

# **Public Political Communication and Media. The case of contemporary Greece.**

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June, 2005

## **ABSTRACT**

Modern politics are increasingly shaped by the dynamics of public communication. As a consequence, the success of governments that historically are interconnected to the State in general, is to a large extent dependent on their ability to communicate effectively to the broader public. In significant are the EU Publicity and Promotion Community Directives, which oblige the national governments to increase their communication with the Public/ the citizens.

The Media are now playing an active part in the political field. They compose a societal institution for the political management of the public sphere, and the media-centric logic emerges. Governments, in order to comply with the forenamed commitments and these newly coming trends, employ new communication policies and strategies. Furthermore, they set off modern public information tools such as "infoganda" (information + propaganda).

This paper builds upon my ongoing PhD thesis, the basis of which is the academic oriented research of Communication Science, prominent dimension of which are Public and Political Communication. Its main objective is to be as a reference point for the recording and the analysis of the Public Political Communication in Greece. The aim and aspiration of the thesis is to examine the existence of this complex framework in Greece and its extent by registering today's society depiction regarding the structure of power and the power of the institutions in Greece. The mapping of today's complex of influence among and within the political actors/ power vehicles (the government/ state and the Media) and the society/ public in Greece, will reveal how governments/ the state communicate and manage politically the public sphere, but further also, the "sexual" side of the Public Political Communication.

Specifically, the thesis addresses the following research questions;

- 1) How Public Communication is structured?
- 2) Which is the role and the contribution of the Media, in reinforcing the above-mentioned hypothesis and in the effectiveness of Public Communication?
- 3) Which are the new public opinion communication and information tools that support the Public communication and information strategies campaigns (communication of the State)?
- 4) Is the phenomenon of "infoganda" detected in Greece? If yes, in which form?
- 5) Which are the implications for the future of democracy and the evolvement of a Civil Society in Greece?

**Keywords:** Political Communication, Public Communication, Public Political Communication, Politics, Government, Media, Infoganda

## **Introduction**

Modern politics are increasingly shaped by the dynamics of public and political communication. Political communication is the role of communication in the political process, as Chaffee (1975) suggests simply and perhaps in the best way. (Lee Kaid, 2004) Government is a legitimate player in political process, and communication to the public is a legitimate element of this process. Public information, dispensed by government and other social groups, has become an increasingly vital aspect of politics. What is the role though, played by communication in the conduct of government and the making of public policy? In moral suasion, government communication is the governance tool itself. Appropriate public communication is necessary for them to become effective. (Engel, 2005) Most other governance tools do not automatically reach their addressees. As a consequence, the success of governments that historically are interconnected to the State in general is to a large extent dependent on their ability to communicate effectively to the broader public. Moreover, should government be allowed to spend public money on communication and public relations? The negative answer is easily prompted, if the question is framed that way. Yet government communication serves more purposes. These purposes should be analyzed in terms of politics, society and culture.

What is the role played by the media and principally the news media, in the above process? How do they interact with government and the public? Are citizens bombarded by crafted presentations? And, should the media be fully disentangled? Seemingly almost all communication scholars agree that the media are playing a growing role in modern politics. Contemporary news media function as a vital, but unofficial, intermediary branch of government. (Cook, 1998) However, the nature of that role is changing in uncertain ways that lead to speculations regarding their role in and effect on the transformation of the democratic process in the western contemporary societies.

Interweaving all the above-mentioned, the notion of the public political communication emerges as well as its potential to capture public opinion and interact with it in the socio-political context.

The challenge in this paper, which builds upon my ongoing PhD thesis, is to 'unmuffle' itself from the potential distortion of elections that tends to outweigh against the governance effect. (Engel, 2005) This paper attempts to achieve that, by interpreting governmental communication and public relations as a bundled product, and by examining it in non-electoral settings that have heretofore received only limited analysis and empirical research. Thus, it models the people as the principal, and the political parties running government as the agent, whereas the media lie as a linkage in between.

By observing newborn phenomena, the paper attempts to depict the governance effect and further, to establish whether the distortion effect of electoral periods is observable also within the governance effect and charge to the latter the characterization of the culprits for transformation as well. This set-up of the model invites a mapping of today's complex cluster of flow of information and influence among and within the political actors and power vehicles such as government/ state and the media, and the public, in terms of design.

## **Political Communication**

Political communication is perhaps the most "encephalic combination of art and science". Countries all over the world are becoming the land of the "politics overbuying" (Keriakakis, 2000). The offspring of the latter is the notion of political communication to be always current.

Why did political communication finally become an academic 'Eden' for many scholars?

The reason is simply that when the urge for mutual collaboration is stronger than disciplinary prejudices, scholars forge a multidisciplinary effort. This effort is a driving force in developing an individual field of study (Lee Kaid, 2004)

The study of political communication is a branch of contemporary communication studies that began at the turn of this century. Although this notion is not an invention of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its origins can be traced back many centuries e.g. Aristotle's and Plato's works in ancient Greece, as a cross-disciplinary field of study it began to emerge in the 1950s. Traces of the evolution of political communication and a greatest amount of scholarship can be found in the all the areas of the world, America; Europe; Britain and Germany, and Asia; China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Japan (Lee Kaid, 2004) However, political, social, cultural and media system differences should be acknowledged (Swanson & Mancini, 1996)

Political communication has emerged as a focal point to scholars in political science, communications, and allied social sciences. The label political communication first appeared to describe an intervening process by which political institutions and citizens interact with each other and political influences are mobilized and transmitted. (Lee Kaid, 2004) Over the past 30 years, there has been a widespread sense among political communication scholars and researchers, and so, have the mounting evidence presented, that "political communication is undergoing rapid, perhaps profound changes in many countries of the world and that the character of these changes might be worrisome" (Swanson, 1999).

That "still emerging, phase is marked by the proliferation of communication, media abundance, ubiquity, reach and celerity". (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999) This third called age is more multifaceted than its two<sup>1</sup> predecessors, since it is more an amalgam of conflicting crosscurrents such as intensified professionalizing imperatives, increased competitive pressures, anti-elitists populism, and it is a process of 'centrifugal diversification' and changes in how people perceive and receive politics, than simply a dominant tendency. (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999)

Historically as a field of inquiry, political communication is intellectually rooted in five research traditions. These five traditions later evolved in to two dominant approaches in political communication research; rhetorical criticism and social-scientific analysis. These two approaches have generated most of the studies in the field. These studies are usually considered mainstream political communication research. In the field of political communication research both of the above dominant analysis / approaches make important contributions, but neither of them establishes hegemony. (Lee Kaid, 2004) Yet, the diversity of research topics and methods are the basic features that reveal the maturity of the field.

