YouTube Debate: A New Era of Internetized Television Politics[1]

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ABSTRACT

Integration of Television with Internet technologies has renewed the discussion for a new era of political communication. The adoption of Internet communication rules in television, has introduced a new hybrid model of *"Internetized Television"*. This hybrid model aims to reverse the passiveness of tele-democracy, supporting a more active political participation of citizens. However, since now, the impact of this new medium in politics has not been studied adequately. In this research paper, we performed an extensive empirical study of the political impact of internetized television. In particular, we study the impact of this new medium in the 2007 national elections of Greece, when a specific broadcast was aired on TV, named "Skai-YouTube Debate". Based on our survey results, we conduct an in-depth theoretical discussion of the political and communicative challenges imposed by internetized television.

Key words*: YouTube, debate, political participation, Internet, democracy, Internetized television*

Introduction

The role of Internet in the formation of a more active citizenship is a current debate in political theory enriched lately by the widespread use of social media (Web 2.0). Internet seems to have all the "credentials" in order to support a model of participatory democracy. Furthermore, the incorporation of Internet technologies into television creates a new model of political communication. This hybrid model, which has emerged as a "reciprocal incursion" between traditional television and Internet called "Internetized Television" (Fortunati, 2005:27), can possibly enhance the political participation of citizens, by building on the advantage of direct interaction between citizens and politicians.

This paper confronts participation in politics as a multilevel procedure that does not refer only to the voting moment, which we consider as the last part of the process, nevertheless important. Political participation is closely dependent on the pre-voting process when the electorate forms its political decision. Based on this theoretical standpoint we have divided participation procedure into three stages[2]. First citizens shape their questions and claims for politics, second they address them to politicians and third, according to answers given, they decide for their vote. One could say that this is, ideally, a procedure followed by a "thinking" citizen who is approaching politics in a critical and skeptical way and thus, this procedure is unlikely to represent the average voter. Moreover the age of passive telepolitics makes this model of voter to seem even more rear and idealistic. Media malaise, a symptom of tele-democracy, is been accused for encouraging an already existing predisposition in the electorate; the unwillingness of citizens to engage in political sphere (Deligiaouri, 2006).

This paper explores the reconceptualization of political participation in Internet terms by providing a concrete model of variables that influence this participation. Our motivation for this research was to find out whether this hybrid-model of Internetized television can really change the current apolitical situation with the distance growing between citizens and politicians. Especially we are interested in how this model, that is naturally closer to younger ages, can rejuvenate political participation in younger ages. In general is participation in Internetized television dependent on the same variable in comparison to off-line participation?

Literature Review

While Internet was gaining a prominent position in media landscape, with a scalable increase of Internet users worldwide, a multifaceted debate has emerged

regarding the political role and potential of this new medium. Internet, contrarily to TV, provides the possibility of personalized, direct and almost unlimited interaction generating a sense of total freedom to its users. The discussion about Internet, rich and controversial with many opposing opinions offering different perspectives, can be confined in two basic oppositional views. (for a synopsis of this discussion see indic. Bimber, 2001: 53-55, Norris, 2002: 59-61, Oates &Gibson, 2006: 1-5).

The *positive* (or utopian) *aspect* emphasizes on the contribution of Internet and new technologies in participatory democracy and the perspective of overcoming deficiencies of the "old", descending representative democracy. Internet provides to its users a sense of liberation, of uncontrolled action and interaction. This interaction between Internet users is even more evident in social media and Web 2.0 technologies. As a result, a new perception of social life has emerged, with e-networks enhancing "sharing", free deliberation and creating- in the end- a networking society. In terms of politics, in the Information Society there is certainly abundance of political information which can be easily and cheaply obtained by websites. Moreover, the "networking effect" of World Wide Web and social media, has aspired new forms of activism offering many opportunities to social movements to get organized and express their ideas not only in a local but in a global level (Castells, 2005: 169-187). The "net effect" has also introduced another form of sociability and a new perception of participation. The codes of communication in social media have revived the discussion for the inherent democratic attributes of Internet. Interactivity and the world wide increase in net-citizens or "netizens" have spread an optimism regarding the democratic premise of Internet. The "civic potential" (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 2003: 129) of Internet is most of the times centered to young users (Owen, 2006) that are more skillful in new technologies and

find on the Net the place to exercise their freedom, their rights; alternatively they use the Net to express their anger and fear. All the above lead to the assumption that young people are more likely to be engaged in an e-democracy and a kind of political participation that is strongly connected to the rules and norms of Internet as an interactive medium.

On the other pole (the dystopian view), more skeptical criticism alleges for the existing socioeconomic barriers that still deprive Internet from its promising role. A number of scholars presage for the danger of having "two-geared" citizens because of special preconditions and personal skills needed for an Internet user. The issue of free and cheap access to Internet in many cases is still unclear and affects the utilization of Internet to its full potential. The new informational state (Braman, 2006) should provide the basic prerequisites in order to prevent a new social division, a digital divide between the ones that are "connected" and skillful and the ones that are left behind (have nots). Enhancing democracy means that several requirements are seriously taken into account. Morissett (2003) sets out six: *Access, Information and Education, Discussion, Deliberation, Choices and Action.* (pp.27-30). If these preconditions are not satisfied then the new digital public sphere will remain in opposition with egalitarian principles (see indic. Brandemburg, 2006). Technological evolution is of necessity related to certain aspects of modernity and confederates within a large socioeconomic and political context (Brey, 2003:33-35). To this extent, how technology such as Internet is been confronted by the official state, remains a political choice that can be either *instrumental*, facing technology as a neutral phenomenon or *critical* facing technology on a holistic view, encountering several additional factors (see also Schot, 2003: 258, Nye, 2002: 12).

Findings regarding the relation and intersection between political participation and Internet are in some cases ambivalent. Early researches (see Bimber 1999, 2001) do not really notice a change in the voting behavior of citizens because of their evolvement with Internet. At the same time, the true content of "political participation" remains vague and ambiguous itself. It can mean a number of actions, attitudes and behaviors. Accordingly, *web-based participation* and deliberation can be identified in many forms of Internet action such as on line consultations with MPs, on line policy dialogues and from deliberative polling to coordinated Web-based networking among groups in civil society (see Schlosberg, Zavestoski & Shulman 2007:38). This is why it remains a fundamental issue to define political participation nowadays in order to form an accurate hypothesis.

Regardless of the approach taken, the majority of researches conducted for Internet and politics indicate the avoidance of over-valuating Internet as the new mass medium of public participation. Socioeconomic barriers; policy and educational issues are factors that interfere in any social action and are unlikely to disappear when surfing on the Net (Murdock and Golding, 1989) even if the medium itself is potentially more democratic. Comparative research indicates that many variables such as underlying dynamics or causal mechanisms and national contexts intersect and affect the impact of Internet technology to political process and especially to electoral process (Gibson and McAllister, 2008:17-19). While a number of researches (Tolbert &McNeal, 2003) spread quite optimism for the role of Internet as a new political communication tool they remain skeptical and reserved when countering limitations that still exist concerning fundamental rights such as the right to access the Internet.

