

Adapt to Survive.

**The role of social media, sharing and communication to ameliorate
this world**

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Crowdsourcing as a tool against misinformation: The role of social media and user-generated content in overturning misinformation during the Greek Covid-19 pandemic.

Evangelos Lamprou²
Nikos Antonopoulos³

Introduction:

The abundance of information can be considered a favorable factor for obtaining better-informed citizens, especially since the volume and diversity of information in the media environment promote learning about the most relevant public issues. In times of crisis, as are those in which large-scale natural disasters, terrorist attacks, or disease outbreaks occur, the importance of this factor increases, and information from the media becomes a key element for the functioning of society. Due to the high level of uncertainty, it is in the media that most people usually trust to understand the environment in which they live and make decisions regarding that environment. Similarly, in these situations, the media's influence is often amplified. Especially in crisis management situations, the use of reliable sources of information is one of the most important factors of social behavior.

Research Topic:

This dissertation scopes to reveal whether crowdsourcing and citizen journalism strategies and techniques can be used by various stakeholders in order to tackle misinformation and disinformation deriving from established popular and important media outlets. For this reason, an iconic incident is used. Researchers use quantitative & qualitative research in combination with the empirical walkthrough method visiting major and high evaluated news websites that displayed non-true stories about the beginning of Nea Smyrni riots in Greece on the 7th of March 2021.

Research questions:

The dissertation's research focuses on two basic pylons:

- Monitoring and analyzing the way the Nea Smyrni initial incident was presented by 5 of the most important news websites in Greece in terms of circulation and state funding during the pandemic of Covid-19 as this is obvious from Alexa top 50 sites in Greece and the state funding campaign "Menoume Spiti". Researchers conducted empirical research and visited the websites using the walkthrough method.
- Analyzing certain characteristics of importance and popularity of the news websites which initially presented a different aspect on the incident which was later proven misleading and highlighting that professionalism, popularity and importance of news-media websites do not necessarily guarantee absence of misinformation.

Results:

This dissertation states that professional and highly evaluated news websites in Greece cannot avoid fake news and misinformation. This statement derives from the high evaluation they gain from the state as it is proven from the funding distributed from the "Menoume spiti" campaign as well as from the vast popularity they retain according to the data derived from the Alexa top 50 Greek websites list[...].It is obvious that crowd-sourced and citizen journalism retain great potential. Social media are accused of wide-spreading fake news and misinformation. On the other hand, professional, popular, and high evaluated media outlets do not always avoid fake news and misinformation. The corona-virus era in Greece highlights this statement intensely due to the lockdown and the difficulties it brings in journalistic research and reporting but also in the lack of resources of all kinds for the media. Professional reporters and journalists alone seem that cannot guarantee the absence of fake news and misinformation. Crowd-sourced and citizen journalism might be a solution to support media outlets in many ways when all kinds of resources are scarce, in order for journalism to fulfil its role and serve public interest and democracy.

Questions for reflection:

In what ways credibility of mainstream media can be strengthened?

Can professional reporters and journalists alone guarantee the absence of fake news and misinformation?

Can crowd-sourced and citizen journalism consist a solution to support media outlets in other ways when all kinds of resources are scarce, in order for journalism to fulfil its role and serve public interest and democracy?

² Adjunct Lecturer, PhD Candidate, New Media Communication and Usability Lab (NeMeCU LAB), Ionian University, Kefalonia, Greece, email: evaglamprou@gmail.com

³ Associate Professor, Head of New Media Communication and Usability Lab (NeMeCU LAB), Ionian University, Kefalonia, Greece, email: nikos@antonopoulos.info

ABSTRACT

Journalism is a critical element for democracy. Though accurate information and news are crucial for all modern democratic societies, fake news and misinformation seem to be present even in mainstream traditional media. Journalists used to be the gatekeepers of news providing reliable information to audiences mainly through the dominant traditional media. Nevertheless, this has significantly changed. The emergence of digital journalism, social media, participatory journalism, and a significant decline in traditional media's power and impact has led to a new era in public sphere control and agenda-setting.

Citizens of the digital era have plenty of opportunities not only to access information such as news but also to record, produce, comment, share or criticize such information. Without a doubt, social media and citizen journalism have been heavily criticized for helping fake news, hoaxes, and non-true stories to spread in the public sphere but this is not the case. Fake news and most importantly misinformation and disinformation seem to derive not only from social media but surprisingly from established traditional media outlets who are supposed to be the main gatekeepers of truth and news reliability.

This paper scopes to reveal how crowdsourcing techniques such as crowd wisdom, crowd voting, and crowd creation mainly through social media have overturned cases of misinformation and fake news presented in traditional and established media outlets during the covid-19 pandemic lock-down in Greece. The walkthrough method and statistical analysis are used in order to track the cases of fake news and misinformation in comparison to the media outlets' popularity.

The findings of the study chart the Greek public sphere's and mediascape's characteristics and reveal the importance of crowdsourcing and its different techniques as a tool for digital journalism in the battle against fake news and misinformation, shaping new communication models.