A research tradition that made its unique contribution to the emergence of the new area of the communication study (political communication), is the tradition of political propaganda study during the period of post World War I to post World War II. Scholars like Lasswell and Doob, focused on how different governments used propaganda / persuasive messages to influence public opinion. Lasswell's (1927) quantitative analysis (content analysis) of messages generated by the government demonstrated the power of mass political communication in forming public opinion (Lee Kaid, 2004)

Another tradition is the tradition of institution study of the press and government and their relation to public opinion. The political effects of the mass media according to this tradition

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<sup>1</sup> The first age is temporalized in the first two decades after World War II, and the passage to the second age has been made in the 1960s where the nationwide, limited-channel television starts to dominate.

are the result of the media agenda – setting process in which media may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling people what to think about (Lee Kaid, 2004)

In general terms, many of the earliest contemporary communication studies were generated by analyses of propaganda / persuasive messages, mass media effects on voting and public opinion of political and social issues. (Lee Kaid, 2004)

Politics, as an ongoing conversation about social issues, encompass a broad scope of political communication and demonstrate the ubiquity of political communication in contemporary life and in non-electoral periods. Internal and external political communication channels are the nerves of government. Political system can not function without effective networks of such channels capable of transmitting political messages. (Lee Kaid, 2004) Hence, there is much concern about political communication such as an inactive and uninformed public at the societal level, as most political action and power relationships operate at that or other systemic levels; the latter leads to the seeking of a more properly functioning democracy. Moreover, this new DNA of political communication, clearly a product of the second half of the 20th century, with television situated in the centre of today's politics, is the reason for many to support that today's "politics have entered a world, which usurps cultural values, a world that changes its face like a chameleon, which speculates miscellaneous identities" (Kathimerini Newspaper, 2000).

While charting the evolution of political communication's dynamic, scholars are now orientating to concepts such as the "modern publicity process"<sup>2</sup>, the loss of the traditional form and function of the political parties, the competition for control of the media, public and political agenda, the media power in and control of politics, the development of the political marketing and the professionalism in campaigning, the rise of infotainment and the permanent campaigning, the appearance of political professionals in the decision making process within political parties, the audience's reception of politics, and the 'Americanization' and / or 'Modernization' hypothesis. On the whole, all the forenamed are describing current changes of political communication.

In addition to the above, comes the fact that the principles of political communication are undergoing ongoing changes so as to comply with the demands of the times that of globalization, e-democracy, civil society, etc. Consequently, modern public communication and information tools are developed. As a result, in terms of politics, western contemporary democracies are experiencing the transformation of the political party in power, in the long run, to a governing party exclusively. Continually, the governing party ends up privileging itself, directly or indirectly, in order to empower its positing in the national political scene. As any other innovative tendency finds birth in the United States so this phenomenon detected firstly there and is now being observed over the world.

This phenomenon of having political communication practices introduced to the world by the Americans, Americanization, has been stressed by many researchers. Countries such as Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Israel, Russia, Spain, Sweden, many Latin American countries, and others have seen this trend, and newly developing democracies in East and Central Europe are also being affected. This new boundary, which is being transgressed in the democratic societies, has as most striking feature the fact that patterns and common

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<sup>2</sup> This term involves a comparative struggle to influence and control perceptions of key political events and issues through the major mass media, and it has been used in Habermas, J., (1962), "*Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Politischer Funktionswandel der Öffentlichkeit*", Neuwieg and in Ferguson, M., (1991), "*Public communication; The new imperatives*", SAGE Publications, p. 103-111.

implications are taking place simultaneously in different countries, whose contexts are so dissimilar in many other respects. (Swanson, 1999) Many democracies share changes with a great amount of common themes despite great differences in their political cultures, histories, and institutions. Hence, many researchers encapsulate these changes in, and characterize this pattern of innovation as 'Americanization' of the media and the political process. (Butler & Ranney, 1992) For all the modern features, which are apparent in all democracies, the United States has been a pioneer and almost all of the other democracies have followed later. Thus, the term of Americanization suggests itself as an easy characterization, since it facilitates the description of "the social, political and economic make-up of the West", and not a more general fundamental cultural phenomenon. The American experience may have been the prime source of inspiration, but not a perfect 'fit' into the political systems of other nations. (Negrine, 1996)

Actually in this Americanization approach as in the globalization concept, the procedures are more complex. United States communication consultants have been used in Britain, yet there was also a reverse of exchange communication expertise. Proportionately, the same case is with Greece for example; there have been used communications consultants from Europe as well as the Americans and Greek communications consultants have offered their expertise also in other countries such as Bulgaria, Albania, Cyprus (Papathanasopoulos, 2004)

In charting the progression of political communication as a distinctive field, we reach nowadays; an exiting time for research in political communication. The field's attraction is not only because of all its above transformations, but also because of its shift from a one-dimensional reliance of survey research to the current flourishing of methodological diversity. (Iyengar, 2001)

## **Public Communication**

The objective of public communication is to transmit messages targeting the public and enabling it to have an overall view, while at the same time is able to retain its distance from the general strategy and the central messages being transmitted by government so that to achieve its goals and policies. This way allows the public to discover the connection between the politics of the Ministries and other public institutions or organizations and the central politics of government; regardless it impresses it as either positive or negative.

Not any political message can find an application without the public. But, what exactly does the term public stands for?

According to Thompson (1999), the term public can be seen through two prisms during the evolvement of the western democracies. The first aspect, concerning the dichotomy between public and private, is based on the relationship between the field of institutionalized political power, and the economic and other activities that do not fall under direct political control. The public space includes the state and semi-state owned institutions, whereas the private refers more, to the economic and market oriented organizations. Of course, this distinction during the historical evolution of contemporary societies has never been definite or strict. The second aspect sees this dichotomy as it appears in the social and political speech. According to that the term public means open and available to the public; visible and observable from the public and effectuated in front of it. Thus, public has to do with publicity and diaphaneity / transparency.

With the evolution of the media, however, a new intermediary space is being established between those two, regardless the prism through which they are seen and, thus their boundaries are being redefined. New publicity forms and formats make their appearance;

the mediated publicity, with which all get acquainted and further, attempt to tame its evolving nature by finding ways to manage it. (Demertzis, 2002) This process nevertheless, has affected to a great extent the circumstances under which the political power is being exercised. Further, this positing of the news media as a central political force in national governments, as Cook supports, raises also, questions for government officials and citizens. (1998) Reaching today's times, it could be argued that society is in a phase, where all these political rulers and power holders are discovering other new ways and forms to mold public communication in the everyday governing and away from electoral periods.

Public space means the space, the whole spectrum where the polity operates. Consequently, the meaning of the management of this public space refers to the political operation of those power institutions that play a decisive role in the formation of political opinion and will, in the societal and state level. According to recent researches (Mavris, Givalos, Vernardakis, Karapanagiotis & Findanidis, 1998), in Greece for example, the basic categories of institutions are considered to be: businesses, the media and government. In this triangle is being detected today's society depiction regarding the power structure and the power of the institutions. Moreover, still according to the forenamed research, the positioning of government in the power structure is not autonomic, rather is being overmastered by the dominant power of the other two basic power institutions, businesses and the media. Thereupon, the political supervisor of the executive authority (government) does not merely by itself constitute the balancing point of the power nexus nowadays. The political management of the public sphere in contemporary democracies has been devolved to other hands. Could it be that their communication is too?

