Papagiannidis S, Manika D.

[Political Participation and Engagement via Different Online and Offline Channels](#).

International Journal of E-Business Research 2016, 12(4), 1-22.

Date deposited:

21/12/2016

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International Journal of E-Business Research

Research Articles

Political Participation and Engagement via Different Online and Offline Channels

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how political participation and engagement via social media may affect political participation and engagement offline and via other online channels, drawing from the exchange concept in marketing theory. Social media political participation and engagement is distinguished from other online activities, as the latter is restricted to users already involved in politics, as opposed to social media, which even allow users not involved in politics to be exposed to political messages. This study takes place within the context of Greece, characterised by the financial crisis. An exploratory quantitative methodology, employing a self-administered questionnaire (N=215 online users) was adopted. Results suggest that users who engage in politics, whether this is through social media or other online or offline activities, are more likely to participate politically in more than one form of political engagement. Social media usage intensity was positively associated with social media political participation, while favourable perceptions about politicians who use social media was associated with higher online participation activities among users. Gender was a significant factor for other online political engagement, while age was a significant factor for offline political engagement. Interestingly, the high perceived stress resulting from the financial crisis was not associated with any form of political engagement.

KEYWORDS

Financial Crisis, Greece, Offline Political Participation, Online Political Participation, Political Participation and Engagement, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

Political participation is commonly defined as those legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing and/or supporting the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978, p.1). Political participation is not restricted to electoral processes, but it involves much more than voting. For example, attending public hearings, putting up signs or using banners to advocate opinions, attending rallies, writing letters to public officials, volunteering and campaigning, as well as online activities such as emailing politicians, participating in political discussion forums and communicating with members of a political party through websites, among others. In this paper, we take a micro-perspective and focus on political participation, taking into account new media formats.

Technological advances in today's world, in combination with an era of political unrest during the recent financial crisis have also resulted in the increasing popularity of non-conventional political participation activities via social media, which may or may not have a direct effect on the selection of

governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take. These may include, but are not restricted to, the use of social media for political-related communications and discussions among potential and actual voters, searching for information related to politics by using, for example, hash-tags on Twitter, voicing opinions to other voters/users and politicians/political parties via liking a politician's Facebook page, tagging photos and posting messages on social media related to a politician. Therefore, the term political participation encompasses all the aforementioned activities, which may be at an individual or collective level (one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many), and can describe actual and potential two-way communications/interactions among external actors (voters and potential voters) and internal actors (politicians/political parties). This implies that not only can politicians engage with voters/users (the term 'users' here is used to refer to social media and online users) (Papagiannidis, Stamati, & Behr, 2013), but also that voters/users can engage with politicians.

Given these relatively new political activities that exist among social media users, in this paper we use the term "political participation and engagement" (PPE) to describe all these aforementioned political activities, both offline and online, which are not restricted to actual voters, but also extend to potential voters and users of social media. They do not necessarily have to be engaged politically, but could potentially become engaged with political activities and relevant content online. For online engagement we adopt the definition by Hutchins et al. (1985), which considers engagement as taking place when a user experiences direct interaction with the objects in a domain, leading to a feeling of involvement directly with a world of objects. Given the interactive nature of social media, which is ideal for political engagement, we differentiate these from any other technologies that could potentially be used by users.

Social media refers to using mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms in order for individuals and communities to share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011, p.241). Although social media is a relatively new phenomenon, its roots can be traced back to well-established, mature technologies with relevant social behaviours that have underpinned information exchanges for years. For example, viral email or video propagation can be seen as the online projection of offline word of mouth. What distinguishes social media from other forms of online communication channels (e.g. exchanging email, accessing websites, etc.) is that information shared via social media can reach wider audiences much faster, capturing the attention of other users, even when they are away from their computer screen. Social media usage spans a wide range of applications, including political communications, and political engagement. Social media are often integrated as part of election campaigns, and/or are used by voters as the communications vehicle for protests and lobbying, as well as voicing opinions. The role social media played in president Obama's election campaign (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Pack, 2010) and in facilitating the Arab Spring (Cottle, 2011; Shirazi, 2012; Wolfsfeld, Segev, & Sheafer, 2013) are examples of how social media can be used to engage citizens in politics, influencing and mobilising them to take specific actions. "*It is unlikely that citizens will turn away from television and print newspapers, continuing to supplement traditional sources with new media*" (Towner & Dulio, 2012, p.112), which is why it is important to explore how social media may affect political participation and engagement offline and via other online channels.

Between the campaigning and lobbying in the west (where social media access is high and freedom of speech is possible, but political and social issues may be of relatively smaller scale and impact) and the major political unrest in the middle East (where social media access and freedom of speech can be limited, but political and social issues may be on a grander scale) lies the on-going Eurozone political and financial crisis, which commands its own attention. In the Eurozone, social media access and freedom of speech may be high, but the political, economic and social challenges faced are major ones. This is why this paper explores PPE within the context of Greece, characterised by the financial crisis, as Greece is regarded as the epitome of the Eurozone crisis. More specifically it aims to explore how PPE via social media may affect PPE offline and via other online channels. In addition, Demertzis et al. (2005) who explored voters' social media interactions in an off-campaign

period in Greece has called for further research in PPE. Social media PPE is distinguished from other online activities in this paper for three reasons. First, the latter is restricted to users already involved in politics, as opposed to social media, which makes it possible for users not involved in politics to be exposed to political messages. Secondly, social media such as Facebook and Twitter have gained considerable popularity, and thirdly, because so far prior literature has not explored social media political engagement independently of other online political engagement activities and how one may affect the other, including how these may affect offline political engagement. Social media can be used among potential and actual voters, between users and political parties, as well as political parties and users. Given that a study by Papagiannidis et al. (2013) explored how politicians use online technologies including social media to communicate with users, this paper fills the gap in research and explores how users communicate with other users and political parties/politicians, including actual and potential interactions. This study explores PPE via three channels: offline, social media, and other online. More specifically, this research will aim to address the following research questions:

1. Does social media usage affect social media PPE?
2. Does social media PPE affect a) other online and b) offline PPE activities?
3. Does social media PPE affect users' perceptions about politicians who use social media?
4. Does the context of Greece used in this study, which is characterised by the financial crisis, affect a) offline, b) social media, and c) other online PPE?

