

Freedom of information and democracy: an interdependent relationship and the role that the Internet can play.

Mpoitsis Ioannis, impoitsis@uom.edu.gr
Koutsoupas Nikos, nk@uom.gr
University of Macedonia, Greece

This paper deals with the interdependence between democracy and information. Taking for granted that information means knowledge and knowledge means power, we examine the importance of free and immediate information in democracy, that helps citizen to evaluate, participate and exercise actively and freely his political rights and obligations. Taking as an example the way that dictatorships treated the factor of information and the importance they gave to control information and create their own propaganda, we reach to the conclusion that free information is an enemy of totalitarian regimes and the biggest ally of a well-governed and effective democracy.

But how can we have free and objective information (newspapers - radios - TV) when information is in the hands of entrepreneurs and factors associated directly or indirectly with various political forces? When many TV channels and newspapers act, admittedly, as mouthpieces of various political parties with which they interact? Is this an important problem of democracy and also a moral-ethic issue of information? And how it differs from the function of propaganda in totalitarian regimes?

Perhaps the only mean of information that can be direct and independent, is the Internet. Here the citizen can have direct and free information through a various number of blogs and hundreds of pages. In a deficit democracy combined with the frustrating political situation, according to the common sense, the Internet can be the biggest ally of democracy, giving it its true essence, which is the right to freedom of information and expression.

Keywords
Information, Democracy, ethics, Internet, Propaganda

Introduction

The power and the importance of access to information is something that needs no proof. Throughout the centuries, the control of timely and reliable information was an extremely important factor of political power (Bohman, 1996). He, who could control and hold the information about the real facts, had the privilege to be one step forward of his political opponents and to direct the people that he ruled. Over the centuries and reaching today, the era of the Internet and instant information and the value and importance of information access in general, are major issues and create new opportunities and

challenges. On the one hand, in countries with democratic culture and past, the use of Internet and the volume of information access that can be provided immediately by it, have created the conditions for a debate on the quality of the current state of democracy and the opportunities that can be provided now on one direction of greater immediacy and involvement to the politics, on the part of citizens (Mpoitsis & Koutsoupas, 2012). On the other hand, in countries with consciousness and culture of authoritarian regimes, the major issue is the control of information access in general and use of the Internet in particular, to maintain the awareness of citizens away from the wishful thinking of the democratization of their country.

All these show the direct link we believe that information access-exchange has to democracy. Timely and accurate information can provide the citizen the opportunity to seek and ask for the power it deserves in a democratic environment or the ability and consciousness to seek to acquire such rights in an authoritarian regime.

In this paper, we look at the relationship and interaction between information access-exchange and democracy and the dimensions that the use of the Internet can give to information and as a consequence, to democracy itself. We will also discuss the relationship between *information* and *propaganda* and generally the relationship between the *mass media* and the politics. Then we will examine the phenomenon of *group polarization* and extremist behaviors that it can generate and the problem of *personalization* posed by the use of the internet and social media, which of course creates a problem of democracy because the democratic sentiment is based on socialization and consciousness of common and social solidarity and responsibility. Finally we will discuss about the importance of *filtering* in front of the huge volume of information provided by the internet and whether it can be dangerous not to have this.

1.1 Information and Democracy

Within the basic principles of democracy are freedom of expression and the freedom and independence of the mass media by any type of influence. According to Dahl (1971) the eight basic principles of democracy are 1) freedom to form and join organizations 2) freedom of expression 3) active right to vote 4) passive right to vote (eligibility for public office) 5) right of political leaders to compete for support and for votes 6) access to information from multiple sources (alternative sources of information) 7) free and fair elections 8) institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preferences. Within these eight principles are both the principles that are related to the freedom of information and the pluralism of mass media. This means that, the freedom of information in general and of mass media in particular are the backbones of democracy. As Mohrenberg (2011) notes:

“In democracies, open media are the lifeblood of civil society and political opposition.”

By definition democracy is a civil polity by the people and for the people (Brennan et al, 1993) and that means that if it is to work, it needs citizens with developed critical thinking and an awareness of social responsibility. If democracy is a political system made by citizens and for citizens themselves, it is not waiting for connoisseurs and professional politicians its salvation. Instead, the citizens themselves must be activated to move in one direction, where the political system that they serve and it serves them, can operate smoothly (Lombardini, 2013). Clearly, the two most important factors that can create such a democratic consciousness of social and political responsibility are education and information access-exchange. In this paper we are dealing with the issue of information, although these two (education and information) are quite similar to each other. This is because as it happens with the process of education, the media have the ability to form consciences and impressions to the citizens. Of course, in many cases, this ability and process of forming consciences and ideas, is contrary to the democratic role that the media have because it happens deliberately and is directed by specific political powers that want to control the media's power for their purposes.