Keywords: Misinformation, Crowdsourcing, Digital Journalism, Social Media

Introduction

News media, in their gatekeeper function, are expected to play a pivotal social role in providing relevant and accurate information during crisis situations. In their coverage, news media and journalists are acknowledged being capable of shaping the evolution and magnitude of a crisis and its consequences. Media make information public and so add to the collective knowledge of what is going on. The audience uses the information and frames provided by journalists to interpret the crisis and act upon it. Therefore, news media and journalists can create or avoid public panic and hence play an important role in the prevention of crisis escalation (van der Meer, Verhoeven, Beentjes & Vliegthart, 2016).

At first glance, the abundance of information can be considered a favourable factor for obtaining better-informed citizens, especially since the volume and diversity of information in the media environment promote learning about the most relevant public issues. In times of crisis, as are those in which large-scale natural disasters, terrorist attacks or disease outbreaks occur, the importance of this factor increases and information from the media becomes a key element for the functioning of society. Due to the high level of uncertainty, it is in the media that most people usually trust to understand the environment in which they live and make decisions regarding that environment. Similarly, in these situations, the media's influence is often amplified. Especially in crisis management situations, the use of reliable sources of information is one of the most important factors of social behavior (Ferreira & Borges, 2020).

Although the communication channels available today are improving worldwide interactions, the dissemination of uncorroborated information is affecting the content's credibility adversely (Liu *et al.*, 2020).

1.1 Literature review

As media's consensus-building function weakens, multiple agendas compete against one another for people's attention. This fragmentation of agendas is evident as numerous groups and segments give attention to topics and issues about their specialized interests. Most importantly, consumers of content seem unable to differentiate between documented information — including scientific research — versus undocumented content, pseudoscience, and gossip. Often consumers of digital content cannot distinguish among various types of 'news,' the origin, and how content was processed and disseminated. The rapid proliferation and easy dissemination of content, though heralded as a triumph of the information society, nonetheless pose challenges for citizens and media users. As consumers fail to differentiate between information and undocumented content, fake news seems to set new agendas of mass communication, and dubious content becomes salient in public minds (Maniou *et al.*, 2020).

Some years ago, the access and the diffusion of information was not so easy, as there were a lot of technical and economic barriers that needed to be overcome in order to achieve the spread and communication of information throughout such a large network. The maintenance of this vast connected network allows citizens to share openly their ideas and opinions without relying on face to face communication. In some cases, this advancement plays a significant role in expressing easier political or ideological ideas (Karyotakis *et al.*, 2019).

Participatory journalism is any kind of newswork at the hands of professionals and amateurs, of journalists and citizens, and of users and producers benchmarked by what Benkler calls commons based peer production: “the networked environment makes possible a new modality of organizing production: radically decentralized, collaborative, and non-proprietary; based on sharing resources and outputs among widely distributed, loosely connected individuals who cooperate with each other without relying on either market signals or managerial commands describes the key to understanding the new media ecosystem as based on networked technologies that are P2P (‘peer-to-peer’) in organization and collaborative in principle. As such, an embrace of this networked environment by journalism challenges news organizations to extend the level of their direct engagement with audiences as participants in the processes of gathering, selecting, editing, producing, and communicating news (Deuze *et al.*, 2007).

1.1.2 Crowdsourcing

A fundamental element for citizen and participatory journalism is crowdsourcing. Jeff Howe, (2008) states that crowdsourcing isn’t a single strategy. He explains four strategies that broadly make up crowdsourcing:

1. Crowd Wisdom – uses crowd’s knowledge and opinion
2. Crowd Creation – uses crowd’s creative energy
3. Crowd Voting – uses crowd’s judgment on specific issues
4. Crowd Funding – uses crowd’s fundraising abilities

In terms of media and journalism, crowdsourcing can be used as a knowledge-search method for both participatory and citizen journalism. In participatory journalism, readers participate in journalistic processes as, for example, commentators or content producers. In citizen journalism, people who are not professional journalists produce news and content that can be perceived as journalism. Citizen journalism is often defined as reporting in which ordinary people adopt the role of journalist, and citizen journalists produce articles and pictures that can appear either on independent blogs and news sites run by citizens or on established news sites. In crowdsourcing, instead, the crowd contributes raw material to a process run by a journalist, who decides if and how to use the crowd’s input in her or his story. Participation in crowdsourcing is often a quick, one-time act. Citizen journalists can use crowdsourcing in their reporting, and established news sites can deploy crowdsourcing by asking citizen journalists to submit certain types of information (Aitamurto, 2015).

In crowd-sourced journalism, the crowd is invited to participate in journalistic processes in various ways, by submitting knowledge, sharing opinions, or sending pictures. While the classic form of crowdsourcing employs the audiences’ eyes and ears by urging people to recount their daily observations, improvised crowdsourcing channels the expertise of readers in reporting specialized topics through an open call (Antonopoulos *et al.*, 2020).

1.1.2 Crowdsourcing in journalism and misinformation

Misinformation—or information that is false or misleading— can quickly reach thousands to millions of readers via online social and search platforms, helped by inattentive or malicious sharers and algorithms optimized for engagement. In recent years, platforms and third party organizations have developed tools and processes for people to label the credibility of news articles to slow the spread of misinformation. Some initiatives include Facebook’s fact-checking

program and Climate Feedback's use of domain experts. However, expert feedback is hard to scale. Other initiatives such as TruthSquad, FactcheckEU, and WikiTribune have pursued a lower-barrier crowdsourced approach, which sometimes run into issues with quality; workarounds include final judgments by experts or delegating primary research to experts (He *et al.*, 2020).