This paper aims to speculate in this two- fold discussion about Internet, on the new horizons that convergence or cooperation of technologies could provide but also,

on the human and social factor; how people perceive these evolutions, especially young people, if they would like to be involved in them and if, in the end, they do believe that they can lead to a significant change in political procedures. We have categorized the challenges imposed by Internet to existing media democracy in two arguments. The *political challenge*, which is mainly understood as the political context and potential of Internet and the *communicative challenge* that concerns the possible transformation of the one-dimensional communicative model of TV to a more interactive model of communication which will be "Internet-aided".

In order to test empirically the model of Internetized Television, we focus our attention to the example of National Elections in Greece, in September 2007, when a private TV channel, Sky (SKAI) TV in cooperation with YouTube has introduced a new type of political debates promoted from a specific broadcast called "Skai, YouTube Debate". The broadcast provided citizens the possibility of uploading their questions on the video-sharing website "YouTube" and then addressing them to politicians. First we analyze the procedure, the participants of this Debate, basically the characteristics of the "uploaders" of videos and second we discuss and evaluate this broadcast as a pioneer political communication method. The evaluation result is revealed by a questionnaire we have addressed to a representative sample of 900 people from different age groups and educational backgrounds.

This case has certainly an idiomatic character as it does not examine directly the impact of Internet in politics since the mediation of journalists- at least regarding the selection of videos -is still present. On the other hand, the results are indicative of the political motivation that Internet and especially YouTube can provide to the electorate and especially to young people and, second, of the acceptance of Internet by voters as a new political communication method.

The role of Political Debates on Television

Nowadays political discourse and political information reaches the electorate basically by television broadcasts despite the fact that TV viewers have proved to be quite reserved on the quality and objectivity of political information provided on TV. Additionally *"Political Discourse that reaches citizens through television is widely believed to be the major means by which citizens learn the rationales for opposing perspectives"* (Mutz, 2007:622*)*. Political information should not be interpreted only as data and news. Contra wise it should also enable a comparative analysis of political views. This comparison between opposing political options is well served on television debates that allow different opinions to be heard, contested and judged. A good citizen is a well-informed citizen and since television is the main source of political information politicians, especially during electoral periods, focus their attention on television debates in order to communicate their ideas. In these periods (elections) the need for legitimate political opposition is even more necessary and incumbent.

Political debates[3] on TV have gained during the years an esteemed position in the preferences of TV viewers[4] for a number of reasons such as: a) Debates, because of their strict- formal structure, offer an additional pledge of representative legitimacy; they somehow constitute the "formal moment" of televised political opposition b) The firm procedural rules applied in them impose a unique ritual in candidates' speech and attitude; TV audience expects from the participants justifiable arguments, "serious" answers and decent political opposition c) Debates of political leaders, succeed in providing a strong representative legitimacy which is obtained

from the participation of all political leaders; in this way preconditions of democratic dialogue on an equal basis are been preserved.

"Skai-You Tube Debate" has embraced the concept of debates adding a new element, the direct participation of citizens that would substitute the mediated journalistic discourse. Therefore, the specific broadcast represents an amalgam of TV and Internet characteristics, it constitutes the new "Internetized" television, and this is where its innovation and its particularity reside.

The political premise of "Skai-YouTube debate"

The problem so far with television, referring to political debates as well, was always the lack of interactivity, the absence of the viewer in political process. TV producers sought for the help of an interactive and popular medium, such as the Internet, that could possibly fill the gap of "no participation". In this way they hoped to overcome the "handicap" of television as a one dimensional medium. This effort has lead to a new type of television, an integration of TV and Internet, literally an "Internetized" television. Consequently, political communication has entered a new era because "*Anytime you fundamentally change the way you reach consumers and audiences through media, you fundamentally change the way you reach voters and constituents too*"[5]. This cooperation was believed to be fruitful in terms of providing a new perspective in watching "political" television and in promoting real political communication and not just political information.

The next step for the new broadcast was to reach a high level of legitimacy and representativeness in the procedure. For this reason the appropriate number of politicians should be invited in order for the broadcasts to comply with the rules of

equal representation. To correspond to this democratic demand the Skai TV channel, in its four broadcasts, has invited politicians from the major political parties, according to their parliamentary percentage. We should point out, thought that not all the political parties were represented in each broadcast; only in the last debate we had representatives from the five major and more popular political parties.

Before the beginning of the broadcasts, in the trailers and ads presented on Skai TV channel introducing this new political "experiment", we find significant data and evidences for its political premise and the goals the channel hoped to achieve. Phrases such as: "Entrepreneurship, innovative broadcast", "an opportunity to re-gain control of politics", the ability to a "direct, uninterrupted communication", "a new way of political communication", "a new kind of dialogue" "public participation" "challenge" (for politicians to confront citizens) have accompanied TV trailers before and during the broadcasts. Also in the beginning of this TV campaign an emphasis was given on the resemblance of the broadcast to its similar presented on CNN channel, in order to convince for the importance and the special "gravity" of this newly introduced broadcast. A newspaper article commenting on CNN YouTube Debate explains that "*yes from 3000 videos only 39 were presented*" but still this is an innovative effort and certainly more interesting because "*citizens face politics with cynicism and mistrust, they are not afraid to make aggressive questions, because they have nothing to loose*" (Kanellopoulou, 2008).

Characteristically, on the van of Skai TV, where citizens could upload their videos, was written "Before you vote come and ask". Another point that was exemplified regarding the new broadcast was the comparison between existing TV debates and the new one. *"In 'traditional' debates, journalists ask, politicians are answering and citizens just watch*". (www.skai.gr)

Doubtless it was an innovative effort on behalf of a relatively new TV channel which has the profile of a serious qualitative channel and probably this effort has additionally aimed to maintain this profile of the channel.

Observing the procedure followed on "Skai-YouTube Debate"

Citizens had the opportunity of direct communication with politicians by uploading their videos to the website www.youtube.com/skaidebate. The TV channel has also offered a van with mobile Internet connection, situated in a different location every day, in order to facilitate citizens with no access to Internet to make their questions, preventing in this way possible counter-arguments regarding the "openness" and "equality" of the process. At the specific broadcast named "Skai YouTube-Debate", were invited politicians-speakers from the largest political parties and they had to answer the uploaded video questions. The questions were addressed to all political representatives except from a number of questions that required a specific politician to answer.

In total, four (4) broadcasts took place from 6 to 14 September 2007[6]. What is been displayed as a general remark, is a progressive normalization of the procedure and gradual familiarization of politicians with the procedure and concept of the debate[7].

According to the data on YouTube site in the community-channel which has initiated on YouTube, on the 22nd August 2007, subscribed 365 people. The total number of uploaded videos was 126. The number of videos presented finally on TV was 61, almost 50% of the total number. Channel views on Internet were almost 33,990. Last sign -in subscriber has entered on January-February 2008[8].

Regarding the broadcasts we note:

a) Political representation: in the first debate only the two major political parties were represented (Socialist and Liberal). In the other three broadcasts, each time four political parties were represented, (one right wing -the liberal governmental party-, one socialist, one left wing and the communist party). In the last debate the politicians were 5 as one more representative from the "extreme" right wing was also invited.

b) Duration of broadcasts: 1st: 114 minutes, 2nd: 87 minutes, 3rd: 66 minutes and 4th: 52 minutes.

c) Uploaded Videos/ questions presented on the broadcasts from YouTube: 61.