Information access-exchange is crucial for a well-governed democracy. Through information the citizen is shaping consciousness and perspective on current affairs, of political or social interest. As Dennis McQuail (1979) notes:

“On the one hand, there is a provision of a consistent picture of the social world which may lead the audience to adopt this version of reality, a reality of ‘facts’ and of norms, values and expectations. On the other hand, there is a continuing and selective interaction between self and the media which plays a part in shaping the individual's own behavior and self-concept.”

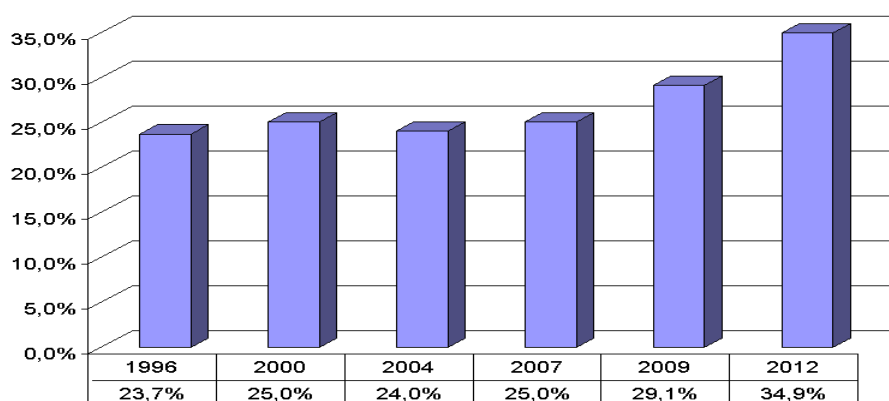
This of course demonstrates how sensitive the issue of information access and of the mass media is because if they can shape and direct the general political and social opinion-conscious of citizens, they constitute very important political-democratic tools (McQuail, 1979). In the current form of representative democracy that exists in most Western nations, information access and general media are helping people to control the actions of their politicians (Bimber, 2003). This of course presupposes the independence of mass media from different political forces and generally by private interests. The independence of the mass media, as we will see later, is a very important democracy index of a country. A democracy with state-controlled information ceases to serve its purpose and starts flirting with more authoritarian regime's practises. When the citizen ceases to have contact with the real facts that constitute the political affairs of his country, then he loses the power that is conferred to him by definition in a democracy, i.e. the possibility of political control.

Information access is crucial for a democracy as it has the power to “guide” public opinion and form consciences, and preferences. Of course when we are talking about democracy we are talking about real and objective information that can provide to citizens a very a constructive gaudiness. Also, because it offers the possibility of control on the part of citizens, to the political acts and legislation, but also because it is the intermediary between citizens and politicians, making the common intention known to politicians and the acts of politicians, known to citizens (Bimber, 2003). None of this can happen without the exchange of information and the intermediary role that the media should have. What were the “agora” for ancient Athens, for today’s democracies are the sites where citizens can receive information. The sites of conciliation and thought where opinions can be formed and decisions can be taken, serving the common intention of the municipality. In a democracy, information is a right and a measure of the quality of the political life. Wiener (1964) aptly notes:

“To live effectively is to live with adequate information. Thus, communication and control belong to the essence of man’s inner life, even as they belong to his life in society.”

In a civil polity, such as democracy, citizens have the right and must be objectively informed on the happenings of the political life of their country. When the individual loses touch with the power, then by definition no longer is interested in politics. This is because when he believes that he can not have sufficient information, then he feels isolated and loses the power of control that democracy, by definition, should provide him. This has as a result, the gradual removal, on the part of the citizens, from politics and in the end, the final indifference (Peabody, 1905). Very indicative are the elements of abstention from the electoral process in Greece as we can see in figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1



Abstention from election in Greece

These indicators of abstinence possibly can show something. What is clear is that the interest is constantly reduced over the years. Even in the 2012 election, amid the very serious crisis that Greece was facing, abstinence was higher than ever. This can be explained on the one hand as a general indifference on the part of citizens, but on the other hand, this indifference must somehow be interpreted. As Beard and Schultz write (1912):

“The smallness of the vote in many instances indicates not a lack of interest but a high degree of intelligence on the part of the voters. It often shows that the voters are aware of the fact that they do not know enough about some particular or local matter to warrant their expressing an opinion one way or another.”

