

## **ABSTRACT**

From the Polis to Facebook: Social Media and the Development of a New Greek Public Sphere

A prevalent perception in the existing body of literature on Greece is that, unlike most Western European and North American societies, Greece's public sphere and civil society are poorly developed, while clientelism and patronage have flourished. As the Greek economic crisis has lingered, credibility in institutions ranging from the state to the mainstream media has waned, while social and new media has increasingly played a dynamic role in Greek society. Despite the relatively low penetration rate of broadband Internet access in Greece as compared to northern and western Europe, the usage of social media for news and information in Greece ranks among the highest levels in Europe and worldwide. From the rapid popularity of "news blogs" in the late 2000s, to the mass movement of the "Indignants" which is said to have launched as a result of a Facebook invite, to the formation via Facebook of a new political party which is now part of Greece's governing coalition, digital media have played a catalytic role during the Greek crisis. However, have they played a transformative role in Greece's public sphere and civil society, or have they replicated the institutional status quo? Have new forms of political communication developed? Have social and new media tools helped reinvigorate democracy, civil society, or activism? Does digital journalism present news and information which was previously unavailable via Greece's mainstream, traditional media, and is it considered a more credible source of news and information? Do citizens have a greater say in public discourse? This project, a longitudinal study conducted over four years in Greece in the midst of the country's financial crisis, dissects the role of social and new media during this period, and can provide a broader understanding of how digital media can influence public debate, civil society, and foster political and social movements.