In addition to professional fact checkers, ordinary citizens, who are concerned about misinformation, can play a crucial role in organically curbing its spread and impact. Compared to professional fact checkers, concerned citizens, who are users of the platform where misinformation appears, have the ability to directly engage with people who propagate false claims either because of ignorance or for a malicious purpose. They can back up their arguments using professional fact checks and trusted sources, whenever available. The cohort of ordinary citizens is also commonly referred to as crowd. Thus, the role of crowd or citizens who are concerned about misinformation can be critically important (Micallef *et al.*, 2020). Generally it is accepted that collective wisdom can be better than an individual's judgment, including those of individual experts. However, there are situations in which the collective is a lot worse because they do not have enough relevant information, suggesting a baseline expertise in the crowd is necessary (Bhuiyan *et al.*, 2020).

Journalists and news outlets have been under pressure to accommodate changing dynamics related to the information-seeking and information-sharing behaviours of a connected audience. These conditions have contributed to an institutional crisis in the field with many traditional news outlets closing or scaling back coverage, and this trend has been accompanied by an identity crisis for journalists with some viewing the rise of the "citizen journalist" as a potential rival or even replacement for the professional, culminating in a notion that journalism can take place without a journalist—"journalism as doing" as opposed to "journalism as being" (Dailey & Starbird, 2014).

Online media in particular have made it possible for audiences – or more precisely, users – to skip past news publications to directly connect with the organisations, institutions, and individuals in which they are interested – to follow first-hand the press releases and public statements of governments, politicians, companies, NGOs, and other figures of public life. Additionally, such active users are now also able to share with others what they observe as they do so, through a wide range of platforms ranging from collaborative bookmarking tools through personal and group blogs to social media sites, and thereby to find and connect with other users interested in similar topics (Bruns, 2011).

Professional journalists' participation in Web 2.0 communities like Twitter and Facebook, the social media platforms most widely used by journalists in their work, is having a transformative impact on established professional practices, norms and values. In particular, the convergence of private and professional lives on these platforms, and real time interactions between 'audiences' and journalists are altering traditional reporting practices and even challenging the value of objectivity.

Additionally, 'open journalism' models, which promote collaborative research and reportage, are gaining traction via the large-scale uptake of social media practice within mainstream newsrooms. One impact of this trend is the development of new verification processes that actively challenge long established standards designed to ensure accurate reporting (Posetti, 2013).

Crowdsourcing is a way for journalists to fill gaps in their knowledge. A metaphor for illustrating the mechanism in practice is fishing with nets. By crowdsourcing, journalists cast their nets into the water. The net is larger and wider than in a traditional journalistic knowledge search, which involves the journalist calling potential sources one by one. In crowdsourcing, the journalist's call for information goes out to a massive number of people simultaneously, and thus, can result in an effective discovery of knowledge. Crowdsourcing can be particularly useful to journalists who are new to a topic or to news journalists who are not covering their regular beat, because news journalists are time-pressured for finding relevant information very fast (Aitamurto, 2015).

According to Riskos *et al.*, (2021) news media brands can be considered as signs of credibility and quality, designed to communicate traits and feelings, and to enhance the product value. A brand can be associated with previous product experience and can create expectations for future outcomes. Keeping in this vein, a news media brand serves as a construct that reflects emotional, cognitive, stylistic, conscious, and unconscious indications for a news medium. The significance of news media brands was stressed by Marshall McLuhan, in his popular quote, "the medium is the message". News media brands function as a formative trait of media messages and affect the process of news elaboration. In particular, news media readers encode, store and retrieve better the news that is offered by a specific media brand, rather than the news provided by non-branded media. Credible news media brands trigger stronger arousal responses, which in turn improve information storage and retrieval efficiency.

When putting professionals and crowds side by side to compare their relative source credibility, studies find that cues from the crowds are more persuasive than from authority under certain circumstances. The crowds will be more influential than professionals if the crowds have a consensus. Paek *et al.* (2011) add that when individuals perceive similarity from a group, messages from the group members have a stronger ability to change people's ideas than authoritative messages. Given these studies on the persuasiveness of professionals and crowds, this research introduces fact-checking flags from both experts and crowdsourcing and investigates their impacts on media consumers' identification of fake news (Gaozhao, 2021). Lots of researches have been conducted in order to fight fake news and misinformation. Crowdsourcing seems as a promising strategy to tackle the phenomenon of misinformation, by detecting non trustworthy news outlets and flagging fake news when detected. According to Pennycook and Rand research (2019) using crowdsourced trust ratings to gain information about media outlet reliability—information that can help inform ranking algorithms—shows promise as one such approach. Despite substantial partisan differences and lack of familiarity with many outlets, participants' trust ratings were, in the aggregate, quite successful at differentiating mainstream media outlets from hyper-partisan and fake news websites. Furthermore, the ratings given by participants were very strongly correlated with ratings provided by professional fact-checkers.