Considering the differences in the adoption of Internet technologies (Krueger, 2002) and especially social media among different demographic groups, the above research questions will be assessed in relation to key demographic factors (Nam, 2012), which can also offer practical implications for political marketing and communication strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Political Participation and Engagement

There has been much debate as to the role of the Internet in politics. Some believe that the Internet has the potential to revitalise democracy, while others believe that it will not result in any significant changes in patterns of political interest, efficacy, participation or knowledge (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). Early evidence suggested that Internet users with access to political news online were more likely to vote in the 1996 and 2000 US presidential elections. The mobilising potential of the Internet in 2000 was also associated with political engagement beyond voting itself (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). At the same time, though, unequal demographic access to the Internet was considered a potential factor for amplifying existing disparities in the composition of the electoral body (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). Krueger's (2006) work concluded that the most significant predictor of online political mobilisation was Internet skills, which was something common among those who scored high on past political activity, civic skills, and most socioeconomic indicators, and as a result the Internet itself did little to contribute positively to influence participatory inequality in the United States. It appears that, on one hand, the Internet promised to expand participation, but on the other it added barriers via social digital access and the skills required to utilise it effectively. "*Whilst the Internet does not universally lower the costs of participation, it may bring some new individuals and groups into the political process –notably younger people, many of whom have grown up with the Internet as part of their daily lives*" (Ward, Gibson, & Lusoli, 2003, p.667). More importantly, the Internet could facilitate deeper participatory experiences and extend the range of political activities and social movement actions one could undertake (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010; Ward et al., 2003; Xenos & Moy, 2007). Davis (2010, p.746) reached the same conclusion, stating that "politics for those already engaged or interested is becoming denser, wider, and possibly more pluralistic and inclusive. But, at the

same time, the mass of unengaged citizens is being subject to greater communicative exclusion and experiencing increasing disengagement".

Over time, as Internet technologies become more advanced and pervasive and user behaviour matures, one could expect the Internet to start living up to the initial expectations. This does not imply a technological determinism (Polat, 2005), which may have previously inflated expectations, but simply that over time ICT become embedded and more accepted by society. According to Anduiza et al. (2009) we are already seeing evidence of this, with the literature reaching a broad agreement around the proposition that the Internet provides new opportunities for new modes of online engagement and that after an initial period of negative expectations, Internet use results in changes in attitudes not unfavourable to political engagement. The models underpinned by incremental contributions of ICTs to democratic governance, which are compatible with existing incentives and institutional constraints, may be more likely to become increasingly impactful because these uses of digital technologies amplify the efforts of organisations and individuals to achieve the aims that they already have (Fung, Russon Gilman, & Shkabatur, 2013). In other words, social media are perceived as complementary to existing mechanisms, rather than a change agent in their own right.

Early studies examined online political practices, from a politician and party perspective, typically revolving around web site evaluations, which were based on benchmarking politician and party sites against various analytical frameworks (Fogg et al., 2001; Gibson & Ward, 2000). Although such studies still have value, they cannot capture the full extent of political engagement activities as these now often take place beyond a specific political web site. Instead they are distributed across a number of online services, many of which fall under the umbrella of social media. Given the increasing usage of social media in politics, a growing body of literature dedicated to social media and their role in political marketing has recently emerged, across many countries (Bode & Dalrymple, 2014; Cameron, Barrett, & Stewardson, 2014; Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Demertzis et al., 2005; Ekdale, Namkoong, Fung, & Perlmutter, 2010; Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Gil De Zúñiga, Puig-I-Abril, & Rojas, 2009; Gil de Zúñiga, Veenstra, Vraga, & Shah, 2010; Xenos, Vromen, & Loader, 2014; Vagra et al., 2014; Sandoval-Almazan, 2015; Svensson & Larsson, 2016). By their very nature social media have a built-in user involvement element, which is key to political engagement. Social media can become a facet of political marketing, facilitating the role that O'Cass (2001) argues it should play, i.e. to enable parties, politicians and voters to participate in a constructive dialogue for both specific and broader societal development and the utilisation of social and economic goals. The above does not suggest that social media will replace web sites, but rather that online political engagement happens across a number of different platforms and that studying one does not result in a sufficiently representative understanding of all. Neither does it suggest that online political engagement happens only on politicians' and political parties' web sites or social media. "Modern expressions of political action and communication such as online fora and social networks are not in contradiction with traditional ones like voting; rather, they can serve as complementary tools facilitating social engagement and political participation" (European Commission, 2012, p.18)

Heavy Internet use has been associated with increased participation in voluntary organisations and politics (Wellman, Quan-Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001), while Internet behaviours such as social communication and information searching may foster social and civic participation (Shah, Schmierbach, Hawkins, Espino, & Donovan, 2002). Social media as a civic communication channel allow members of particular groups to be included in civic participatory activities (Warren, Sulaiman, & Jaafar, 2015). Still such developments may have been confined to specific population segments. For instance, Krueger (2002) noted that Internet access issues, and more specifically the fact that early adopters came from high socioeconomic backgrounds, resulted in a biased perspective, with the Internet reinforcing the existing patterns of political inequality. However, he concluded that in the future, considering the Internet's participatory potential, such issues could eventually be minimised and consequently there will be a need for more research in the area. The ever increasing usage of Internet applications on a plethora of different devices points in this direction.

Despite social media lending themselves to interaction by facilitating dialogues between users, as well as politicians and other users, this is not happening and campaigns are not symmetrical when it comes to relationship building. A decade ago Stromer-Galley (2000) found that candidates were not utilising human-interactive channels on the Internet because they were burdensome to the campaigns, they risked losing control of the communication environment and they no longer provided ambiguous campaign discourse. Considering the development of Internet-based communications since then, it is clear that politicians cannot afford to sit back passively and not engage, but should aim to embrace interaction with users, as well as pay attention to interactions among users themselves, rather than be afraid of losing control. This would not only put meaning and purpose back into the interaction itself, but also help improve politicians' reputation and influence among users. "Using social media, a political candidate may reach individuals who feel comfortable sharing their political views with almost anyone, who already are highly interested in political campaigns, whether via face-to-face discussions or online sources, and who are highly politically informed, across all platforms." (Himelboim, Lariscy, Tinkham, & Sweetser, 2012). Consequently, addressing the proposed research questions seems imperative in today's era, which is characterised by a turbulent and often unstable political, economic and social environment, as social media users can help in enabling parties, politicians and citizens to participate in a constructive dialogue; value-exchange relationships, with societal benefits.