Abstinance means moving away from politics because of an indifference, which, in our opinion, is created by a malfunction of democracy. The citizen decides to abstain from politics precisely because he feels that he has no real effect on the political process. This has to do with the quality of information received by the citizen. The media are not playing their role properly and as a result they stop playing the crucial role of the intermediate between citizens and politicians. This probably happens because citizens no longer trust the media, considering that they have lost their objectivity that a democracy demands. When information access is inadequate, or targeted to a non objectively direction, it creates a gap of trust between media and society.

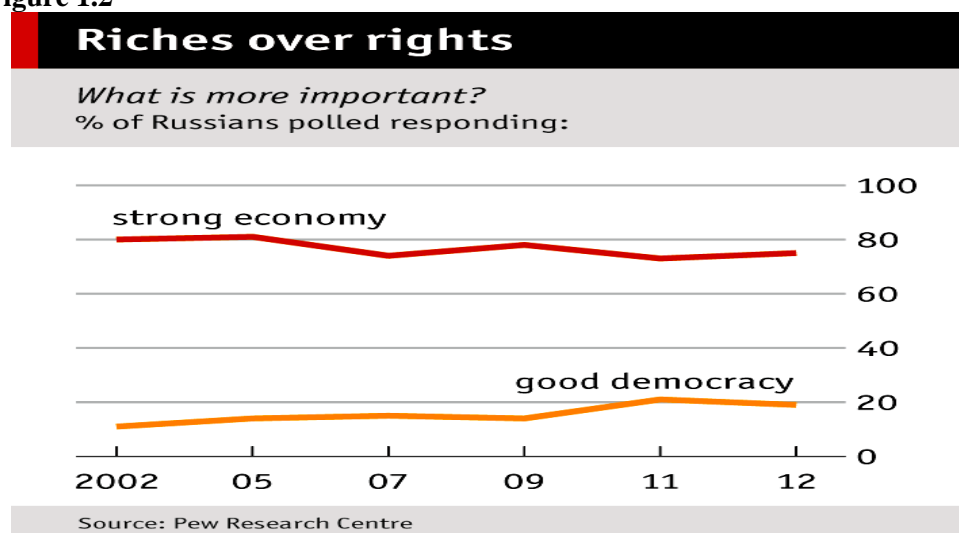
Democracy is a regime that requires a sense of conscience and the sense of responsibility on the part of citizens. This is a theoretical premise but a very practical necessity. When in a regime that has created by the citizens and for the citizens themselves, the sense of responsibility to the state, no longer exists, then democracy loses its real meaning. The sense of responsibility, however, has to do with the information access-exchange provided and received by the citizen. Citizens can't be activated for a constitution need that they don't or they are not allowed to know. As aptly pointed out by Luciano Floridi (2005):

“Consider first the crucial role played by information as a resource for as moral evaluations and actions.”

We are responsible when we know about a political problem and we are not doing something about it and not for those that we do not know. Perhaps the high levels of abstention have to do with it. With the fact, that citizens have a minimum and low level of update for very serious and critical issues of the state, that apparently are considered too “heavy” for the “layman”. That means that the state of the citizens considers the citizens to be inadequate for serious political act. But this gradual removal of citizens from the vital for a democratic state, information access, disarms them of their political activities and creates a feeling and a conscience of apathy that in the case of authoritarian regimes, the democracy scholar Ivan Kraster (2011) calls

“Zombie authoritarianism”. And we are talking about a term used in cases of authoritarian or undemocratic regimes, because the lack of adequate information access and the feeling of apathy that it creates to citizens, are attributes of such regimes and clearly not democratic. For instance, the accentuation of the news on the economy because of the timeliness of this topic because of the world economic crisis leaves the citizens with no information on many other critical issues of democracy. The over-consumption and the accentuation of the importance of the economy, creates consciences located exclusively in this direction. As shown by the following table, according to The Economist (fig 1.2), Russian citizens consider the existence of a very strong economy to be more important, against a strong and well-founded democracy.