We have expected the group of 18-28 to have a leading participation in the uploaded videos. Their percentage is 43% which is quite close to the percentage of the next age group of 28-45 that has reached the level of 36 %. The age groups of 45+ naturally less familiar with new technologies and Internet has gathered a percentage of 11 % as the results are displayed in *Figure 1*[9].
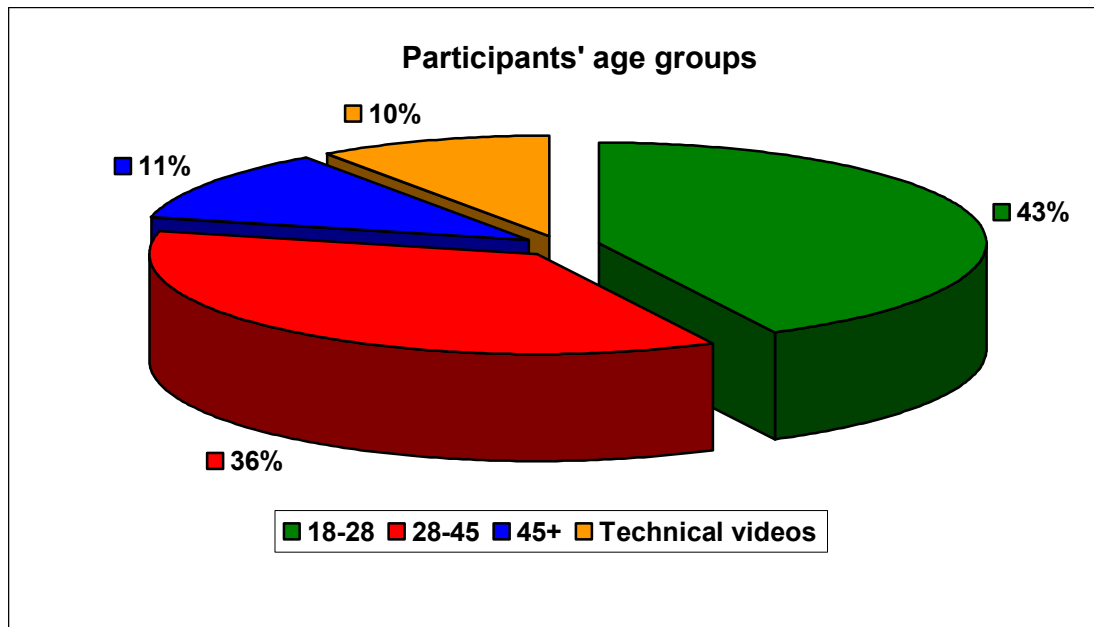
Figure 1: Analysis of participants' (uploaded videos presented) age groups

The logical explanation for the comparatively high percentage of the age groups of 28-45 is that this age group includes the main "working body" of the population, the core population of employment. In this age, citizens, even in the case of not being that much keen on new technologies, are surely interested in politics as policy agenda concerns their life directly.

The age of 18-28 and sometimes even below 18 (one participant said that her age is 17), as mentioned above, are more likely to be involved in new technology and its capabilities. However, a great part of them face politics from a more "theoretical standpoint", meaning, that most of them, students or not, have not yet experienced the consequences of a bad or a good political decision. Great parts of this age group are probably people still economic dependent from their parents. We cannot insist though that people from this age group are not political active only because they did not participate to the level we expected to this broadcast, as the last three years in Greece we have experienced many multi-scale protests from young people regarding issues of education and other governmental policies.

There are also a 10% of videos (technical videos) that were innovative in their presentations as we could not see the face, sometimes could not even listen to the voice, of the "video uploader". These videos were comprised of a sequence of pictures, or written messages or other visual ways in the effort to make their message more innovative and perhaps more comprehensible to the audience.

We have categorized the topics of the questions in 5 inclusive categories: *Domestic policy* with questions concerning domestic policy agenda (like health, public administration etc.), *Foreign policy issues*, *Current affairs*, *Environment* and last but not least, *Political system*. In the category of "Political system" we have

subsumed questions that have exercised strong criticism to the "core" of politics, addressing defects and deficiencies of political system and questions that expressed their discontent regarding the function of political system and politicians in general.
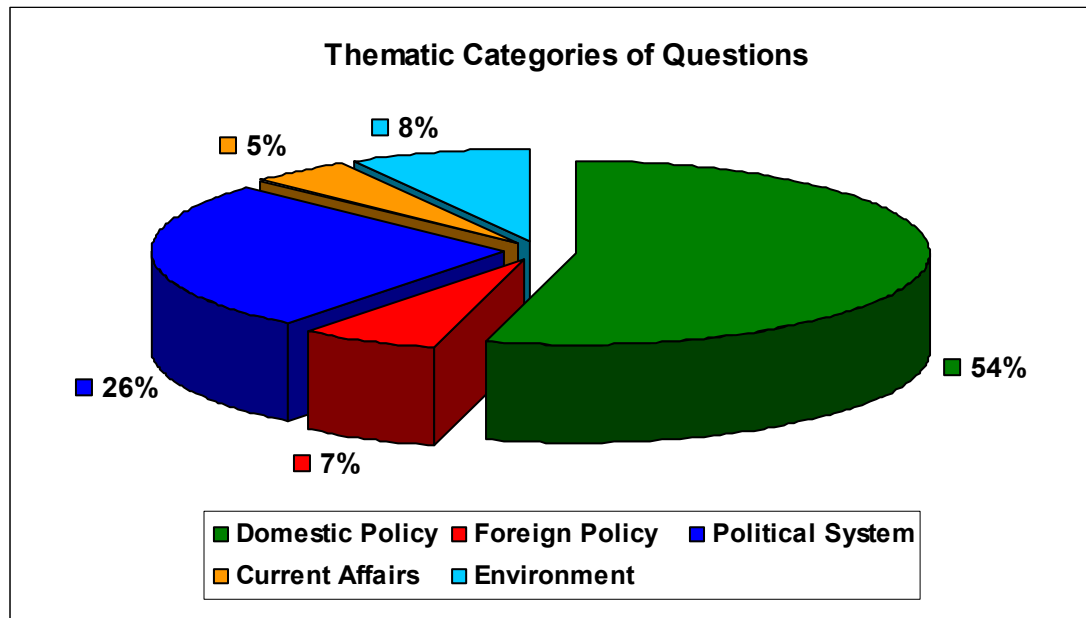
Figure 2 shows the results:

Figure 2: Thematic categories of Questions-Videos presented.

From the high –comparatively- percentage of "Political system" category (26%) we can deduce that many citizens found "Skai-YouTube Debate" as their unique chance to make politicians aware of their anger and discontent for their actions. This debate was exceptional because citizens' questions have not been transformed and mediated by the formal speech of journalists and TV ethics. The main anchor of the broadcast has also underlined and repeated at the broadcasts that "*you are going to watch questions that we, the journalists, could not possibly ask you (the politicians) or if we could ask you it would be in a different way*".