Political Participation and Engagement in Greece during the Financial Crisis

The on-going global and Eurozone financial crisis has been a very deep one, not just in terms of its economic impact, but also in terms of the side effects it had on social structures and coherence. Beyond the issues of financial regulation that surfaced, it fuelled and then sparked discussion about the systemic problems many countries had been facing for years, which in turn became a debate as to how these should be addressed. Focusing on Greece (for an extensive review of the Greek financial crisis, its causes and implications see Kouretas & Vlamis, 2010; Pagoulatos & Triantopoulos, 2009; Sakellaropoulos, 2010; Zahariadis, 2010), Kouretas and Vlamis (2010) suggest that among the many causes of the Greek crisis the primary one was that Greek governments, in combination with the existence of a weak political system, were responsible for a constant mismanagement of the domestic economy. The consequences have been devastating for the middle and lower classes and incomes, leaving little room for hope for young people, who saw youth unemployment climb to over 60% (Lowen, 2013). In such a tense environment politicians were often met with hostility and anger, which made political engagement a very challenging endeavour. Social media usage could potentially help alleviate the tensions that exist by providing a new political engagement platform, and encouraging political engagement through social media (e.g. protests). This is in line with expectations as set by studies such as that of Valenzuala et al. (2009), who reported that higher intensity of Facebook use led to higher levels of political participation among students, or the work of Gil De Zúñiga et al. (2012), who found evidence that seeking information via social network sites is a significant predictor of people's political participatory behaviours, online and offline.

When it comes to protesting and the use of social media, Facebook use has been shown to be associated significantly with protest activity, even after taking into account political grievances, material and psychological resources, values, and news media use (Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman, 2012). Similarly, social media in general, and Facebook in particular, provided participants in Egypt's Tahrir Square protests with new sources of information that the regime could not easily control and they were crucial in shaping how citizens made individual decisions about participating in protests, among other political activities (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). On the other hand, evidence from the 2010 Toronto G20 protests suggests that social media did not facilitate the crowd-sourcing of alternative reporting, except to some extent for Twitter, and even then this was dominated by a few individuals, mirroring the often-criticised mainstream reporting practices for protests (Poell & Borra, 2012).

Even though the evidence from prior literature is mixed due to the variability in the context of these prior studies, we expect that higher social media intensity leads to higher political engagement, through social media, other online activities, as well as offline activities. This is expected within the context of Greece, characterised by the financial crisis, as social media usage can be seen as an alternative way to seek information, outside the mass media, which is very important during times of crisis, and, based on Valenzuala et al. (2009) and Gil De Zúñiga et al. (2012), social media intensity (a measure of social media usage) impacts on political participation behaviours. Exploring this hypothesis will offer useful insights into the relative importance of social media both as a channel for political engagement, but also as the cause or the spark of political engagement via other channels and in particular offline forms (e.g. like the "indignant movement", also referred to as the "Facebook May" movement Ethnos, 2013). It is hypothesised that:

The higher the intensity of using social media, the higher the likelihood will be of

H1: political engagement through social media, within the context of the Greek financial crisis;
H2: engaging in other forms of online political participation, within the context of the Greek financial crisis; and
H3: offline political participation, within the context of the Greek financial crisis.

Beyond publicly expressing views about financial and political circumstances, social media have been credited with facilitating grass roots movements. For instance, in May 2011 citizens organised protests in a number of cities across different countries, following invitations by Facebook groups, resulting in the "indignant movement" (Ethnos, 2013). Many MPs felt the frustration and anger of the public, making public appearances very challenging. Social media could have played a catalytic role in facilitating communication and interaction among politicians and online users, especially when other channels of communication had broken down.

The first important question arising is whether social media were just a facilitating agent for mobilising citizens who were already active via other channels or whether they were mobilising citizens who would not otherwise protest. "Cyber-enthusiasts" might express their optimism about the ability of citizens to adopt new strategies, e.g. in our case adopting social media, while "cyber-sceptics" might downplay their significance, arguing that using the Internet gives people a false sense of engagement and keeps them away from actual physical protests (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). The balance probably lies somewhere in between the two extremes. "*There is a connection between technology diffusion, the use of digital media, and political change. But it is complex and contingent.*" (Howard & Parks, 2012) Segerberg and Bennett (2011) suggest that although protest ecologies are expected to be different, three dimensions could still facilitate analysis and comparison over different cases: 1) the way social media (Twitter in their case) streams represent networking mechanisms crosscutting the protest ecology; 2) how social media embed and are embedded in various kinds of gatekeeping processes; and 3) how social media reflect changing dynamics in the ecology over time. Protest ecologies may involve both social media and more "traditional" online technologies, such as web sites and blogs, which may also play a significant role in these activities (Theocharis, 2012).

Within the scope of our study's context, it is necessary to consider and compare political engagement across a number of offline and online channels, including social media. For example, Vaccari et al. (2015) found evidence that the activities of Italian Twitter users enabled by social media, which are generally thought of as lower-threshold forms of political engagement, were positively associated with higher-threshold ones that took place both online and offline. It is expected that political engagement in any form will be positively and significantly associated with other forms of political engagement, meaning that if a user is motivated to participate politically and engage with politicians and other users via one channel, he/she will also be motivated to participate and engage with them via other channels (Steinberg, 2015; Vissers & Stolle, 2014; Vitak et al., 2011).

We hypothesise that:

H4: Political participation and engagement via offline, social media, and other online channels will be positively and significantly correlated with each other, within the context of the Greek financial crisis.

