Title

News blogs vs mainstream media: measuring the gap through a frame analysis of Greek blogs

Abstract

This article offers an empirical examination of the power of independent news blogs to expand the boundaries of public debates, through their capacity not only to host volumes of information, but also to frame it in unique packages. Despite the scholarly attention given to blogs as a counterforce to traditional news media, there are unanswered questions regarding the discrepancy in the qualitative characteristics of the debates promoted by these two realms. We aim to offer an empirical test of this potential gap with an innovative content analysis that draws on framing research and corpus linguistic techniques. This is performed in the context of Greece, where a rapid increase in the volume of blogging has created a new platform for political debate. Through a computer-assisted qualitative frame analysis of partisan newspapers and independent news blogs, we find differences in the breadth of certain frames that could prove significant for audiences' understanding of current affairs.

Keywords: news blogs, framing, Greece, Wordsmith

Introduction

As online media are challenging traditional perceptions of journalism, questions are being raised about the demise of journalism as it was known for the last one century (Boczkowski, 2004; Deuze, 2006). Features such as links and the ample space made available on online platforms are believed to have increased transparency in the news production process, allowing journalists to make sourcing and gatekeeping more visible and readers to trace back the reporting process (Deuze, 1999; Matheson, 2004; Napoli, 2008).

Following the rise of online news platforms to prominence, this article explores the capacity of weblogs to expand the news landscape and open up the public dialogue by allowing more arguments and interpretations to gain public attention. We are focusing particularly on the content of news, an element that has been less visible despite the generous scholarly attention given to formal attributes of websites (Quandt, 2008). Although the blogosphere has received ample consideration as a counterforce to traditional news media, questions regarding the actual gap that exists between these two realms, and the quality of the debates they promote, still remain. In this article, we seek to measure this gap empirically with an innovative research instrument that combines framing theories and corpus linguistic techniques and allows for a meticulous qualitative analysis of news content. Framing provides a valuable conceptual and methodological device for unpicking key underlying forces in the construction of news content; yet, it has received little attention with regard to the analysis of online news content. In this study, we endeavour to achieve a more efficient identification of frames with the use of corpus linguistic techniques that enable a systematic connection of stylistic and ideological features of news.

For the purposes of this study, we focus on Greece where, in the last six years, media organisations have been hit with austerity measures that are gradually curtailing media autonomy, while Greek citizens are becoming increasingly disconnected from civil society. At the time of writing, and as the newly re-elected party SYRIZA is commencing a new round of negotiations with the EU, the media's future remains uncertain while alternative media, including blogs and web-only news sources, have already began to gain in popularity (Spyridou et al., 2013). These new information platforms provide unique opportunities for less ideological news coverage, at a time when people's demand for transparency regarding politicians' decisions, on national and European level, also becomes more pressing.

Our analysis focuses on news content disseminated through Greek mainstream newspapers and independent news blogs in the summer 2013, at the time of the closure of national broadcaster ERT and amidst fierce negotiations with the EU. Hence, by documenting a momentous phase in what looks to be a transition period for Greek news media, we provide empirical evidence that can serve as a basis for future investigations and comparative approaches in the field of online journalism.

Online news: challenging existing paradigms through framing

The internet's transformative power is often attributed to its inherent openness and the ample space it makes available to a multiplicity of voices and information sources. Often described as 'citizen journalism', the flotilla of independent news sites and blogs that becomes accessible on a daily basis can expose audiences to an array of different viewpoints that is unprecedented. The contribution of online tools to the generation of new and different news discourses is evidenced mostly through their capacity to juxtapose news and commentary from a range of sources. As Matheson (2004) observes, their reliance on hyperlinks points to a model in which what is happening in the world is no longer channeled through one news

text (p. 457). News blogs can turn into watchdogs of other news organizations, alerting audiences to information that may make useful contributions to debates (Bruns, 2008). The participants involved in this process could also be described as 'writer-gatherers', defined by Couldry (2010) as source-actors that range from individual bloggers to organised news sites, contributing to the expansion of the media landscape. Through the plurality of voices that these source-actors incorporate in their writing, this type of journalism offers a different, multidimensional contextualization of current affairs (Fenton, 2010). Drawing from Gans (2004 [1979]), Bruns (2005) refers to a 'multi-perspectival' journalism, whose power lies in challenging the limited space and bandwidth that determines the gatekeeping function of traditional news media; and in offering a platform for voices that would normally be excluded through the commercially and institutionally driven filtering that takes place in mainstream news organizations.