From the results and the percentage of 26% in "Political system" category it is evident that citizens are rather concerned in a long-term and not in a short -sighted perspective for politics. Citizens do not limit political agenda only to the problems

concerning their everyday life. Certainly, as Edelman (1977) very early has foreseen, citizens are motivated by everyday problems and the proximity of the problem to their life plays a significant role in their approach. The issue here -as it arises from debate's questions- is that citizens -to a significant percentage- regard their everyday problems equally important to structural insufficiencies of political system. Perhaps because they believe that their everyday life is seriously affected from the erosion and failure of politics. This fact also reveals the growing belief, at least in Greece, that neither political party, nor a single government can solve a problem by itself unless specific changes will be made to the core of political system; current malfunctions of the political system are capable of negating any decent effort from any political party.

It is also interesting to see how the sub-categories of the wide inclusive category "Domestic Policy" are allocated within the category.

The highest percentage in the category have gained questions about the (mal)function of public administration (18%), a basic and reflective component regarding the general perception of the state. Human rights and more specifically the right of immigrants and homosexuals are in a high level in the interests and concerns of citizens reflecting a social sensitivity. Employment (15%) is also a basic problem for young people and it is closely related to education and its perspectives of employment and certainly economic conditions. We should underline, at this point, that there was only one question regarding the economy of the state in "strict economic terms" which perhaps indicates that citizens perceive economy under a very specific and personalized way and not as statistical data and numbers.

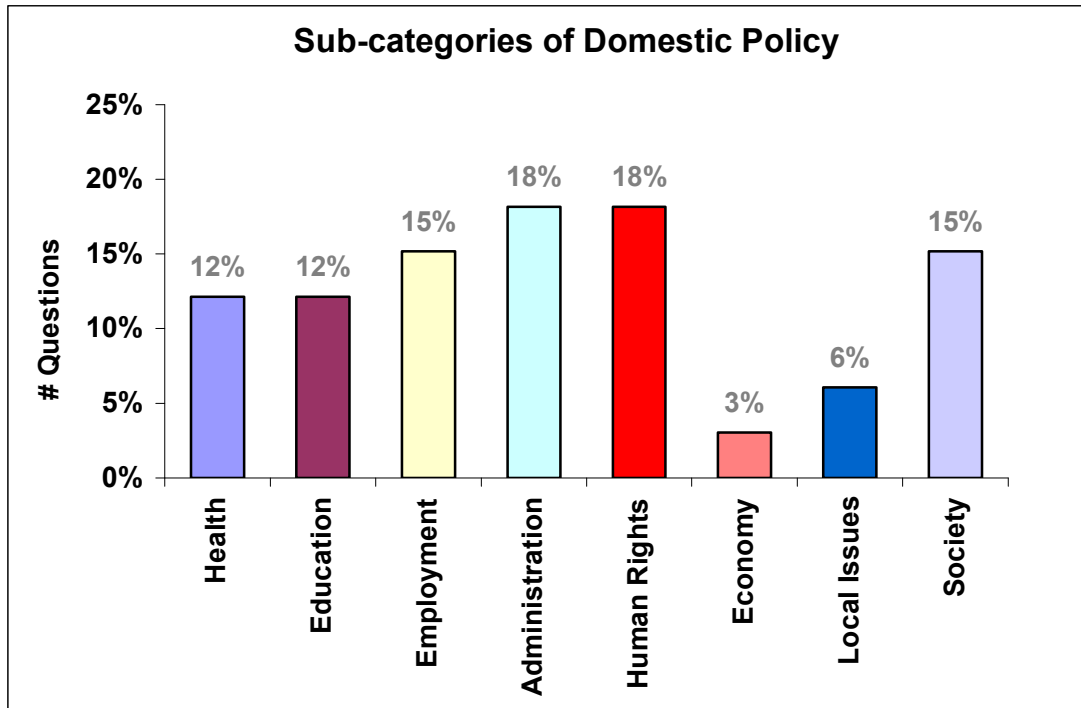*Figure 3* represents the division of questions within "Domestic Policy "category".

Figure 3: Allocation of questions in sub-categories within "Domestic Policy" Basic

Category

Health and general questions regarding society have achieved a considerable percentage (12% and 15% correspondingly) while a comparatively small percentage of questioners have preferred to talk about local issues (6%) as an opportunity to shed light on geographical areas that feel neglected from the centralized state of the capital. It is easy to capture in these questions, a feeling of bitterness and abandonment along with a strong criticism against state policy.

The proposed model

In this Section, we formally relate the variables that are investigated in this research paper based on our proposed model. In Figure 4, we present how these variables are expected to be related to each other. The "Participation in Internetized Television Politics" (PITP) is the dependent variable of our model, with the demographic

variables and answer of respondents being the independent variables. In particular, as shown in Figure 4, we construct a decision tree model, where PITP is the dependent (predicted) variable with two possible values (high and low). That is, our model predicts PITP variable based on the demographic and other characteristics of a citizen. For example, as shown in Figure 1, a citizen who (i) lies in 18-28 group age, and (ii) knows to use Web 2.0 technologies (i.e. upload a video etc.) has a high to present high PITP. In contrast, a citizen who lies in 45+ group age and does not have Internet Access has a low PITP probability.
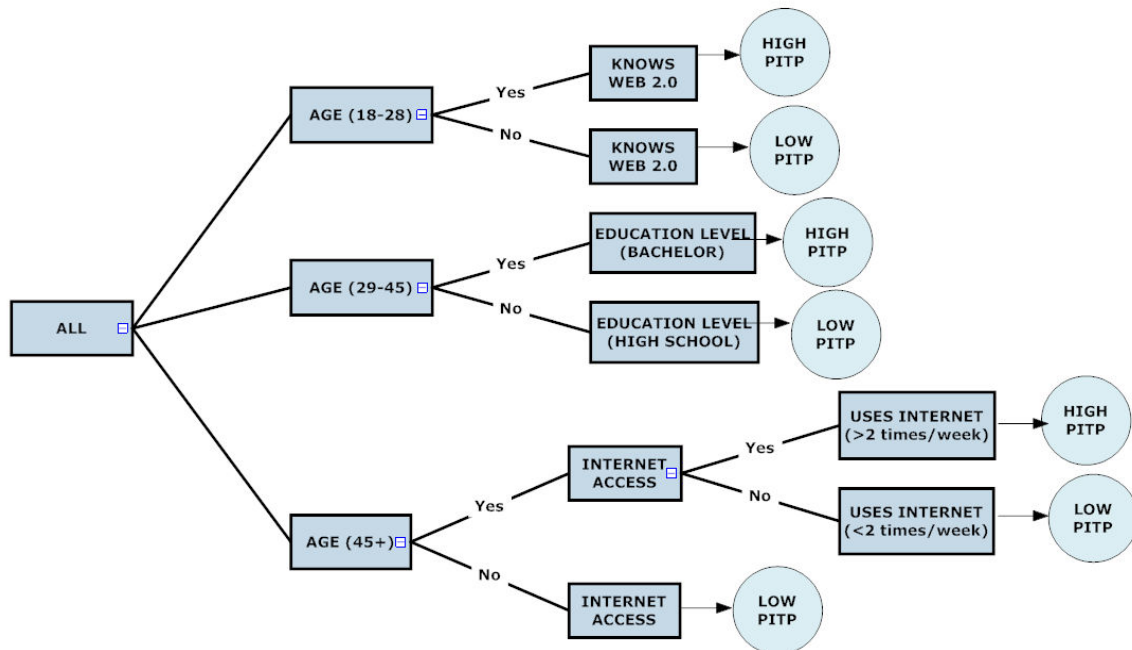

Figure 4: The proposed model

Hypotheses

For the purpose of testing the proposed model we have constructed a questionnaire and addressed it to 900 people from different age groups (300 for each age group). These age groups were: 18-28, 29-45, 45+ and up. The main purpose of the questionnaire is to reveal citizen's participation and acceptance of the "Skai-YouTube debate" broadcast.

