

Special Issue 1, December 2019

**"Redefining Communication: Social Media and the Age of Innovation"**



Journal of  
**EDUCATION  
INNOVATION and  
COMMUNICATION**

Edited by



**COMMUNICATION INSTITUTE OF GREECE**



**Journal of Education, Innovation, and Communication (JEICOM)**

**Special Issue 1, December 2019**

**‘Redefining Communication:  
Social Media and the Age of Innovation’**

**ISSN: 2654-0746 (listed in the National Library of Greece)**

**DOI: 10.34097/jeicom\_special-issue-december-2019/**

**[https://doi.org/10.34097/jeicom\\_special-issue-december-2019/](https://doi.org/10.34097/jeicom_special-issue-december-2019/)**

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## Mission/ Presidents Message

The publications of the [Communication Institute of Greece](#), such as the “[Journal of Education, Innovation, and Communication \(JEICOM\)](#)”, are open access without any costs for the authors or the readers.

JEICOM is a Fully Peer-Reviewed, Open Access journal, publishing articles from all areas of education, innovation and communication, independent of the events organized by the Communication Institute of Greece.

JEICOM’s scope is to provide a free and open platform to academics, researchers, professionals, and postgraduate students to communicate and share knowledge in the form of high quality empirical and theoretical research that is of high interest not only for academic readers but also for practitioners and professionals. JEICOM welcomes theoretical, conceptual and empirical original research papers, case studies, book reviews that demonstrate the innovative and dynamic spirit for the education and communication sciences, from researchers, scholars, educators, policy-makers, and practitioners in education, communication, and related fields. Articles that show scholarly depth, breadth or richness of different aspects of social pedagogy are particularly welcome.

The numerous papers presented every year during the conferences organized by the Communication Institute of Greece, enables us to have access to a plethora of papers. Following a rigorous peer-review process, only a selection of these papers submitted is published biannually. In addition, to the papers presented in the Institute’s conference, we do encourage independent submissions of papers too. Nevertheless, before you submit, please make sure to respect the guidelines and templates provided.

The current special issue of the “Journal of Education, Innovation, and Communication (JEICOM)”, is our First Special Issue (December 2019).

We consider that education and fruitful exchange can improve our lives with the view to nurture intercultural communication. Academics can contribute significantly to the quality of the educational experience and help educate, communicate, exchange, meet new cultures, create and collaborate!

We wish you an excellent reading and for the year to come soon, 2020, Health, Love, Knowledge, Education, Prosperity, Communication and Exchange!

Dr. Margarita Kefalaki  
President, Communication Institute of Greece

## Preface

### **Redefining Communication: Social Media and the Age of Innovation, an Introduction**

Difference is what defines us, makes us go further, helps us react and create. Difference is something we should all cherish and respect and what makes communication so important. Considering redefining communication might help us understand what connects us and what separates us. The dialogue between the past and present allows us to rethink of habits and practices that we consider as important.

Jeppe Hein<sup>1</sup> states: ‘Life begins with an inhale and ends with an exhale. In-between we all breathe and live different lives. And yet, each breath keeps us together, connected, sharing the same air’. As human beings we have so many things in common and yet we are so different. With the rise of Social Media in our lives can we consider that we use innovative ways to communicate? Can such practices encourage us to appreciate and respect values and principles that define us as human beings?

Our special issue discusses how to redefine the way we communicate, innovate and protect via social media tools and practices. How can technical innovation (semantic technologies, Digital Forensics, social media) ‘protect us’ and bring us together. The articles discuss how we can better connect, collaborate, and innovate to avoid misinformation and cultural loss. In this special issue, we present five different articles to address the issue above. Two are from the field of New Media/Innovation and three refer to Cultural Communication, Traditions and National Promotion.

*Multimodal news authentication as a service: The «True News» Extension*, by Anastasia Katsaounidou, Nikolaos Vryzas, Rigas Kotsakis, and Charalampos Dimoulas, provide us with solutions in identifying fake content, according to fact-checking tools, and utilize them in automated/semi-automated mechanisms, as the key to defend the truth and avoid misinformation. The main novelty of the proposed tool is for users to help determine whether they can trust an article or not, in a more simplified and educational manner. The proposed methodology attempts to introduce a valuable free tool in the field of Digital Forensics.

The second paper, *Towards a semantic-oriented model of participatory journalism management: Perceptions of user-generated content*, by Theodora Saridou, Kosmas Panagiotidis, Nikolaos Tsipas, and & Andreas Veglis, defines the requirements and describes the characteristics of a new managing participatory journalism model, based on semantic technologies. This new model is proposed by the authors to support organized collection and moderation of content in an effective way and in a short amount of time. The findings lead to a collaborative, semantic-oriented way of submitting and receiving user-generated content. We have a long way to go to understand preferences and new practices in innovation, nevertheless it is encouraging that the young generation is keen on developing knowledge on the topic. More particularly, it is encouraging that a recent research (Podara et al., 2019), confirmed that millennial generation need to rely to its own research about the credibility of a news’ topic that appears on the internet.

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<sup>1</sup>Jeppe Hein is a Berlin-based Danish Artist that created ‘Breathe with Me’. This artwork was initiated to engage audiences worldwide with their breath and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. See at <https://www.breathewithme.world/breathe-with-me/>, and <https://breathewithme.world/breathing-watercolours/> , accessed 25/11/2019

Azian Muhamad Adzmi, from the UK, author of the third paper of this special issue with *Social Media and 'Silaturrahim'*. The study investigates how emigrated Malaysians maintain their tradition of 'silaturrahim' (togetherness- bond) with the help of new media. Her findings indicate that the increasing use of social media, as a platform of maintaining or improving 'silaturrahim', could establish a positive communication culture among the Diaspora community.

Culture is produced, shaped and transmitted through intergroup relations and communication. Margarita Kefalaki, Eirini Daskalaki and Fotini Diamantidaki, present the next paper of this special issue, entitled *Cultural Communication and Cultural Transmission: The Case of Popular Tradition in Corsica*. This paper suggests a change in taught communication modules in order to achieve cultural transmission, evolution and ways to avoid a possible cultural loss. Exchange and communicate, especially when popular tradition is concerned, could lead to openness, understanding and collaboration of different people and countries around the world. And how much we need it, today more than ever, to learn to co-exist in diverse societies where there are harmonic relationships and mutual respect, despite cultural differences, in today's 'innovative' societies, is food for thought.

Last but not least, the study of Athina Papageorgiou, and Aristidis Papagrighoriou, *Athens as a Major Congress Destination and the Role of Professional Congress Organizers (PCOs)*, examines the type of communication needed for Athens to become a city of major congress events attractor. Results from the study show that joint efforts from the state and the private sector and certain congress tourism stakeholders are needed in order for the capital, largest city of Greece and historical capital of Europe, to be promoted and be established as a major congress tourism destination.

We very much hope that you will enjoy navigating through the articles and considering the dynamics between innovation and communication in this new era of social media and how innovative digital tools can help us move forward and re-create our present and define our future.

**Dr Margarita Kefalaki and Dr Fotini Diamantidaki**

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## Multimodal news authentication as a service: The «True News» Extension

Anastasia Katsaounidou<sup>2</sup>

Nikolaos Vryzas<sup>3</sup>

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Charalampos Dimoulas<sup>5</sup>

### Abstract

The current work focuses on the problem of misinformation. Filtering and blocking every unreliable source is impossible even to consider. Thus, discovering the dedicated steps to indicate fake content, according to the fact-checking procedures, and utilize them in automated/semi-automated mechanisms, is the key to defend the truth. Despite the availability of various authentication applications/services, there is a lack of integrated systems supporting media veracity in real-world scenarios. There are useful tools and practices for detecting processed/altered content, usually investigating a single manipulation or relying on the credibility of one source, which turns to be inadequate. Based on the above, a browser extension is presented, aiming at evaluating news authenticity in a multimodal, integrating and collaborative way. Operating unobtrusively in the background until needed, the extension is a solution transparent to the user. Without having to open a new browsing tab or to switch navigation /media environment, the user can identify relevant information regarding the five (5) clues which frame a news story (Title, Date, Creator, Source, Containing Images). In essence, with the aid of the True News Plugin, a user reveals information from trusted sources, classifying them by the accuracy of their domain names, while also spotting possible misinformation through doctored images. The main novelty of the proposed module is that it will help users determine whether they can trust an article or not, in a more simplified and educational manner. By walking through five (5) essential steps and by answering ten (10) questions, the proposed methodology attempts to introduce a valuable free tool in the field of Digital Forensics.

**Keywords:** Misinformation, Fake-news, Multimodal authentication, Plugin, Browser extension

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**1. Introduction:** Information can fit into the “palm of our hand” allowing everyone to see and hear everything in real time. Social Media are mining peoples’ reality by holding a critical role in the way they perceive information. Digital processes have become visible by shaping peoples’ experiences and algorithms from scientific papers suddenly emerge as objects of newspaper articles and conversations during coffee (Dourish, 2016; Katsaounidou, Dimoulas & Veglis, 2018). Observing what is happening on the Internet, we will face with a situation where Google holds 87% of worldwide online searches and Facebook has surpassed 2.2 billion monthly users. The two companies absorb more than 60% of the global cost of digital advertising and of course, they are the greatest owners of information (Statista, 2018).

Facebook's business model heavily relies on ads, as the majority of the social network's revenue comes from advertising (Budak, Agrawal, & Abbadi, 2011). The Internet that once looked like a rich range of blogs and web sites has been squeezed out by a few platforms that "manage" what ideas and opinions will be seen and shared, but also by ever stronger digital gatekeepers, whose information distribution technologies can easily be used by manipulators whose motives are in doubt (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

Widespread misinformation on the Internet is a cause of concern, making everyone suspicious or prone to disagree with everything (Owen, 2019). Entirely made-up or manipulated content that looks like real journalistic report is disseminated, and designed headlines go viral. More often than not, due to its influential and emotional symbolism, people are encouraged to share them. Surprisingly, creators of content, trying to increase their profitability, support attempts to reproduce false content (emotional, political, etc.), which most of the time cause much more reactions than ordinary news (Bakir & McStay, 2018).

The explosion of misinformation spread and internet propaganda is partially a result of how the advertising platforms of the major digital platforms, such as the above are designed to keep people's attention (DiFranzo & Gloria, 2017). Until today, the scientific community has been divided on whether a regulatory framework needs to be established. However, the debate should revolve around what kind of regulatory framework is appropriate to avoid the complete disappearance of freedom of speech on the Web (Lazer, Baum, Benkler, Berinsky, Greenhill, Menczer, ...& Schudson, 2018). To answer the above question, we must first think about how much profit Social Network Services (SNSs) are willing to lose and how much freedom users are willing to sacrifice. From the above, it is clear how important the next day's solutions are, including automated and semi-automated techniques to detect and identify inaccurate information (Katsaounidou, Dimoulas & Veglis, 2018).

Misinformation forms an exceptionally complicated research field, where multiple scientific and applied disciplines are involved. It is a fertile ground for scientific articles, innovative technological proposals, startups, and newspaper articles. Although there are plenty of approaches trying to solve the problem, the real societal impact is difficult to be identified. This is partly due to the fact that the problem is discussed behind the closed doors of Verification Industry, a multidisciplinary fact-checking and Digital Forensics (DF) industry which includes debunking sites, researchers among the fields, projects, institutes and consortiums trying to analyze and propose solutions (Katsaounidou, Dimoulas & Veglis, 2018). It goes without saying that in the case of such particularly complex and multidisciplinary questions, more than one “rapporteur” must be

appointed. Thus, in fighting false information, the number of initiatives, web environments, organizations, platforms and tools for information verification has enormously increased (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

By studying related research, it is easy to observe that most attempts to face the problem of misinformation through automated solutions seem sole and/or incidental. More specifically, examples of false news have been identified, discussed, analyzed and used to train classification algorithms that recognize inaccurate information in favor of humans (Reid & Sands, 2016; Katsaounidou & Dimoulas, 2018b). For this reason, most of the already implemented web-services are specialized in one type of multimedia content, i.e. text, image, audio, video, URLs.

Nevertheless, based on human-operated validation of sites and stories, most of the existing environments try to automate every aspect of the encompassed tasks and operations. Following the above approach, people learn to depend on software to come to conclusions and make decisions, a habit that has never proved to be adequate and beneficial for them in the long-run (Dourish, 2016). Therefore, the significance of semi-automated solutions, suitable for facilitating media authentication, while also supporting digital media literacy and life-long education emerges.

The goal of the verification field is that, eventually, users will acquire the knowledge and know-how to identify the realness of information with partial machine assistance, to be capable of transmitting accurate information instead of propagating misinformation (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). In this direction, the ultimate objective of the present project is to investigate the possibility of creating a reliable application, namely a browser extension, which will bear the latest forensic verification developments, without disregarding the well-known traditional principles of doubting about every little piece of information and answering to the five Ws questions (who, what, where, when, why) plus “how” (Katsaounidou & Dimoulas, 2018a). Hence, the interface will guide the users step by step through all the deployed validation processes, helping them to become familiar with the tasks they should follow in evaluating the truthfulness of an article, therefore cultivating their necessary verification skills.

Social Media (SM) and webpages have been proved unable to address the phenomenon of misinformation spread within their platforms, in the first place (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). A browser extension, a software component that adds specific features to an existing application, has been chosen as the most appropriate solution for the task. SNSs like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are used by members to spread “knowledge” and to seed topics for journalists (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Moreover, SNSs are the favorite places and /or tools of news organizations to broaden their audience. Unfortunately, due to their widespread nature and the lack of efficacious censorship, without suppressing rightful freedom of speech, SNSs are the central space for spreading misinformation online (Lewandowsky, Ecker, Seifert, Schwarz, & Cook, 2012). Essentially, trying to overcome the above lack of control, the True News extension offers a solution transparent to the user, operating unobtrusively in the background until needed. Without having to open a new tab in the browser or to move away from each environment, the user can collect useful information regarding the nature of the news items.