In one way or another, media environments around the world are changing. The change is not only a change in content but also a change in the ways in which citizens discover, use, consume, and interact with content. These new conditions have significant implications for what the media report, the way in which the content is consumed, and, finally, the quality of informed citizenship. Beyond any doubt non-true stories also exist in the Greek mediascape, leading citizens to wrong decisions, misleading them for important decisions for their everyday lives, and even creating misunderstanding among different social teams and stakeholders. What is clear with the findings of this research is that non-true stories, fake news, and misinformation penetrate many different media outlets, even legacy and historic media. Brand qualities such as the trustworthiness of

traditional media outlets might be under question (Lamprou *et al.*, 2021).

1.1.3 The mediascape situation in Greece

Greek mediascape seems in turmoil during the last decade or more. The economic crisis and its political management by all Greek governments after the beginning of the crisis in 2009 and the so called Troika (the EU, ECB and IMF), have brought significant challenges to the media environment of Greece, with independent journalism, in particular, to be facing important economic as well as sociopolitical pressures. The loss of printed press sales during the crisis' times has resulted in the closing of established newspapers (like 'Eleytherotypia') and the opening of new ones as well. The crisis' emergency regimes also brought the autocratic shut down of the public broadcaster (ERT) in June 2013 by the time's coalition government of conservatives and social democrats. Independent media projects and networks also rose during the crisis, developed by journalists, citizens and social movements, in Greece and elsewhere. According to Mylonas (2017), self-organized groups and networks of journalists and other media personnel have started exploring new models of journalism, while the Internet has become increasingly prominent in the media landscape, offering the potential for greater pluralism and independence, yet it has also been implicated in low quality output, gossip, copy-and-paste news, and dependence on big firm advertisements'. Within the crisis context, social media allowed civic participation in Greece to occur in and through the media citizens were able to be media producers in different (and often conflicting) ways.

Media in Greece rank among the least trusted by the public, compared to other countries in Europe. This fact, however, is not reflected in the ongoing international discussion about the challenges faced by the media around the world. On the contrary, it seems that Greek media are by and large regarded internationally as acceptable for the standards of a functioning democracy. This is a misconception. It is true that media in Greece don't face overt authoritarian intervention from the part of governments (exempting, of course, the notorious government decision in 2013 to shut down ERT, the public broadcaster), as is the case in some Eastern European countries. But a combination of ownership issues, drastic cuts in costs and jobs, and a peculiar — to put it mildly — relationship to political power, has produced a deeply problematic media landscape, where unbiased, dispassionate coverage is hard to find. What is more, the debasement of the news industry in Greece is happening against little resistance, either from public watchdog mechanisms, which are powerless or non-existent or from independent, alternative media, which are few and lack support ("The Covid-19 crisis highlights Greece's media problem - International Press Institute", 2021).

The Greek case highlights the inability and unwillingness of the Greek governments to implement policies that would promote and nourish pluralism and transparency [...]. Under the current circumstances, we can only witness the morbid functioning of the public sphere. That means that there is an actual threat in the quality of information for a large part of the population and particularly for those less familiar with the Internet such as the elderly, who represent these segments of the population relying particularly on television for their information. Therefore, the challenge is to respond to this situation with a concrete and complete regulating framework. In a period of profound reflection about the new digital environment as well as of widespread concern about the effects of economic recession on media operation, it is essential that we re-appraise the media policies in Greece (Veneti & Karadimitriou, 2013).

1.1.4 The “Menoume spiti” campaign

During the lockdown that followed the Covid-19 outbreak, the Greek government allocated €20 million to media outlets for them to carry “Menoume spiti” (We stay at home) public health messages campaign. It outsourced the distribution of these funds to a private media shop company, thereby bypassing its obligation to make public all transactions conducted by the state, as well as the Online Media Registry (where online media have to be registered in order to receive advertising revenue from the state).

The government initially responded by publishing the names of outlets that had been funded, but without the amounts that had been allocated. The list was found, amongst others, to include non-existent news websites. A social media furor erupted. So in early July, the government finally released the so-called “Petsas list” — named after government spokesperson Stelios Petsas — featuring all media outlets alongside the allocated sums. The list confirmed what many suspected: that the funds had been disbursed in a way that was closely aligned to the government’s agenda (“The Covid-19 crisis highlights Greece’s media problem - International Press Institute”, 2021).

2. Scope of the study & Methodology

This dissertation scopes to reveal whether crowdsourcing and citizen journalism strategies and techniques can be used by various stakeholders in order to tackle misinformation and disinformation deriving from established popular and important media outlets. For this reason, an iconic incident is used. Researchers use quantitative & qualitative research in combination with the empirical walkthrough method visiting major and high evaluated news websites that displayed non-true stories about the beginning of Nea Smyrni riots in Greece on the 7th of March 2021. According to Politico (2021), video footage shared on social media showed a group of people arguing with police about coronavirus lockdown fines and one of them being attacked by an officer. The man, who was beaten to the ground while at least three other officers stood nearby, can be heard shouting “it hurts.” Police initially said it was the officers who were attacked, although video footage from nearby shops does not support that claim. Athens prosecutors have opened an investigation into the incident and police are conducting an internal investigation. Opposition politicians have called for the resignation of Civil Protection Minister Michalis Chrisochoidis (Stamouli, 2021). Few research efforts have been conducted in Greece in order to demonstrate both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the origin of misinformation, disinformation, and non-true stories deriving from major and important news media websites. This dissertation uses qualitative and quantitative analysis in order to reveal whether crowdsourcing and citizen journalism strategies can tackle fake news and misinformation. Furthermore, researchers scope to investigate whether major important and popular news websites are “clean” from cases of misinformation. Social media users published amateur cell phone video footage that depicted the incident, (a young man beaten brutally by police officers) which went viral through social media platforms and led to protests against police violence. A few days later Civil Protection minister Chrysochoidis apologized for police violence to the public (Zahos, 2021).