1rd *hypothesis:* We assume that younger ages (who use internet frequently) are more aware and more watched "Skai-YouTube debate" broadcast, than older ages (who have no internet access or use internet rarely).

2nd *hypothesis:* We assume that "Skai-YouTube debate" is more positively evaluated from younger ages (who use Web 2.0 technologies and online social systems such as YouTube etc.), than older ages (who do not use Web 2.0 technologies and social networks).

3nd *hypothesis:* We assume that for younger ages the Web 2.0 technologies awareness is the most important variable to present high PIPT, whereas for older ages the most important variables for high PIPT are both the existence of home internet access, the high frequency of internet usage and the education level.

Methodology

In this Section, we explain in detail how, when, where and why the data of our citizens' study was collected. We also provide information about how the data was analyzed and what statistical test were used.

For the purpose of testing the participation and acceptance of citizens in PIPT, we have constructed a questionnaire concerning "Skai-YouTube Debate" and addressed it to 900 people. We have defined three large age groups (18-28, 28-45, and 45 and up) in order to categorize our results. The questionnaires were anonymous and the only personal data that were asked from participants was their age group, their education level and their political preference.

The research was conducted in three weeks (June 23rd – July 13th 2008) in the first phase and in 5 weeks (September 15th- October 19th 2008) in the second phase.

Questionnaires were given randomly to persons in the center of Thessaloniki, willing to participate (the choice of the respondents concerned only their age in order to have the expected analogy in age groups).

The questionnaire consists of 10 questions (a copy of the questionnaire is presented in the appendix Section). Recipients of the questionnaires were asked, among other things, their opinion about the specific broadcast, about internet access and use. In the end they were asked about "Skai-YouTube Debate" and the possible contribution of Internet to a new era of political communication and participation. This citizens' study is important to be conducted in Greece because it is the first time, to the best of our knowledge, that such a broadcast (Skai-YouTube debate) is organized and presented in TV.

The conducted citizens' study is tested for validity and reliability. In particular, in order to test if the different responds between the age groups is statistically significant, we performed a chi-squared significance test.

Findings

In this Section, we present our results that are related to each hypothesis.

Testing 1rd hypothesis:

We assumed that "Skai-YouTube debate" is more positively evaluated from younger ages (who use Web 2.0 technologies and online social systems such as YouTube etc.), than older ages (who do not use Web 2.0 technologies and social networks).

From the analysis of questionnaires accrues that younger viewers have responded positively in a high percentage (57%) in the question *Q1* ("Are you aware

of Skai-YouTube Debate that took place in the Last National Elections of 2007?").
However, only 30% of them that knew or heard about the broadcast has finally
watched it. The second age group raises the level of attendance to 40% and in general,
in this age group, we find more proportional results between people knowing the
broadcast and people watching it.

On the other hand, in the age group of 45+ although the percentage of people
that have responded positively in the first question is lower (50%), the number of
people that have actually watched the broadcast is relatively higher (43%), displaying
at least a kind of curiosity or interest in watching something new.

Figure 5 below reflects the positive answers (YES) given to Questions 1 and 2
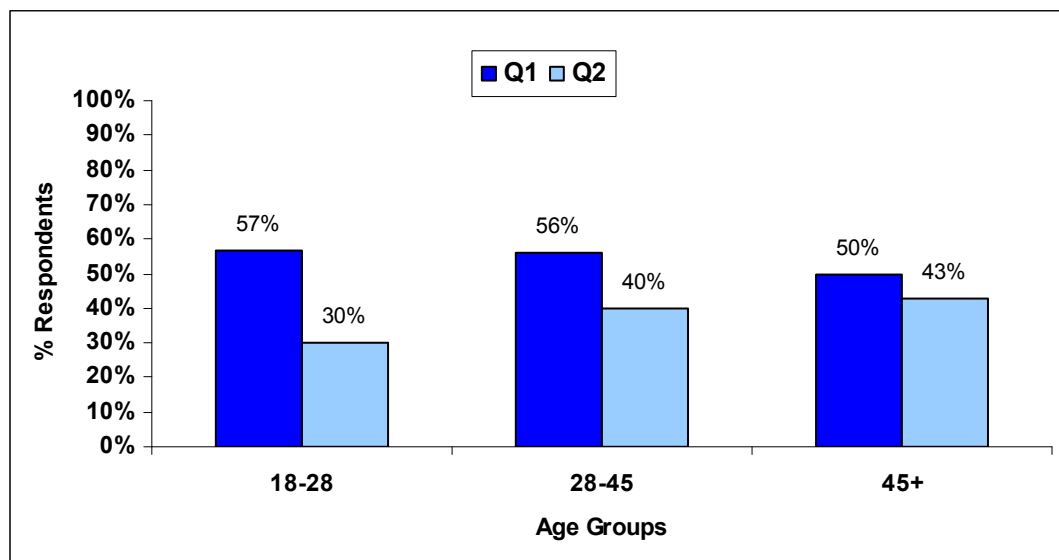according to the age groups:

*Figure 5: Positive responses (YES) to **Q1** (awareness of 'Skai YouTube Debate) and*

***Q2** ("have you watched "Skai-YouTube Debate") according to age groups*

A possible justification for these results could be that elder people are indeed
much keener on watching TV in general and more specifically, are more used in
watching *politics* on TV. On the other hand, young people do not have much faith in

"old media" such as TV even if a "flavor" of Internet is added, as in the debate in question.

Relating these results to the high levels of abstention in last elections of 2007[10] and to the case of emergency the country has confronted because of the extended fires, we can support that these figures indicate –comparing to these conditions -a good level of attendance to the debate.

Testing 2ⁿᵈ hypothesis:

We assumed that "Skai-YouTube debate" is more positively evaluated from younger ages (who use Web 2.0 technologies and online social systems such as YouTube etc.), than older ages (who do not use Web 2.0 technologies and social networks).