At the same time, the gatewatching act that takes place through bloggers' news content curation has been openly questioned, especially in relation to bloggers' capacity to challenge the dominance of mainstream news media. Their heavy reliance on professional journalists and traditional newsrooms implies that the rules of the market and the political clout of the actors involved in the making of news are transferred to online platforms. Blogs end up reinforcing the agendas and discourses of mainstream news organizations, as online echo chambers in which writers reiterate the perspectives of the mainstream media (Deuze et al.2007; Haas, 2005; Lee & Carpini, 2010; 2007; Singer, 2003).

Notwithstanding the abundance of studies on news blogs and speculations about their capacity to offer a diversified space, the lack of systematic cross-media analysis has left unanswered questions regarding the gap between traditional media and news blogs in terms of the range and quality of interpretations that shape public debates. So far, emphasis has been placed primarily on processes of hyperlinking, immediacy and interactivity at the news site-level of analysis (Karlsson & Stromback, 2010). Cross-media studies have examined the role of weblogs as legitimate sources used by mainstream media as well as the different types of sources used by weblogs and the influence of non-elite sources over their content (see Herring et al., 2005; Messner and Distaso, 2008; Papacharissi, 2007). Lescovec et al (2009) have also looked at the dynamics of information propagation between mainstream and social media and the ways that short, distinctive phrases travel through on-line text. These studies offer significant insight into the role of blogs and online news in the life of the news cycle. However, they are less successful in identifying and explaining the qualitative differences that may exist in the different types of news content. This creates a need for more issue-based methodical comparisons of blogs with mainstream news content to test out the discrepancy and overlap between the two realms. Such analyses can offer empirical purchase to our understanding of the gap that exists between traditional media and blogs, and the role of the latter as contributors to a dynamic co-generation of meaning with the capacity to diversify political public debates. In essence, we argue that the ability of blogs to offer a unique packing and distribution of the curated news content merits more attention. Although it may reflect mainstream newsgathering channels, a story that has been gathered through a mainstream source may still contain a variety of viewpoints; and as Voakes et al. (1996) explain, readers are not affected by the newsgathering channel but by the viewpoint.

Approaching blogs as gatewatchers and curators of mainstream news media content implies interplay between interpretations of events as they are promoted through mainstream news sources and the unique perceptions of bloggers. Through the subjective aggregation of certain statements and rejection or critique of others, one can expect the emergence of unique interpretations of events that can be usefully described as frames: story lines that provide meaning to an unfolding strip of events; simplify complex issues by lending more weight to certain considerations; and activate schemas that encourage audiences to think in a particular

way (Chong and Druckman, 2007; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Gross and D'Ambrossio, 2004).

The reliance of bloggers on the routinized mainstream news may suggest that agency of the individual writers as setters of frames is relative, but their interpretive role is subtle: it resides in contextualising, playing-up or neglecting certain frames through the juxtaposition of news reporting and commentary from different sources (Brüggemann, 2014; de Vreese, 2012). This is in line with Reese's (2007) observation that frames are more about the organisation and structuring of elements – i.e. clusters of words, attributes and story topics – into a large story, than just the manifest content. This contextualisation opens up possibilities for the promotion of alternative frames that enable content diversity and can even weaken the potential effect of elite voices on the cognitions of audience members (Chong and Druckman, 2007). According to Voakes et al. (1996), content diversity is about the dispersion of the representation of frames within a news product and a particular issue. Such diversity is inevitably linked to the sponsorship of frames and the professional routines and time and space pressures of the newsroom; and can be significantly curtailed due to the favouring of certain institutional sources as the primary sponsors of frames (Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Chong and Druckman, 2007). Nevertheless, competing frames may also emerge from the writers' own contextualisation of these sources and the packing of the collected material in ways that give prominence to statements and issues that are different to mainstream media. In effect, the use of framing enables the comparison of blog content with mainstream news media beyond the range of topics and sources, focusing instead on the range of interpretations within a specific topic. It is through this comparison that we aim to empirically measure and shed light on the ways in which blogs may reiterate, complement or challenge mainstream news.