In order to highlight cases of misinformation on the incident by important and popular websites, researchers visited five cases of websites chosen by two distinctive factors: Their importance according to the funding received by the “menoume spiti” campaign and their popularity according to the Alexa top 50 Greek websites. Researchers used the walkthrough method and compared the coverage of the selected websites towards the Nea Smyrni incident. Through the statistical analysis, researchers visited five of most important news from the official “Menoume Spiti” campaign known also as “Petsas List” in order to track whether cases of misinformation arise. More specifically the dissertation’s research focuses on two basic pylons:

- Monitoring and analyzing the way the Nea Smyrni initial incident was presented by 5 of the most important news websites in Greece in terms of circulation and state funding during the pandemic of Covid-19 as this is obvious from Alexa top 50 sites in Greece and the state funding campaign “Menoume Spiti”. Researchers conducted empirical research and visited the websites using the walkthrough method.

- Analyzing certain characteristics of importance and popularity of the news websites which initially presented a different aspect on the incident which was later proven misleading and highlighting that professionalism, popularity and importance of news-media websites do not necessarily guarantee absence of misinformation. Researchers analyzed the official data provided by the government with the use of MS Excel software, in order to confirm the importance of the media websites. ("This is the list of the media and the money they got for the We Stay Home - “Menoume spiti” campaign [All names] | in.gr", 2021). Also the Alexa top 50 list for Greek websites was used in order to confirm the popularity of the media outlets. We have to mention that the Greek Alexa top 50 websites list does not concern only news or media websites but websites of every kind such as Google, banking portals, governmental portals, retail websites and many more.

3. Results

3.1: Statistical analysis

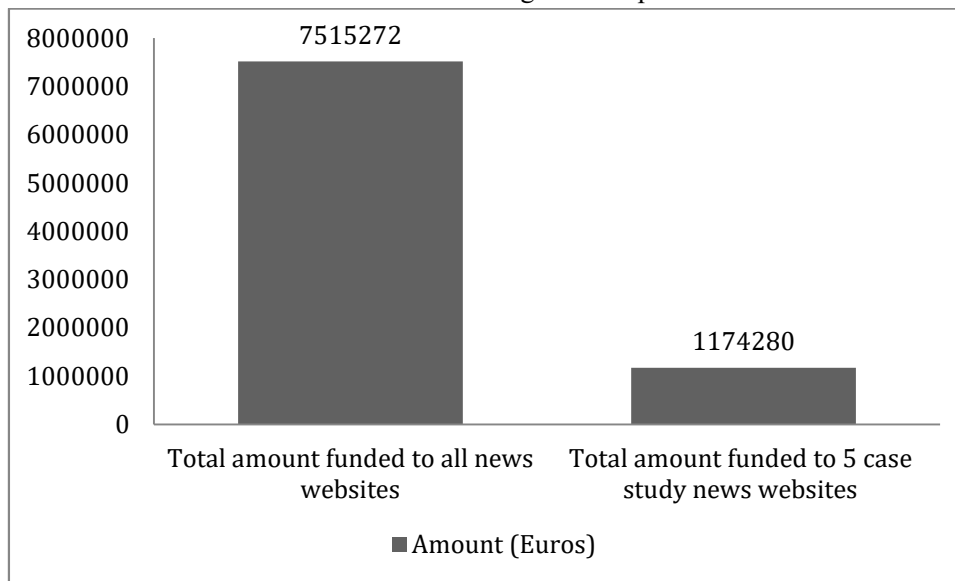
Researchers used statistical analysis in order to confirm that the selected websites are considered as of high importance and influence by the Greek government, according to their funding. The statistical analysis focuses mostly on 5 of the considered most “important and influential” news websites funded from the official “Menoume Spiti” state campaign also known as “Petsas’ List”. This dissertation takes into account only the amount of money given to websites. In table 1, news media websites in Greece are presented according to the amount they received from the “Menoume spiti” state campaign. The average amount that the 5 news websites received is 234.856 Euros.