Regarding the acceptance and the positive opinion of viewers for the debate, our survey results indicate that although many more persons from the age group of 45+ have watched the broadcast their opinion about it is indifferent (64%). On the contrary, the broadcast was more appealing to the other two age groups of 18-28 (47% have answered that it was very good) and 28-45 (34% very good). If we sum up the yellow and light blue bar answers (good+very good) in all age groups it is clear that "Skai YouTube" Debate evoked a more positive impression to the first two age groups as they are more familiar with Internet and new technologies and can more easily appreciate and understand the whole procedure. Results are displayed comparatively in *Figure 6* below:
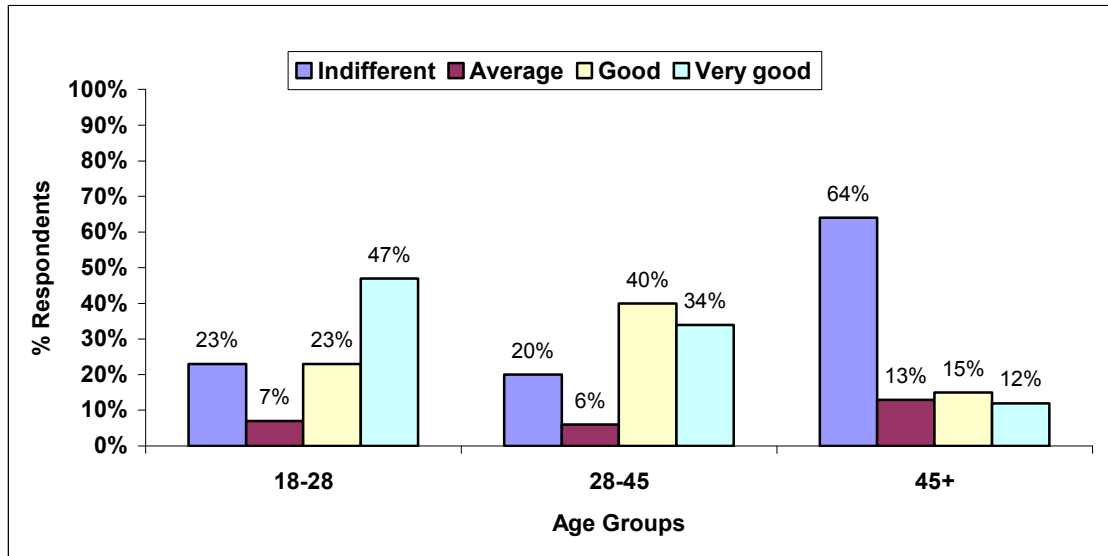
*Figure 6: **Q3** Opinion-Evaluation of "Skai –YouTube Debate" according to age groups.*

To test if this difference between the 18-28 and 45+ age groups is statistically significant, we performed a chi-squared significance test. As shown in Table 1, for Question 3, the difference between the age group of 18-28 and the age group of 45+ is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. In particular, over 60% of the Age group 45+ found the Skai-YouTube Debate "indifferent", while a 47% of the age group 18-28 found it very good (df=3 , p<.01).

Table 1. Summary of answers between Age groups 18-28 and 45+

Question 3	Answer	Age group 18-28 % / (N)	Age group 45+ % / (N)	Chi-Squared Significance (df = 3)
What is your opinion for "Skai-YouTube Debate?	Indifferent	23% (21)	64% (83)	**.002**
	Average	7% (6)	13% (17)	**.262**
	Good	23% (21)	15% (19)	**.321**
	Very Good	47% (42)	12% (16)	**.003**
Total		100% (90)	100% (135)	

Consequently, our second hypothesis is verified because the acceptance and the positive opinion of young people about the debate is quite high. In contrast, the 45+ age that seems to construct the main body of viewers of the broadcast (43%, see also Figure 5) has found the broadcast rather indifferent, while the 18-28 age group, found it quite good.

Testing 3rd hypothesis:

We assumed that for younger ages the Web 2.0 technologies awareness is the most important variable for someone to present high PIPT, whereas for older ages the most important variables for high PIPT are both the existence of internet access, the high frequency of internet usage and the education level.

Based on our findings, from Question 5 (Have you home internet access?), Question 6 (How frequent do you use Internet?) and the Education Level of the Respondents, the most influence variable for high PIPT is the age group (see also Figure 4). Then, for the age group 18-28, the knowledge of Web 2.0 technologies (87% of the respondents in this age group knows to use Web 2.0 technologies and presents high PIPT) is the second important variable for getting high PIPT, as shown in Figure 7.
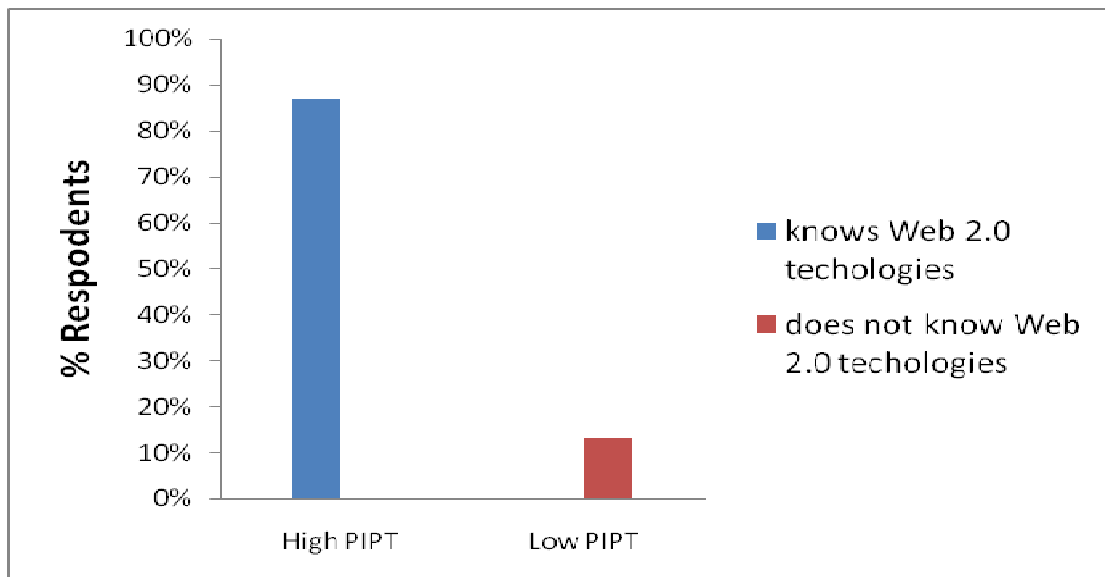
Figure 7: The most influential variable for PIPT in 18-28 age group is the knowledge of Web 2.0 technologies.