Given that social media are also used by politicians and political parties, the question that arises is how users perceive those politicians who were trying to engage with them via social media. Individuals who wrote on candidates' Facebook walls perceive themselves as being on friendly terms with the candidates (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). Media multiplexity theory also suggests that the stronger the tie between user and the politician the more media forms/channels may be used, including social media and other online ones, to communicate with the politician and other users (Haythornthwaite, 2005). This is in alignment with a study of web sites and their effect on trust (Papagiannidis, Coursaris, & Bourlakis, 2012), which reported that Greek users tended to visit the websites of favoured candidates, which in turn may reinforce their positive perceptions of them. In addition, according to interpersonal attraction theory (related to how much we like, or dislike, someone (Lydon, Jamieson, & Zanna, 1988)), and self-image congruence models (the consumption of products and services based on whether or not they complement someone's perceived image (Aaker, 1999)), people (i.e., users, voters) are attracted, not necessarily referring to physical attraction, to others who share similar characteristics, including people who engage in similar activities. Therefore, social media users will have a more favourable attitude towards politicians who use social media than those who do not. We hypothesise that:

H5: The more users engage in political activities through social media, the more likely it will be that they will have high regard for politicians who use social media, within the context of the Greek financial crisis.

So far the aforementioned hypotheses have examined a number of different channels with regard to users' political access and behaviour. To holistically frame participation and engagement we should also include the effect that the environment (in our case the political and financial crisis) has on citizens' motivations, as this affects both the ability of citizens to gain access to social media and their motivation to take to the streets (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). We turn our attention to the motivations behind political participation in Greece during the financial crisis. The study of online politics in Greece has attracted attention by academics (Apospori, Avlonitis, & Zisouli, 2010) due to its potential benefits (Lappas, Chatzopoulos, & Yannas, 2008) and according to Temple (2013) online social media may play an important role in the future, which is why this case study is particularly interesting in terms of the interactions of different political actors and/or users (Lisi, 2011) in Greece during the financial crisis. Oskarson (2010) notes that a crisis can lead to a decrease in political alienation. It can be inferred from these results that people will be more interested in politics during times of financial and political unrest, such as those faced in Greece, than during times of financial and political tranquillity. To control for this, the resulting stress (perceptions) of the crisis for each individual, and how it impacts on PPE through different channels, is explored in this study. Given the impact that the crisis has had on citizens' finances and the direct and indirect consequences that the resulting financial constraints may have had on citizens, the perceived stress resulting from the financial crisis is seen as a proxy for the public's motivation to participate politically.
Therefore, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H6: The greater the perceptions of stress as a result of the financial crisis in Greece, the greater the likelihood of political participation and engagement via any channel (i.e., social media, other online, offline) will be.

Socio-demographic differences among users are considered in regard to the exploration of the aforementioned hypotheses. The section below discusses prior literature relevant to socio-demographic differences among users related to PPE.

Online Political Participation and Demographics

When it comes to demographics, Wang (2007) concluded that a model in which political participation is dependent on political attitude, which in turn is dependent on political use of the Internet, matched his empirical data better than an alternative model in which demographics lead to attitudes, which then lead to political use of the Internet and finally to political participation. More recently, Nam (2012), examining the reinforcing and mobilising aspects of the Internet on political participation, did not find significant categorical differences between those who participate online and those who participate offline, neither did he find any cross-group differences in how politically active users are between the offline and the online mode. On the other hand, his research suggests that the Internet can politically mobilise those who do not normally get involved, as well as reinforce offline participation. However, Best and Krueger (2005) found evidence suggesting that the factors predicting online participation can differ from the factors that predict offline participation and that those who fall in the higher socioeconomic classes tend to possess these distinct online determinants disproportionately.

It is worth remembering, though, that Internet-based communications have greatly evolved in the past decade. Internet access has become more widespread and users have had a great deal of time to mature, not just in terms of their ICT skills, but also in terms of their online behaviours. For example, Ward (2003) notes that in 2003 Internet-based activities were rather mundane and did not include interactive discussions or networking, something that social media as we know them today could naturally facilitate.

A meta-analysis by Boulianne (2009) found a positive, albeit small, effect of the Internet on political engagement. Citizens who live in poorer, more repressive regimes are less likely to have access to the Internet, and even when they do gain access they are much more likely to be monitored, harassed, and censored (Herkenrath & Knoll, 2011; van Dalen, 2011). Consequently, it is precisely those populations that have the greatest need to mobilise against their governments that find it most difficult to exploit the new media. In addition, a report by the European Commission (2012) found that younger adults are more likely to participate politically via new forms/channels (i.e., via the Internet), more than engage in offline political activities. Even though the youth still believe in the power of voting, they prefer new forms of political engagement to voice their opinions. This is also consistent with findings of Xenos et al. (2014) on his study of political participation via social media among young adults. Relevant to new forms of political engagement, the report also suggested that differences based on educational background and income become less evident in new forms of political engagement. Lastly, a recent study by Park and You (2016) found that the two generational groups had different preferences for types of political engagement, with those in the 40-50 age group being interested in formal political engagement, while those in the 20-30 showed more interest in informal political engagement, such as social movements. In turn, this also made a difference in the two groups' media channel preference.

These results illustrate the new changing environment we live in, which is accompanied by new perceptions of citizenship and patterns of socialisation (European Commission, 2012). Exploring how different demographic groups engage in different forms of political engagement thus becomes imperative, which is why the aforementioned hypotheses are also explored by taking into account socio-demographic factors that might impact on PPE.