Table 1: Amounts given to major news websites & Alexa.com rankings

Alexa top 50 ranking (Greece)	Medium type	News website name	Amount funded (euros)
8	news website	PROTOTHEMA.GR	310.000,00
19	news website	NEWSIT.GR	182.280,00
20	news website	IEFIMERIDA.GR	310.000,00
34	news website	KATHIMERINI.GR	186.000,00
48	news website	NEWSBOMB.GR	186.000,00
Average			234.856,00

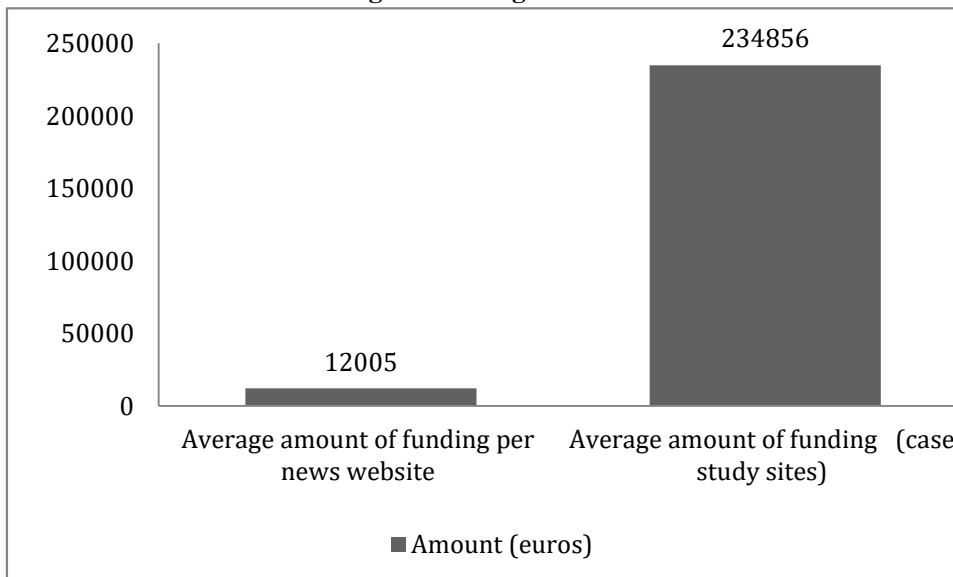
The total amount given to news websites according to the governmental sources is 7.515.272 Euros while the above mentioned five news websites take 1.174.280 Euros, approximately 16% of the total sum.

Table 2: Total amounts given comparison



A clearer image comes with the average amounts that are given to major news websites in comparison to the general average. The difference is enormous between the 5 news websites receiving in average 243.040 Euros almost 20 times the amount a typical news website gets (12.005 Euros).

Table 3: Average amounts given to news websites



3.2 Empirical study

Using the walkthrough method, researchers visited five of the most important, influential and popular news websites in Greece in order to monitor their coverage towards the initial Nea Smyrni incident. Furthermore the dissertation examines two more news websites which used social media footage, crowdsourcing and citizen journalism strategies in order to receive information and to cover the incident.

Case 1:

News website “iefimerida.gr” which ranked 20th in the Alexa top 50 Greek websites covered the incident on 07-03-2021 as follows:

“Tension in Nea Smyrni square: Incidents between police officers and 30 people - Ten arrests”

“Tensions erupted shortly after 3 a.m. Sunday in Nea Smyrni Square, when, according to the Hellenic Police, about 30 people attacked DIAS police officers.

It all started, according to the same information, when the police arrived in Nea Smyrni Square, where there were reports of overcrowding. A group of people, when they saw the police, moved threateningly against them, resulting in a fight.

Ένταση στην πλατεία Νέας Σμύρνης: Επεισόδια ανάμεσα σε αστυνομικούς και 30 άτομα -Δέκα προσαγωγές



Ένταση με αστυνομικούς στην πλατεία Νέας Σμύρνης την Κυριακή 7 Μαρτίου

NEWSROOM IEFIMERIDA.GR
07/03/2021 16:10

Ένταση σημειώθηκε λίγο μετά τις 3 το μεσημέρι της Κυριακής στην πλατεία της Νέας Σμύρνης, όταν, σύμφωνα με την ΕΛ.ΑΣ., περίπου 30 άτομα επιτέθηκαν εναντίον αστυνομικών της ομάδας ΔΙΑΣ.



Όλα ξεκίνησαν, κατά τις ίδιες πληροφορίες, όταν οι αστυνομικοί έφτασαν στην πλατεία Νέας Σμύρνης, όπου υπήρχαν αναφορές για συνωστισμό. Μια ομάδα ατόμων, όταν είδε τους αστυνομικούς, κινήθηκε απειλητικά εναντίον τους, με αποτέλεσμα να ξεκινήσει συμπλοκή.

Figure 1: The initial “Nea Smyrni” Incident as covered by iefimerida.gr

Case 2:

One of the most popular and important news media website in Greece is “protothema .gr” which ranked 8th in the Alexa top 50 Greek websites list. Protothema.gr covered the incident on 07-03-2021 as follows:

“Riots in Nea Smyrni: Clashes between 30 people and DIAS police officers”

“A hand-to-hand battle ensued - Seven arrests were made - A police officer was slightly injured - Residents protested after the clashes and new incidents took place

A clash took place between a group of 30 people and police officers of the DIAS group at 3 in the afternoon on Sunday in the Grove of Nea Smyrni.