Figure 1.2



This tendency of course, has to do with the information received by Russian citizens, because the mass media of Russia, as we will see below, is strictly controlled by the government of Vladimir Poutine. In a democracy, active and capable citizen is considered one when he is able to be properly informed (Floridi, 2008) and because of that can act properly. Democracy and information are two concepts associated by absolute way and the one promotes and reinforces the other. Therefore, it can not be termed as democratic a constitution which does not allow, either indirectly or directly, to its citizens to receive clear and balanced information. Any attempt to control the information given to citizens, is identifies a totalitarian regime.

1.2 Propaganda as the enemy of Democracy.

As discussed above, democracy and access to information are two concepts very closely connected and interdependent from each other. But what happens when one of these two is eliminated? Could they exist independently of each

other? In the modern history of the last 100 years, where the western states, gradually and steadily became democratic, freedom of the press became a serious demand on the part of citizens who experienced, after many centuries of oppression, the constitutionally establishment of their rights and freedoms. Pluralism and freedom of expression and information were considered as the basic principles of democratic states. But this freedom that was introduced in the democratic societies found no space in totalitarian regimes. Where there is no pluralism and freedom of expression there is the only admissible voltage and ideology. In Nazi Germany of Hitler there was the propaganda ministry which was headed by Goebbels (Mann, 2004). Through this the Nazis channelled to citizens the information and news that could support and define the common sense of the opinions and theories of Nazism. So did the communist Stalin's Russia, where the only acceptable ideology within the state, was that of communism. That was named as "propaganda" which definition is:

"In general, a message designed to persuade its intended audience to think and behave in a certain manner. Thus advertising is commercial propaganda. In specific, institutionalized and systematic spreading of information and/or disinformation, usually to promote a narrow political or religious viewpoint."

But we don't need to go far to look the way that totalitarian regimes manage the access to information. In today's Turkey and Russia, two countries that claim to be democratic states, we can see how work the media monitoring and information in general. But first we need to see why it is so important for authoritarian regimes to impose an ideology and control information access. Certainly the modern totalitarian regimes have learned from history that shows that excessive repression and coercion by methods of violence, leads mathematically to social explosion, with bad, for those who are in power, results. So along with the booming of media and particularly television, the totalitarian governments are trying to impose by an indirect manner their principles and beliefs. Through the control of information access, they can form the consciences they want and as they wish, in whole generations. By this way, they can create massively and profoundly the conscience that they want and with very little chance of questioning on the part of citizens.

But except from advertising the authorities of the totalitarian regime, an even more important function of the manipulated media is to identify and prevent the public from any potentially damaging, for the status quo, perception. As it was noted by Christopher Walker and Robert Ortung (2014):

"State-controlled media do not exist solely to praise the powers that be, however. A vital companion function is to trush and discredit alternatives to the authoritarian status quo before these can gain traction with citizens at large. In this way,

state-run media are a tool for marginalizing any potential political opposition or civic movement.”

This function of the mass media is extremely important and shows the way that most modern dictators think and act, because as we’ve seen before, they prefer more indirect means of control. However, knowing that they can’t impose their ideology on the whole population that they govern, they are trying to disarm the political dynamics of dissidents by an also indirect way. I.e. to those that they can’t persuade and control, they are trying to create, if not a consensus consciousness, then a consciousness of political apathy. They prefer create a culture of apolitical citizens to their state, so as to discourage them from potential overthrow thoughts and democratic inquiries. As Christopher Walker and Robert Ortung (2014) also point out:

“State-dominated media work to make mass audiences respect and fear the regime, but just as important is the task of breeding apathy and passivity.”

Here we can identify the basic difference between democracy and dictatorship. In the case of democracy political apathy is a very serious disease of government that needs to be addressed, while in the case of dictatorship this apathy is what those governments seek for. At this point of course, we should note the fact that there is now a huge wave of political apathy in traditional western democracies, which shows a serious problem of those democracies that needs be addressed (fig. 1.3).