Framing as methodology and the contribution of corpus linguistic techniques

Our method draws on sociological approaches that see frames as part of a collective struggle over meaning. They are perceived to occur through a range of resources, including news sources, organizational structures and personal experiences, all of which interact within a specific cultural context. We suggest that frame extraction should take place through a thorough interpretation of the text and can be best served with an inductive, qualitative frame analysis, which enables the extraction of a more comprehensive range of frames (Gamson, 1992). [1] In this study, we employ Wordsmith software, an instrument developed for corpus-assisted discourse studies (Scott, 2011). Wordsmith enables a systematic connection of empirical indicators, such as lexical choices, with salient issues identified by the journalists and can help reconcile the gap between the interpretative and the attribute-based approaches to frame identification.

We follow Entman's suggestion that frames can be detected through the presence or absence of certain keywords, which can function as an indicator of the conscious or unconscious judgement made by the communicator (1993:53). In this case, keywords can be central to the meaning of the text without occurring very often (Hertog and McLeod, 2001: 152) as their salience is established through their association with certain cultural values. Two functions of the software are used in this analysis: keywords and concordances. Keywords are used to compare the relative frequency of words in any corpus with reference to another corpus (Scott, 1997; 2011). Here keyness is defined as 'a quality words may have

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[1] Methodological approaches to frame analysis can be divided in two categories: deductive and inductive. Deductive approaches measure the frequency with which certain frames occur in a given text. Inductive methods can vary from those that are open and qualitative (Boni, 2002; Coleman & Dysart, 2005; Tucker, 1998) to the more systematic ones that focus on language and analyse the structure of specific words and sentences in a text (Entman, 1991; Esser & D'Angelo, 2003).

in a given text… suggesting that they are important, [that] they reflect what the text is really about' (Scott and Tribble 2006: 73). The 'keyword' function helps identify words whose frequency is unusually high in comparison with some norm. Keywords that reflect the 'aboutness' of the text encapsulate perspectives by which issues can be discussed and interpreted and provide a statistical method to determine where the frame could be located in this text. In other words, they can direct the analyst to certain concepts in the text that may help 'diagnose' ideas around which the frame is constructed. Concordances constitute the text surrounding the keywords; they allow the automated compiling of large volumes of text extracts surrounding each keyword, which enables a closer and more controlled inspection of the text where frames can emerge from. In essence, keywords allow us to identify empirical indicators, i.e. lexical choices, in a statistical manner; while with the use of concordances, these empirical indicators enable a focused and systematic selection of text extracts for the frame analysis. Our analysis focuses on the case of Greece and the news coverage of the ongoing financial crisis. This is an issue-based approach that is better-suited for testing out differences and similarities in the framing of mainstream news and blogs.

Journalism and online news in Greece

Greece belongs to a group of countries in Southern Europe that are characterised by distinct patterns of media-politics interactions; and similar to Italy, Spain and Portugal, the Greek media have developed within a system of clientelism. In this system, the provision of balanced news becomes secondary to the representation of political and business interests, with newspaper content becoming tightly linked to specific political affiliations (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Papathanasopoulos, 2013). Following the deregulation of the state broadcasting monopoly and the expansion of the magazine sector of the 1990s, the Greek media is believed to have entered a new phase. As the country entered a deep recession, the media industry also began to suffer major losses in advertising revenue and huge reductions in state subsidies, while public distrust in the press increased and was manifested in the sharp fall in newspaper circulation figures (Papathanasopoulos, 2013; Siapera et al., 2014).