The screenshot shows a news article on the website protothema.gr. The page header includes the site logo and navigation links. The main headline is "Επεισόδια στη Νέα Σμύρνη: Συμπλοκή 30 ατόμων με αστυνομικούς της ΔΙΑΣ". Below the headline is a photograph of a street scene with police officers on motorcycles and a white car. To the right of the photo is a small inset image of a woman in an apron. Below the photo is a timestamp "07/03/2021, 16:14" and a comment count "88". On the left side of the article, there are social media sharing icons for Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Telegram. A text box on the left contains the following text: "Ακολούθησε μάχη σώμα με σώμα - Έγιναν επτά προσαγωγές - Τραυματίστηκε ελαφρά ένας αστυνομικός - Μετά τις συμπλοκές πραγματοποιήθηκε πορεία διαμαρτυρίας κατοίκων και". To the right of this text box is a "Thema Insights" section with a small image.

Figure 2: The initial “Nea Smyrni” Incident as covered by protothema.gr

Case 3:

Another important and popular news media website in Greece is newsit.gr which ranked 19th in the Alexa top 50 Greek websites list covered the incident as follows:

“Tension in Nea Smyrni Square - Police officers were attacked by 30 people”

“According to information from police sources, the police officers, while conducting checks, were suddenly attacked by about 30 people. Clashes ensued and police called for help. A total of seven arrests were made and one police officer was slightly injured”.



Figure 3: The “Nea Smyrni” initial incident as covered by newsit.gr

Case 4:

One of the most renowned and acclaimed Greek news websites “Kathimerini.gr” which ranked 34th in the Alexa top 50 Greek websites list covered the incident on 07-03-2021 as follows:

“Nea Smyrni: Tension between police and 30 people - 11 arrests”

“Tension prevailed at noon in the area of Nea Smyrni, between a group of about 30 people and police. According to Greek Police, the incident happened shortly after 15:00 when the strangers attacked the police, who were carrying out checks for mask use, distances and illegal movements, with the result that one of them was slightly injured. According to the same information, reinforcements from the DIAS team and the OPKE team immediately rushed to the spot and 11 arrests were made”.



Figure 4: The initial “Nea Smyrni” Incident as covered by kathimerini.gr

Case 5

“Newsbomb.gr” is another major news website best known for its populist aesthetics, which ranked 5th in the Alexa top 50 Greek websites list. Newsbomb.gr covered the incident on 07-03-2021 at 16.27 as follows:

“A group of 30 people in Nea Smyrni carried out an attack against police officers of the DIAS group on Sunday afternoon”.

“A police officer slightly injured and 7-8 arrests are the report of the attack received by police officers of the DIAS Team in the square of Nea Smyrni. The incident occurred shortly after 15:00 on Sunday (07/03), when ELAS crews carried out checks for compliance with measures to limit the spread of coronavirus”.



The image shows a screenshot of a news article on the website Newsbomb.gr. The page features a navigation bar with the site's logo and a search icon. Below the navigation bar, there is a large image of a police officer in a white helmet. The article's headline reads: "Επίθεση σε βάρος αστυνομικών της ομάδας ΔΙΑΣ πραγματοποιήσε το μεσημέρι της Κυριακής, ομάδα 30 ατόμων στη Νέα Σμύρνη." Below the headline, there are social media sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Email. The article text states: "Ένας αστυνομικός ελαφρά τραυματίας και 7-8 προσαγωγές είναι ο απολογισμός της επίθεσης που δέχθηκαν αστυνομικοί της Ομάδας ΔΙ.ΑΣ. στην πλατεία της Νέας Σμύρνης." The text continues: "Το περιστατικό σημειώθηκε λίγο μετά τις 15:00 το μεσημέρι της Κυριακής (07/03), όταν πληρώματα της ΕΛ.ΑΣ. έκαναν ελέγχους για τήρηση των μέτρων περιορισμού της διασποράς του κορονοϊού. Ξαφνικά ομάδα περίπου 30 - 40 ατόμων, με καλυμμένα τα χαρακτηριστικά του προσώπου τους, εμφανίστηκαν στο σημείο και επιτέθηκαν στους αστυνομικούς με αποτέλεσμα να τραυματιστεί ελαφρά ένας απ' αυτούς."

Figure 5: The “Nea Smyrni” initial incident covered by newsbomb.gr

3.3 The social media reality

Though the initial coverage of the incident from the above news websites was that of police officers under attack by 30 people, social media users published photos and video footage with different aspects of the story. Social media users videos displayed “Unprovoked beatings of citizens and arrests in Nea Smyrni by the police” “Beatings and arrests” of citizens in Nea Smyrni square on the occasion of a fine to a family sitting in the square”

“Beatings and arrests of citizens by the police took place in Nea Smyrni square at 3.00 in the afternoon on Sunday. The reason for the incidents was a fine for a family sitting in the square”.



Figure 6: Social media footage example 1



Figure 7: Social media footage example 2



Figure 8: Social media footage example 3



Figure 9: Social media footage example 4



Figure 10: Social media footage example 5

The citizens' amateur material and footage, circulated in the social media digital public sphere, displaying a different aspect of what happened in Nea Smyrni square on March 7th 2021. The users' crowdsourced material such as comments dislikes and shares revealed that not all of the media outlets covered properly the incident. However, certain important and influential news websites used crowdsourcing and citizen journalism strategies, presenting what the social media users recorded in Nea Smyrni square with their mobile phones. These elements were decisive for overturning the initial coverage of the incident and a more balanced and detailed coverage emerged in almost all news media websites the following days. Nevertheless, there were some news websites which trusted crowdsourced footage and social media material in order to present a more balanced coverage of the incident. Two of them are gazzetta.gr and newsbreak.gr.