For the age group 29-45, the most influential variable is the Education Level (67% of the respondents in this age group has a bachelor degree and presents high PIPT), as shown in Figure 8.
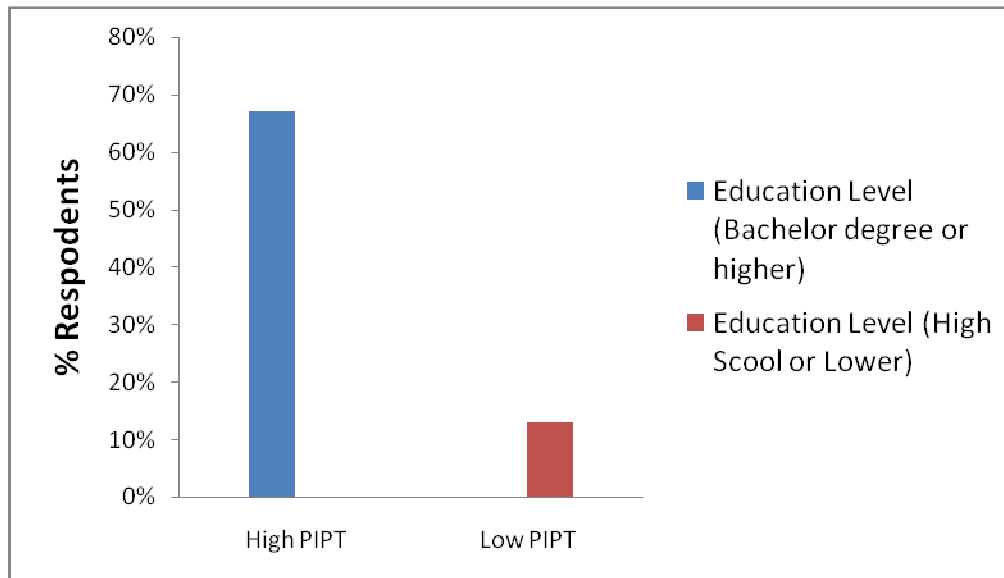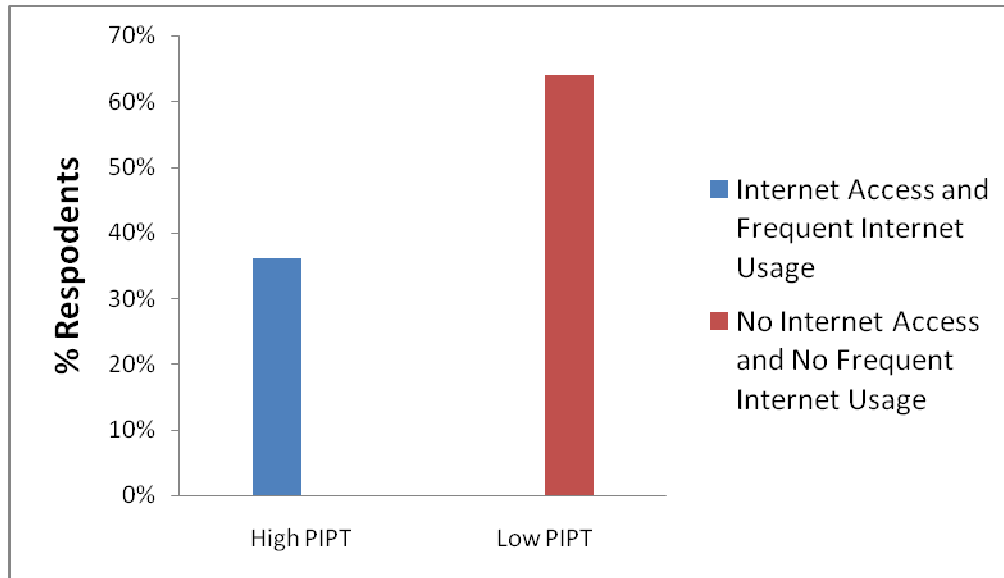

Figure 8: The most influential variable for PIPT in 29-45 age group is the Education Level.

Finally, for the age group 45+, as shown in Figure 9, the most influential variables are the existence of home internet access and the frequency of internet usage (36% of the respondents has internet access, high internet frequency usage and present high PIPT). The above results prove that hypothesis 3 holds.

Figure 9: The most influential variable for PIPT in 45+ age group is the both the Internet Access and the Frequent Internet Usage.

Based on the aforementioned observations, we can strongly argue that our model is confirmed and can describe adequately the citizens' behavior in PIPT. That is, for younger ages the knowledge of Web 2.0 technologies is the most important variable for someone to present high PIPT, whereas for older ages the most important variables for presenting high PIPT are both the existence of internet access, the high frequency of internet usage and the education level.

Discussing the blurring political premise of Internet and "Internetized television"

a) The Political challenge

Is this effort the preamble towards a constitution of a new citizenship and consequently towards a new perception of politics?

Technology itself despite its potential is not sufficient to change existing political setting. Moreover it is likely that even the freedom of Internet can be

manipulated and framed by the same powers that frame and dominate current political settings. What is the element then that gives us the hope that there is a "slot" of uncontrolled freedom left for netizens? Why would anyone think that offline elites will not try to maintain their position as on-line elites as well? (Jordan, 2001:164-165).

If the proponents of Internet revolution in relation to political participation can be sorted into three categories: "**citizen information, interaction between citizens and government and policy making**" (Davis, 1999: 21) then the only safe assumed change in the current situation refers to the *first category;* citizens' information. It is true that citizens have at their disposal a vast variety and amount of information and it today is far more easily to search and find new information on the Internet than anywhere else. Regarding the *second category,* the interaction between citizens and government, it is still uncertain and unsolicited how this can possibly happen and how this act will be truly "interaction" and not just a one dimensional activity on behalf of the citizens which is not considered appropriately and seriously from governmental officials. Positively, governmental websites offer an opportunity of interactivity but they are basically constructed on an informational basis, mainly offering rather than collecting information and countering citizens' reactions (Constantopoulou, Andras & Deligiaouri:2007). To this extent, the effort to an e-government model seems to resemble in most of its features to the "managerial model" limited to an "unilinear flow of communication" from government to citizens and vice versa while some websites seem to be more closer to the "consultative model" (Chadwick & May 2003: 276-280).

Talking about the third category, policy making, one can affect policy and political decisions in a number of ways such as by participating in a deliberative

procedure and expressing his opinion, by protesting against a decision or by proposing something new. Another possible way to do so is by expressing acute disagreement in respect to an already formed decision; in this case this disagreement can only have an impact if it is expressed jointly with other people and gains an increasing level of "public disagreement". However, even if someone is willing to affect policy making and he is doing it so in one of the aforementioned ways, the status and appreciation of his action by governmental bodies cannot be guaranteed. Moreover, the influence of this action on the formation of a specific policy is even less easy to be detected and measured. The only so far tested power of Internet in this policy affecting option, is its power to create easily communities, virtual communities that they can act as social force either by empowering policies or by trying to prevent them from been practiced. In this case a kind of political pressure can be exercised because the fear of a popular dissatisfaction is always a countable factor for politicians and measuring political cost is always a precondition for political survival.

Definitely one should be reserved about the actual contribution of Internet to the ideal of participation. Researches show that political participation is a complicated political behavior and it is always in close relation to existing social and economic conditions that should be examined "in concreto". Apart from the willingness of a citizen to be involved in politics there are a number of factors that have an effect on his final decision to do so. Along with the factors that concern state policy, equally important is political education and the political socialization of future -to be - citizens. If TV has educated contemporary citizens in its passive logic then perhaps a hope stands for Internet and new "Internetized television" given the precondition that future citizens are steadily educated of their role in politics and they realize the power of their participation.

As already stated in the beginning, political participation signifies a number of actions and behaviors that can not easily been evaluated and measured. For example: why is it more important as a political participation action the uploading of a video than the actual involvement of a person in party politics or a street-protest for example? We cannot ignore that there is a significant percentage of people "disconnected" yet interested in politics and there are, additionally a number of ways to express this interest without being involved in new media. Perhaps Internet can reinforce existing political activists but it is not at all sure that it can convince inactive citizens to participate.