Figure 1.3

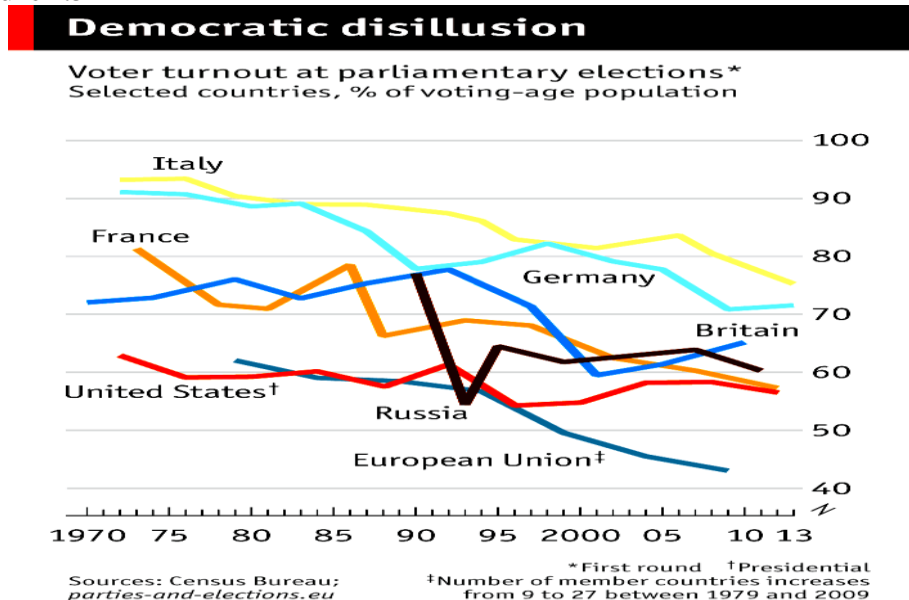


Figure 1.3 shows that abstinence from the democratic process of elections is an increasing phenomenon in almost all the traditional democratic countries of the West. Here we would say that the percentage of non-politicized citizens in democratic Europe and America, could be enviable for the modern totalitarian regimes, where the main goal is to keep away from political consciousness, the greatest possible proportion of citizens (Hirschman, 1991).

The tactics that are used by totalitarian regimes in order to keep in apathy and to disorientate citizens are many. In today's Russia, where there is an ostensibly democracy, the government of Vladimir Putin uses sideway tactics to bypass any information about political activism that contradicts with the centerline of the government (Walker & Ortung, 2014). To achieve this, the government uses many ways. For example the most important media that are in complete control by the government, show entertainment programs at the same time that an antigovernment demonstration take place in Moscow's center. To understand what this means, we need to consider the enormity of the Russian territory and the distance that separates the largest percentage of the population from the places that the most important political developments and reactions, take place. This means that this isolated from the facts population can be updated only through the media and internet use (Mickiewicz, 2008). According to measurements 88% of the Russian population is informed through television while only 47.7% use the internet (www.internetworldstats.com 2013). This shows that the largest proportion of the population of Russia, is updated through the central news highlighting channels that are in absolute control of the government (Mickiewicz, 2008). That means that the average Russian citizen has the image that government's media-controlled create and he doesn't know the real facts because the limelight news, can't reach him. Here it is important to say that we mentioned the rates of the Internet use because it is considered as the only mean that can provide free information. So considering the fairly small percentage of Internet users, we can understand that there are not many chances for real and objective information.

The paradox in this case is that while about 49% of citizens, who are informed by the TV, declare that they are sceptical about the objectivity of the traditional mass media (Mickiewicz, 2008), at the same time they show a political apathy and they continue to be informed by those unreliable (as they declare) sources. This naturally signifies the effectiveness of the practises and generally the system followed by the central authority. The fact is that a very large proportion of Russian citizens seem to understand that behind the information they receive, there is a manipulated political approach and feasibility, however they seem to have completely been convinced that they really can't do anything to change this situation. As rightly noted by Christopher Walker and Robert Ortung (2014):

“Large majorities have absorbed the idea that they can do little to change the situation. They remain apathetic and apolitical.”

This is exactly the fact that was mentioned above. How i.e. when the central government sees that can not convince people of the correctness of the policy that it applies, it prefers to poison their political consciousness and make them apathetic towards crucial events. This ensures smooth governance and stability, without the worry of that the ruling will have to face in the future a possible social explosion that will require true democracy.

A similar situation is faced by Turkish citizens. There, the government of Tayyip Erdogan is in direct interaction with the owners of the most important mass media stations and the objectivity by with those media inform citizens, depends on the business that the media-owners are doing with the government (Walker & Ortung, 2014). That shows that the media are controlled absolutely by the governance. A very good example of this is when in June 2013 during the mass protests in Taksim Square, the major television networks that are directly controlled by the government, were showing documentaries about the animal life. This, as we saw in the case of Russia, means that in a huge country such as Turkey, the largest proportion of the population that is receiving information from the TV could have never learned about the extent and the intensity of those anti-government protests. At this point we should note that in Turkey, only 45.7% makes use of the internet (www.internetworldstats.com 2013).