Undoubtedly, it is necessary for the verification field to develop, modernize, update and optimize applications in the “war” against disinformation. A brief review of related works (applications,

webpages, extensions, etc.) and their theoretical background is presented and analyzed, to allow the reader to become acquainted with the current state of the art.

### Literature review:

As most researchers tend to agree, the most important initiative regarding fact-checking is the International Fact Checking Network (IFCN), which aims at bringing together fact-checkers worldwide (International Fact Checking Network, 2018). First Draft<sup>6</sup> forms another innovative network, initiated in June of 2015, with objectives to raise awareness, perform research, and address challenges relating to trust and truth in media in the digital era. “First Draft” undertakes practical journalism projects in the field, investigating effective methods for tackling information disorder online. It also provides practical and ethical guidance on how to find, verify and publish content, sourced from the social web (First Draft News, 2019). Integrated environments like the web-based collaboration platform Truly Media<sup>7</sup> and its Artificial Intelligence (AI) utilities, powered by TruthNest<sup>8</sup>, help individuals discover, analyze and verify any information through predefined operations.

As already mentioned, most of the existing online services are unimodal, i.e., specializing in a single content entity, with the visual element being the most popular subject of investigation. Due to their common use as evidence in News, images have also become the most usual form of digital misinformation, i.e., tampered and re-used photos in the context of a new story (Katsaounidou, Dimoulas & Veglis, 2018). The simplest way to check the history of a picture on the Web is by reverse image search, a content-based search driven by the visual data and not by text. The most popular reverse image search engines are Google Image, TinEye, Bing, Yandex and Baidu. Significantly, Google has already tons of stored pictures, and anyone can upload an image file or paste its corresponding URL into the search bar for retrieving similar content (Reid & Sands, 2016).

Existing open source tools offer verification solutions that can adequately support typical authentication tasks, although they do not feature the entire desired functionality and comprehensiveness for the average user. Two popular and free web services are the Image Verification Assistant<sup>9</sup> (Zampoglou, Papadopoulos & Kompatsiaris, 2017) and Forensically<sup>10</sup>, which contain online toolkits for fundamental forensic investigation. Similarly, Ghiro<sup>11</sup> is an open-source web application for inspecting image metadata.

Photo Detective<sup>12</sup>, recently renamed to Axon Detect, is another profitable forensics toolset. The platform offers useful authentication insights, by taking into account lighting direction calculation, compression consistency estimation and metadata analysis. Likewise, system Pizarro<sup>13</sup> performs standard forensic procedures, along with algorithmic image reconstruction capabilities (Kamenicky, Bartos, Flusser, Mahdian, Kotera, Novozamsky, ...&Zitova, 2016). According to Korus (2017),

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<sup>6</sup> First Draft News <https://firstdraftnews.org/>

<sup>7</sup> Truly Media <http://www.truly.media/>

<sup>8</sup> TruthNest <https://www.truthnest.com/>

<sup>9</sup> Image Verification Assistant <http://reveal-mklab.iti.gr/reveal/>

<sup>10</sup> Forensically <https://29a.ch/photo-forensics/#forensic-magnifier>

<sup>11</sup> Ghiro <http://www.getghiro.org/>

<sup>12</sup> PhotoDetective <http://metainventions.com/photodetective.html>

<sup>13</sup> Pizarro <http://pizarro.utia.cas.cz/>

Amped Authenticate<sup>14</sup> is the most comprehensive commercial platform, assembling tools for the manual investigation of visual data, as well as automatic indicators of several forensic trails. Finally, the JPEG Snoop<sup>15</sup> application allows the retrieval of the full JPEG compression settings, taking advantage of an extended database of identified capturing and storing signatures for many cameras.

Video content is more difficult to manipulate and also harder to verify, thus, the available video authentication platforms are outnumbered by the image-oriented ones (Papadopoulou, Zampoglou, Papadopoulos & Kompatsiaris, 2019; Teyssou, Leung, Apostolidis, Papadopoulos, Zampoglou, ...& Mezaris, 2017, October). The verification process becomes heavier as the visual information increases, i.e. checking every frame of a video file is hugely time-consuming. One solution is to reveal the video key-frames and the corresponding thumbnail pictures, utilizing them in reverse image search. This can flag up other videos that contain similar footage. Complementary keywords-based search can expedite the process.

In all cases, one can reveal whether a seemingly new image or video is reused, as long as he/she is equipped with patience and the correct tools. Amber Video<sup>16</sup> is a related platform that uses signal processing and artificial intelligence to identify tampered audio and video, designed to detect /stop misinformation, therefore to eliminate distrust. Amber Video is also useful for individuals who need to investigate the accuracy of videos, the source of which is unknown. InVID<sup>17</sup> is another solution that aims at detecting, checking and verifying newsworthy video material, spread through social media, thus exporting credibility marks (Papadopoulou et al., 2019; Teyssou et al., 2017).

A company that specializes in real-time video verification to protect customers, business and profits, offers information regarding its services through the site Iverify<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, Amnesty International<sup>19</sup> has introduced a new web service to support journalists in checking YouTube videos. Additionally, to help address these kinds of issues, Amnesty International has also launched a website, the Citizen Evidence Lab<sup>20</sup>, providing journalists and human-rights advocates with tools and learning material on validating user-generated video. Furthermore, Storyful<sup>21</sup>, in collaboration with Google, has created the Montage<sup>22</sup>, a product that allows users to team up on verifying or analyzing YouTube videos.

Tweet Verification Assistant<sup>23</sup> is the only dynamic text centered application that evaluates the integrity of a tweet, by analyzing multiple (textual mainly) parameters, i.e. language, punctuation, number of hash tags, mentions and external links, as well as multimedia content (attached or connected) (Boididou, Papadopoulos, Zampoglou, Apostolidis, Papadopoulou, & Kompatsiaris, 2018).

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<sup>14</sup> Amped Authenticate <https://ampedsoftware.com/authenticate>

<sup>15</sup> JPEG Snoop, <http://www.impulseadventure.com/photo/jpeg-snoop.html>

<sup>16</sup> Amber Video <https://ambervideo.co/>

<sup>17</sup> InVID <http://invid.condat.de/>

<sup>18</sup> Iverify <http://www.iverifysecurity.com/solutions/video-verification.html>

<sup>19</sup> Amnesty International <https://www.amnesty.org/en/>

<sup>20</sup> Citizen Evidence Lab <https://citizenevidence.org/>

<sup>21</sup> Storyful <https://storyful.com/>

<sup>22</sup> Montage <https://montage.meedan.com/welcome>

<sup>23</sup> Tweet Verification Assistant <http://reveal-mklab.iti.gr/reveal/fake/>

Regarding Forensic Audio analysis, no open source platforms can be found. Among the commercial solutions, the IKAR Lab<sup>24</sup>: Forensic Audio Suite and the Forensic Audio Workstation are listed, forming professional software suites for speech signal analysis, both provided by the Speech Technology Center. Moreover, the authors of the current paper have recently presented a framework (in its infancy) for delivering supervisory tools for audio-driven multimedia Content Authentication as a Service (CAAAS) (Vryzas, Katsaounidou, Kotsakis, Dimoulas, Kalliris, 2019). We have presented the existing web-based services and their implications in the related field of interfaces, intending to validate multimodal content. The existing browser extensions are discussed below, providing some analysis insights that will facilitate the presentation and analysis of the proposed “True News” extension.

### Browser extensions:

The most vanguard approach is the B.S. Detector<sup>25</sup> browser extension with 19.074 users worldwide, which is powered by OpenSources<sup>26</sup>, a professionally curated list of unreliable or otherwise questionable sources (Zimdars, 2016). By domain classifications, B.S. Detector categorizes the sites as fake news, satire, extreme bias, conspiracy theory, rumor mill, state news, junk science, hate group, clickbait and proceeds with caution, displaying a warning screen when someone enters a site known to publish false news stories. The main problem is that the repository of OpenSources has a tiny number of entries (834), compared to the billions of websites online. The optimal use of the B.S. Detector could be succeeded by checking and labeling all the webpages worldwide, a process which is considered unfeasible. Moreover, classifying a specific article as fake does not mean that all the items provided by the same site are unreliable (Fan, 2017).

Another interesting approach is the Fake News Guard<sup>27</sup> extension with 289 users, which checks every visited page and every link that ends up on the user’s Facebook feed against its blacklist. If the source of the article is blacklisted, the user gets a particularly detectable warning in the browser. Moreover, this approach introduces the element of interaction, allowing users to report on anything they consider unreliable, thus helping the creators of Fake News Guard to get valuable feedback to set further improvements. One drawback of this tool is that, although it is an extension, its full interface is unfolded in a separate browser tab.

In the same line, there are two similar name extensions, the Fake News Detector<sup>28</sup> with 1.398 users and the Fake News Detector<sup>29</sup> with 651 users. The first one marks fake news in the browsing pages in red color and the clickbait links in orange color. The second one allows users to detect and label news directly from their Facebook and Twitter accounts, using the following flags: Legitimate, Fake News, Click Bait, Extremely Biased, Satire or Not news. After flagging an item, this becomes visible to the rest of the users, so that they can be more cautious. Human-provided information is

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<sup>24</sup> IKAR Lab [https://speechpro.com/product/forensic\\_analysis/ikarlab](https://speechpro.com/product/forensic_analysis/ikarlab)

<sup>25</sup> B.S Detector <https://github.com/selfagency/bs-detector>

<sup>26</sup> Open Sources Repository <http://www.opensources.co/>

<sup>27</sup> Fake News Guard <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/fake-news-guard/pmebnfgmccgnpmecdcopidnjdlnggbech>

<sup>28</sup> Fake News Detector <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/fake-news-detector/aebaikmeedenaijgicfmdndfknoobahep>

<sup>29</sup> Fake News Detector <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/fake-news-detector/alomdfnfpbaagehmdokilpbjchacabk>

used to update a database, in order to train algorithms that can automatically classify news into the above-listed categories in the long-term. Through this method, even recently published stories that no one has seen, may be rapidly flagged in an automated way. The critical innovation of this specific plugin is its collaborative nature, since it displays on Facebook users, the decision of peoples and algorithms. The problem, in this case, is that anyone can flag information, regardless of his /her abilities in the information validation process and the skills on deciding what news is right and what wrong.

Regarding image authentication, a Google Chrome plugin, called RevEye<sup>30</sup> (23.608 users), checks databases at Google, TinEye, Bing, Yandex, and Baidu. The search engines are useful in the cases of re-used visual content, allowing users to find out the origin and the context /surrounding behind a picture and its use, or even to retrieve higher resolution versions.

Another popular approach for video verification is the InVID<sup>31</sup> extensions with 10.789 users (Papadopoulou et al., 2019; Nixon, Apostolidis, Markatopoulou, Patras & Mezaris, 2019) which aims at detecting, checking and verifying newsworthy video material, spread through social media to export credibility marks. In this case, also, a major weakness is that, although it is a plugin, it enables the full interface in a separate browser tab.

Prioritizing metadata as the most critical factor, the Send to Exif Viewer<sup>32</sup> extension by Jose Tomas Tocino with 7.073 users adds an element to the contextual menu that opens images in a metadata viewer. Furthermore, some tools utilize the lists in the debunking databases of the fact-checking websites. This is the case of Instant Snopes Checker<sup>33</sup> (Unofficial) with 596 users, which offers a quick and simple way to check if the current page title and keywords are listed on Snopes.com. This approach relies on the idea that clickbait news posts are frequently recycled, hence the recorded titles and keywords of the debunked articles on Snopes.com may provide useful indications.

Closer to the True News approach, in terms of functions, is First Draft News Check<sup>34</sup> with 1.380 users, an interactive version of First Draft Visual Verification Guide for Images and Videos. The extension allows users to have an image or video open in a browser and then work through a checklist that prompts to investigate: 1) If they are looking at an original piece of digital material; 2) How confident they are about who created the content; 3) How confident they are about the date of the capture (i.e. when); and 4) how confident they are about the place of content creation (i.e. where). The extension calculates a verification score and creates a button that can be embedded on each website.

As already noticed, all the mentioned above tools are intended for users familiar with the English language but also for content analysis written in English. Nevertheless, there is a Greek Hoaxes

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<sup>30</sup>RevEye <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/reveye-reverse-image-sear/keaaclejehbbapnphnmpiklalfhelgf?hl=en>

<sup>31</sup>InVID <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/fake-video-news-debunker/mhccpoafgdgbhnjfhkcmgkndkeenfhe?hl=en>

<sup>32</sup> Send to Exif Viewer <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/send-to-exif-viewer/gogiienhpmfmodmlnhdljokkjiapfck?hl=en>

<sup>33</sup> Instant Snopes Checker <https://goo.gl/U1vzih>

<sup>34</sup> First Draft News Check <https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/firstdraftnewscheck/japockpeaaanknlkhagilkgcledilbfk?hl=en>

Detector<sup>35</sup> extension with 2.061 users offered by the Greek debunking site “Ellinika Hoaxes<sup>36</sup>”. Most of the code comes from the aforementioned BS Detector, under the LGPL-3.0 open source license. In essence, this extension checks a list of unreliable or questionable Greek sources and informs the user when he/she visits the blacklisted sources.

In summary, apart from some exceptions, most of the above-listed tools are fully automated, keep their internal procedures hidden, are usually unimodal (specializing in one content type), and do not offer collaboration. Hence, a browser extension aiming at evaluating the authenticity of news (and generally posts) in a multimodal, integrated and collaborative way, is a necessity (Katsaounidou& Dimoulas, 2018a). This is precisely the targeted innovation of the True News approach, guiding the user through concrete steps and questions that need to be answered, taking into consideration the traditional cross-validation rules.