Communication practices and technologies have come to dominate media – government relations. This systematic professional control of strategic public communication applies to democracies on both sides of the Atlantic. (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999) Media control is widely thought to be essential for governing. Politicians and officials use publicity to make news, to get the attention of other policymakers, to set agendas, and to help persuade others into action. This link between governing and publicity in all political institutions has news media as the facilitator for enabling politicians to accomplish their policy goals. (Cook, 1998) Moreover, more sophisticated news management operations that enable officials to retain control of key political messages, restoring the media – government balance in favor of government, arise. So, there is more to the story of media – government relations and the political content of news media than simply that the media are dependent upon official sources. (Bennett & Livingston, 2003)

### **The media in modern politics**

Political action is apprehensible and tangible through the relationship among political institutions, the public and the media.

The media constitute a societal carrier for managing politically the public sphere. They act politically within the framework of the broader societal system, and today their interposition in the polity's operation with the development and the constant evolvement of the technology, is powerful. A fundamental element of the centrality of the media to today's politics is the near-instantaneous delivery of political events and issues by television and Internet. By any objective standard, the media are critically important to government and politics. Most significant is the extent to which politicians use various methods to communicate with their constituencies, which renders the media to a linkage institution. The media may be key elements, or objectively important to government and politics since

they constitute a vast economic power. This concentration of economic power is likely to be accompanied by political power as well. (Leighley, 2004)

Moreover, the media have a critical role in the communication of the government with the public. Thus, considering they might shape public opinion, they have a share also in the shaping of the political will. The media have several responsibilities within a democratic society. Among others are: a) to inform and educate the public accurately and completely and b) to independently investigate claims made by biased sources, most notably the government.

The last 20 years have witnessed important changes in news content patterns. Pinpointing the changes that have occurred between news and politics are media logic and entertainment formats, meaning the packaging of events for media attention that will appeal to audiences. The format and logic of newsworthy information shape the nature of discourse itself and have consequences for the content of political communication. (Altheide, 2004)

Through out the last years there has been sufficient demonstration that the media is in desperate need of reform. The absence of substance in news content has a great deal to do with the structural and organizational constraints that constantly bear on the news decisions of media, journalists and even politicians maintaining the gatekeeping function. Lance Bennett offers a four-pronged, multi-gated model that drives the modern news cycles; application in different historical and political contexts, the reporter's news judgment values, bureaucratic or organizational news gathering routines, economics, and information and communication (Lee Kaid, 2004)

This leading role of the media in political communication and their anagoge to a linkage between government and the public is largely favored by the absence or the weak presence of a civil society in the countries. And thus, the Americanization process in these countries is more intense. Such paradigms are the South European countries particularly Spain and Greece, in contrast to the North and Central European ones. (Papathanasopoulos, 2004) Nevertheless, the form of the Americanization process in these countries is shaped differently as Papathanasopoulos argues; the bureaucracies of the political parties remain powerful, and there is a lack of communication among the party members and their constituencies or the public in general, which retains that the power of the clientele system has not faded out. Political parties much more their leaderships are closely dependent on the media so as to bring themselves forth to public view. (2004) And hence, they end up adopting the media logic regarding their public communication. Moreover, the traditional carriers (parliament, direct contact with the citizens) of political communication lose their special weight and subserve the entering of Americanization and telecracy in these countries. (Papathanasopoulos, 2004)

### **Public Political Communication**

If all the above interwoven, interrelate, inter-collaborate and interact with each other, the applied field of the study of public political communication is shaped; a field that borrows characteristics from all the above fields of study distinctively, and interlaces them so as to provide a framework for another form of study of political communication. It might be another side of the 'Eden' of political communication unleashing its scientific and academic charm.

In contemporary society public opinion is generally mediated by the mass media, which has come to encompass the Habermasian 'public sphere'. This arena is now characterized

by the conflict between market and democratic principles, by competing interests of politicians and the media. The presentation of information for debate becomes distorted. The opinion of the 'public' is no longer created through deliberation, but is constructed through systems of communication, in conflict with political actors, who seek to retain control of the dissemination of information. (Savigny, 2002)

Government and people communicate via various forms and channels; advertising a new policy or communicating changes in an older one, promoting or propagandizing certain ideas, etc. Specifically, government publicity and public communication can be distinguished in the types of a) electoral, b) advertising meaning the promotion of the services / "products" of the public institutions, c) propagandistic and d) informational.

As a form of political communication, political advertising is both celebrated and reviled. Government is free to advertise. But advertising is costly in that it generates a handicap at the next elections. (Engel, 2005) Political advertising has evolved into the dominant form of communication between government and its constituencies. Furthermore, in a variety of forms and styles, it has also become a staple of communication among government and the public in democracies around the world (Lee Kaid, 2004) Although politicians and statesmen have sought to promote themselves and their ideas throughout the history and evolution of democratic systems of government, political advertising is often considered a relatively modern form of political promotion. Differences in political systems, media systems and cultural constraints have accounted for many differences in the speed and extent to which other democracies have adopted political advertising as a central component of the communication of their politics in both electoral and non-electoral settings. (Swanson & Mancini, 1996)

In the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, government and public institutions increased their use of advertising a public policy tool in non-electoral settings so as to attain political and image enhancement goals. Sponsored by public or private entities and designed to influence public opinion, has occupied a unique place in the political system, because it often blurs the line between commercial and political speech. On the one hand the purpose of the advertising can be seen as offering information and viewpoints on a political issue. On the other hand it is also often the case that such advertising had the ultimate purpose of influencing policy that may have political or economic implications for the promoter. (Lee Kaid, 2004)

The use of strategic communication and political public relations by governments has also increased in the last decades. Governments are changing the face of politics by attempting to directly "sell" their message to the public, rather than having complex policy matters debated in Parliament or disseminated by more traditional media (television, radio, newspapers). The rise of this trend is symptomatic of the decline of the public dialogue. (Rose, 2000)

Campaigns are a communicational technology of planned social change. They are organized and sustained communicational strategies of social engineering. National campaigns are set out as an instrument of social governance. Engineering social change via communication campaigns is a widespread practice across the globe. (Lazar, 2003) Thus, they provide the socio-political framework within which the changing nature of the relationship between politics and communication can be examined.