All these reveal the tactics of totalitarian regimes and their kind of relation to the objective and free information. In fact, timely and reliable information is the biggest enemy of these regimes while on the contrary is the greatest ally of a democracy. The issue of information access is vital as it can guide and control political behaviors, or conceal phenomena of anti-government political activism. The tactics that the old authoritarian regimes were using in the past have today been abandoned, as today's authoritarians, no longer seek the control of the media by an ultimate and violent way but by an indirect one that seems to be more sufficient, and also can create an illusion of objectivity and freedom of the press to citizens (Brady, 2010).

This is the tactic of the totalitarian regimes who do not want democracy by definition. They are not so much interested in whether can convince their citizens as if they can hold them as passive receivers of the events that they monitor. But what happens if in a democracy, the sources of information have completely lost their credibility and they are regarded by citizens as government-controlled institutions? In the cases of non-democratic regimes, this practice is a given fact that we know. But how can we identify similar cases of media-control in countries that are considered to have real democracy?

2.1 Information through the Internet and Democracy.

The fact is that there is recorded a growing distrust for the objectivity of the mass media. The correlation of their owners with powerful business interests

that have to do with the elected governments has made citizens suspicious as they are not convinced for the independence of the media that is required in a democracy. In a VPRC's (2013) measuring, it was recorded a distrust of Greek citizens towards to mass media.

Table 2.1

| <i>“There is a general view that claims that large and basic media in our country do not inform objectively the citizens, but mainly serve the interests of their owners. Will you personally say that you agree or disagree with this opinion?”</i> | Percentage % |
|--|---------------------|
| Agree | 79% |
| Quite agree | 12% |
| Quite disagree | 3% |
| Disagree | 3% |
| Don't have opinion | 3% |

Source VPRC (January 2013)

According to table 2.1 79% of Greek citizens declare that they don't trust the information that is provided to them by mass media and believes that they don't serve their democratic purpose of free and objective information. In the same survey (table 2.2), the largest percentage of respondents answered that he considers the internet as the most objective and independent source of information.

Table 2.2

| <i>“Personally what medium do you trust more for your information?”</i> | Percentage % |
|---|---------------------|
| Internet | 39% |
| TV | 32% |
| Newspapers | 9% |
| radio | 8% |
| None | 11% |

Source VPRC (January 2013)

Although the Internet is considered as the most reliable and independent mean of information, the percentage of the Internet users is still small, but indicates a trend that is growing. The Internet is a relatively new medium, which seems that is slowly but surely gaining the trust of citizens and is regarded as the most independent source of information. For this reason, we consider it as a very important ally of democracy and a very important future “player”.

Freedom and pluralism of views that are offered on the web make the Internet a very important democratic tool of the present but even more of the

future (Lucchi, 2012). The role of the social media (Facebook, Twitter) is becoming increasingly important and this is something indicated by the concentrations of the indignants, especially in southern European countries, which were motivated and organized mainly through Facebook. Another good example is the events that took place in the Arab countries, known as the Arab spring and whose development and organization, based entirely on social media (Khondker, 2011).

The fact that, whole movements that overturned regimes that were in power for decades such as in the case of the Arab spring made hundreds of thousands of citizens to protest in the central squares of south Europe, in the case of the indignants, developed and shaped through the Internet and social media, reveals an incredible momentum. In this period, a huge percentage of citizens are using the Internet to be informed, considering it as the most objective source of information (Moor, 2005). Another reason that explains why the Internet is gaining an increasingly preference of citizens, is because through the forums and blogs that exist, are highlighted and discussed issues that either fall or intentionally been ignored by conventional media (Bohman, 2004). This of course, according to Michael Schudson (2005), has to do with the subjectivity of the journalists and the close relationship that they develop with politicians, because as he notes:

“There is a real danger for democracy here: namely that, journalists and politicians, because they are so closely linked, have their own, narrow, idea of what the media should cover and they ignore the interests of the people.”