Another limitation of the above-presented tools is that they do not produce a final decision, but they only give users some approximate indices. The True News approach seeks to formulate a decision-making process and extracting a conclusive answer as to whether the article is true or false. The above is achieved through the semi-automated transparent processes that it contains. This process targets also to support users by enhancing digital literacy. The user, guided by the True News interface, answers with crisp Yes or No choices to the questions that each step includes. In the end, all these answers are fused into a final decision that is displayed to users, providing an overall truthfulness estimation. More detailed information about the True News system architecture is presented in the following sections.

## 2. True News Extension Presentation:

As in most cases of project implementation, the final software service emerges after iterative design, debugging and improvements. The objectives of this subsection include the detailed presentation of the "True News" extension, the description of the fact-checking steps concerning news verification, and specifically the questions that the user has to answer to get the final result. Accordingly, User Experience (UX) Design aspects are analyzed and clarified to optimize usability with emphasis on the tools that are integrated in the plugin.

The application consists of five (5) different sub-modules that are successively deployed along the end-to-end chain. Though the original plan contained five (5) tabs, incorporating the required validation clues (Article Title, Date, Creator, Source, Containing Images), it turned up to an eventual screen setup of thirteen (13) tabs. The first panel corresponds to the welcome page. The next ten (10) displays contain the questions addressed to the users and the remaining two (2) form the areas to display the final pages. An analysis of similar applications was conducted, leading to the adoption of similar /consisted Graphical User Interface (GUI) design, following the modern UX trends and aesthetics. Representative screenshots are provided to help the illustration of all the intermediated processes and authored functionality.

Following the installation process, the welcome page appears on the right side of the browser, providing quick guidelines about the plugin usage (Figure 1). Careful dimensioning and positioning

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<sup>35</sup> Greek Hoaxes <https://goo.gl/ryBNGA>

<sup>36</sup>Ellinika Hoaxes <https://www.ellinikahoaxes.gr/>

have been selected to place the add-on User Interface (UI) in the sidebar area of the Facebook platform, usually reserved for advertisements or other communication elements, avoiding to hide parts of the article or other useful information. Actually, the True News window has been set to a size a bit larger than the usual format of these hosted services, aiming at offering higher resolution and overall application visibility.

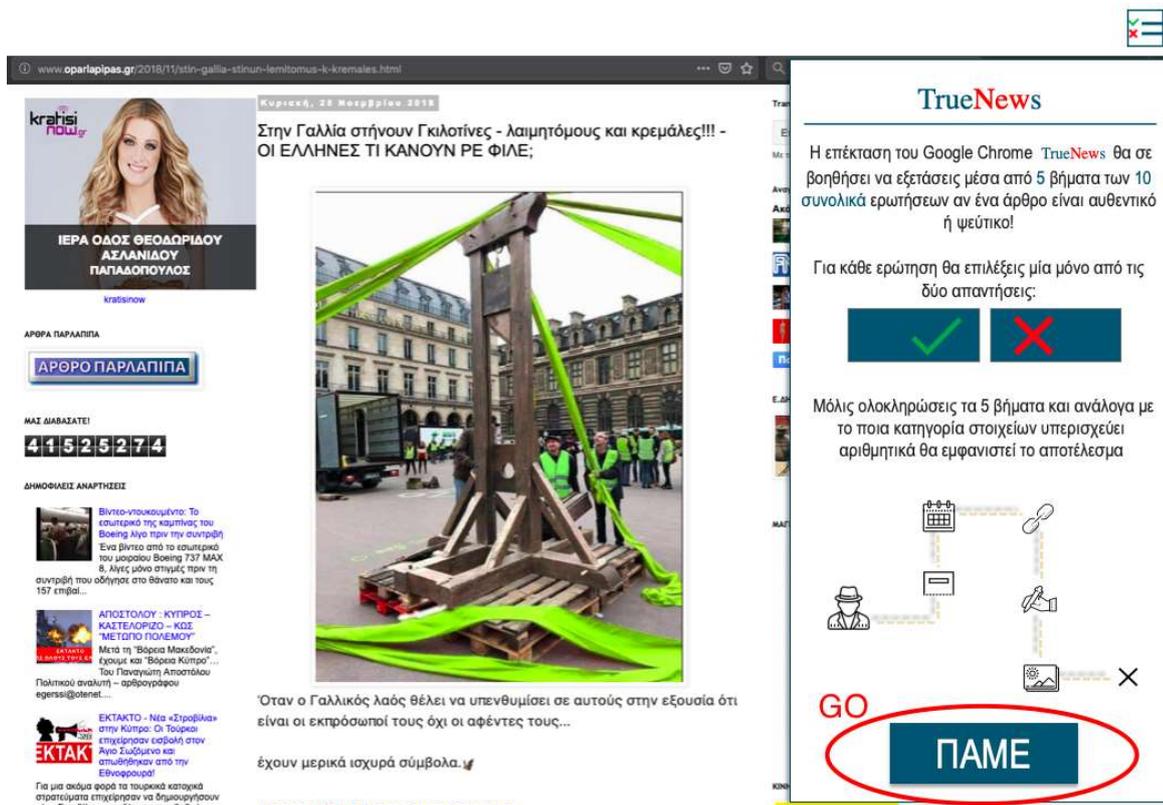


Figure 1. The Welcome Page of True News extension

When the plugin is activated through the selection of the GO (ΠΑΜΕ) button at the bottom of the window, the first question unfolds: “Does the title contains overloaded language, excessive punctuation (!!!), a lot of capital letters to emphasize?” (Figure 2 left), introducing users to the step-by-step validation process.

Following the user’s answer (Yes | No) the cross-checking proceeds to the second inquiry: “Does the title claims that it contains “a secret” or something that is hidden from the mainstream media /informing streams?” (Figure 2 center). In both of the above two cases, the title of the article is automatically repeated at the bottom of the UI, near the user's interaction buttons, to serve usability, expediting the analysis in a more straightforward manner. In this context, users are learning and becoming familiar with the evaluation of title-related features, therefore to detect potential propaganda articles.

Based on the provided feedback and instructions, the guide continues to the third question, aiming at checking previous records on that (or similar) on a predefined list of unreliable sources: “Are

there any unreliable sites that have also published this title?" (Figure 2 right). In this step, a pop-up window with the corresponded search engine results emerges, and the user is asked to simply track down the number of unreliable webpages, answering (Yes | No) concerning if there a doubtful background on that title.

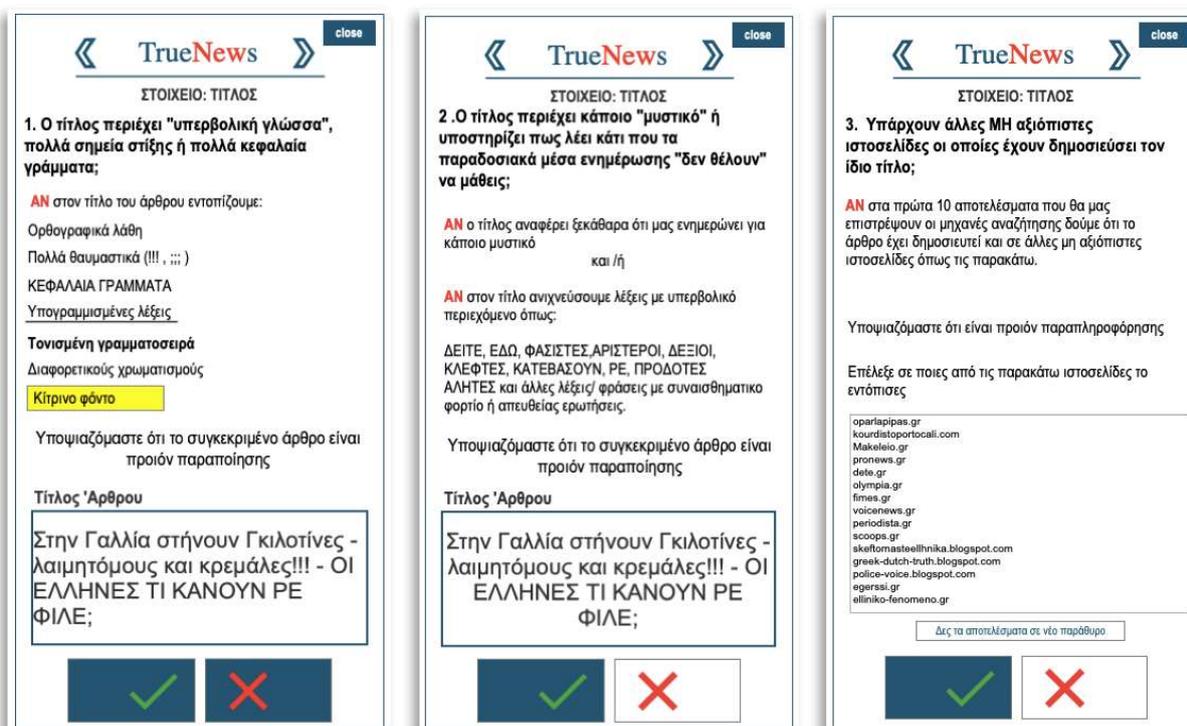


Figure 2. Question 1: Does the title contain overloaded language, excessive punctuation (!!!), a lot of capital letters to emphasize (left). Question 2: Does the title claims that it contains “a secret” or something that is hidden from the mainstream media /informing streams? (center). Question 3: Are there any unreliable sites that have also published this title? (right)

The fourth question is similar to the previous one but in a reverse perspective: “Has the “title” of the article been already investigated by the debunking sites?” (Figure 3 left). As Figure 3 (left) depicts, the answer to this question is presented in an inline frame, offering also the option to visit the debunking sites and read more information regarding the specific article. Hence, if the title has already been evaluated by the debunking site “Ellinika Hoaxes”, it would probably be unreliable (implying the YES answer and vice versa).

True News extension also provides substantial evidence concerning the date and the source of the news item, two essential clues that everyone has to examine before believing an article. Hence, at the tab of the fifth question (Figure 3 center) the user can find information about previously published history (if any).

Likewise, at the display of the sixth question, users can identify, in real time, if the visiting page has been already blacklisted by debunking sites (Figure 3 right). In this step, a pop-up window with the corresponded search engine results is shown, and the user is asked to choose the specific page among a list of unreliable webpages.

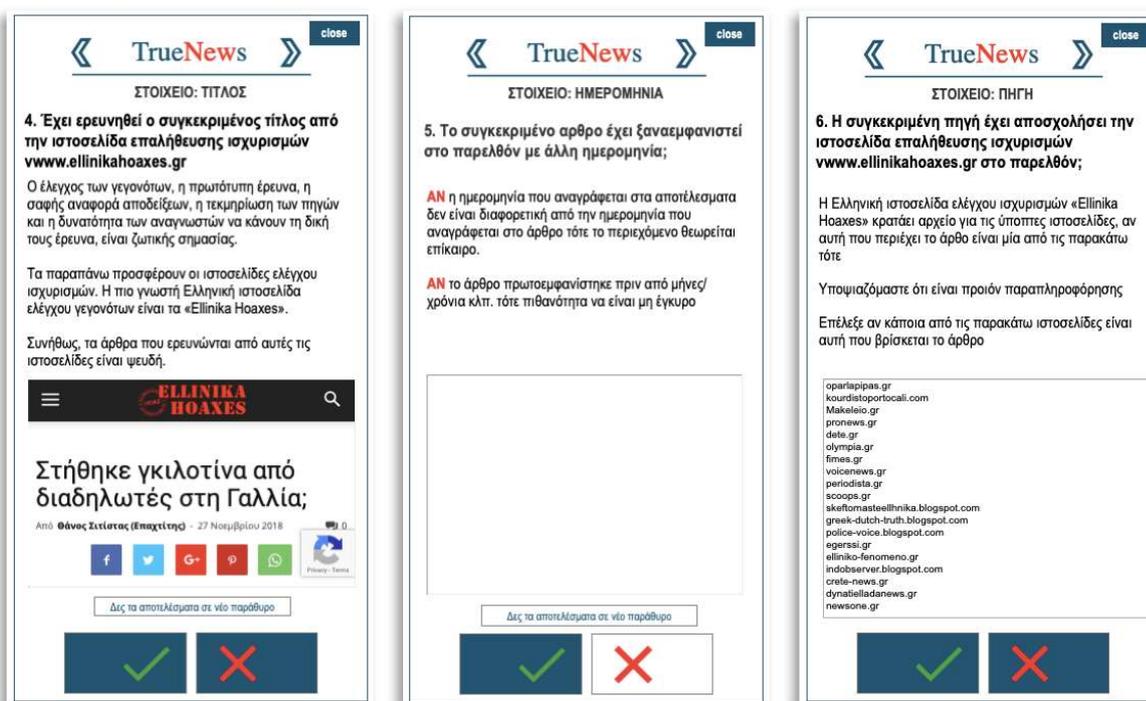


Figure 3. Question 4: Has the “title” of the article been already investigated by the debunking sites? (left). Question 5: Has this article been republished again in the past? (center). Question 6: Has this source been blacklisted from debunking sites? (right)

The seventh question offers guidelines regarding the identification of the author of the article (Figure 4 left). As mentioned before, articles containing images receive 94% more readability than plain text (Katsaounidou, Dimoulas & Veglis, 2018), a fact that makes them the most usual form of digital misinformation. However, the technique of Reverse Image Search (Google, TinEye, Bing, Yandex, Baidu) can help us discover the truth. Thus, the next three questions aim at identifying the nature of the containing images (if any).

