

Online media has
become a very useful
tool media essay



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The online media or the New Media has also been a consequence of dynamic communications technology developments and the need of a universal platform that emerges traditional media with the interactive power of computers and the participative aspect of the Internet. I strongly believe that online media has indeed become a very useful tool for citizens to play their role in political and social participation. The reasons are various: Internet is very popular and user-friendly, it give people the opportunity of engaging in civic discussion and there is a common lack of time, interest and proximity issues hinder their willingness in participating,

As Margaret Scammell also pointed out in her paper *The Internet and Civic Engagement: the Age of the Citizen-Consumer*, (anul) “ the Internet, we hear constantly, will change everything. Thus far, however, the evidence for politics is rather small. We see vastly expanded information sources for citizens, new delivery systems for political institutions, greater opportunities for politics at the margins. But mostly we see the same old electoral and institutional politics with no evidence of huge new communities of participating citizens.” What is actually emphasized here is the fact that we expect a greater involvement of citizens in political and social aspects on online media platforms, whereas new media online only endows us with brand new instruments of citizenship performance.

Internet, as one of the 20th century’s most important developments, facilitates old and new functions of media, by orientating traditional media, like newspapers and television towards more participation, interactivity, flexibility, real time interaction, experiences and information sharing at a low cost.

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Politics and political participation of citizens is one of the topics of discussion over the Internet. The basic function of media - informing people, is clearly seen in the huge World Wide Web community. Politicians have recently started to be aware of the impact that the Internet has, especially on young generations and therefore have "moved" online, where they have their own blogs, participate in online political forums, and get in direct contact with their electors. A very good example in this sense is Barack Obama's famous online campaign which helped him engage more with his voters and actually gave them the opportunity of integrating and even creating a political campaign. "I think it helped us to access a lot of people by giving them tools to organize, to create events, to connect with each other's and giving them everything that they needed, so that when they had talking points to pass onto their families, videos, events in their area that were happening, community outreach programs in their state. Everything that we did was to connect people, because it was a movement that was fundamentally about people." (<http://www.cbc.ca/technology/story/2008/12/04/felesky-rahaf.html> - Rahaf Harfoush - interview)

Moreover, even in 2000 American elections, "American Online reported that seven of the all-time top ten live "online chats" were political, suggesting an increase in interest and involvement in the political process" (Marlin 1999: 12 in CAROLINE J. TOLBERT AND RAMONA S. MCNEAL, KENT STATE UNIVERSITY).

Another essential aspect of online citizenship is the civic engagement. One might argue that civic engagement online is one of the pioneer activities promoted online and which had a tremendous success among both

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nongovernmental organizations and participants to different online campaigns, petitions, manifestations. Its mobilizing character has had a very good outcome in community volunteer work, environmental causes and protest behavior, as it has engaged people in various discussions on social media platforms or in sharing experiences and thoughts about problems of common interest on YouTube, Blogs, MySpace, Facebook and websites. A very good example of a civic engagement campaign that has attracted many participants is the Greenpeace campaign. Promoting their activities in environmental causes and simultaneously asking for people's direct involvement online has ensured the success of their campaign.

Online media's main advantage – that of offering great opportunities of sharing information and experiences to its users can sometimes turn into a disadvantage, because normal people are becoming “journalists”. This facilitates subjectivism and might sometimes lead to misinforming the other users. Moreover, many organizations, politicians or public figures have sensed the potential impact and success of online campaigns and therefore tend to control certain information flows for their own interest and even manipulate the content of forums, blogging, etc.

The Web community facilitates the achievement of different types of citizenship, whether they are political, cultural, social or national. Citizens have often declared themselves dissatisfied with traditional media coverage; due to media concentration, the information and knowledge they get seems most of the times to be influenced by particular view that media moguls try to impose indirectly. Therefore the online media give them the opportunity of expressing themselves without restrictions and engage actively in different

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knowledge sharing activities and even direct participation to political decisions.

Taken all this arguments into consideration, I believe that the new media indeed contribute to a better citizenship by means of more interaction, delivering own experiences and thoughts towards different political topics, being informed and having access to a greater range of knowledge sources. Online media, creates opportunities for all the Internet users to contribute to the main attribute of democracy and that is, being able to take part at political and social decision making process.