METHODOLOGY

This study takes place in Greece, with the population under investigation being Greeks living in the country during the time of the study. An exploratory quantitative methodology, employing an

anonymous self-administered online questionnaire, which was prepared in English and translated into Greek, was used to collect the data for this study in March 2012, after a short pilot. A non-probability sampling technique was adopted based on self-selection and snowball sampling. 215 online users completed the questionnaire. The participants' average age was 33.9 years (*SD*=8.8). Given the focal point of this work was the effect of the financial crisis participants were required to have the right to vote in the last two Greek elections in order to ensure that they had a minimum of potential political engagement over this period, irrespective of whether they had exercise this right, and that they had to have lived in Greece during the preceding 12 months. Although there appears to be a skewed distribution towards highly educated users, one needs to consider that the most active Internet users in Greece tend to be males, 16-24, with a high educational level and living in big cities (Observatory for the Greek Information Society, 2011). Also, social media users in Europe in general tend to be between the ages of 15 to 39 years old, according to European statistics (European Commission, 2012). In this paper we do not only focus on elections, but on general PPE (actual and potential). Therefore, the sample is online users, and not only voters. European statistics (ibid) also indicate that even though Greece is one EU country with low Internet usage, Greece has experienced the second fastest growth of internet usage, after Ireland. In addition, Greece is one of the top six EU countries that read and post opinions about civil and political issues via websites, indicating that Greece is an appropriate context for the purpose of this study. In Greece, Facebook users more than doubled (from 1.05 million in May 2012 to 4.63m in May 2013), while Twitter users also increased from 58,000 in May 2012 to 333,422 (+475%) in May 2013 (Imerisia.gr, 2013). Facebook and Twitter were selected due to their prominence among social networking sites and their utilisation for political interactions.

142 (78.5%) participants had Facebook accounts and 79 (43.6%) participants had Twitter accounts. Breakdowns of usage and connections on these social networks are indicated in Table 1. The vast majority of Facebook users (29.6%) had more than 400 friends, followed by 24% who had 100-200 friends on Facebook. Facebook usage was also heavy, with about 65% spending more than 1 hour a day on this popular social networking site. Twitter usage was lower, with only half the users spending 1 hour on it, while 30% of the users spent only up to 10 minutes on a daily basis on Twitter. This pattern is also reflected in connections on Twitter, with the category of fewer than 100 connections being the most populous one, followed by the one with 400+ connections for both Twitter followers and following.

Table 1. Social usage media and user social network reach

Social Reach	Facebook Friends (n=142)	Twitter Followers (n=79)	Twitter Following (n=79)
up to 100	21 (14.8%)	38 (48.2%)	31 (39.2%)
101-200	35 (24.6%)	10 (12.7%)	14 (17.8%)
201-300	25 (17.6%)	7 (8.8%)	7 (8.8%)
301-400	19 (13.4%)	2 (2.5%)	3 (3.8%)
400 or above	42 (29.6%)	22 (27.8%)	24 (30.4%%)
Social Media Usage			
Less than 10 mins	10 (7.0%)	24 (30.4%)	
10-30 mins	19 (13.4%)	8 (10.1%)	
31-60 mins	20 (14.1%)	8 (10.1%)	
1-2 hours	29 (20.4%)	6 (7.6%)	
2-3 hours	17 (12.0%)	8 (10.1%)	
More than 3 hours	47 (33.1%)	25 (31.6%)	

Out of the 215 participants, 103 (47.9%) were males and the mean age was 33.69 (SD=8.7), ranging from 18 to 69 years old. 34% (n=73) of the sample had an undergraduate degree and 31.2% (n=67) had a postgraduate degree, followed by a 12.6% (n=27) who had a PhD. 59.5% (n=128) of the sample are fully-employed, followed by a 16.7% (n=37) who were unemployed.

Social Media Intensity was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree via 5 items/statements for Facebook and 5 items/statements for Twitter, which were adapted from the Facebook Intensity scale, which offers a better measure of Facebook usage than frequency or duration indices (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). We selected these two networks as they are the two most popular social networks based on the number of registered accounts (Imerisia.gr, 2013) and also because they were reported as playing a role in the Greek protests (Ethnos, 2013). Each of the Facebook and Twitter item/statement scores was then added together to create the Social Media Intensity Scale items, which ranged from 2 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). Statements that were included were "Facebook/Twitter is part of my everyday activity", and "I feel I am part of the Facebook/Twitter community".

Political Participation through Social Media was measured by 6 yes/no statements adapted from Vitak et al. (2009) for Facebook and another 6 for Twitter. After coding, yes=1 and no=0, these similar statements for Facebook and Twitter were then added together, which resulted in a combined scale ranging from 0 to 12. This made it possible to capture political participation using a single scale for the two social networks of interest. For example, items included "Posted a status update that mentions a politician", "Posted a photo of myself or others at a politician's event", "Became a "fan"/ "follower" of a politician". We focus on politicians as opposed to politics as politicians' social media spaces are ideal for engaging in direct interactions about politics.

Other Online Political Participation was measured via 7 statements, using a 9-point Likert scale asking participants how frequently they used the Internet for a number of online activities (1=Never, 9=More than once a week). Statements included: "Write to a politician," "Make a campaign contribution", and "Send a political message via e-mail") and were adapted from Gil De Zúñiga et al. (2012).

Offline Political Participation was measured with 12 items (e.g. "Attended a political rally", "Voted in 2009 general election" and "Participated in groups that took some local action for social or political reform"), which were adapted from Gil De Zúñiga et al. (2012), in addition to two statements regarding Greece's general elections in 2009 and local elections in 2010, which for this study are key events related to social media (i.e., in 2010 protests in Greece were organised on Facebook). Items were then added together to create the composite score of offline political participation.

Perceptions about Politicians who Use Social Media were measured with 4 items (i.e., "I hold in high regard politicians who: regularly tweet or update their Facebook status, tweet, reply to user posts, maintain an active social media presence") on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. This scale was checked for content validity and was supported by an exploratory factor analysis.

Perceptions of Stress Resulting from the Financial Crisis were measured with 8 items on a 10-point scale, ranging from 0=extreme stress to 10=no stress. Statements were based on the financial well-being scale (Prawitz et al., 2006), such as "What do you feel is the level of your financial stress today?" and "How do you feel about the current financial situation?".