The dominance of mainstream news media began to tremble in the 2000s, with the emergence of news blogs featuring continuous news updates, investigative journalism, commentary and criticism of political elites (Nevradakis, 2011). But more recently, the closure of the Greek Broadcasting Service (ERT) in June 2013 along with the overwhelming implications of the financial crisis - as more and more journalists find themselves unemployed or underemployed - have signalled more profound changes in the structure of the Greek media system. The emergence of journalistic collectives and online communities such as 'Radio Bubble', which operates through a communal hashtag, a platform for bloggers and an online radio, signify journalists' strong desire to utilise new technologies in search for alternative news platforms. These developments were also accompanied by the emergence of more alternative funding methods including crowdsourcing and donations.

Until now, research on Greek blogs has been scarce, with emphasis placed primarily on hyperlinking. Although some evidence does exist regarding the high levels of news provision in the Greek blogosphere and the attention given to blog content by mainstream newspapers, this evidence remains limited (See Pleios et. al, 2010; Zafiropoulos and Vrana, 2008, 2011, 2012).

Sample

Our sample consisted of two sets of news stories, one from mainstream newspapers and one from selected news blogs. It covered a four-month period from 1st May to 31st August 2013 and included all news stories about the political developments at the time of data collection. This was a time of crucial negotiations taking place between the Greek government and

representatives from the TROIKA.[2] Moreover, this is a period of great turbulence in the media sector following the closure of the public broadcasting service, a development that created more space for alternative media to contribute to public debates. For the newspaper sample, three mainstream newspapers were selected, namely *Kathimerini*, *Avgi* and *Ta Nea*. The selection was based on circulation and political orientation. In terms of a right-left continuum, *Kathimerini* is centre-right, *Ta Nea* is centre-left while *Avgi* is strongly attached to the left party of SYRIZA whose popularity skyrocketed in the 2014 European Elections. The sample was collected through the online versions of the newspapers and consisted of 1,500 stories. The sample of the news blogs was harvested manually through Alexa and Google blog search engines, while Technorati was used for authority checks. The main criteria for the selection included content, traffic, ranking and authorship. A first list of 100 blogs was collected and they were further examined to ensure they contained a regular uploading of news stories and the owners/authors were not affiliated with any mainstream news organization. After a second round of harvesting, a list of 40 news blogs and sites comprised the final sample. This list included three types of news blogs: blogs that uploaded stories taken from mainstream or non- mainstream news sources without any original content; blogs that offered a combination of content drawn from mainstream or non-mainstream sources and original content in the form of news and commentary; and blogs that provided only commentary on the current political developments. The sample consisted of 3,000 stories/ posts, which is a significant finding in itself, confirming the function of blogs as aggregators of material collected through a wide range of sources. Descriptive statistics for the two corpora are shown in Table 1.

Analytical framework and data processing

We followed the procedure of the inductive analysis with the use of the frame matrix suggested by Van Gorp (2010), as it is one of the most systematic qualitative approaches to frame analysis. We therefore, integrated our keywords and concordances into the inductive process suggested by Van Gorp and made them part of the frame matrix construction. For the analysis with Wordsmith we produced three wordlists: one reference list that was composed through a reference corpus of nine million words from newspaper *Ta Nea* [3] and two lists generated specifically for our two corpora, the newspapers and the blogs.

The material from the three newspapers was compiled in one large file that was then analysed for keywords and concordances and the same procedure was followed for the blogs. Hence, the analysis does not allow for a distinction between the frames associated with different newspapers and blogs or the different sections within the two media. In other words, the analysis is not designed to measure the variations between the different outlets, nor does it aim to demonstrate which parts of the selected blogs are copying traditional sources content or adding, commenting and changing content elements. For the purposes of this article, we are interested in how the discussion promoted through the mainstream news agenda compares to the debate that took place in the blogosphere as a whole and the degree of diversification – if any - that exists in the interpretations promoted through news blogs.