Consequently and by contesting contemporary facets of "political participation" we should wonder if it is enough for someone to be "on-line" and searching for political information in order to be characterized as politically active. What makes us believe that the active blogger, who expresses his political views on the Internet but he is absent from elections or any other political act of the real world is really participating? Once again we cannot escape from the methodological prerequisite which asks a simple question. Which act constitutes political participation and which not? Certainly, more than one answer is available for this question which itself causes a round of new questions. To this extent, it would be safer to ask ourselves: "how do we expect to understand citizen's participation, what do we want from them", although somebody could argue that this question has an inherent antidemocratic nature. You do not set expectations from citizens. Citizens set expectations for politics. This could be a good point to begin with. Maybe a real good citizen with the "tag" of participation is the one worried about current condition, is the citizen who asks questions and exercises control in any given way. Finally, he is the

one who is closer to the Aristotelian concept of a citizen who cannot see himself outside "polis".

b) The Communicative challenge

Having as basis of our research the cooperation of Skai channel with YouTube we can trace some important elements regarding the role of Internet as a participatory medium in political communication. This "experiment" of "Internetized television" allow us to appraise Internet's role only to a certain level because this broadcast constitutes a quasi-Internet experience as its basic vehicle is TV. What is been clearly displayed is the evolution of television from one way communication model to a more interactive one, in which "old" televised politics overcome the lack of interactivity creating a trans-genre of "internetized" politics. Television remains the main carrier of the message but communication seems to flow from both sides this time. But is that so?

Surely there was an innovation introduced in this broadcast. The mediator of "journalists" was diminished to a certain degree. On the other hand, questions were not "live" but recorded. Citizens could not have a follow-up question to clarify possibly their first one or ask for further information; neither the politicians had the opportunity of a dialogue with citizens. Therefore part of passiveness remains in the procedure. "Interactivity" was not enforced but certainly "activity" was. This means that at least there was a motivation and interest of citizens to confront politicians face-to-face and receive a feedback from them more directly than usual. Television democracy and its one dimensional model seems to fade away but the new one will not easily overcome completely the old deficiencies. As bloggers have pointed out: *"This YouTube Democracy" is still passive. Videos are not live and no dialogue can*

be maintained. The only difference is that people have substituted journalists, which is important but not enough"[11]. Towards a direction of improvement, some politicians have proposed to the channel to accommodate in their next broadcasts a more "live version" for "SkaiYouTube Debate" that could facilitate a dialogue between citizens and politicians.

To conclude, regarding the Greek case, we have to notice that this broadcast was introduced in Greek society in a very awkward moment when disastrous fires have turned Southern Greece (Peloponeese) to a desert area. Therefore, the significance and urgency of this situation has overlapped any effort for a renewal in the perception of political life and electoral procedure was almost condemned to gain minimum attendance. Some "netizens" and bloggers also expressed their discontent about Skai TV channel that did not pay attention to the national disaster caused by the fires but expected citizens to forget everything and to be occupied with elections[12] .

Conclusions and further concerns

The contribution of Internet and new technologies in revitalizing democracy is ambivalent. On the other hand, there is certainly a positive link of youth civic engagement in politics because of new media. However, virtual public sphere seems to be significantly segmented and not inclusive as it should be. E-democracy plan has inherited almost the same social antinomies that teledemocracy had all these years. E-democracy is still a dependent variable that in many of its dimensions perpetuates existing social divisions.

In this research paper, we performed an extensive comparison of the impact of internetized television politics on different age groups. More specifically, our study is

three-fold: a) we test the participation of different age groups in the internetized television, b) we classify the topics that are raised by the participants in this new media, c) we analyse the impact of this new political communication media in citizens.

Based on our results, we conduct an in-depth theoretical discussion of the political and communicative challenges imposed by internetized television. In particular, our study has brought to surface some quite surprising results: a) E-democracy is not a panacea in motivating young people to participate in political deliberation b) Older people are more likely to participate in politics through these new media technologies, even if they are not that Internet literate. As a conclusion of the above results, we can strongly support that new technologies can alleviate political participation of citizens, but there are not the determinant factor in motivating their participation in politics. In other words, a citizen who is not politically active is not likely to become one because of new media existence. Maybe Internet and new technologies have not corresponded fully to the prophecies of a direct participatory democratic model. However, we cannot underestimate, that they have offered much in the exchange of ideas, in the creation of communities and in reconceptualizing participation and social life.

Finally, we cannot safely measure the impact of Internet in real politics and its possible effect on the forums where decisions are taken, because, in the end, what constitutes the critical moment in politics is political decision. What we can surely claim is the strong effect of interactive media towards the deliberation and decentralization of public sphere and the feeling that political game can return to where it belongs; to the people.

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Notes:

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 6th Annual APSA Preconference on Political Communication held in August 27, 2008 at Shorenstein Center, Harvard University, Boston, MA, USA. The author wishes to thank especially the chair Jeff Gulati and Richard Davis but also other participants of the preconference for their useful comments and suggestions on the paper.

[2] The initial title of this paper as a conference paper was "YouTube-YouAsk-YouVote" displaying this three level electoral procedure.

[3] We have to explain that the term "debate", at least in Greece, is used mainly for the debates of political leaders and not for any other broadcast where other candidates are participating.

[4] The spectatorship ratings in the traditional electoral debate of political leaders are increasing each electoral period. From 81,6 % in 2004 elections it has reached the number of 83,9 % (total spectatorship of all TV channels) in September 2007 elections and moreover in an season that the country was in a very difficult situation due to the disastrous fires. Data from: http://dailymedianews.blogspot.com/2007/09/debate_07.html (date of access: 10-07-2008).

[5] http://www.newpolitics.net/about/context/transformation (date of access: 22/12/2008).

[6] The Electoral period in National Elections in Greece has commenced on the 18th of August 2007 and finished a day before the elections, on the 15th of September 2007.

[7] We should also underline that two different kinds of debates were presented by Skai TV channel during the electoral period in question. The first one, we can call it "political debate", is the one that we are interested here, which involves citizens' participation. The second one, we can call it "thematic or specialists debate" was also a series of debates but each debate focused on one topic at a time (p.e. health) and only specialists (scientists, professionals) were making questions to politicians invited, no citizens. The first kind of debate, aimed, according to the channel, to enhance political participation, the second to offer a better knowledge and rich information on specific and crucial issues such as health, education etc. In this way, the goal of a well informed active citizen could be satisfied more adequately. This paper is concerned and investigates only on the "political debate".

[8] Data retrieved from the site www.youtube.com/skaidebate, on July 20th 2007.

[9] We have to clarify that except from some participants that said their age on the video the age of the rest was calculated by an approximate visual estimation of their appearance in videos.

[10] The level of abstention in the last National elections in Greece was ranged between 25-30 % an unusually high level if we consider that Greece is a country where voting is a constitutional obligation for citizens.

[11] Comment of a member in www.youtube.com/skaidebate channel (date of access 8-07-2008).

[12] One of these discussion forums can be found on http://www.toplinks.gr/web/youtube.com.skaidebates (date of access 5-07-2008).