The questionnaire ended with relevant demographic questions, such as age, gender, education, income, employment status (employed vs. unemployed), and type of community they live in (city vs. rural areas). The various offline, social media, and other online PPE activities explored can also be seen in more detail in Table 2.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and correlations among all the main constructs can be seen in Table 2. The average scores of participants' PPE through social media, other online, and offline activities

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, reliabilities and correlations

Variable (N=215)	Cronbach's Alpha	M (SD)	Min-Max	Correlations					
Social Media Political Participation (Vitak et al. 2009)	a=.90	.28 (.50)	0-2	1					
Social Media Intensity (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007)	a=.95	4.27 (1.86)	2-10	.62**	1				
Offline Political Participation (Gil De Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela 2012)	a=.72	3.30 (2.30)	0-12	.40**	.24**	1			
Perceptions about Politicians Using Social Media	a=.93	2.38 (1.03)	1-5	.17*	.27**	.12	1		
Perceptions of Financial Stress[1] (Prawitz et al. 2006)	a=.93	4.25 (1.99)	0-10	.04	.06	-.12	.09	1	
Other Online Political Participation (Gil De Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela 2012)	a=.84	1.73 (1.01)	1-7	.42**	.23**	.50**	.36**	.11	1

[1]negative valence statements: ranging from 0=extreme stress to 10= no stress

were low among participants. Participants reported a "high" (corresponding label of mean value) level of perceived financial stress (M=4.25, scale ranging from 0=extreme stress to 10=no stress).

Correlations among the main constructs of this study were positive and significant, except for the correlations among the perceived level of financial stress construct and other variables. Interestingly, the perceived financial stress had no significant relationship with any of the other constructs. The correlation analyses showed that the greater the social media intensity and the more positive the perceptions about politicians who use social media, the higher the level of PPE through social media. As expected, perceptions about politicians who use social media were also not associated with offline political participation.

These results were further assessed via the following regression analyses. Three regressions were computed, one for each form (social media, other online, and offline activities). Results can be seen in Table 3. All the main constructs and demographic variables were entered as independent variables for each regression, in order to test the hypotheses, while controlling for the effect of all other independent variables. All regressions had significant results, with the higher adjusted R^2 explained by the PPE through social media regression (R^2=.48), followed by the online (R^2=.42), and lastly offline regression (R^2=.33).

For the social media regression, social media intensity, other online and offline PPE activities were positive and significantly related to the dependent variable. For the other online regression, gender (coded as 0=male, 1=female) was negatively and significantly related to the dependent variable, while social media and offline PPE, and perceptions about politicians who use social media were positively and significantly related to online PPE (the dependent variable). Lastly, for the offline regression, age, and other online PPE were positive and significantly related to the dependent variable.

These results also indicate that gender is an important factor for other online PPE activities (β=-.17, p<.01), and age is an important factor for offline PPE activities (β=.18, p<.05). Gender differences for other online PPE activities were further assessed on a post-hoc basis, via a t-test. Results indicated significant differences (t(213)=3.06, p<.01), with males indicating a higher mean value for online PPE activities (M=1.77, SD=1.04), compared to females (M=1.39, SD=.71). Age differences for offline PPE activities could not be further assessed, via an ANOVA, because of the violation of the homogeneity of variance assumption (the Levene's Test was significant).

Given that social media intensity was a significant factor for social media, and not for other online and offline activities, only H1 was supported, supporting that the higher the social media intensity of users, the greater the likelihood of users participating politically through social media

Table 3. Regression results

Regression with Dependent Variable: Social Media Political Participation				Regression with Dependent Variable: Other Online Political Participation				Regression with Dependent Variable: Offline Political Participation			
Independent Variables	Beta	St. error	t	Independent Variables	Beta	St. error	t	Independent Variables	Beta	St. error	t
Gender	.03	.06	.49	Gender	-.17**	.12	-2.76	Gender	.05	.30	.76
Income	.01	.02	.15	Income	.10	.03	1.29	Income	-.02	.09	-.26
Age	-.00	.00	-.05	Age	-.04	.01	-.59	Age	.18*	.02	2.52
Education	-.02	.02	-.28	Education	.07	.05	1.13	Education	-.09	.13	-1.29
Type of Community	.07	.07	1.27	Type of Community	-.05	.15	-.80	Type of Community	.01	.38	.08
Employment Status	.09	.07	1.52	Employment Status	-.02	.13	-.28	Employment Status	-.04	.34	-.65
Social Media Intensity	.54**	.02	9.28	Social Media Intensity	-.13	.04	-1.74	Social Media Intensity	.06	.10	.73
Perceptions of Financial Stress	-.01	.02	-.18	Perceptions of Financial Stress	.05	.03	.75	Perceptions of Financial Stress	-.12	.08	-1.74
Other Online Political Participation	.25**	.04	3.56	Social Media Political Participation	.28**	.15	3.56	Social Media Political Participation	.20*	.40	2.31
Offline Political Participation	.15*	.01	2.31	Offline Political Participation	.39**	.03	6.04	Other Online Political Participation	.45**	.18	6.04
Perceptions about Politicians Who Use Social Media	-.09	.03	-1.51	Perceptions about Politicians Who Use Social Media	.27**	.06	4.53	Perceptions about Politicians Who Use Social Media	-.08	.15	-1.23
R^2=.48, p≤.01; F(11,169)=16.06, p≤.01				R^2=.42, p≤.01; F(11,169)=1, p≤.01				R^2=.33, p≤.01; $F(11,169)$=9.05, p≤.01			

will be. However, social media intensity has no effect on other online and offline PPE activities and therefore H2 and H3 were not supported.

After taking into account other variables in our regression analyses, the results suggest (in line with the correlation results noted earlier) that the three forms studied (offline, social media, and other online) are positively and significantly related to each other. From the three regression results regarding the effects of each from on the other forms, which are summarised and presented in Figure 1, it appears that social media political participation is only moderately affected by other online (β=.15, p<.05) and offline (β=.25, p<.01) political participation activities. Not surprisingly, social media political participation is also heavily influenced by social media intensity (β=.54, p<.01). However, as seen in Figure 1, there is a much stronger mutual influence between offline and other online political participation activities (ranging from β=.39 to β=.45, p<.01). Based on the above, H4 was supported.