In specific, the eighth question "Can you locate the ‘image’ elsewhere on the Internet (different version/context)?" inquires the above issue, returning publication dates, sources, and context of articles using similar visual documents /elements (Figure 4 center). If the results are consistent concerning the frame of the story, the article is considered true, otherwise, it is assumed probably a recycled item.

The next step takes advantage of Jeffrey's Image Metadata Viewer<sup>37</sup> and/or the Exif Info<sup>38</sup> tools to reveal the basic meta-information of the image (date, time, creation location, logging device, etc.), so that users would be able to answer the question "Is the metadata information of the image in relevance with the article information?" (Figure 4 left). For instance, if the dates do not match with each other, the article is questioned for its reliability.

The tenth and last question investigates the presence of a potential tampering operation: “Is the ‘image’ manipulated?” (Figure 5 left). Users can benefit from the free-to-use Image Verification

<sup>37</sup> Jeffrey's Image Metadata Viewer <http://exif.regex.info/exif.cgi>

<sup>38</sup> Exif Info <https://exifinfo.org/>

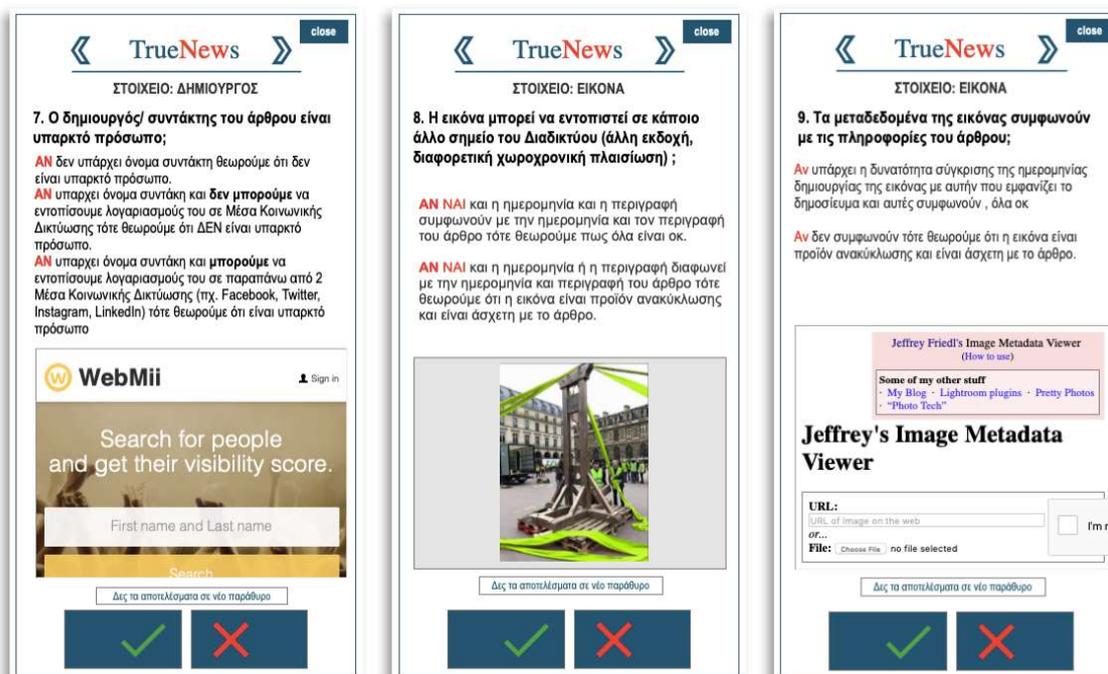


Figure 4. Question 7: Is the author of the article a real person? (left). Question 8: Can you locate the 'image' elsewhere on the Internet (different version/context) (center). Question 9: Is the metadata information of the image in relevance with the article information? (right).

Assistant tool to find out if the visual content is intact. If the tool detects that the image is edited, the article is documented on doctored data, therefore it is very likely to fall to the spectrum of Misinformation. After analyzing and integrating the answers, the system proceeds to a fused decision-making operation, combining all of the unimodal estimates to display the final result (Figure 5 center) and (Figure 5 right).

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the questions and their categorization emerged after thorough analysis. To verify that this corpus of items is a safe and effective way to reach conclusions regarding the nature of an article, many original and fake stories were analyzed from the research team with the use of these ten questions. The results of the above procedure were the promising vehicle on the way of their final determination. Of course, we are consistently trying to identify reasons for false positives to modify the guide and make it more efficient. The above will be achieved in the future by keeping records of the news being checked from the users and by adding/offering the ability to receive feedback.

As already mentioned, the main goal of the plugin is to help people become familiar with the tasks they should follow in evaluating the truthfulness of an article and cultivating their necessary verification skills. While the field of information verification is rapidly evolving, yet, besides the fact-checking principles, no unmistakable method of identifying false information exists. Thus, especially at this time when even first-generation fact-checking is no longer enough, the cooperation between humans and machines (algorithmic techniques) should be intensified.

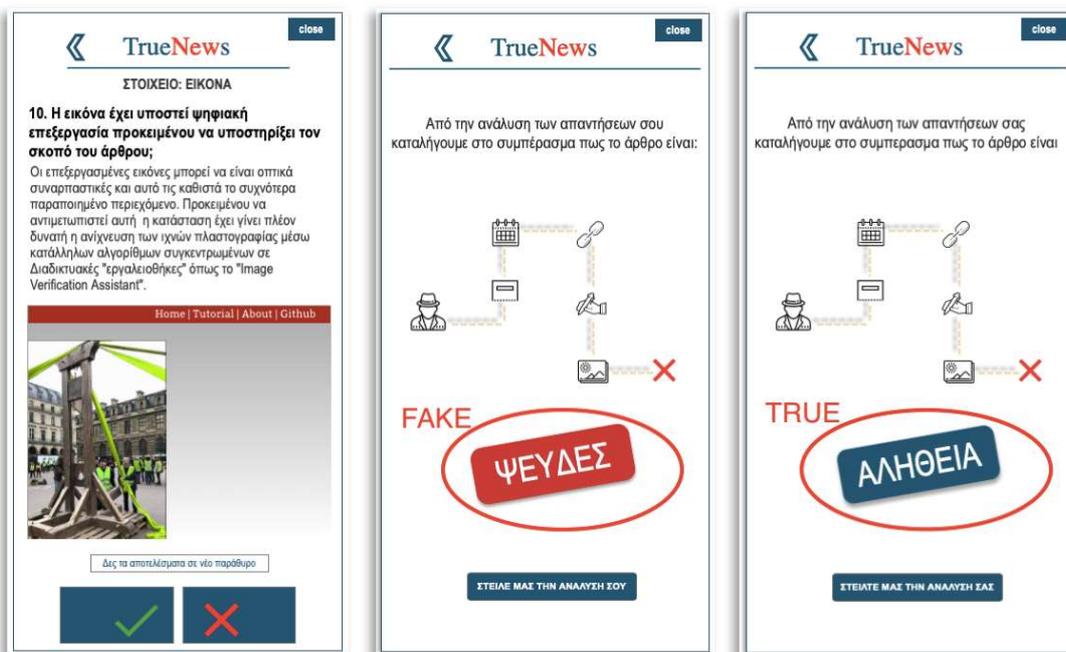


Figure 5. Question 10: Is the ‘image’ manipulated? (left). The result page for fake articles (center). The result page for real articles (right).

**3. System Architecture:** As mentioned above the True News Service offers a variety /combination of crosschecking and validating operations to estimate the credibility or truthfulness of an article. These processes have to be analyzed into the modules of a multimodal architecture that would serve the whole decision-making implementation. Specifically, Figure 6 presents the proposed architecture for the True News extension in a connected block-diagram flow chart.

Starting from the beginning, when an article is given to the system as input, the first step is to conduct a web parsing operation, to disintegrate the web page into stand-alone elements for further exploitation, namely the modalities of text and images. The textual information is then categorized into the conceptual fields that refer to the title, author, source, and date of the published article elongated by the main plain text area of the article. The above fields are investigated through (meta)search engines, dedicated services and debunking sites for data consistency, debunking sites logging, etc. before exposing the results to the user for the semi-automatic /driven operation of the article validity checking.

While more and more users engage to the service, their feedback is stored and subsequently exploited towards the formulation of generalized rules for more accurate and more automatic checking operations via Natural Language Processing techniques (NLP), like pattern recognition of a Fake Article via the style analysis of its title.

Next, as Figure 6 exhibits, the second modality of the proposed architecture is responsible for the processing of the parsed images. Specifically, the images of the input article are used for reverse search via the aforementioned services to investigate whether they appear in other sources as well. In addition, they are further analyzed by specialized algorithms for the detection of implicated potential (deliberate) manipulation.

The designed scheme is based on a decision-making process at each step according to the questions that are posed to the users, while a final combined/ weighted validation derives from all the results at each control module. At this point, the low fidelity prototype of the whole True News services has been designed, while on the other hand almost all the modalities have been algorithmically deployed in Matlab 2018b software, except for the part of the dedicated image processing modules. However, the future plan is to implement the algorithms with Python scripting, to combine them with JavaScript web programming for a platform installation that would take the entries/ articles for all of the above functionalities.

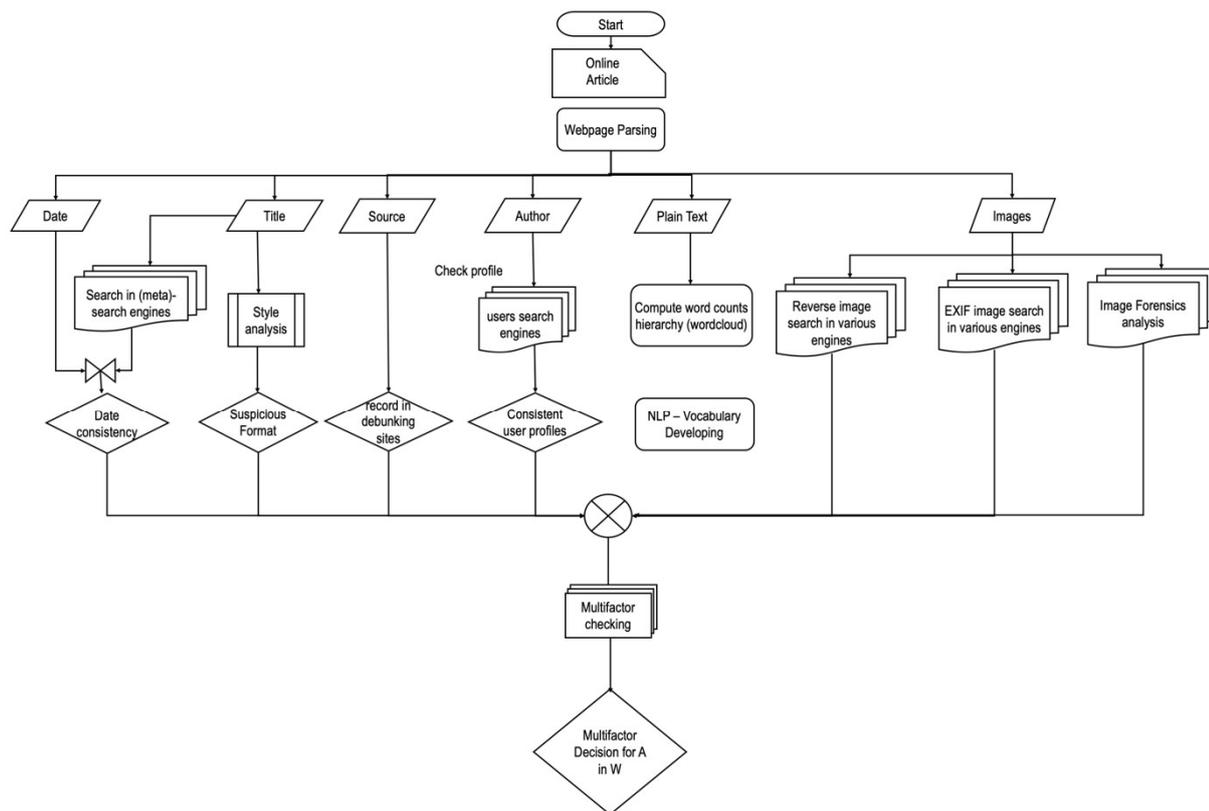


Figure 6. The architecture of True News extension

**4. Conclusions:** As mentioned previously, the verification industry has tried to offer solutions and to understand the challenges that exist in a variety of ways. Practices, methods, and tools, policies and procedures that adequately contribute to ensuring the quality of the transmitted information have been established trying to cultivate globally informing awareness and digital literacy. And yet, even now, the field of verification industry seems unable to restore the paradigm of factual information. Thus, the paper discusses the significance of semi-automated solutions and presents the True News plugin as the most suitable approach for facilitating media authentication, supporting digital media literacy and life-long education. The current paper, by introducing step by step all the deployed validation processes, hopes to help users become familiar with the steps they should follow in evaluating the truthfulness of an article, therefore cultivating their necessary verification skills. Moreover, it hopes to support the users who lacked critical thinking skills as well as

sufficient knowledge of logic, history, etc. to be able to filter this information successfully. Hence, the ultimate goal of True News extension is to gather all the existent knowledge regarding verification in an easily accessible interface offered as an online service. We expect that the proposed framework will eventually ensure users' ability to transmit accurate information and to prevent misinformation propagation.

**5. Acknowledgments:** This research is co-financed by Greece and the European Union (European Social Fund-ESF) through the Operational Programme «Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning» in the context of the project “Strengthening Human Resources Research Potential via Doctorate Research” (MIS-5000432), implemented by the State Scholarships Foundation (IKY) which supports A. Katsaounidou PhD Research. Moreover, this research has been partially supported by General Secretariat for Research and Technology (GSRT), the Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation (HFRI) (Scholarship Code: 1900) which supports N. Vryzas' Ph.D. research.