At one point this seems to be normal, but hides a real threat to democracy, and creates a gap between the common will and power and somehow manipulates the information that citizens receive, in a manner inconsistent with democracy (Walker & Ortung, 2014). This gap seems that can be covered with the help of the internet, through pluralism and freedom of expression and information access that it can provide. For this very reason, the web is considered by many scholars as a tool that can enhance and improve democracy. The truth is, that in this phase, the effective influence of citizens through the Internet, is relatively weak (Bohman, 2004). These millions of voices and opinions expressed on the Internet sites are lost and not taken into consideration by the politicians. As Christopher Walker and Robert Ortung (2014) write:

“The Internet, by contrast, is a cacophony of many discordant voices-not the best platform for promoting a unified , coherent opposition to the powers that be.”

This is because there isn't a formal institutional site where citizens can express their opinions and which obliges politicians to follow the common will. And we are talking about a web place where citizens could participate to the

politics actively through “referendums” and exercise their political obligation and right of political control (Mpoitsis & Koutsoupias, 2013). This could promote the democratic consciousness and to guide democracy to its real essence that is the direct and active participation of citizens in political processes. At this point it should be noted that the government of PASOK made a fair effort in this direction by creating <http://www.lab.opengov.gr>. This was a website where citizens could express their opinion and be informed about political issues. Unfortunately this wasn't a very successful effort as there was not too much participation on the part of citizens. We believe that the low participation was not due the indifference of the people, but because they were not convinced that their participation would have any special significance in policy decisions making (Mpoitsis & Koutsoupias, 2013). Even critics of direct democracy, who believe that citizens are inadequate to cope with the modern political requirements, ignoring of course that this by definition eliminates the concept of democracy, are considering the Internet as a tool that can help representative democracy to improve because the common will of citizens can be recorded directly and easily from the politicians who represent them.

From the above, it becomes obvious that the Internet is a major political issue. The force that has acquired and that continues to grow, and the preference that it gathers and of course the common belief that it is an independent medium have made it as an extremely valuable tool of democracy. This power has been understood by those who are in political power, since, especially in totalitarian regimes, there is an attempt to control the Internet (recent example the closure of Twitter by Erdogan), while on the side of democratic regimes, it is becoming a real useful and efficient tool for politicians for their election campaigns (recent example is the election campaigns of Obama). The free information provided by the Internet “captures” citizens and provide them with a place where they feel free from the trivial and, according to their opinion, controlled information. But what are the issues arising from the use of the Internet as a source of information? And what are the new challenges that it creates?

2.2 Group polarization

A first problem that is identified by scholars, is that of *Group polarization*. Eliot Arison (2010) gives the following definition:

*“In social psychology, **group polarization** refers to the tendency for groups to make decisions that are more extreme than the initial inclination of its members. These more extreme decisions are towards greater risk if individuals' initial tendencies are to be risky and towards greater caution if individuals' initial tendencies are to be cautious. The phenomenon also holds that a group's attitude toward a situation may change in the sense that*

the individuals' initial attitudes have strengthened and intensified after group discussion."

This means that just because in the Internet, the individuals can choose the information they want, they don't receive a global view and that don't come in touch with different views. It has been observed that the Internet user will be directed to be informed by sources that are familiar with the concepts and political beliefs that he has already formed. This focus on sources of information that have a specific direction, make him lose the contact with the different terms and general with objectivity (Bikhchandani et al, 1998).

This is a major problem, because a basic principle of democracy is the civilized dialogue and exchange of different views. Of course, a contrary argument to this is that in the Internet it is provided at least the possibility of expressing a different opinion and this opinion even if it belongs to a minority group, can be directly expressed. This is a possibility which is not provided by the conventional media.

Also, except for the removal of citizens from opposite views, it has been observed that information from online sources of concrete view and ideology, leading to extreme behaviors (Sunstein, 2007). It is not a coincidence that the internet is a shelter for many extremist views. As Sunstein (2007) notes:

"Group polarization is occurring every day on the Internet. Indeed, it is clear that the Internet is serving, for many, as a breeding ground for extremism, precisely because like-minded people are deliberating with one another, without hearing contrary views."

This clearly constitutes a problem that must be addressed. However, in our opinion, this is a matter of political culture as well. Even extremist ideologies, were created because of a social-political injustice or even more, because of exclusion of some group or ideology by the media. So it's not the internet that is causing the problem, as it is just a place were these groups can be expressed with freedom. Therefore, the control of the Internet is not the therapy, but the examination of the causes that lead some people to such opinions should be the first step for the "cure". Here we would like to note that in many cases, movements that were named as extremist ideologies, as for example the movement for the abolition of slavery and the movement for the equal rights of all men, have offered many things to achieve to guarantee certain rights, which admittedly today are of highly significant (Sunstein, 2007). This of course does not mean that all the extremists have good intentions and fight for fair things.