Although campaigns have been a constant feature of governance, the design and management of the campaigns have not remained static, but have changed over the decades, consonant with shifts within the political field of government; a notable shift in the political field has been the difference in the style of governance practiced by the different political parties in power each time. (Lazar, 2003)

In significant are the European Union Publicity and Promotion Community Directives, which oblige national governments to increase their communication with the public. Further, all countries boast an internet site, and many individual ministries have their own homepages. Strategic communication is contracted sometimes out by private agencies, rather than done by the government itself. These agencies advise government as to how best to package their policies in order to gain approval in the domestic scene, how and when to control access to news and information so that they appear to best advantage in the media, and how to communicate with and through the news media. They teach them what to say about their policies and activities. They help governments to control access to information, potential news makers, and events, and to generate newsworthy or stage media events.

The rise of this trend of government publicity has led government and more in particular the political party in power, on top of its own budget allocations for publicity and promotion to also exploit those budget allocations of the public sector institutions, in order to promote the government work, itself and in extent the specific political party. This in turn has impacts on the communication of the public sector institutions, which makes their communication, depended and directed, without any open space for communication initiatives. Further, such attempts evoke more public criticism about government using public money to publicize and promote ideas and a discussion of the nature of the discourse between government and the public; whether it reflects, under the guise of providing information, an effort to change public opinion, to persuade the public indirectly. Thereby, creating a demand for information, when not identified from the public, brings government fighting off charges of propaganda. Is something else going on here, something of far greater significance?

The aftermath of the above is the abridgement in practice of those types of public communication, the propagandistic, the informational and probably the electoral, in an indivisible one, the "communication of the achievements". Government campaigns may be a form of domestic propaganda, designed and evaluated by a set of communication scholars drawn from various social sciences (Lee Kaid, 2004) Therefore, it seems that public communication can have a multiple effect apart from public action. Thus, the moral of communication emerges as a focal point. So, how effectively governments communicate? Which is the role and the contribution of the media in reinforcing the above and in the effectiveness of public communication? What is the factual media's role in contemporary politics?

The public character of politics is often conflicting to the desire of the politicians to survive in the political scene, and thus at times it gets sacrificed. As a result the public might receive as information in the public sphere, an incomplete and segmental picture of the reality. The actual fact of the encryption is withheld from the public. The manipulation of the public and the withhold of information are practices that derive from the political actors and are being exercised via the media, which at times are supervising in favor of the public interest and at others, they consent. The difference between persuasion, traditionally recognized as a political actor's act, and the manipulation, which encompasses propaganda elements, is difficult to define. Therefore, transformed to a tool, manipulation holds an increasing attention in contemporary democratic politics.

The media and particularly the news media began to discover the importance of the above-mentioned as publicity tools and acknowledged their significance as a major force in the socio-political discourse. Media consultant Tony Schwartz who produced the famous 'daisy girl' spot for Lyndon Johnson in 1964 observed long before others seemed to

understand what it meant that in the past political parties were the means of communication from government to public. The political parties today are ABC, NBC and CBS etc. (Lee Kaid, 2004)

Media agendas can have substantial impact on the priorities and behavior of government, but they also suggest that the influence is sometimes from government to the media, rather vice versa, and that journalists and government officials often cooperate with each other to raise the salience of various issues and problems without first involving public opinion. (Lee Kaid, 2004)

Who sets the media's agenda? There are many different agendas in society and many different agenda setters. Of course, different cultures and norms of politics and journalism lead to different outcomes, different norms and interactions result in quite different political agendas. The active agenda setting role of the media assumed by many public agenda setting studies, is nowadays questioned. The media may be merely passing on agendas set by other influential actors and institutions in society, which makes inaccurate to think of the media as the dominant agenda setters. Government sometimes influences the subsequent media agenda and sometimes follows earlier media and public agendas. Specifically, important news sources influence on the media agenda is the corps of government public information officers and other public relations practitioners. They subsidize the efforts of news organizations to cover the news by providing substantial amounts of information. Prominent personalities and government sources as well as polls and personal conversations and affiliations are more influential news sources. Moreover, journalists are ready to use government or party – initiated material. Catalysts are the formal and informal transactions between journalists and officials. So, considering that news organizations have their substantial reliance on government communication and public relations sources, the key role that information subsidies play in the formation of all media agendas, is being underscored. And, that in turn might leave some open untutored space available to be cultivated, maybe with modern public communication and information tools? Modern tools that influence the media agenda for issues traditionally owned by the political party in power, that invent the advantage of exerting control over the message conveyed to the public, and thus escaping the gatekeeping function of the news media.

Media influence is enhanced or diminished by the political power or weakness of other players in the political arena. The expectations that the media foster democratic governance and guard against abuses of power by government officials are tempered by the realities of power struggles. (Graber, 2001) The news is in a state of continual change, defined and redefined by economics, journalism, technology, politics and public. Today's news system has evolved as an essential tool of government at a time where audiences increasingly mistrust politicians and journalists. Moreover, it evolves under pressures of commercial political profit and political spin. (Bennett, 2003) The political power structure tries to shape the news content directly and indirectly. Government's officials try to manipulate the media to their advantage, to foster their preferred policies and to win favorable publicity. Communication structures in many ways map the social connections and their practices express cultural habits and understandings.

2003 and 2004 seem to confirm the suspicions of a public already dubious about government communication. Although the news media provided a window on the world of politics, the content which the public received was subject to widespread criticism. (Stanyer, 2004)

Characteristically are the following cases:

The Department of Health and Human Services in United States sent out a video news release to extol the virtues of the Administration's new Medicare prescription-drug benefit, complete with fake reporters and a shot of President Bush receiving a standing ovation as he signed the bill.

«A government spokesman, said in defending the fake TV 'news' stories, with pure Orwell-speak : *"Anyone who has questions about this practice needs to do some research on modern public information tools."* ..... It is hard to argue with that. In a world of infomercials, advertorials, and docudramas, what's more imposture? ..... *"They created a whole new category of fake news — infoganda,"* Rob Corrdry said. *"We'll never be able to keep up!"* ..... But Mr. Corrdry's joke is not really a joke. The more real journalism declines, the easier it is for such government infoganda to fill the vacuum. .... Moreover, George W. Bush tries to facilitate this process by shutting out the real news media as much as possible. By the start of 2004, he had held only 11 solo press conferences, as opposed to his father's count of 71 by the same point in his presidency. (Even the criminally secretive Richard Nixon had held 23.) George W. Bush has declared that he rarely reads newspapers and that he prefers to "go over the heads of the filter" — as he calls the news media — and "speak directly to the people." ..... There's no point in bothering with actual news people anyway, when you can make up your own story and make it stick, whatever the filter might have to say about it. No fake news story has become more embedded in our culture than the administration's account of its actions on 9/11. .... After 9/11, similar fake-news techniques helped speed us into "Operation Iraqi Freedom." The run-up to the war was falsified by a barrage of those "modern public information tools" .....» (New York Times, 2004)

« ..... Infoganda missions; the effort of the U.S. government to shape public opinion by going around traditional news outlets with positive stories about its policy initiatives. Media observers worry, however, such efforts further colonize U.S. news organizations, and by extension public opinion, in ways similar to the effect televised coverage sent home by embedded reporters had with its overwhelmingly upbeat but sometimes misleading accounts of the war in Iraq ..... » (Zewe, 2004)

The above are Bush administration's recent attempts to produce propaganda videos, intended for broadcast during actual news programs, for both the Iraq war and the much-criticized Medicare prescription drug plan.