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## Towards a semantic-oriented model of participatory journalism management: Perceptions of user-generated content

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### Abstract

During the last two decades, citizens' participation in news production process has raised great academic and entrepreneurial interest for participatory journalism. Traditional procedures and concepts such as gatekeeping have been under discussion. News organizations redesign their websites in order to adopt tools and applications that make it possible for users to be active consumers or even co-producers of journalistic content, by liking, sharing, commenting and submitting material. At the same time, huge amounts of user-generated content are uploaded every minute on social media platforms. Subsequently, professionals have to deal with continually available information which requires management, classification and evaluation in order to keep high journalistic standards and to avoid problems, varying from plain grammar mistakes to serious situations of fake news, hostility or hate speech. Thus, there is the obvious need for a new model of managing participatory journalism, based on semantic technologies, which will support organized collection and moderation of content in an effective way and in short time. The main objective of this paper is to define the requirements and describe the characteristics that the model should have. For this purpose, two online surveys of journalists and users were conducted in Greece, in order to gain some insights concerning the development of the model. The paper presents the key findings from the surveys and identifies the views, the preferences and the experiences as expressed by the respondents, which lead to the tendency towards a collaborative, semantic-oriented way of submitting and receiving user-generated content.

**Keywords:** Participation, Semantics, User-generated content, Journalists, Model

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## 1. Introduction

Although the idea of mediated participation is part of the long-standing debate between cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists (Spyridou, 2018), it is accepted that the current new media era has seen a proliferation of user-generated content (UGC) and an increasing participation by Internet users in public communication, impelling newsrooms to integrate non-professional contributions into ordinary news practice (Tong, 2015). In the light of changing roles, users become prosumers (Deuze, 2003), while gate keeping turns to gate watching, as journalists do not define, but observe the information flow stemming from a variety of sources, receive UGC and construct a final product (Bruns, 2008). In a similar vein, Boczkowski (2005) refers to gate opening, when users actively co-develop website content and traditional work routines are questioned. Media organizations employ on their websites participatory formats that allow readers to actively consume or co-produce content. Classification of such formats has not led to a unique typology, since research has -among others- focused on the stages of news production (Singer et al., 2011), on the different propositions of communication process (Franquet et al., 2011) or on the concept of interactivity (Suau&Masip, 2014). Identifying the most prevalent and widespread participatory tools, Spyridou (2018) concluded to the following nine: i) Content rating, ii) polls, iii) sharing through social networks, iv) audience footage in the form of audiovisual material, v) collaborative content, vi) comments, vii) discussion forums, viii) submission of textual material and ix) citizen blogs.

Apart from the UGC that is produced on news websites, traditional news gathering process is also influenced by social media platforms, where users produce a wealth of data in the form of text, images and video, which must be processed, compiled and verified by journalists within a very short time span before being incorporated into a news story (Heravi et al., 2012). Journalists use social media to look for breaking news events, find ideas for stories, keep in touch with their audience and collect information (Weaver & Willnat, 2016, p. 853).

As a result, professionals are often challenged by a vast amount of content that has to be handled in tandem with other daily tasks (Boberg, et al., 2018). Moreover, digital content can be processed, intentionally altered or falsified and redistributed relatively easy, posing threats to mass communication and journalistic processes that can be associated to unwanted content tampering, construction of fake evidences, sharing and propagation of untrue stories (Katsaounidou& Dimoulas, 2018). Journalists therefore face the challenge of carefully disentangling valid opinions from manipulated statements, with the obvious danger of either censoring genuine speech or letting noxious forms of user engagement slip through (Frischlich et al., 2019). As Quandt (2018) argues, the potential for dark participation is enormous, not only in comment sections controlled by the media themselves, but also on non-proprietary platforms, like Facebook or Twitter, where the negativity and toxic atmosphere can be present and the deliberative quality very low.

Subsequently, it is necessary for journalists to establish consistent and transparent moderation strategies (Boberg et al., 2018), to develop their skills and use digital tools in the service of tracing information, forensic examination, UGC dissemination and verification (Johnston, 2016; Veglis, 2013). Since the Web evolution was built on structures which proved weak and unable to deal with the burden of managing huge amounts of information (Panagiotidis & Veglis, 2015), the application of automated, semi-automated and manual content annotation processes can significantly improve the management and retrieval of content at scale by enabling advanced categorization and search mechanisms (Lew et al., 2006; Saridou et al., 2018).

The main objective of this paper is to define the requirements and describe the characteristics that a new model of participatory journalism management based on semantic technologies should have in order to support collection and moderation of UGC effectively and in short time. For this purpose, two online surveys of journalists and users were conducted, in order to gain useful insights concerning the development of the model.

### **Difficulties in managing UGC in journalism**

Although the concept of participatory journalism was initially accompanied by promises for democratization and community enhancement (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2004), it is accepted that the incorporation of UGC in the journalistic process is not an easy task (Veglis, 2013), due to significant ethical, legal and responsibility issues (Saridou & Veglis, 2016, p. 88). Users' contributions have raised questions about the actual practice and its implications for culture, society and politics (Manosevitch, 2011), while journalists often see comments as a necessary evil, which holds intolerable standards of expression and poses problems stemming from low quality (Singer et al., 2011). Specifically, many professionals underline the excessive use of inappropriate language, flaming, stereotyping and superficial discourse that impede constructive public discourse (Manosevitch, 2011, p. 425). Research also shows that incivility is a common feature of public discussions. Defining the term, Coe et al. (2014) refer to features of discussion that convey an unnecessarily disrespectful tone towards the discussion forum, its participants or its topics, mainly in the forms of name-calling, aspersion, lying, vulgarity and pejorative for speech. Incivility is not only associated with key contextual factors, such as the topic of the article and the sources quoted within it, but also with the frequency users comment. For example, "hard news" topics about politics or economy generate a higher percentage of uncivil commentary in contrast to articles about health or lifestyle and at the same time frequent commenters are more civil than occasional ones (Coe et al., 2014, p. 669).

Furthermore, the examples that could be labelled as dark participation range from misinformation and hate campaigns to individual trolling and cyber bullying (Quandt, 2018), while the spreading of fake news, disinformation and conspiracy theories in UGC are forms of deviances as well (Frischlich et al., 2019). In addition, reports about malicious "pseudo-users", troll armies and social bots have jarred confidence in even the fundamental assumption that user interaction is interaction with users (Frischlich et al., 2019, p. 3). Issues about UGC lie also in the field of responsibility as traditional legal liability models are questioned in the light of changing author, editor and publisher's role (Valcke & Lenaerts, 2010). When users produce content on a professional website, the debate on liability concerns them, the journalist, the website owner and the Internet service provider as well.

Trying to ensure the quality of their job and to avoid problems like the abovementioned, professionals have to manage and control users' content. When pre-moderation is used, every piece of UGC is checked before publication and high security is achieved. However, this method is labor-intensive and costly (Santana, 2014; Singer et al., 2011). On the other hand, post-moderation policies lead to simpler and more open comment systems, but can lower the quality (Hille & Baker, 2014).

When distributed moderation is chosen, users are involved in the control process, often earning some kind of privileges (Lampe & Resnick, 2004). News media can let users themselves moderate

content by using buttons to rank comments or to report abuse (Hille & Baker, 2014, p. 565). All strategies can be accompanied by purely technical methods such as automated moderation under predefined filters that detect and replace banned words, phrases, IP addresses and paragraphs (Veglis, 2014) or Completely Automated Public Turing tests to tell Computers and Humans Apart (CAPTCHA), which are employed in the websites more rarely (Saridou & Veglis, 2016), aiming to block computer-derived mass entries. The reCAPTCHA service offered by Google is the most widely used CAPTCHA service and has been adopted by many websites for preventing automated bots from conducting nefarious activities (Sivakorn et al., 2016). Except for concerns about human, financial and time resources, the individual moderation decision is affected by newsroom routines, media organizations for which journalists' work, the societal institutions and social system in which they operate their personal experiences or even gut feelings (Boberg et al., 2018, p. 60).

### **Semantic Web and tools in journalism**

Aiming at the exploitation of UGC, many media organizations have built platforms, such as CNN iReport, BBC's UGC Hub and Guardian Witness, where users can submit and journalists can elaborate content. During the past few years, news media outlets have also started using artificial intelligence technology in new ways, from speeding up research to accumulating and cross-referencing data (Underwood, 2019). The New York Times, for example, has implemented artificial intelligence to moderate reader comments, encourage constructive discussion and eliminate harassment and abuse. Comments are organized interactively so that viewers can quickly see which can be considered 'toxic' and which may be more illuminating, by sliding a bar across the top of the page. The closer the bar gets to the right, the more toxic the comments become (Underwood, 2019). A coarse classification of the tools and services used by media organizations in UGC-driven platforms can lead to the categories of content discovery and monitoring in social media, distributed multimedia content capturing, semantic analysis of multimedia content, audience involvement in news making, UGC verification and UGC sharing (Saridou et al., 2018). It is, however, noticed that the aforementioned examples focus on building heterogeneous platforms and rely in most cases on the integration with services provided by third parties, while professional journalists are still involved in many stages of the process (Saridou et al., 2018, p. 286).

Semantic Web technologies can help the evolution of journalism due to their aggregation features, regarding the advanced ability of collecting information (Heravi et al., 2012). Through the utilization of new tools and methods, journalists can search, find and process any piece of information more quickly and more easily, thanks to the exploitation of structured data (Gray et al., 2012). Nevertheless, such semantic techniques have not been widely adopted by media organizations (Brandtzaeg et al., 2016). One of the main reasons is the immature semantic technology and the lack of a unified platform in which journalists can concentrate in the utilization of UGC. Thus, a semantic-oriented model of participatory journalism management can support organized collection and moderation of content in an effective way and in short time.

## **2. Methodology**

In order to define the requirements and describe the characteristics that such a model should have, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1: How do journalists manage UGC in their work routine?

RQ2a: How do journalists perceive the importance of education in UGC management?

RQ2b: How do journalists perceive users' role in a semantic-oriented participatory journalism management model?

RQ3: How do users participate in content production in media organizations?

RQ4: How do users perceive their role in a semantic-oriented participatory journalism management model?

In order to answer these questions, two online surveys of journalists and Internet users were conducted. The first one was conducted among journalists of the Journalists' Union of Macedonia-Thrace Daily Newspapers, of the Journalists' Union of Thessaly-Stereia Ellada- Evia Daily Newspapers and among professionals of online media (magazines, newspapers and news portals). A questionnaire consisting of 22 questions was distributed to the potential participants via email. In total, 52 people responded. Of these, 51.1 percent were female and 48.9 percent were male. The majority (48.9 percent) was between 31 and 40 years old and 35.6 percent belonged to the 41 to 50 age group. The second survey was conducted among undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD students of the School of Journalism and Mass Media Communication of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. A hyperlink which led to a questionnaire consisting of 11 questions was uploaded on the relevant Facebook group. Overall, 52 users responded.

The data from both surveys were collected in a one-month period, between October, 9 2018 and November 9, 2018, using Google Forms. All responses were anonymous. An introductory text informed the participants about the anonymity, the use of the obtained data and the scope of the survey.

### 3. Data analysis

In order to analyze how they manage UGC in their everyday work routine (RQ1), journalists were firstly asked whether they had been part of a journalistic team that managed UGC. More than half (53.8 percent) of the participants gave a negative response, with the rest responding positively. However, the rates were reversed when participants were asked whether they had managed UGC as part of their tasks on their own (not as part of a team), since 53.8 percent responded positively.

When asked which participatory tools are mostly preferred by users, journalists highlighted tools that allow sharing to social networking sites, tools for content rating and comment sections. On the contrary, participants considered that discussion forums, citizen blogs and tools for submission of textual and audio-visual material are much less or hardly ever used by audience members. Regarding comment management systems used by media organizations, Facebook by far (86.5 percent) and services like the Disqus comment system (25 percent) are the most used, according to journalists.

Focusing on the problems that occur in participatory contributions, respondents identified spelling and syntactical mistakes along with intellectual property violations as the most frequently encountered problems, while fake news, personality insults, hate speech, defamation, spamming and trolling are very frequently faced as well. Asked how they handle UGC, half of the respondents said that they do not perform any kind of classification. Furthermore, 59.6 percent of the journalists stated that they face problems with quality management and exploitation of UGC, mainly due to high workload and different content types (e.g. text, photo, and video). Quite often problems were also ascribed to low content standardization (e.g. various image file formats) and mass production.

Afterwards participants were asked which content moderation method they use and indicated pre-moderation as the most employed (57.7 percent). This was followed by post-moderation, moderation based on users’ reactions and automated moderation. It is, however, noticeable that 15.4 percent of the participants do not moderate at all (Figure 1). When asked which method they use to verify UGC authenticity, more than half of the respondents (57.7 percent) mentioned user registration, 42.3 percent mentioned check of multimedia content, 34.6 percent check of publication time, 26.9 CAPTCHA and 21.2 check of the location.