The keywords function of the Wordsmith tools software was used to compare the contents of the reference wordlist with the two lists from the newspapers and the blogs (Scott, 2011). This comparison generated two keyword lists, for the newspaper corpus and for the

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[2] European Commission (EC), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and European Central Bank (ECB)

[3] The corpus was developed by Dr George Mikros, from the University of Athens. For more information, please see, Koutsis, I.,Kouklakis, G., Mikros, G., Markopoulos, G. (2005). "MINOTAVROS: A tool for the semi-automated creation of large corpora from the Web". In Proceedings from the Corpus Linguistics Conference Series, 1, pp. 1-8,   http://www.corpus.bham.ac.uk/PCLC/minotavros.doc

blog corpus respectively. Those words that turned out to be unusually frequent in our two corpora, compared to the frequency of the same word type in the reference corpus, were displayed as the two keyword lists. The more statistically significant an item is, the more *key* it is (its keyness value is higher), and the higher it is placed on this list (Partington 2010). Here, the use of one common reference corpus for the creation of keyword lists for both newspapers and blogs enabled us to conduct an initial comparison between different genres. More specifically, by comparing the specific reference wordlist with the blog wordlist, the generated keyword list for the blogs allows us to detect word choices that represent the different genre. These could include keywords related to digitally-related content, such as comments and personal nouns, forms of narrative characterisation and spoken-like features (Sindoni, 2013). This allows for a first-level analysis in terms of the differences and similarities that exist between mainstream media and blogs.

We selected the first fifteen statistically significant keywords, which were then concordanced. Based on the concordances generated for the selected keywords, we compiled two datasheets with text extracts, one for the newspapers and one for the blogs. There were 350 text extracts generated for the newspapers and 500 extracts for news blogs, given the bigger volume of data that was harvested through the blogs. These text extracts comprised the units of analysis and constituted the locus of framing and reasoning devices. In order to extract meaningful frames, each text extract comprised the entire sentence containing the keyword as well as the preceding and following sentence.

Each text extract was coded for the framing and reasoning devices it contained, through an open coding process. In this process, framing devices represent key terms and manifest elements that came from the material itself and function as demonstrable indicators of the frame. Reasoning devices are those elements that are not explicitly included in the message but are likely to come up in the interpretation of the message as they reflect a thought process. Both types of devices are considered capable of invoking a framework of thought at the audiences' cognitive level (VanGorp and Vercruysse, 2012: 1275). The open coding was followed by an axial coding during which we ran through the data for a second time in order to identify causal patterns and relationships between and within the coding categories identified in the first stage of analysis. This enabled us to reduce the initial codes to fewer and more significant codes that represented bigger archetypal ideas, which we called frames. This stage led to the creation of the main frame packages that represented the frames. The analysis produced nine frames for the newspapers and eight frames for the blogs, based on which the frame packages were constructed, as shown in tables 2 and 3.

In the construction of the frame packages, we followed the process adopted by VanGorp and Vercruysse (2012) in their frame analysis of dementia. The frame packages were created through the identification of a logical chain of framing and reasoning devices that appeared to convey a coherent overarching idea. The packages are composed of a general definition of the problem or issue; the reasons why this is a problem or else, an explanation of the issue in question; the consequences associated with the issue in question; and lastly, the moral values involved. Each row in the matrix represents a frame package, while the columns show the various framing and reasoning devices that make up the frame. The rows are logically integrated clusters of framing and reasoning devices that refer to the same overarching idea that represents the main frame. A frame package shows how the idea that the Greek government is unable to handle the financial crisis (newspaper corpus, frame 1) is manifested and understood through different dimensions of the frame, i.e. through the internal conflicts or through the fact that the government is leading the country to a state of impoverishment. The three stages of coding that led to frame packages were conducted by the two authors and a third coder independently, following coder training. During the coding process, discrepancies were examined and reconciled.

Findings and analysis

The first major finding emerged from the two keyword lists produced by the software for the two corpora. The lists presented insignificant variations that were mostly related to the order in which some words were presented, rather than the word-choices. With the exception of few pronouns, they keyword list for the blogs revealed no genre-specific keywords, which is an important finding as it demonstrates the overlap that exists between blogs and mainstream news. This finding agrees with assumptions regarding blogs as echo chambers. Keyness shows the aboutness of the text and in this case, the software provides statistical evidence of the reliance of blogs on mainstream news media. In this case, using the same salient keywords for the frame analysis of both mainstream media and blogs allowed the comparative analysis to focus on attributes that were shared by both platforms and the meaning constructed around these attributes. In essence, any differences that emerged from this comparison related to the different ways in which the two media configured those attributes into meaning, and the interpretations that emerged from this configuration.