The fusion word of infoganda has been coined by the correspondent Rob Corrdry on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show"<sup>3</sup>, Wednesday 17th of March 2004. After that, the word has gotten mainstream acceptance with its use in an Op – Ed column by Frank Rich of the New York Times. The journalist extended infoganda to the range of ploys the United States Administration has used to spin news coverage, from the manipulation of the Jessica Lynch story, the "Mission Accomplished" photo op aboard the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln, and the editorial direction it offered to Showtime's movie "DC 9/11" to the TV blitz by Condi Rice and others aimed at discrediting Richard Clarke. (Nunberg, 2004)

Since then, several attempts were made in order to capture its meaning. Simply said is the obliteration of the line between news and propaganda.

Another definition is the one that describes it as the act of using public information networks such as newscasts or newspapers in a misleading, devious, or mischievous way,

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<sup>3</sup> It is a satirical 'fake news' program. One of the sharpest political commentary US TV shows: in 2004 has been honored by the Television Critics Association by winning for Outstanding Achievement in News and Information, beating out traditional news shows in the category.

to disperse a hidden propagandistic message that seems plausible to the population. (<http://keywords.oxus.net>, 2005)

One more definition is that infoganda is a term describing a dramatic or literary work that contains both elements of an infomercial and propaganda. The term was sporadically used in both the popular media and in blogs since 2001. Infoganda is a form of propaganda<sup>4</sup> in which the message is delivered in a format that imitates an infomercial<sup>5</sup>; a commercial message that purports itself to be purely informational. The combination of an infomercial and propaganda is an advertisement or show that pretends to be neutral (typically a news source) that has a real agenda of promoting the biased viewpoint of a large organization, typically a religious or government entity. (<http://en.wikipedia.org> , 2005)

Infoganda is a relatively new phenomenon. The word infoganda though, is not a new invention. For first time the press used it during the Gulf War of 1991 in order to name the reports and footage that the Pentagon was furnishing to journalists. Being critical about the word, one would say that it could have been coined in other occasions too and that it seems like a natural name for this sort of thing; it fits the pattern of those spliced – together portmanteau words like infotainment and docudrama, which can be thought as genre benders. (Nunberg, 2004)

Many historical instances of propaganda were very close to being infoganda. Filmed news reports of World War II, the Korean conflict, and other wars can be seen as having carried propaganda in a news format.

Definitely this new word came to describe the government – produced fake news, but why was there need for a new word? Were not things adequately covered by the word propaganda?

Propaganda<sup>6</sup> entered, the everyday vocabulary in the First World War, when the British and Germans began to use the new techniques of mass advertising and public relations to rouse popular support for their cause. As one journalist observed, "before 1914, 'propaganda' belonged only to literate vocabularies and possessed a reputable, dignified meaning ..... two years later the word had come into the vocabulary of peasants and ditch-diggers and had begun to acquire its miasmic aura" (Nunberg, 2004)

Americans got more closely acquainted with this practice in its current sense when President Woodrow Wilson took the country to war against Germany in 1917<sup>7</sup>.

After a long journey throughout time, the use of propaganda declined and met its end in the period of the Vietnam War and the fall of Communism. Since then, the word is just another word without so common reference. (Nunberg, 2004) A characteristic depiction of this tendency is demonstrated in the following chart, which brings forward two explanations.

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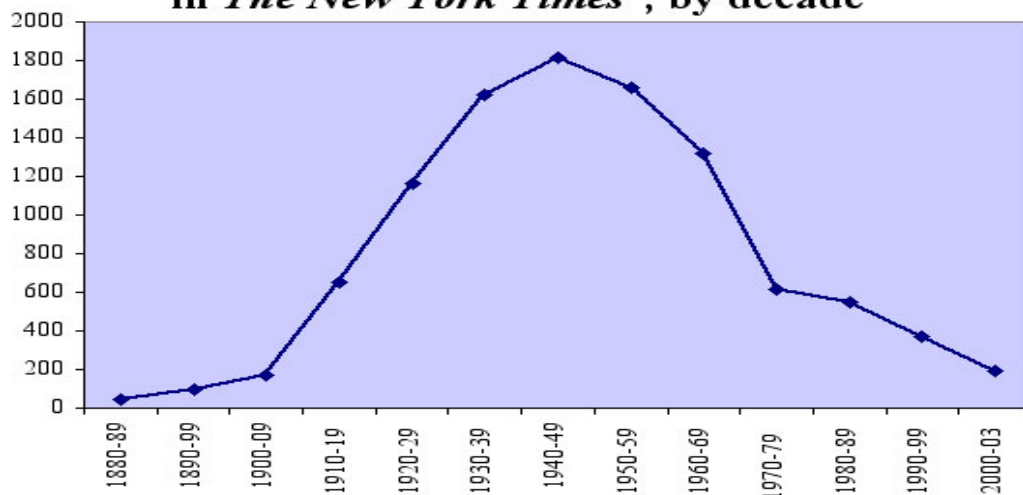
<sup>4</sup> Propaganda is a message with an underlying agenda. That agenda can be obvious or not. Typically propaganda is used to refer to dramatic or literary works created by highly biased government or religious entities

<sup>5</sup> An infomercial is a work of commercial speech (typically a television advertisement) whose purpose is to advertise a commercial endeavor. These commercials can often include fake news anchors that pretend to be neutral observers even though they are all participants in a ruse to sell something.

<sup>6</sup> Propaganda was originally coined by the Jesuits in the 17th century as the name of the Vatican committee charged with propagating the faith.

<sup>7</sup> That is when the first Committee on Public Information was set up to do the propaganda work and became known as the Creel Committee after its chairman, the journalist George Creel. Later, when Roosevelt decided to join the war against Germany (in 1941), he set up an Office of Facts and Figures to mobilize public support.

### **Average Annual Frequency of "Propaganda" in *The New York Times* , by decade**



(Source : Nunberg, 2004)

Firstly, offers a rationale basis on why the new sophisticated word made its first mainstream appearance in the New York Times. Secondly and much more substantial, provides a fertile ground according to linguist Nunberg<sup>8</sup>, for explaining why people felt the need to coin the new word infoganda to describe the fake news shows and contrived photo ops that are designed to blend seamlessly into the media background.