Case 6:

Gazzeta.gr is a major news media website specialized in sports news. It is known as one of the basic sources of news and information for sports fans, athletes and athletic matters in Greece. Gazzeta.gr ranks 24th at the Alexa top 50 list for Greek websites. The sports news media outlet received an amount of 45880 Euros from the official "Menoume Spiti" campaign. Gazzeta.gr utilized users' video footage, photos and comments which overturned the initial information in order to cover the incident with a more broad view.

"Nea Smyrni incident: Overthrow for the episodes in Nea Smyrni: Incredible scenes of police violence".

"A new aspect of the incident of Nea Smyrni arises"



Figure 11: The "Nea Smyrni" initial incident covered by gazzetta.gr

Case 7:

Newsbreak.gr which ranked 39th in the Alexa top 50 Greek websites list also used for its reporting citizen’s crowdsourced pictures and video footage from amateurs and material from twitter. The news outlet received 3720 Euros from the “Menoume spiti” campaign. The news website covered the incident on March 7th as follows:

“There is no excuse for what we see”

“There is really no excuse for these images shown in the video. Of course we cannot know what has happened earlier, but from the moment the man has been arrested beating him with a globe around his neck, there is no excuse”.

newsbreak.gr/ellada/185252/sokaristiko-vinteo-me-xylodarmo-politi-alla-kai-gynaikon-sti-nea/

ΑΡΧΙΚΗ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ ▼ ΑΜΥΝΑ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ ▼ ΑΥΤΟΔΙΟΙΚΗΣΗ ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ ▼ ΑΠΟΨΕΙΣ ▼ ΚΟΣΜΟΣ ΑΘΛΗΤΙΚΑ

Δεν υπάρχει δικαιολογία για αυτό που βλέπουμε

10.2k Shares

f Share

Tweet

Share

Share

Πραγματικά δεν υπάρχει δικαιολογία για αυτές τις εικόνες που φαίνονται στο βίντεο. Φυσικά δεν μπορούμε να ξέρουμε τι έχει προηγηθεί, αλλά από την στιγμή που ο άνθρωπος έχει συλληφθεί το να τρώει ξύλο με το γκλομπ στο λαιμό, όπως και να δέρνονται γυναίκες που προσεγγίζουν το σημείο, δεν έχει εξήγηση.

Μιλάμε για εικόνες που βλέπουμε στην Τουρκία και αποδοκιμάζουμε. Εικόνες επικίνδυνες, που μπορεί να οδηγήσουν την κοινωνία σε επικίνδυνα μονοπάτια. Ειδικά μετά τον πολύμηνο εγκλεισμό, την οικονομική και την κοινωνική καταστροφή που έχουν επιφέρει τα κυβερνητικά μέτρα λόγω πανδημίας.



Figure 12: The “Nea Smyrni” initial incident as covered by newsbreak.gr

4. DISCUSSION - CONCLUSIONS

In many cases, social media have been accused of circulating misleading information, fake news, and propaganda. This is not the case in this dissertation. Lamprou and Antonopoulos (2020) highlighted that fake news and misinformation can derive from established, popular, and professional media outlets. This dissertation also states that professional and highly evaluated news websites cannot avoid fake news and misinformation. This statement derives from the high evaluation they gain from the state as it is proven from the funding distributed from the “Menoume spiti” campaign as well as from the vast popularity they retain according to the data derived from the Alexa top 50 Greek websites list. Most of the above news websites did not trust material and footage from civilians, readers, and amateurs and gave a conventional aspect of the story. What was initially presented was that almost 30 people attacked with no reason to police officers who had to defend themselves and make arrests.

On the contrary, social media circulated material and footage which presented a different point of view for the story: Videos, pictures, comments, and reactions which in a way overturned the initial storyline of the incident. Nevertheless, some other news websites covered the incident in a totally different way using crowd-sourced and citizen journalism material such as mobile phone videos which showed a totally different reality than that of the five major news websites. The amateur video footage clearly displayed that there was no 30 people attack police officers but a young man beaten brutally by police officers. The viral circulation of this new version of the story in social media from users, aided by some news websites which utilized crowdsourcing and citizen journalism strategies for their reporting shaped a new agenda in the public sphere, police violence, which led to protests and forced the civil protection minister to publicly apologize to those who became victims to unnecessary violence by the police.

It is obvious that crowd-sourced and citizen journalism retain great potential. Social media are accused of wide-spreading fake news and misinformation. On the other hand, professional, popular, and high evaluated media outlets do not always avoid fake news and misinformation. The corona-virus era in Greece highlights this statement intensely due to the lockdown and the difficulties it brings in journalistic research and reporting but also in the lack of resources of all kinds for the media. Professional reporters and journalists alone cannot guarantee the absence of fake news and misinformation. Crowd-sourced and citizen journalism beyond their watchdog role can be a solution to support media outlets in many ways when all kinds of resources are scarce, in order for journalism to fulfil its role and serve public interest and democracy.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE POSIBILITIES

This dissertation covers only a certain incident in the Greek public sphere. There are many other similar incidents that can be researched. Also other types of crowdsourcing strategies in journalism can be researched in combination in the future.

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