The frame analysis revealed certain differences between newspapers and blogs that could prove significant for the role of online writers in the dissemination of news content. Overall, newspapers offer a fairly comprehensive explanation of the financial crisis that acknowledges domestic, European and global dimensions. These are articulated through the lack of governmental leadership in Greece, the failed European experiment as well as global capitalism. Frames 1 and 2 (Table 2) were the most prominent as they emerged from a rather wide network of keywords, the concordances computed for these keywords and the framing and reasoning devices that were identified from the respective text extracts. Through them, we see the role of the Greek government being contained within the current domestic instabilities and the lack of a reliable leadership. Although frame 2 predicts a bleak future for Greece, the frame packages reveal no explicit connection between these predictions and the government's responsibility. Instead, it is Europe that is held accountable for bringing the country to a state of impoverishment. The role of Europe is manifested through the failed monetary union (frame 3) and the threat that the European project poses for Greece's national sovereignty (frame 8).

This framing is consistent with the relationship that newspapers have traditionally shared with the political circles of power. In line with the new political scenery that led to abandonment of the classic Manichaean depiction between right and left parties in Greece, traditional news media appear to have shifted from reflecting distinct left/right political tendencies to new ideological divisions such as supporting or condemning the memoranda and the European policies. The new polarization is also reflected in the framing of the then opposition party SYRIZA. SYRIZA is positioned mainly against the TROIKA, rather than against the government. It is framed as the party that will 'save' the country from the catastrophic European policies.

The framing of actors such as Germany is also revealing. Interestingly, most of the framing and reasoning devices were concentrated in the keyword 'Wolfgang Schaeuble', which produced the majority of the texts through which the frame package emerged. Germany's tough stance towards Greece is personified through Germany's Federal Minister of Finance, while Germany is also framed as an actor that encompasses the role of the entire TROIKA. It is a frame that reflects a typical archetype, such as the 'villain', and is drawn from a cultural reservoir made up of historical narratives and memories from the Second World War. The frame is strengthened also through the framing of the USA as an ally of Greece and as counterweight to Germany's stance.

In light of the mainstream news framing, the content of blogs presents interesting variations. What needs to be mentioned first is that the larger volume of blog posts published in these four months, compared to the newspaper stories, manifests the capacity of news

blogs to host and process bigger volumes of data. The significance of this data lies in eliciting a bigger volume of text extracts through the concordances. This made more framing devices manifest in the text, which are essential in triggering the reasoning devices and the bigger frame (Van Gorp, 2007).

The most significant finding lies in the framing of the government's role. It is here that the role of blogs becomes more evident, through what seems to be a unique packaging of information. While in newspapers the government's role is contained within the first two frames, blogs have unpacked these interpretations, adding more breadth to the framing of the government's responsibility in the crisis. Frame 1 identifies the government as unable to convince the European Commission of its ability to implement the required measures, while frame 2 presents the government as the main responsible actor for the crisis. This responsibility is also linked to the predicted impoverishment of the country, exhibiting a stronger blame frame for the Greek government than the framing in the newspapers. The government's responsibility emerges also through frames 3 and 4. Frame 3 promotes the loss of national sovereignty as the result of the government's submission to the orders of Europe; and it is the government that should 'salvage' the nation. Frame 4 promotes an additional layer. Here, the poor public spending management and the state corruption that had been obscured during the country's euro membership are portrayed as the main reasons for the emergence of the current crisis, along with the country's failure to develop internal adjustment mechanisms. This is an important explanation for the audiences' understanding of the crisis, but was absent from the newspapers' frames.

An essential ingredient in these frames was the polemical language employed by news blogs. Language is the tool that weaves together the different meanings into frames, and in this instance, language becomes a sign of the different structural and regulatory context of online media in Greece, as opposed to traditional media. The tight connection with party-politics that Greek mainstream media exhibit, translates into content and language that is consistently cautious not to upset political elites. In the case of blogs, the absence of an institutional framework, which would restrict them into a discursive style of neutrality, leads to different discursive packages that are unusually controversial.