Is it the rebirth of propaganda? There may be nothing new about these techniques, but the current administration of the United States has exploited them more deftly than anyone since Roosevelt's day, as Nunberg supports. And, they have found a fertile ground for their plantings in the modern media setting, which already blurs the lines between journalism and advocacy and reality and fiction. (Nunberg, 2004) The latter speeds us into 'operation Iraqi freedom' with the fake news techniques, the secretly release of fake news stories, the fusion of unrelated events to make a point, and the use of terrifying matters of national security to distract public.

Moreover, it is supported that the difference between propaganda and infoganda is that the second is propaganda, only dishonest in addition; a covert propaganda, which makes it even more dangerous. In the case of infoganda, the disseminator's agenda is hidden behind the cover of objective reporting. Whereas propaganda, although it means an overt and usually dishonest attempt to influence opinion via biased and unbalanced reporting, the information used is not necessarily dishonest, since propagandist does not bother to hide his/her agenda. The message presentation aims at serving an agenda. It is honest in that regard, if someone could say. The aim of propaganda is to actively influence people's opinions, rather than to merely communicate the facts about something. The most common use of the term is in political contexts. (<http://casadelogo.typepad.com> , 2005) Despite superficial similarities with propaganda, the term infoganda refers to a very peculiar kind of propaganda. The infomercial format that has developed in the United States since 1990 has a specific format, which includes fabricated names of reporters, scripted interviews with other supposedly neutral people, a maximum use of authority-projecting (costumed) professionals (doctors, lawyers, etc.), the use of statistics in the

<sup>8</sup> GEOFFREY NUNBERG is a linguist at Stanford's Center for the Study of Language and Information. He adapted this article for Perspective from a commentary that aired on NPR's ``Fresh Air."''

same way that news organizations use it, and other similarities to local news. Infoganda is the use of this format to sell propaganda to the viewers. (<http://en.wikipedia.org> , 2005)

In a publicist – driven culture where it's an art form to blur the line between truth and fiction, television is increasingly awash in fake anchors delivering fake news, some of them far more trenchant than real anchors delivering real news. Real journalism and its evil twin merge into a mind-bending mutant that would defy a polygraph's ability to sort out the lies from the truth. Moreover, with trust in politicians and public institutions already at an all time low, attempts of this kind give evidence for further government's mendacity, foster a corrosive cynicism and may destroy any little trust there is left in government communication. (Stanyer, 2004)

### **The case of Greece**

The development of the Greek media is closely interrelated with the political circumstances that characterize the Greek history. Thus, the media were used to a great extent as tools of political propaganda. The latter in correlation with the fact that the media market development has been relatively slow and weak, has lead the media to build up and to sustain a dependency and reliance with the state, political parties and other institutions. This in turn has restrained their professional evolvement and their emertion as autonomic institution. Although the changing forces of today's global media environment such as globalization, commercialization and life style / aesthetics, have contributed to the change of media structure and work, and have affected the communication system structure as well, the media in Greece as in other Mediterranean countries, can not shake off the above-mentioned historical legacy, which still has its influences on their overall structure and actions. (Papathanasopoulos, 2004) Having the press evolved as an institution that mainly reflects the political world rather than the market dynamics, and with a non mass circulation character, due to economic and political factors, the media did not mature until the middle of the twentieth century. Consequently, Papathanasopoulos comes to the conclusion that the only factual media in Southern Europe and therefore in Greece, are the electronic ones; television. The high and still ongoing, rates of average television viewing in the countries that matured in the mid of the twentieth century, comes to confirm the above conclusion. (2004)

Moreover, journalism has an interpretative style. The media tend to have political nuance and their reports emit a political essence, since journalists and media owners have often political commitments or alliances.

In addition, the media are controlled by private interests. The latter leads to the media's exploitation for political and business purposes and, transforms them into tools for political pressure. (Papathanasopoulos, 2004) The Charta of the forth estate in Greece is noticeable that officially has not yet been sketched out and de-structured, albeit the efforts of the National Audiovisual Council and Greek government's regulation regarding the "basic shareholder".

Public television is under the direct control of the government and hence, government policies find a channel to be publicized and promoted and if not consented, then definitely not doubted. There is a great politicization of the televisual field. (Swanson & Mancini, 1996) This intense indeed, politicization of the public televisual field and the loose supervision of the private one, results to the deregulation of the societal role of the media and their services.

To that comes as an addition the fact that journalists themselves believe that the media exercise power instead of controlling it, in a percentage of 53,9%, that they are vulnerable

to “side” interferences during their work (79,7%), and that journalism is dependent on political (69,5%) and economic (82,8%) power, which in turn applies restrictions on the journalistic work (83,8%). (Papathanasopoulos, 2004)

Audience confirms the above by stating that businesses have the first role as a power institution (80,1%), and businesses’ (85,4%) and media owners (78,8%) are the two factors apart from influences from abroad, that shape political decisions. (Mavris, Givalos, Vernardakis, Karapanagiotis & Findanidis, 1999)

Taking as paradigm the following case study regarding the engagement of journalists and power in Greece; their occupation in public positions and their multi-positing, an essence is being emitted. An essence of what, is the examining subject of my PhD thesis and research.

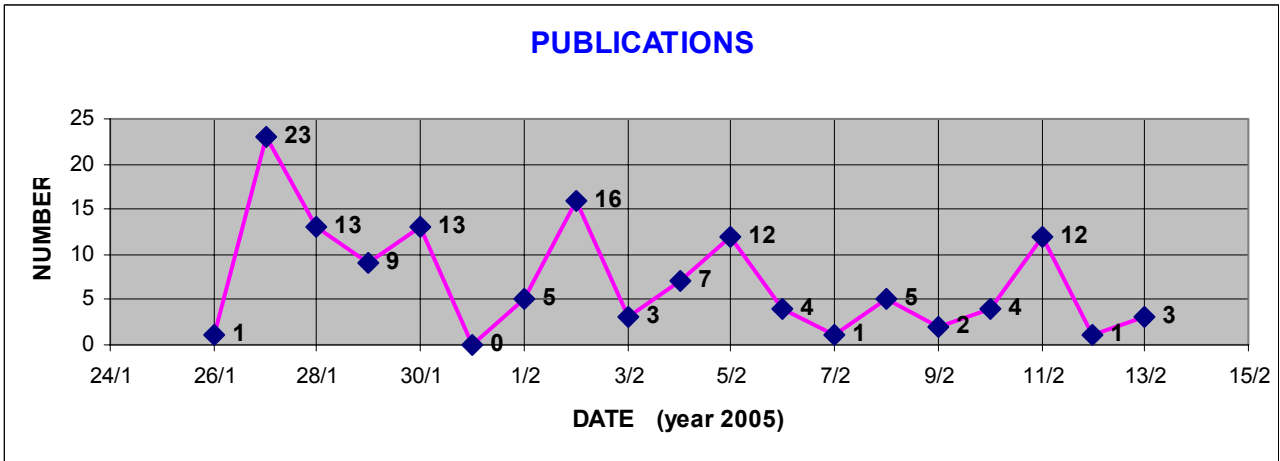
Corruption is an issue that the Greek public with a percent of 87% nowadays, believes that it has to be fought off. Moreover, the Greek public (57%) feels that this government is determined to fight it off. (Kathimerini Newspaper, 27/1/2005)