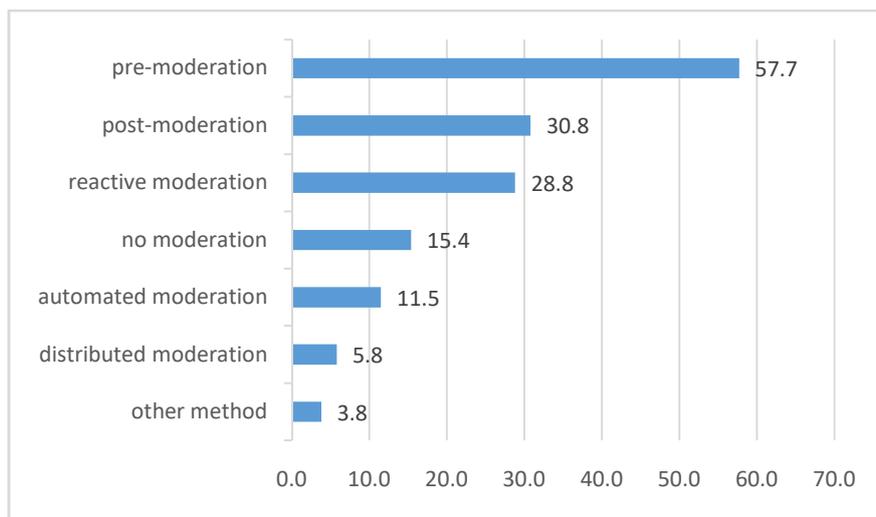


Figure 1: Content moderation methods used by journalists

Trying to identify journalists’ perceptions of the role of education in UGC management (RQ2a), it was obvious that most respondents (51.9 percent) are not satisfied with the functionality of the UGC management tools they use, with a large group of respondents (88.5 percent) considering that journalists do not use the best management and control practices. In a similar context, the overwhelming majority (96.2 percent) believes in the need for further journalists’ education in this field, while a vast majority (90.4 percent) would spend time to get trained as well.

RQ2b tried to identify how journalists perceive users’ role in a semantic-oriented participatory journalism management model. Among respondents, 80.7 percent believe that users’ engagement in UGC management processes would be very or quite effective and 17.3 percent believe that users’ engagement would have little effectiveness. At the same time, only 1.9 percent of the journalists see no effectiveness at all. More than half of the respondents (61.5 percent) find that cooperation between citizens and journalists would work more efficiently if it took place in the website of the media organization, while the rest consider an autonomous platform outside the main organization as a better option. Although most of the respondents seem willing to cooperate with users in UGC management, 63.5 percent of them are not aware of environments that support the collaboration between citizens and journalists in the submission, management and publication of UGC. It is finally clear that journalists (92.3 percent) believe in the need for creation of an integrated UGC management tool with specific features, such as collection, word processing, classification and content verification.

RQ3 was related to the way users participate in content production in media organizations. As indicated by the participants of the second survey, they produce content mainly for business and less for entertainment or social interest reasons. Photos are the type of content mostly submitted by users (75 percent), with text (69.2 percent) and video (30.8 percent) following (Figure 2). When asked through which participatory tools they submit content, users -in line with the journalists' responses in the first survey- indicated tools that allow sharing to social networks, tools for content rating and comment sections. On the contrary, as journalists noticed too, users do not use discussion forums, citizen blogs and tools for submission of textual and audio-visual material. Among participants, 69.2 percent stated satisfaction with the functionality of the content submission services provided by news websites.

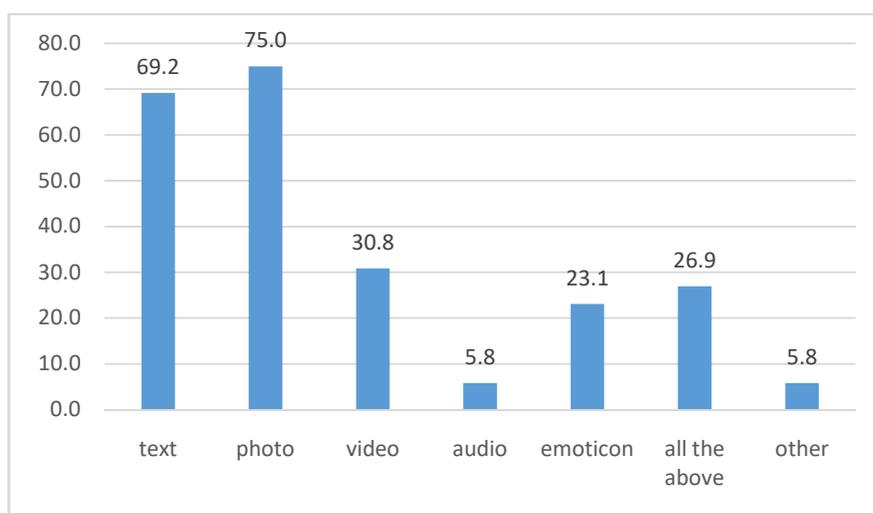


Figure 2: Type of content submitted by users

Asked about their possible role in a semantic-oriented participatory journalism management model (RQ4), 86.5 percent of the users claimed that they have never been invited by a news medium to manage content posted by other users. Nevertheless, 94.2 percent believe that their participation in UGC management in a website would be very or quite effective and 84.6 percent would like services that support collaboration between citizens and journalists in a participatory context. Specifically, more than two-thirds (71.2 percent) of the respondents would prefer such an environment to work in the website of the media organization and not in a separate, autonomous platform. It is also clear that users (82.7 percent) believe in the need for creation of an integrated UGC management tool with specific features, such as collection, word processing, classification and content verification. Asked, finally, how they would choose to access a content submission service, the most popular ways seem to be using a web browser from a desktop/laptop (63.5 percent) and using an application from a mobile phone (51.9 percent).

## Discussion

The findings of the first survey indicate that half of the journalists do not classify the content submitted by users, while the biggest obstacles to management and exploitation mainly derive from heavy workload, high content heterogeneity and a small degree of content standardization. While managing users' contributions, professionals detect problems that not only diminish quality, such as

grammar mistakes, but also may give rise to legal consequences, such as offenses of personality and hate speech.

The second survey, on the other hand, shows that users submit photos, texts and videos, mostly for business purposes. When participating, they share content to social networking sites, rank news items or comment on published stories, but they do not create their own content. Their participation is mainly limited to interaction with already produced, professional content. This remark ties in with the findings of previous studies about participation in the news production process, which indicate that media organizations are reluctant to allow readers to set the news agenda or take part in the gatekeeping process, while there are only a few options for citizen stories, always subject to strict editorial control (Singer et al., 2011).

As a key result, both surveys show a strong agreement with a new, collaborative way of managing UGC in a semantic context, as user involvement in such a model is deemed effective both from journalists and from users themselves. It is obvious that a new participatory journalism model should be fast to use and part of the existing journalistic workflow in order to facilitate daily newsroom routines. It should allow automatic categorization of UGC, detection of malicious content, moderation by journalists and problem flagging by users. Furthermore, in order to serve verification purposes it should support features for data export related to the place and time that a photo or video was taken. It would preferably be embedded in the organization's website, designed for working both through computer browsers and mobile applications. Additionally, it should have some characteristics inspired by social networking platforms, such as ‘like’ and ‘comments’, since not only users, but also journalists seem familiar with the relative social media functions (Table 1). With professionals, finally, declaring willingness to spend time for their training on UGC platforms, model could be presented to journalists and evaluated by them for further improvements and adjustments.

Table 1: Characteristics of a semantic-oriented model of participatory journalism management

<b>Relationship journalists - users</b>
collaborative
<b>Structure – Design</b>
fast to use
part of the workflow
on the organization’s website
computer browsers and mobile applications
characteristics from social networking platforms
<b>Moderation</b>
moderation by journalists
problem flagging by users
<b>Available services</b>
automatic categorization of UGC
detection of malicious content
data export for multimedia content

However, limitations of the study should be noted. First, only Greek participants were surveyed and the results may not be valid for other countries. Moreover, the second survey was conducted among students of journalism and communication, who are assumed to have more knowledge about news media than the general public. Therefore, a more varied sample may have generated different findings.

#### 4. Conclusion

Huge amounts of constantly produced user-generated information necessitate a thorough handling by professionals. This study examined perceptions of UGC in order to define the requirements and characteristics that a semantic-oriented model of participatory journalism management should have. Journalists and users agree that cooperation can lead to a more efficient way of managing participation in news production process. In order to design the model, we should take into account the needs of the directly involved parties. Specifically, journalistic working reality, difficulties in UGC exploitation and users' activity should constitute the basic framework.

Additional studies can include qualitative interviews to gain deeper understanding of the journalists' attitude towards UGC. Further, it would be worth focusing on the modelling and designing of such a system. Future extension of this work can also focus on the actual implementation of the features and the evaluation of the model.

#### 5. Acknowledgments

This research is carried out/funded in the context of the project "Semantic services and models of participatory journalism management" (MIS 5005184) under the call for proposals "Supporting researchers with emphasis on new researchers" (EDULLL 34). The project is co-financed by Greece and the European Union (European Social Fund- ESF) by the Operational Programme Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning 2014-2020.

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## Social Media and ‘*Silaturrahim*’

Azian Muhamad Adzmi<sup>43</sup>

### Abstract

This research identifies the ‘*silaturrahim*’ relationships in social media engagement among Diaspora communities. Particular focus is given to Malaysians overseas, and their ways of communication with their families, community/society, and friends or acquaintances, in the country they are currently residing as well as their country of origin. Moreover, the research looked at the relationships of Malaysians overseas with other Malaysians who are staying abroad, while continuing the tradition of ‘*silaturrahim*’ relationships in forming a positive culture online. In addition, this research seeks to create a deeper understanding of ‘*silaturrahim*’, and how ‘*silaturrahim*’ has become a good online culture among Malaysians, particularly the Malays. Apart from that, it investigates how the actions of ‘*silaturrahim*’ relationships, which are practised physically, can be translated as part of online communication activities and identifies other elements that show closeness in the ‘*silaturrahim*’ culture. The research is carried out using a qualitative research approach, combining two methods, namely; in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. It involves a wide range of respondents’ who possess Malaysians background and live abroad, to obtain their insights on the ‘*silaturrahim*’ culture in social media, as well as their primary purpose of using social media. This study is expected to contribute in the cultural studies, communication and the social media fields, especially in understanding the ‘*silaturrahim*’ culture, not only limited to physical involvement, but also its ability to enhance a positive non-physical communication culture. These findings are useful for increasing the use of social media as a platform of maintaining or improving a ‘*silaturrahim*’ culture and for establishing a positive communication culture among the Diaspora community.

**Keywords:** Social media, culture, relationships, communication, Diaspora society

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**1. Introduction:** Communication is an essential human need and therefore, people are continuously discovering methods for addressing this need. New Media has turned into a necessary mode for communication around the globe. In this regard, latest types of individual media, discussion and movements have the advantage of being anything but as their usage is difficult, therefore complex innovation should not be done (Oh et al., 2013).

With the presence of new communication technology, Internet has become the most popular means of communication around the world (Hvass & Munar, 2012). Because of migration, communication technologies have influenced the way immigrants communicate with their family in their country of origin. Social media is seen as a crucial medium of communication and plays a huge role in strengthening the '*silaturrahim*'. Hence, modern technology helps people to maintain a more timely and efficient communication (Siapera 2014; Espinosa 2016). Research has shown that social media can increase human well-being when living in a different country (Ko et al., 2015).

It is important to notice that the main objective of this study is to understand how the use of social media affects the '*silaturrahim*' or bond among Malaysians all over the world.

**Literature review:** As suggested by Kaur Kapoor et al. (2017), social media is a convergence culture which translates into a participatory culture, media convergence and collective intelligence. Under all these parameters, social media was developed.

In addition to that, social media indicates all sorts of media through which users can be involved virtually by means of Internet sources. Among the popular social media in the years of 2000 are YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, and the Messenger (YM, IM, AOL, and Meebo). From a different view, Fuchs (2017) added that social media should not only be seen as a platform that shows users' profiles, friends, comments and offers private messaging since social network sites vary greatly in their features and user interface. Some have photo-sharing or video-sharing capabilities; while others have built-in blogging and instant messaging technology (Fuchs, 2017).

With the development of technology and in response to people's needs, networks are primarily used on mobile nowadays (e.g. WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter), while there are also some web-based social network sites that support limited mobile interaction (e.g. Facebook, Blogs).

As social network sites are often designed to be widely accessible, people who share the same interest tend to make connections through these platforms. For example, typically people of the same nationality, age, or education level tend to group themselves together, creating a segmented society, which is not what the original intention of the designers was (Lindsay & Krysik, 2012; Junco, 2012).

#### *Social network for socialization*

Among many of the social scholars, the online and offline connection relations have been a key debate. Dunbar (2016), showed that personal connection formed offline are sturdier than those made online. This is what we also support: offline connections are not seen by social media user as a take-over for real connections and companionships. Karapanos et al. (2016) demonstrate that social media in the US are utilized to create social connections and maybe a constructive power of the individuals who generally have weak ties with other individuals on the social media platforms they use.

### *Social media and migrants*

The advancement in the latest technology has resulted in convenient communication with different space and time zones. For instance, new technology enables migrants to remain associated with their family and companions at home. They utilize Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, YouTube, WeChat (Weixin), WhatsApp and Line on cell phones, tablets and computers (Jia et al., 2015).

By the examination of photographs and interviews conducted in the study of Jia et al. (2015), it was found that a group of Chinese immigrants in Australia has created online social media groups, with the help of most prevalent Chinese visiting applications WeChat or Weixin. It began with the members from China who made a group and started sharing knowledge with other Chinese inside the groups. The common information was mostly regarding their lives in Australia and exclusive updates, along with everyday knowledge and experience (Jia et al. 2015).

### *Social media and 'silaturrahim.'*

According to a study carried out by Hussain et al. (2015) the term '*silaturrahim*' (fortified bonding by the Muslims), used by the Malays, is not only referred to as their culture, but it has huge importance among them as it is claimed by their Islamic religion. The Malay community and the '*silaturrahim*' relationships are inseparable, because it is a very close connection, and it does not distinguish groups and levels on the basis of age or rank. This '*silaturrahim*' bond is actually the one that can enhance the strength of a relationship. '*Silaturrahim*' in family relations of Malay community is very important because it brings about significant outcomes, not only in the preservation of religion but also in the enhancement of political, economic and educational systems (Ahmad et al. 2014; Hussein et al. 2015).