Breadth is achieved also through the framing of Europe and its role in the crisis. Through frame 5, the European Commission is held accountable for failing to discourage excess borrowing by the weaker countries. This is also linked to frame 6 that presents the tax-related measures implemented by the EC as unsuitable for the Greek economy, throwing more light on the responsibility of Europe in neglecting the unequal economic and political relations within the Eurozone (Chick and Dow, 2012; Hadjimichalis, 2011). We also see an explicit blaming of the EC for misleading the country.

Alternative news media such as blogs are associated with meaning configuration that is different to mainstream news media. In our findings, this discrepancy was manifested mainly in the framing of the Greek government and Europe. Although the two media shared very similar content in terms of 'aboutness', the same content was presented through different discursive packages. In the case of blogs, these packages encapsulate the volume of information collected from a variety of sources combined with a subjective, personal and impassionate tone. Last but not least, the portrayal of TROIKA in the blog content as a ruthless negotiator that threatens to implement even tougher measures, demonstrates another level of the discrepancy between the two platforms, transcending breadth and emotional expression. Not only is this frame absent in the newspapers' content, it could also render Germany's role as the 'enemy' less compelling in the audiences' cognition.

Conclusion

For more than a decade, online media and news blogs have been discussed in relation to their capacity to empower citizens. Free from the repressive controls of traditional media, blogs have been credited with providing a channel for authentic expression and analysis and enabling an information explosion that can turn them into watchdogs of mainstream news organizations. At the same time, the exact nature of their gate-watching role remains less empirically tested and quantified. In order to measure the level of diversification that blogs can offer in the news agenda, we compared the content of mainstream newspapers with content collected through independent news blogs, with a systematic frame analysis and the use of corpus linguistic software. This was achieved with the use of the Greek financial crisis as an issue-based approach.

Based on our findings, and in the case of Greek news blogs, their contribution to public debates resides mainly in their capacity to expand dominant frames by providing audiences with additional explanations that could prompt the interrogation of those interpretations promoted through political elites and mainstream media. Given the overlap reflected in the keywords found in our newspaper and blog sample, this frame expansion is likely to have been the product of the unique content packaging and contextualization embedded in the curation process performed by blogs. In contrast, there was very little evidence of diversification in the actual range of frames. To a certain extent, our findings also reinforce theories that see news blogs as echo chambers. The similarities in the framing of the Greek government and the EU and the victim-villain archetypes through which the stories were articulated were logically attributed to the reliance of bloggers on mainstream media content. It is the function of blogs as echo chambers that allows the broader archetypes that underlie cultural contexts and journalists' work to be transferred to the blogosphere.

As the analysis focused on the broader interpretations promoted by the two media platforms, several features of the news content remain unrevealed. These include the sources through which information was gathered, the types of blogs that engaged with deeper interpretation of events, potential differences in the frames promoted through commentary sections in newspapers and blogs as well as ideological predispositions that underlay certain frames. It is also beyond the scope of this analysis to draw inferences regarding the professionalism of the news gathering process in online media. From this perspective, our research instrument and design did not allow us to identify alternative voices articulated through the blog content and that could challenge official interpretations in a more direct manner. Yet, by providing an empirical demonstration of the relation between newspaper and blog content our analysis casts more light on the gate-watching role of blogs; and their capacity to generate a certain degree of openness and publicity that may reduce the ability of political elites to have complete control over the public definition of events.

The analysis also shows signs of the value of unregulated news reporting in a country where state intervention has traditionally curtailed the watchdog role of the media. From this point of view, independent news blogs can give audiences more to think about during a time of financial and political instability that has not left traditional media unaffected. At the same time, the fiscal crisis poses a number of questions regarding the viability of the current model of media-state interdependence and although it may still be too early to foresee the development of a more market-driven media system, the role of digital technology should not be neglected. As both readers and advertisers gradually migrate to online spaces, online media may be creating conditions for more radical changes in the Greek media ecosystem.

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