So, in 34 newspapers and in a period of almost 20 days the issue has entered the news. The media agenda has been apparently set. The variability of its stressing in the media agenda is shown below (Graph 1 & 2). Considering that the issue has two natures; it is news for the media and a direct reference to the media and the journalistic profession as well, made it more crucial, heavy and essential. And, adding to the above that it was upheaved by the government particularly by the State Minister (Greek Administration) under whose authority are the media and the communication of the Greek government, put on more eccentricity. So, framing the issue this way, it is suggested by itself that the government set the media and the political agenda sensing and exploiting to its advantage the public vide. And, the striking thing is that it used the actual media themselves to make clear how sets the agenda.

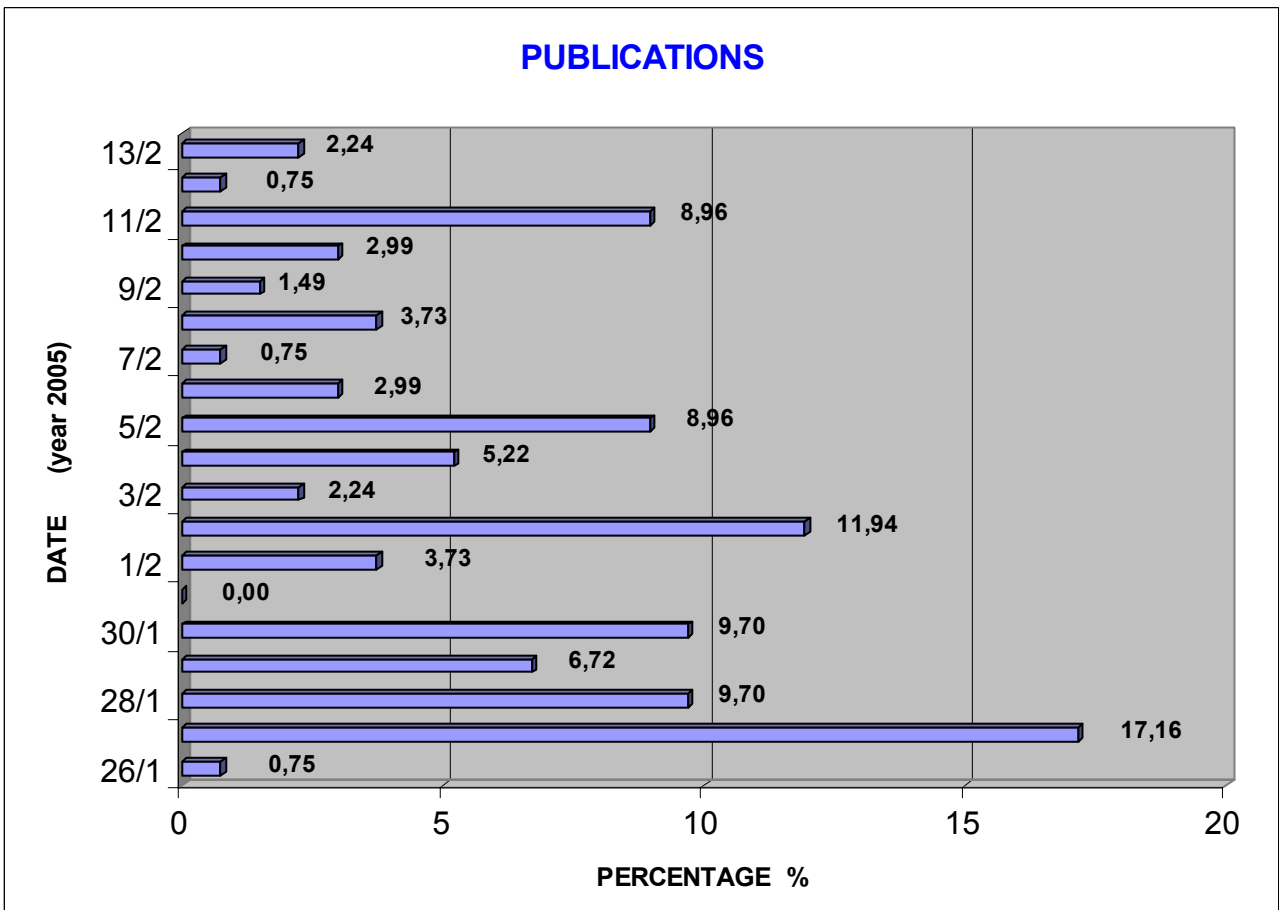
The pick points demonstrate each time the government administration sources provided more data and information to support their first position towards the issue. Firstly, by opening the subject of corruption while making references to names’ lists and bringing out media’s reactions, secondly by triggering comments and reportages over the issue also by the professional union (ESHEA), thirdly by releasing the list to ESHEA and coming in conflict with it, then by passing the ball of the publicizing to the court of the other player, ESHEA, regarding this issue, and lastly by introducing policy solutions.

It could be argued that the path of the issue reveals a felicitous even masterful media management operation, planned carefully enough by the Greek Administration so that government establishes itself in the eyes of both the public and journalists; enjoying public approval for its initiatives and also tangling with the media to that extent that pinpoints kindly who sets the agenda, even by using the media themselves as an issue to achieve that. The paradigm just examined the tactics employed to persuade public of government’s intentions and to tame the media at the same time. Nevertheless, this can not be considered at this stage, as a solid conclusion for the fragile trust on government communication, because it derives from one specific paradigm. It gives a taste of how to better understand the concepts behind this kind of communication strategies by looking beyond the flow of messages from senders to receivers to the social and political context in which the exchange takes place. Simply, it just introduces the grounds on which my PhD thesis will unfold itself.

Graph – 1 –



Graph – 2 –



**My PhD Thesis**

The scope of my PhD thesis is to underline the objective of public political communication, by narrowing it down to the sphere of the government / state activity that refers to governmental politics (governing party, ministries, and organizations with solely shareholder the state) and by analyzing their ability to communicate and further to manage politically the public sphere.

All societal issues are accompanied by estimations of the role of the media, given the fact that everything nowadays is materialized via or with the use of the media. Continually an examination of, if and how the media constitute the carrier or the tool in this process, since they are a political actor from one side and an actual part of this process due to economic and ownership affiliations from the other, will be made. The analysis of the media is an essential prerequisite and has as continuity the understanding of the political procedure. The latter is studied through the prism of the socio-political system of the country; its idiosyncrasy and pathogenesis. Most theory and research regarding the role of the media in democratic politics focuses on news and public affairs genres, where politics is assumed to reside. Thus, news media specifically, is the one selected to be studied in order to identify the existence and the extent of the public political communication phenomenon of infoganda.