2.3 Personalization

This way of informing only from specific sources, which essentially eliminates the possibility of conciliation and transmission of ideas and views, creates the problem of *personalization* (Sunstein, 2007). Sunstein gives the following definition:

“As a result of the Internet and other technological developments, many people are increasingly engaged in the process of Personalization, which limits their exposure to topics and points of view of their own choosing.”

The internet can provide freedom of information and expression, but, according to several scholars, it prevents the Internet user from personal contact with his fellow citizen, such as it was happening in the ancient “agora” where democracy was created. Here we have a paradox. While the Internet can be proved as a great ally of democracy, bringing together millions of people and creating a modern “ekklesia” in the municipality where views and information can be changed directly and without intermediaries (Mpoitsis, Koutsoupas, 2013), it creates a problem of "political socialization" turning the person to himself and leading it to not have contact with other opinions other than its own. Here, of course, it is also worth noting that the same could happen if a person reads and updates by a particular newspaper or TV channel. We believe that the Internet simply highlights the problem and not creates it.

2.4 Filtering

The last issue that we will examine is that of *filtering*. A definition to what filtering means is: *Selective presentation or deliberate manipulation of information to make it more acceptable or favorable to its recipient* (<http://www.businessdictionary.com>). To explain it better, this has to do with the huge amount of information that the Internet can provide and the filtering that has to be done by the citizen. Generally it is believed that what goes up on the Internet is true (Floridi & Sunders, 2004). This has to do with the general view that the Internet is the most free and independent information medium. This of course does not mean that any information provided via the internet is true. But how can the public understand and filter the real information? According to Posner (2005) this is not a major problem, as most of the Internet users know that the bloggers are in their majority amateur “journalists” and that the information provided by them is not guaranteed to be valid. This of course is true but somehow outworn because internet users may know this, but it is not always easy to distinguish valid from invalid information (Goldman, 2005).

This raises the following question: is it necessary and acceptable for the state to interfere on the issue of filtering, or this is censorship and restriction of the role that the Internet can have as an independent medium (Bonadio, 2012) In our opinion, there is indeed a big issue because of the amount of information

provided by the Internet, but the preference and the trust of people on the Internet, has to do exactly with this. I.e. with the ability that is providing to everyone by the Internet to express them and to give or receive any information they want. The intervention on the part of the state would make the Internet, the same as the other media, which pass through filtering, but seem to have lost their credibility. We believe that state's most important care should be about the education and the creation of a democratic political consciousness that could made citizens to collect and to filter the information and the opinions that they receive by a very constructive way.

Today, Alvin Goldman (2007) notes most people are not looking for true information, but this exact information that confirms their existing perception. We agree with this and we believe that the state can shape through education, a truly democratic culture, which is based in shaping opinion and perceptions through dialogue and proposals rather than an advanced ideological trend that of substance has nothing to offer to the state.

Conclusions

Information access is a key issue of democracy and the means that are tasked to provide it are responsible for the proper update of citizens. In a democracy, citizens should be informed promptly and accurately so they can properly assess the political circumstances and needs of their state. As we've seen before, the role of informing the citizens has been taken by the mass media. But during the last years, the confidence on the part of society has been lost because they believe that most of the conventional mass media are mouthpieces of the interests of the government and of the entrepreneurs who interact with it. But as the reliability of the conventional mass media decreases the reliability of the Internet as a source of information is growing. This indicates a trend which must be taken very seriously.

We believe that the Internet will be the most important source of information access-exchange and the most important space for the exchange of views and opinions in the future. So it can, if it is properly used, contribute to the improvement of the democracy and why not, it could lead to a more direct form, where citizens will have an active role in shaping the state's policy. But if it is to maintain people's trust and preference it should be insured that the Internet will retain its independent form. We believe that it will be a mistake on the part of the democratic governments to try to control, even with the excuse of filtering, the information and the opinions that are expressed in the web. That is because this freedom is exactly the reason why the Internet "captures" peoples trust. Of course it is very important for democratic states, to create an educational system that will promote the democratic culture of civilized discussion and opinion's exchange so that future citizens will have the ability to filter the information that they will find through the Internet. Lastly we would say that several problems such as group polarization and personalization are not due the use of the Internet but are social problems that

have to do with many other political-social circumstances. It's not the Internet that creates them, but it just highlights them.

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