The '*silaturrahim*' Malay society is often associated with the culture that has been practised through generations. Some of the essence of the '*silaturrahim*' relationship is not only understood by the Malays, but also by other different racial communities in Malaysia, who are also practicing this kind of relationship, especially in the rural areas and the villages (Omar et al. 2014; Pratiwi 2014; Sheau Shi & Baharudin 2015).

Looking at it from the Malaysian context, social media can be described as the main platform to strengthen the '*silaturrahim*'. For instance, in planning important events such as weddings or big feasts, social media such as WhatsApp is used as an important means of communication (Salman et al. 2013). Distance and time difference are no longer a constraint for effective discussions (Mohamed & Saodah Wok, 2015).

Malaysians tend to use social media as a means of social engagement, and they want to be known as part of the new media literate by their peers or other citizens' groups. Warren et al. (2014) mentioned that participating in the social media is a way of how people can enhance their skills and knowledge, by becoming Internet savvy. Socializing would not be exempt from the concept of '*silaturrahim*'. Presently, '*silaturrahim*' can be inculcated in several ways. These ways might include visiting, messaging, associating by means of phone, writing a letter, sending an email and many more. Moreover, it facilitates people making new companions or looking for old friends who they might not have seen for quite a while (Bruns, 2015).

**Theoretical framework:** This qualitative research combines two methods, namely in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. It was designed according to the theories proposed by Ormston et al. (2014), Silverman (2016), Jafari and Scott (2014), as well as Krueger and Casey (2014). More precisely, as proposed by Steward and Shamdasani (2015), the use of focus group offers a number of benefits, which include the ability to animate new thoughts and inventive ideas; determine the potential for issues with respect to a new term, item, administration or project and create impressions of items or different objects of intrigue. In this regard, the research of Liamputtong (2011) provides that the purpose of the focus group is to identify the details of the frequency and purpose of usage of social media among Malaysians who live abroad.

- 2. Methodology:** This research is based on a number of focus group discussions that were held to gain insights into the respondents pertaining to the subject under examination (Krueger & Casey, 2014). These discussions were carried out to identify the impact that social media has on the connection between native Malaysians, residing in the United Kingdom. A total number of six sessions by four to five respondents were held, led by the researcher as a moderator. Each session lasted approximately ninety minutes and took place at convenient for the respondents venues. The research included respondents from different age groups, ranging from 17 to 60 years old and above. These respondents were students, professionals, and community leaders, with temporary and permanent residence in the United Kingdom. The selection of respondents was made with the help of ‘purposeful sampling’. A focus group is an immensely useful tool in carrying out qualitative research (Silverman, 2016). It helped the researcher meeting the research objectives, pertaining to the understanding regarding the role of social media in the development and enhancement of bonding among residents of Malaysia and those who are residing abroad (Ormston et al., 2014). This paper is based on a discussion involving four female respondents and five male respondents. Opportunity sampling was utilized to identify respondents through the researcher’s networks. At first, only three female respondents were willing to become part of the discussion. However, one of the female respondents (respondent D) invited her friend just to become a listener but later she managed to convince her friend (respondent C) to participate in the discussion. This increased the number of female respondents from three to four. The other five male respondents were easy to gather at one location the same time. This gave the opportunity to the researcher (as an interviewer) and moderator to have the discussion without hesitation. All nine respondents were unknown to the researcher. Female respondents were grouped as four in which Respondent A was 23 years old and was an undergraduate student from Queen Mary University, while Respondent B was a 28-year-old law postgraduate student from the University of Cambridge; Respondent C was a 25-year-old pharmacist from Derby, and Respondent D was a 30 years old optometrist residing in Bournemouth. The average age of the participants was 26.5 years. On the other hand, male respondents were grouped as five in which Respondent A was 29 years old from London; Respondent B was 32 years old from Cardiff; Respondent C was 30 years old from St. Andrew, Scotland; Respondent D was 35 years old from Hull; and Respondent E was 35 years old from Newcastle. The summary of their demographic data is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic data of the respondents

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Place of residence in the UK</b>	<b>Ethnic group and state of origin in Malaysia</b>	<b>Social Media Platform</b>
A	25	Female	Queen Mary	Bumiputra (Sarawak)	Facebook WhatsApp YouTube
B	28	Female	Cambridge	Malay (Kelantan)	Facebook
C	23	Female	Derby	Malay (Kedah)	Facebook Instagram Snapchat Twitter Blogs YouTube
D	30	Female	Bournemouth	Malay (Johore)	Facebook WhatsApp Snapchat Instagram Twitter

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Place of residence in the UK</b>	<b>Ethnic group and state of origin in Malaysia</b>	<b>Social Media Platform</b>
A	29	Male	London	Malay (Penang Island)	Facebook WhatsApp YouTube
B	32	Male	Cardiff	Malay (Penang Island)	Facebook PSN*
C	30	Male	St. Andrew, Scotland	Malay (Kedah)	Facebook WhatsApp Instagram
D	35	Male	Hull	Malay (Terengganu)	Facebook WhatsApp Instagram PSN*
E	35	Male	Newcastle	Malay (Selangor)	WhatsApp Instagram Twitter

\* PSN = Play Station Networking

*Procedure*

The discussion was conducted at a place referred by the respondents. The purpose of interviewing the respondents on their preferred location was to make them comfortable while answering the questions (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Before the discussion, the researcher explained to all the respondents the research purpose. After obtaining the respondents’ written consent, the researcher began the discussion with the first question. The direction of the discussion depended on the respondents’ answer regarding their involvement in the social media while living abroad, and the way their communication enhanced the ‘*silaturrahim*’. The researcher maintained her role as a facilitator and did not propose prompt answers to the respondents. The discussion lasted seventy-two minutes and was video/audio-recorded in order to facilitate the transcription as well as the analysis of data. The questions that were used to guide the discussion were organized into two broad sections:

- i. Attitude towards the involvement in social media
- ii. Attitudes towards maintaining ‘*silaturrahim*.’

Table 2 The semi-structured questions that guide the focus group discussion

Number	Questions
1	How many social media accounts do you have and what are they?
2	What is the main purpose of using these accounts?
3	What is your understanding of the term ‘ <i>silaturrahim</i> ’ or bond? What are your views regarding online ‘ <i>silaturrahim</i> ’ (could you elaborate that please? Do you think that ‘ <i>silaturrahim</i> ’ began with the emergence of social media?) (Has your bond with family members and friends improved because of social media, why/why not?) (Do you think that physical interaction is more important in maintaining ‘ <i>silaturrahim</i> ’?)
4	Do you find that social media helps in creating or maintaining relationships and social bonding with people back home? What is the situation of your relationship in your current country of residence? With other Malaysians who settled abroad?
5	How can physical activities such as <i>gotong-royong</i> , <i>ziarah</i> , <i>rewang</i> , <i>ngeteh</i> , and so on be practised with social media? (if they even can be practised)
6	In your view, what platform of social media are the most contributing to ‘ <i>silaturrahim</i> ’ or bond? Why?
7	How can Malaysians maintain the ‘ <i>silaturrahim</i> ’ culture by leveraging social media?

**3. Data analysis:** In this research, a thematic analysis (TA) was used to extract key information from this focus group discussion that helped in the formation of key themes. The reason for using thematic analysis is that its hypothetical view considers a very adaptable methodology in blending show and idle parts of the collected information (Braun et al., 2019). At this point, it gives a far-reaching record of respondent’s viewpoints on the considered experience. TA of the data collected

from the four respondents led to the identification of the key themes as outlined in table 3. Two main themes were identified together with a number of subthemes for each main theme.

**Discussion of data:** A number of themes have emerged from the thematic analysis, and are presented with original extracts from the participants’ responses in order to ensure the transparency of the discussion. The key themes have been divided into two main categories. Each of the themes accounts for different research objectives accordingly.

Table 3 List of themes and subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency of use</li> <li>• Purpose of use</li> </ul>
‘ <i>Silaturrahim</i> ’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defining the term</li> <li>• Online ‘silaturrahim.’</li> <li>• Popular social media accounts</li> </ul>

**i. Attitude towards involvement in the Social Media**

Frequency of use

The frequency of social media use among Malaysians increases day by day. All the respondents shared their experience according to the number of times they logged in their social media accounts on a regular basis. In this regard, female respondents A and B shared the same opinion of using social media multiple times a day. Whereas, respondents C and D provided that they use social media when they feel the need of using it. On the other hand, there are two male respondents A and B who used to participate actively in online games (PSN) to connect with their family and friends in Malaysia while respondents C, D and E use other different social media platforms for communication:

Table 4 (i) Frequency of use (Female discussion group)

Subtheme	Female Respondents
Frequency of use	<p>“I log in to my social media account multiple times a day during the weekdays, but on the weekend I increase my involvement with social media,” Respondent A</p> <p>“I agree with respondent A, but for me...I log in around four to five times daily even in the weekend,” Respondent B</p> <p>“Most of the time I rely on direct conversations with my family through</p>

	<p><i>phone calls and I only log in to my Facebook page at least once or twice a week,” Respondent C</i></p> <p><i>“I log in to my social media account during weekends only, and it takes me about three to five times to take a peek in my Instagram and my Facebook account on both Saturday and Sunday,” Respondent D</i></p>
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Table 4 (ii) Frequency of use (Male discussion group)

<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Male Respondents</b>
Frequency of use	<p><i>“The most frequent social media that I’ve got connected is PSN,” Respondent D</i></p>
	<p><i>“Same with me, I played PSN to get connected with my siblings and friends in Malaysia,” Respondent B</i></p>
	<p><i>“Even though I have several other social media accounts but the most frequent social media platform through which I always connect myself is Instagram,” Respondent C</i></p>
	<p><i>“Generally, my preference and frequency of use of WhatsApp is high,” Respondent A</i></p>
	<p><i>“I use Twitter frequently more than other social media account,” Respondent E</i></p>

Purpose of use

Extracts from the focus group discussion revealed that the main purpose for using social media is for all the respondents to keep themselves well-informed with all the news about the family as well as other related issues back at home (Malaysia):

Table 5 (i) Purpose of use (Female discussion group)

<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Female Respondents</b>
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<p>Purpose of use</p>	<p>“I need to know the latest news about my family and my country,” Respondent A</p> <p>“I’d like my family to share about their day to day activities since I’m not around,” Respondent B</p> <p>“For me, I prefer to only communicate with my parents because they like to know about me here and share about the political situations with me as I am interested in politics of Malaysia,” Respondent C</p> <p>“News about family in Malaysia is most important for me since I am too far from them...I get to know what's happening in Malaysia,” Respondent D</p>
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Table 5 (ii) Purpose of use (Male discussion group)

Subtheme	Male Respondents
<p>Purpose of use</p>	<p>“The main reason I use social media is that this is the only way to get connected with my family, friends and other acquaintances in Malaysia. To know latest news about my country...right,” Respondent C</p> <p>“I actively participate in social media because my family need to know everything when I am here...they want to know that I am safe and sound,” Respondent A</p> <p>“Of course, the main purpose that I actively participate in social media is to get connected; share tips for travellers while travelling and many more,” Respondent E</p> <p>“My main purpose to get involved with social media is...I can google recipes, and from YouTube, especially Malaysian dishes” Respondent B</p> <p>“I use social media to connect with family, check with news at home (Malaysia), search and sharing new ideas of anything,” Respondent D.</p>

**ii. Attitudes towards maintaining ‘silaturrahim.’**

*Defining the term*

At first, respondents A, B and D from the female group shared the same opinion and mentioned that ‘silaturrahim’ could be mainly described as close relationships among family members. Respondents A, B, D and E shared somewhat similar view according to which ‘silaturrahim’ is defined in Islam as the love between parents, children and other relatives within the same clan. Whereas respondents C of both male and female group shared the similar view for silaturrahim that focussed on relationship with family in addition with neighbours and doing any activities together.

Table 6 (i) Defining the term (Female discussion group)

Subtheme	Female Respondents
<i>Defining the term</i>	<p><i>“For me, this relationship means love between family members, especially parents, siblings, relatives. In Islam, ‘silaturrahim’ means brotherhood,”</i> Respondent A</p>
	<p><i>“I agree with respondent A. However, since Malaysia consists of a multiracial society, it shows that all of us is bonded with this ‘silaturrahim’,”</i> Respondent B</p>
	<p><i>“In my opinion, ‘silaturrahim’ is more about working together, basically ‘silaturrahim’ does mean as bonding, not only among family members but all the community,”</i> Respondent C</p>
	<p><i>“Here in the United Kingdom, the only family members that we have now is the Malaysian community. So for living the moment, we only have each other to strengthen our ‘silaturrahim’... we cannot deny that the special bonding within our actual family back home is a true ‘silaturrahim’,”</i> Respondent D</p>

Table 6 (ii) Defining the term (Male discussion group)

Subtheme	Male Respondents
<i>Defining the term</i>	<p><i>“I believe in Islam, the word ‘Silaturrahim’ is about the family relationship in our own bloodline...yeah! That's what I can define about it,”</i> Respondent</p>

	<p>E</p> <p><i>"I agree with what respondent E just said...it is all about family relationship,"</i> Respondent A</p> <p><i>"In a broader context, 'Silaturrahim' is all about relationship no matter you are related towards each other or not, all Muslims are brothers and sisters in Islam',"</i> Respondent D</p> <p><i>"Different people have a different context of defining the 'Silaturrahim' term...we are in modern society nowadays which believes that 'Silaturrahim' is more about muafakat (togetherness), the way we communicate within our community and the way we treat our community,"</i> Respondent B</p> <p><i>"I just understand that the term is more about bonding between you and family, you and your close friends and you with your neighbours,"</i> Respondent C</p>
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Online 'silaturrahim.'