Through my research, my intention is to analyze the governmental public communication strategy. Attempts to map today's complex cluster of influence among and within the political actors and power vehicles (government and the media) and the public, in Greece, will be made. This depiction of the climate will reveal the realities of public political communication in Greece.

Why was there need for infoganda to appear?  
Where was the fertile ground for infoganda to appear?

Gleaning some of the potential answers to the above questions, I will try to set the framework within which the factual reasons should be examined, and which will actually constitute the scope of my ongoing PhD thesis.

Could it be because ..... ?

There have been changes on the economic and societal level and the administration patterns are now developing horizontally. Moreover, the influence circle of the governmental responsibilities and the influence over the public sphere is being reduced, because of the European Union policies that come to develop direct relationships with the national regional administration entities, overlapping the government.

Could it be because ..... ?

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, governments for their prosperity need to communicate with a broader public, the global public (supranational presence) and not to restrict themselves to a simple governing. Thus, the space-time expanding of the media and the global public are the ones targeted in the public political communication nowadays.

Could it be because ..... ?

The old commonly known propaganda is being mutated to infoganda according and simply complying with the demands of today's era and reflecting current shifts in political practice.

Could it be because ..... ?

It was time to transfer communication practices exercised in international public communication to the domestic environment. Especially, since they were tested and found effective in the international scene. It is common knowledge that in international diplomacy, countries master communication strategies in order to place themselves felicitously in the international scene and gain a beneficiary position that in turn will facilitate their goals and politics. In this nation's packaging and the systematic effort to manipulate another nation's media and news images to one's advantage, a growing body of evidence can be traced. (Graber, 2001) More interesting in the present case and context is the fact that all this communication and political public relations activity,

encapsulates some forms of propaganda too, which, with the intention to persuade, takes the form of news management and information control. If that is the case, then a factor has not been taken into consideration; the fact that whatever presented in the domestic scene can be searched or witnessed and confirmed. It does not refer to something being far away as the case in the international environment, in such a distance or places that can not be verified or reached.

On the other hand, it could be the fact that government, since it tried, up to now, to comply with the demands of the times, as the media-centric logic, in order to facilitate its work, perceived that the media were evolving to a powerful political institution with an active role in governing. Therefore, in order to subdue this tendency and also empower government's positing in the power structure, invented a new public communication and information tool exploiting at the same time the current circumstances.

The public is really sensitive towards mere propaganda due to its historical experiences. An informed public is the base for every democratic society. Government wishes to receive positive stances regarding its actions and policies, which will subserve its governmental work now and, at a later stage, will be translated to support and more importantly to votes in electoral periods. In today's reality of the hyperbolic plethora of images through television and information, the media crave for more images, information and real time stories. All the above interwoven provide the appropriate climate for the appearance of the fusion of infoganda; a dose of information so that government does not detach itself wholly from its original destination, and a dose of propaganda so that it achieves its goals. Could it work? Thinking superficially and quickly, a positive answer could suggest itself. But, what are the consequences of this information miasma whether they are political or more importantly relate to the democracy itself? Where can such initiative lead if looking in a more penetrative way? No one doubts the necessity of government communication with the public. The positing of information in this procedure nevertheless is fundamental so that society and democracy further will be enhanced. So, what does the future hold?

The former explanation puts distrust on government, politicians and politics in general. A tendency that has been multiple times recorded in researches. The following transfers the distrust or it adds up to it, distrust to journalism and the media.

Another explanation can be sought in the nature of the journalistic profession as it has been shaped nowadays. Journalists in order to 'feed' this 24hour ongoing news media system and prove that it does inform instead of merely communicating, have adopted new practices. Drifted from the gush of the live transmission, they are looking frantically for it. As a consequence the substance of the information and the credibility has transformed, and captured in the phrases: for the first, no need to understand it, I am witnessing it and for the second, it is real because it is technological. Media end up being reproduction news machines. They get caught up in and preserve at the same time this frenzy of infotainment and spectacle industry. Moreover, as to the media's economic and ownership affiliations; the pressures being exercised regarding the content of the information should be co-estimated. Further, the latter puts the autonomy of journalism under question, and underlines the mutual tolerance and interdependence among the media and politicians.

Having in mind all the above, a question preoccupies public's mind. So, how or what sets the media agenda? Are the media still the forth estate?

Skepticism, distrust, reservation are the dominant feelings of the public towards government and the media. The public, although is able to recognize and also state what the power structure is, is completely weak to determine from and to which direction the influences flow. It is diffused the feeling that there is something flowing, but there is an absolute lack of ability to impress it. Even more, due to the fact that these paradigms

referred above, are describing a newborn phenomenon, the wherefore is indeterminate. Explanations should be looked into the historical, societal and political phases of public and political communication. These further, have to be interwoven with the notions of journalism and politics. And in continuity, should be placed in every country's special idiosyncrasy and pathogenesis as well as in the framework of the new global order of all levels.

What happens when an attempt to peek over the horizon of political communication, to set new priorities, reopen and revisit long-standing issues of democratic theory and track down future directions and dimensions of the field, and to devise fresh models of institutions or notions suited to this complex age of political communication, is made? Will these attempts overturn some old orders and create a future that is quite unlike the past? Will they be the key elements that will constitute the drivers of change of the nature of the notion, and arise some new aspects of the context of the next age of political communication? These are some fundamental questions that arise for the reform of political communication and the shape of the future of democracy. And, set someone's thinking considering also that as back as Antiquity, the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle sided that 'individuals are political human beings', and as, another essential part of the human nature is communication, these two characteristics are "indissoluble affined, and lead to human desire for public effects, and farther on to human action, moreover to political action". (Katz, 1997) So, politics are the master of arts as Aristotle again, supported.

So, someone justifiably could think what is there left. With this crisis of trust towards and between politics and media, how can be the political dialogue enhanced? How can the political vehicles be detrimental to the health of the public dialogue? An answer could be the civil society. Informed and active citizens participating and molding their everyday reality could be the answerback. Therefore, they will comprise another potential player / actor added in the depiction of the power structure. A more balanced depiction that also reveals the public's potential to serve as a reliable partner in government decision making. This is what should lie in the essence of the civil society. May be also, then, eventually a form or formula for propaganda and information which can be used in a positive way for the benefit of society will be found.

This paper reveals my academic quests regarding particularly, the public space where government puts in and interrelates with the media and the public. The aim and aspiration of my PhD thesis when reaching full completion, is to unfold how government / state communicate and manage politically the public sphere and thereto, the 'sexual' side of public political communication. My PhD thesis' objective is to be a reference point for the recording and the analysis of the public political communication in Greece and trigger further geographical scientific researches.

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