H5 was also supported, as social media PPE had a positive and significant correlation with perceptions about politicians who use social media (r=.17, p<.05). However, even though it was not hypothesised, when perceptions about politicians were regressed on social media PPE, while taking into account other variables (such as social media intensity), perceptions of politicians who use social media did not have a significant effect on social media PPE. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that the positive and significant relationship between other online PPE activities and perceptions about politicians who use social media remained significant even when perceptions about politicians who use social media was entered as an independent variable in the other online regression, with other independent variables.
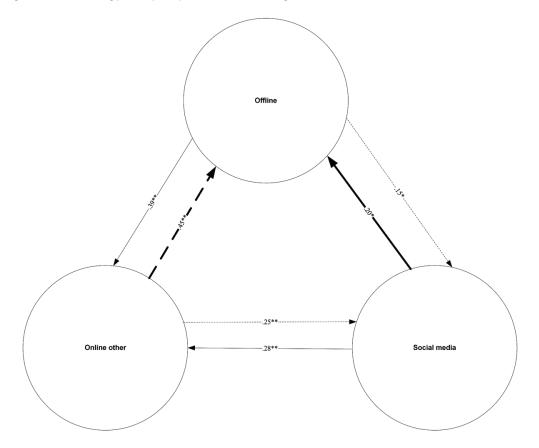
Figure 1. Influence among political participation forms based on regression results

Lastly, H6 was not supported. Perception of financial stress was not significantly related to any PPE form, based on both the correlation and regression analyses (when taking into account other factors that might affect PPE). A series of ANOVAs was also computed to determine whether or not there are significant differences among demographic groups of users for perceptions of financial stress, as a post hoc analysis, and results can be seen in Table 4. Perceptions of financial stress had significant differences among genders, income, education level, and employment status. Males tended to have more financial stress than women. Higher income users exhibited higher levels of perceived financial stress, and higher education level users perceived themselves as having less financial stress. Higher stress levels were reported for those who were studying, or were unemployed. Income, education, and employment status also impacted on perceptions of stress. However, these were not identified as significant factors for any form (social media, other online, and offline activities), as indicated by the regression analysis.

In summary, this study provides support for H1, H4, and H5. Even though some hypotheses were not supported, and results were not statistically significant, it does not mean that they are not important. Fagley (1985) notes that non-significant outcomes can be contributors to knowledge. The following section discusses these results in relation to the prior literature, and offer practical implications and suggestions for future research.

Table 4. ANOVA results for perceptions of financial stress among demographic groups

		SS	df	MSQ	F
Perceptions of Financial Stress and Gender					
	Between	21.20	1	21.20	5.46*
	Within	694.89	179	3.88	
	Total	716.09	180		
Perceptions of Financial Stress and Income					
	Between	158.17	9	17.57	5.39**
	Within	557.92	171	3.26	
	Total	716.09	180		
Perceptions of Financial Stress and Education					
	Between	112.90	5	22.58	6.55**
	Within	603.19	175	3.45	
	Total	716.09	180		
Perceptions of Financial Stress and Employment					
	Between	33.25	1	33.24	8.72**
	Within	682.84	179	3.81	
	Total	716.09	180		

** p≤.01 * p≤.05

DISCUSSION

First of all, it should be noted that the average scores of participants' PPE through social media, other online, and offline forms were relatively low among participants, suggesting that this sample might not be highly involved in politics. Given that our sample's average age was 34 years old, future research could explore these three forms of PPE activities, via a sample with older participants, who might have more interest in such activities. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalised across age groups and across users in Greece. Nonetheless, this study provides interesting findings on a research gap, exploring how each form of PPE impacts on the other, which should not be neglected.

Online and Offline Forms of Political Participation and Engagement

The results indicate that users who participate via one form of PPE are more likely to participate via other forms as well, even after other factors are taken into account based on the regressions (e.g., demographic, social media intensity, perceptions of the financial crisis and politicians who use social media, etc.). This result is supported by prior literature (European Commission, 2012). However, a key question arising is which form of PPE is the core one that fuels the other two. While social media PPE is only moderately affected by other online (β=.15, p<.05) and offline (β=.25, p<.01) political activities, there is a much stronger mutual influence between offline and other online political activities (ranging from β=.39 to β=.45, p<.01), based on the regression results. Consequently, online and offline PPE activities are more likely to influence one another positively than any of them influencing social media activities.

In addition to the influence of other forms, social media PPE activities are positively influenced by social media intensity; online PPE activities are negatively influenced by gender and positively influenced by perceptions about politicians who use social media; and offline PPE activities are

positively influenced by age. Prior literature supports the existence of differences in this respect, and suggests that factors predicting PPE differ by form (Best & Krueger, 2005), even though the different forms are complementary (European Commission, 2012). More specifically, results of this study suggest that males are more likely to participate and engage politically through other online forms (not including social media), compared to females. And even though age differences for offline political participation activities could not be further assessed, via an ANOVA, the positive beta value of age for offline PPE activities (β=.18, p<.05) suggests that older adults may engage in offline political activities more than younger adults, which contradicts a report by the European Commission (2012) (sample difference might be the cause of these different results, as the report was a European representative sample, as opposed to a Greek only sample). Such differences as those noted above suggest that politicians and the marketing and communication professionals that support them, should consider targeting audiences and channels accordingly, in order to improve the effectiveness of their efforts. The results are interesting and require further investigation to explore why gender only affects online PPE activities, and why age only affects offline activities, as opposed to other forms.

Perhaps not surprisingly, social media political participation is also heavily influenced by social media intensity, suggesting that only users who are already using social media and are engaged with this communication outlet will be the ones who are more likely to engage with politicians via social media. Given that a typical user will utilise social media for a number of activities, the influence of social media intensity on social media political engagement is in line with recent findings that provide some support for the theory that political engagement may develop from everyday, non-political uses of social media (Yu, 2016).

Social media intensity was not a significant factor for other forms (i.e., other online and offline). This is of interest as it suggests that social media and other online PPE activities are not a homogeneous set of activities and that potentially different forms of activities may appeal to different users, even though prior research found that social media intensity was significantly associated with online PPE as well (Gil De Zúñiga et al., 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2009). This might be due to the fact that prior studies did not distinguish between social media and other online activities. However, a direct comparison cannot be made with previous studies (Ward et al., 2003), and each study should be interpreted within its own context.

