internet ‘bloggers’ and media organizations that can disseminate news with a remarkable ease.

Now, that social media “have penetrated” in news flow, arguments arose of deteriorated quality in the field of journalism and press freedom because of the social media’s ease and speed of production and dissemination compared to the traditional media. The opportunity provided by social media to citizens to become potential journalists may lead to an infinite number of information sources, uncontrollable news reproduction and copyright infringement. There is a level of professionalism of ethics, of fact-checking and accountability, that you do not get in the so-called citizen journalism, and an important part of reporting is the lens through which it is interpreted, or not, as the case may be.

The fact that news is published first on the internet does not necessarily work against other, slower media. Under the condition, however, that the complete informational value of the news is preserved, that the news is not rebutted in the meantime and that it is not proven untrue, distorted or manipulated. This is the “red line” that must be kept in order to safeguard freedom of press.

4. Have social media changed media landscape in Greece?

The media landscape in Greece has definitely changed, after the introduction of social media in news flow and coverage. The decline in the Greek newspapers’ print editions signifies that shifting point. Print media have been giving “vital space” to online edition and as a result news is being refreshed every minute through Twitter and Facebook. The 140 characters of Twitter are enough to disseminate news rapidly, immediately, briefly and simply.
The decline in circulation of print media in Greece is accompanied by a respective increase in the audience of digital information through social media. "The second revolution after the establishment of the Internet as a basic axis in information took place after the transition from the Web to the Social Web". He emphasized that these new trends bring about changes in the workflow, the assessment of subjects and the establishment of new roles and responsibilities in each newspaper’s newsroom.

As he said, due to the new landscape in the media industry, changes have to be made on four key levels: a total change in attitude, a change in strategy on the part of enterprises, a change in the workflow, as new structures are created in the newsroom, and changes in the personal work of each journalist. “The most important and difficult change for journalists, as well as for other people working in the media, is the change in attitude”, he said.

What concerns the General Directors of media organisations in Greece, as in all over the world, is the number of readers that read the newspaper, that communicate through the social network, the number of viewers of a TV station, the number of visitors of the media websites. The audience that communicates with the media is today one of the most important capitals of the media managers. This fact reverses everything. In the past, the mass media and the companies that operate in the culture industry used to sell news or entertainment to citizens. Nowadays they prefer selling consumers (readers, listeners, viewers, social bloggers, twitters…) to advertisers. The greater the number of consumers of a specific media, the greater the pricing of advertisements. John Kelly, a columnist for the Washington Post, who has published a report on the rise, challenges and value of citizen journalism for the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, gives a vivid example of that fact by saying “today the Huffington Post competes with the Washington Post not in terms of journalism, but in terms of its readers” (The Guardian, 2009).

The future of media in Greece is tied with social media. Allowing people access to instant information through Tweets and Facebook posts creates a venue for additional content and promotion of traditional broadcasts. The monopoly of informing society, that journalists and the media used to hold, is heading towards extinction. The time when they had the sole right to choose the news to be published is gone. Journalism must not compete with social networks or exclude them, but find ways to coexist with them incorporate them and highlight the comparative advantage of every title, offering more added value, quality, reliability and exclusivity in their content.

The public role and the responsibility of the media – for the information of the public as a platform of democratic participation – is a trend which is still expected to become dominant. In most parts of the world, people do not have the same public systems or constitutional protection for freedom of the press or, in some cases, the mentality, which would accept public participation and government control. But
wherever we are, if the media in society do not work and if they cannot give people
the knowledge they need to act as citizens, then we have lost one of the basic tools
for the creation of open societies.

In conclusion, the increasing expansion of social media in Greece and their use
as news source from a wider audience actually determine the shaping of news flow
patterns and influence of such platforms on press freedom. Undoubtedly, the
invasion of social media in the news flow procession gave rise to a fertile discussion
as far as the evaluation of press freedom in Greece is concerned. The fact is that any
extension of freedom of expression whether it is for professional journalists or
citizens gives us hopes for much more press freedom in Greece, as long as
limitations are set and are not transcended.

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Katerina SERAFEIM

L’impact des médias sociaux sur la liberté…


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