Users' Perceptions about Politicians Who Use Social Media

With regards to perceptions about politicians who use social media, correlation results indicated that the higher the regard users have for politicians who use social media, the greater the likelihood of participating politically through social media will be. Although reinforcing positive perceptions is important, politicians and their communication teams have a significant challenge to overcome when it comes to meeting an equally important objective, namely to positively influence those that do not have a high regard for the politician. This finding is in accordance with prior research findings that suggested that voters visit the webpage and/or the Facebook wall page of favoured candidates (Papagiannidis et al., 2012; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). However, when other factors were also taken into account, via the regressions, results indicated that perceptions about politicians who use social media did not have a significant effect on social media political engagement, which makes an interesting finding for future research. In particular, recent findings from a private sector case related to legitimacy suggest that "*since legitimacy is built on the stakeholder's capacity to access the debate on equal terms, it requires a transition in the emphasis in moral reasoning strategies from those built on ideal speech situations and conditions of induced democratic deliberations to those founded on open access, mutual recognition, and dialogue*" (Castelló et al, 2016). It will be interesting to study if and how politicians could adopt a de-centralized approach when it comes to social media engagement. Other factors taken into account might be more important in determining social media PPE than perceptions about politicians who use social media. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that

regression results indicated that perceptions about politicians who use social media were positively related to other online forms. Further research is needed to explore the reasons behind this result.

Perceptions of Financial Stress and Political Participation and Engagement

Participants also reported a "high" (corresponding label of mean value) level of perceived financial stress (M=4.25, scale ranging from 0=extreme stress to 10=no stress), which is in line with the financial circumstances of the country (Lowen, 2013). However, the perceived financial stress, which was used as a control variable given the context of this study, had no significant relationship with any of the other main constructs, indicating that the level of financial stress might not be associated with any form of PPE. Based on this result, users are not likely to be influenced by the financial crisis in such a way that it would influence their level of participation and engagement in politics. This is a rather surprising factor that warrants further research, given that prior research found that a crisis decreases political alienation (Oskarson, 2010). The reason behind this non-significant correlation might be due to the reported low political participation activities of this study's sample participants, indicating that participants might not be involved with politics in the first place. To understand this finding further research is required to compare users with various levels of involvement with politics, in terms of how the financial crisis may impact on their participation in and engagement with different forms of political activities. It will also be of practical interest for politicians and communication professionals to explore if user behaviour would change depending on the period in which an interaction/campaign takes places, especially during a pre-election period when being more vocal can increase the relative weight of a user's involvement.

Lastly, the fact that males reported higher perceived financial stress and higher online political participation activities than females, in addition to the negative and significant associations for both perceived financial stress and online political participation activities with gender (r=-.205, p<.01; r=-.169, p<.05 respectively), may suggest that males who perceive high financial stress might be more likely to participate in online political activities, as opposed to females. Higher income users exhibited higher levels of perceived financial stress, and higher education level users perceived themselves as having less financial stress. Higher stress levels were reported for those who were studying, or were unemployed. However, income, education and employment status were not identified as significant factors for any form (social media, other online, and offline), as indicated by the regression analysis, implying that these differences might not be particularly relevant.

CONCLUSION, PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research set out to examine the relationships between offline, social media, and other online PPE activities, to gain a deeper understanding of how one may influence the other, and provide practical recommendations to politicians, marketers and their parties on how communication channels can be used to encourage such activities. The findings suggest that users who participate and engage in politics, whether this is through social media, or other online or offline forms, are more likely to participate politically in more than one form. Also, this study found that each form has a different effect, in terms of strength, and on the other forms of political engagement, which can be used in order to construct appropriate engagement strategies. Results indicate potential ways politicians could use various channels to engage with actual voters and potential voters. Given also that politicians do not have the time to engage with each voter/potential voter or user on a one-on-one basis, social media might prove beneficial given their ability to reach the masses, as well as in motivating users to forward content to others without it being necessary for the politician to convey this information directly to users. This could be advantageous as trusted sources might lead to more positive results than information coming from politicians themselves. In addition, the higher the social media intensity of users, the higher the likelihood of users participating politically via social media. Positive perceptions about politicians who use social media also led to higher online participation activities. Gender was

a significant factor for other online political participation activities, with males exhibiting a higher online political participation level than females, and age was also a significant factor for offline political participation, with older adults being more likely to participate politically offline than younger adults. The stress resulting from the financial crisis had no effect on any form of PPE, even though there were significant differences in terms of perception of financial stress for demographic groups. The above findings provide useful insights for politicians and their communication support teams when it comes to planning effective strategies for engaging citizens during times of unrest. Ideally, these should be considered in advance and capitalise on longitudinal efforts to develop trusted communication channels between politicians and citizens. Otherwise a reactive approach is not likely to have a significant impact.

When it comes to future research avenues, an in-depth qualitative study would have helped address the reasons behind those unexpected results. A more varied range of services (e.g. YouTube, Flickr, Google+) in the questionnaire may have captured social media more holistically. In addition, YouTube specifically is also one social media service that requires further exploration in PPE, as according to Vraga et al. (2014) it can be adapted to suit movement needs. Also, longitudinal data collection using diaries could have been an alternative approach to the cross-sectional one adopted in this study. Harris and Harrigan (2015) conclude that "*although social media communications can add significant value internally and at the local level when implemented as part of a systematic and long-term online and offline relationship-building strategy, they are not well suited to short-term applications intended to influence the outcome of particular campaigns*". A longitudinal study could help gauge the effectiveness of various channels and in turn capture their influence on decision making and user behaviour.

Future research should address this study's limitation and examine a larger and randomly selected sample that would be more representative of all the population and not just online users. Such a sample would also provide the scope to examine more demographic factors. Moreover, even though the literature has suggested that in periods of financial stress political participation is affected, this study showed that perceptions of financial stress in Greece did not affect PPE forms. Uncovering the reasons behind these results, via qualitative and additional quantitative analyses, is necessary in order to continue exploring the political marketing landscape in this era of social media. Research in countries in which the financial and political circumstances were more stable could provide a benchmark for comparison. Finally, as per the calls for further research in new media formats within the political marketing sphere of Towner and Duilo (2012) and Miller (2013), this study illustrates the need for further research on exchange relationships between the electoral, parliamentary and governmental markets via new media formats.

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