Both female and male respondents gave a different point of view regarding online *silaturrahim* which generated understanding regarding the topic from different angles.

Table 7 (i) Online 'Silaturrahim' (Female discussion group)

Subtheme	Female Respondents
Online 'Silaturrahim'	<i>"The social media nowadays do help in increasing the bonding between me and my family,"</i> Respondent C
	<i>"so for the online 'siltaurrahim', I think it is good if we only share with those people who are close with us,"</i> Respondent D
	<i>"With this new technology, I see that social media really helps in</i>

	<p><i>maintaining family bonding. I never ever felt left out,”</i> Respondent B</p> <p><i>“It is not limited to the connection with our family back home, but here also in the United Kingdom,”</i> Respondent A</p>
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Table 7 (ii) Online ‘Silaturrahim’ (Male discussion group)

Subtheme	Male Respondents
Online ‘Silaturrahim’	<p><i>“communication through social media where we can have the information in no time,”</i> Respondent C</p> <p><i>“Nowadays, ‘silaturrahim’ is not only shaped face-to-face, with the existence of social media, this culture can also be shaped and maintained successfully,”</i> Respondent E</p> <p><i>“I actively use WhatsApp, and I’m sure you’re the other. This is one of the ways we can maintain that relationship, and this reinforces the online ‘Silaturrahim’ as you said,”</i> Respondent D</p> <p><i>“Since the emergence of social media, all relationship or bonding through online we can classify it as online ‘silaturrahim’,”</i> Respondent B</p> <p><i>“Yes that is true, and I agree with you (referring to Respondent B), any event or communication discussion through social media can be classified as an online ‘silaturrahim’,”</i> Respondent A</p>

Popular Social Media Accounts

By the collective analysis of the responses given from all respondents, it was observed that female respondents mostly use WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram for maintaining ‘silaturrahim’ whereas in male respondents YouTube, PSN, Flickr and twitter are also popular along with above mentioned social media platforms.

Table 8 (i) Popular Social Media Accounts (Female discussion group)

Subtheme	Female Respondents
<p>Popular Social Media Accounts</p>	<p><i>“I like to use Facebook and WhatsApp the most,”</i> Respondent A</p> <p><i>“I use WhatsApp, Facebook and the Instagram because of their convenience, with these three accounts I can upload pictures and status too,”</i> Respondent C</p> <p><i>“I prefer to use Facebook and Instagram,”</i> Respondent D</p> <p><i>“I only use WhatsApp,”</i> Respondent B</p>

Table 8 (ii) Popular Social Media Accounts (Male discussion group)

Subtheme	Male Respondents
<p>Popular Social Media Accounts</p>	<p><i>“Most Malaysians actively use Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram,”</i> Respondent A</p> <p><i>“I like online games, so I pick PSN as it is the most popular social media for gamers,”</i> Respondent B</p> <p><i>“Previously, I use Flickr to upload as many pictures as we can, but now, I use Instagram to share pictures and video,”</i> Respondent C</p> <p><i>“I like Twitter and Instagram...well to have long conversation, I use WhatsApp,”</i> Respondent E</p> <p><i>“I like games too, so I actively use my PSN to communicate with other players,”</i> Respondent D</p>

**4. Conclusion:** By the above discussion and as per the definition and interpretation of ‘*silaturrahim*’, provided by the respondents, it is concluded that ‘*silaturrahim*’ is not limited to the

relationship among family members but it also includes relationships among different races, as Malaysia is a multiracial country. Acknowledging the existence of online '*silaturrahim*', it has been concluded by the discussion that WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram are the most popular social media platforms. Participants in this study believe that social media has become a platform for enhancing the '*silaturrahim*'. Few limitations have also been identified in this study as the majority of the focus groups respondents are divided based on the same gender. This effect resulted in similar answers and opinions to most of the discussion questions, as respondents agreed with each other most of the times. It was also a challenge to bring them together due to the fact that they were working or studying, with a time constraint. The researcher suggests the involvement of both the genders (mix-genders) in future research. Response from the female participants is usually very much driven by emotions whereas male respondents generally provide more facts.

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## Cultural Communication and Cultural Transmission: The Case of Popular Tradition in Corsica

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### Abstract

Culture is produced, shaped and transmitted through intergroup relations provoked by communication. In this paper it is examined the cultural communication alternations in a popular culture. More particularly, taking the case of dance practice in Corsica, it is described the actual dance situation. The purpose of this paper is to propose communication modules to avoid a possible cultural loss. This qualitative study is based on field research, in-depth interviews and observation. The researcher had the opportunity to observe the dance condition in Corsica, during the five (5) years that she lived on this island (2003 – 2007), exchanging and communicating with dance associations and other cultural organisations.

Dance activity in Corsica today is considered a limited practice, as dance associations are the only places where it is experienced. This study identified an intergroup relation difficulty among the different dance associations. Some of the actions proposed in this study in order to improve communication and consequently improve the actual situation of insufficient dance transmission and practice is to follow common rules, propose a specific agenda with dance events, invite younger people to dance, achieve members' identification by creating intercultural groups, mixing the teams with regard to nationality and promote cultural education and research.

**Keywords:** *cultural communication, intergroup relations, exchange, preservation, dance tradition, intangible cultural heritage*

### Introduction

Culture is a notoriously difficult term to define. In 1952, the American anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn, critically reviewed concepts and definitions of culture, and compiled a list of 164 different definitions. Apte (1994; 2001), writing in the volume *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* summarize the problem as follows: Despite a century of efforts to define culture adequately there was in the early 1990s no agreement among anthropologists regarding its nature (Spencer-Oatey, 2000:3). Therefore, for the purposes of this study it is proposed to examine culture distinguished by three aspects: i) conservation: culture as an asset, tangible or intangible and a carrier of local identity; ii) production: culture as a commodity which needs to be re-produced not only to reconstitute cultural capital but also as a source of economic development insofar it is

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embedded in production processes; and iii) valorisation: culture as a set of norms and capacities which enrich communities, used as a bridge builder and carrier of good relations for social and economic exchange (Bekemans, 2013:171).

Within this framework, in this study it will be discussed how culture can be understood and what forms it can take in everyday life. Firstly, culture allows and facilitates communication either verbal or non-verbal. Apart from words people use many ways and mediums to communicate nonverbally, such as: music, sounds, dressing, symbols, tradition and so on. Members who belong to the same cultural group can be understood and communicate easier because they share the same cultural characteristics. Secondly, culture becomes a means of belonging simply because members of the same cultural group become automatically members of a broader group i.e. country, religion, so it forms their social identity. Our social identity influences how we live within diverse cultural contexts and relate to a range of social groups and institutions (Jenkins, 1996). Thirdly, culture becomes a vehicle for self-representation in the sense that individuals can act as ambassadors of their own culture by safeguarding and transmitting their linguistic, artistic and cultural heritage. Culture is a living organism that can only develop and expand through exchange and communication.

Nevertheless, exchanging and preserving a culture can be regarded as conflicting goals. Preservation is the procedure of keeping away from outside impacts, while exchanging and communicating is almost the opposite. This conflict can be considered a feature of many modern societies that ‘fight’ between keeping an inherent culture before adapting to a new reality, via the means of communication.

This study examines the actual activity of dance associations in Corsica, with the dance in Corsica being a rather neglected practice. The study looks into the traditional dance practice and dance transmission in Corsica and proposes actions that could promote this practice further. What could potentially prevent cultural loss and what can add to the cultural preservation? With these research questions in mind, it is highlighted in what ways a culture can retain its difference which will enable its people to preserve and promote their intangible heritage. Concepts of ‘united culture’ are explored with the possible effects and actions required by the community to preserve cultural differences, promote dance practice, and prevent a possible cultural loss.

### **The cultural situation in Corsica**

French occupation in 1969 brought an air of change, as far as the cultural and generally the social organization of the island was concerned. A new language, new customs, new habits and generally a different social and administrative organization, that was in some way imposed, had a main impact on Corsica’s society. This is said to be the reason for the appearance of the island’s “cultural problem”, which for many specialists constitutes an obstacle for its development. Jacques Thiers, professor and director of Pascal Paoli University’s cultural centre at the time of the study, explained that the French occupation brought along cultural changes that the inhabitants were not ready to accept and follow, as a necessary plan of integration hadn’t been proposed on time (Thiers, 1979:6).

The region of Corsica is divided into two (2) departments, five (5) districts, fifty-two (52) townships and three hundred sixty (360) municipalities. Inhabitants were estimated at two hundred ninety-four thousands and one hundred and eighteen (294,118) in the 2006 census (Carte de France, 2019). Corsica has its own character, identity and cultural elements. The efforts to conserve the island's historical character, led to the appearance of the *Riacquistu* movement in the 1970s. A self-described cultural militants group that for over 35 years led the movement for cultural reacquisition of the island. Militants have fought to re-appropriate and valorise the *vrai* (true) Corsican tradition, identity and language (Davis, 2011). The impact of this militant group meant that people used music and more particularly polyphony singing, as the only way to express the island's particular character. It was an effort to preserve the inhabitants' intangible heritage (language, music, cultural expressions). This type of polyphony in music then became a symbol of identification, an element that affirmed the island's cultural existence, influenced by the political situation in the region which led in the existence of *militants' culturels*. This in turn spawned an extended family of groups, beginning with *Canta u Populu Corsu*, whose aim was to defend and promote Corsican language and culture by means of song (Gattaceca, 1984), the songs in question being both traditional and of their own creation, and always in the Corsican language. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, attempts to organise musical evenings or concerts in the villages were increasingly met with hostility, not only by the French authorities and their local representatives, who viewed such activities as revolutionary and responded accordingly, but also by some of the islanders themselves, who found the traditional styles of singing and their association with a rural, backwards-looking way of life embarrassing and shameful, as well as being alienated by the associated political rhetoric (Bithell, 1996:40).

The interpretation of culture at that time pervaded all aspects of life, framed societal perceptions (Hofstede, 2001) and had an impact on people's behaviour (Gentinaet *al.*, 2014). Eventually, the fact that *Riaquistu* movement considered polyphony, as something very static and serious and as the only cultural expression that could represent the island's character, was an obstacle for any other form of cultural activity including dance. This cultural movement took very fast a political dimension, living behind its initial purpose. Cultural identity and polyphonic singing, was then perceived as a flag of the island's nationalism.

However culture should be a lot more than something static, and something that would be the flag of apolitical movement. The model introduced by Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede (2005) contributes to the understanding that culture and cultural differences can be described as: values, rituals, symbols and heroes which influence our practice. Dance expression is a cultural practice, which represents the collective habits that are visibly expressed and are influenced by deeper elements, such as values that are profoundly written in our mental programs. When dance becomes a part of a culture's values, by the usual practice and discussion, it is difficult to exclude it from the everyday practice. Many associations and music groups emerged at the time, with the aim to challenge this type of "*original*" identity that promoted the static polyphony as the only thing that created the cultural identity of the island.

### **Dance associations**

A community that does not dance is a community that does not communicate, at least not as well as it should: “*More than any other artistic popular language, dance expresses the variety of cultures, but also the exchange between individuals and communities, men and women, young and elder people... Dance is not just a spectacle to look at; it is an experience to live, no matter what is your age, your talent, the beauty of your body and the status of your society. A society that doesn't dance anymore is a close society*<sup>47</sup>” (Fanise 2006:6).

Another problem is depicted on the moment that a dance is no longer practiced, it starts to lose ground until it is finally forgotten. This is the reason that when usual ways of transmission are no longer in use, new ways should be invented. This is also the main purpose of this study. Indicate the importance of cultural protection and provide possible modes of communication to proceed towards concrete actions to achieve cultural preservation, development and promotion. Dance practice used to transmit orally from one generation to the other. Nevertheless, in a society that this procedure of transmission is no more in practice, it becomes very difficult to even find written or recorded traces that can prove the existence of popular dances. Dance associations in Corsica hold today this important role of transmission.

At the time of the study dance groups concerned mainly a particular age group in Corsica. More specifically, people from forty (40) to sixty (60) years old. For Alain Bitton-Andreotti, the man who created the federation of Corsican dances *Tutti in Piazza* and P.-P. Grimaldi, founding member of the dance association *Ochju à Ochju*, the more difficult thing for dance associations is to give people the will to dance.

### **Intangible heritage and cultural identity**

Intangible heritage includes customs and oral traditions, music, languages, poetry, dance, festivities, religious ceremonies as well as systems of healing, traditional knowledge systems and skills connected with the material aspects of culture, such as tools and the habitat (Bouchenaki, 2003). Intangible cultural heritage uses, representations, expressions, knowledge and techniques – together with the instruments, objects, artefacts and the cultural spaces that are inherent to them – that communities, groups and, in some cases, even individuals are recognized as an integral part of the cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation; it is constantly being created by communities and groups in the function of their surroundings, and in their interactions with culture and their history, and infuses them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and the creativity of humankind (Ruiz-Chiriboga, 2006:45).

As culture is learned, shared and acquired by people through family, school and other social institutions, cultural heritage becomes automatically part of their cultural identity. At the same time, cultural identity is maintained through the efforts of its people via different practices. Cultural identity itself has been conceptualized as the entirety of the cultural references by which a person or

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<sup>47</sup> The texts from French to English were translated by one of the authors.

a group can be defined, manifested, and wishes to be known; it implies liberties that are inherent to individual dignity in a permanent way, and integrates cultural diversity, both individually and universally, in memory and in plan (Draft Declaration on Cultural Rights 1998). Cultural heritage is an integral part of cultural identity, and must be understood as everything that forms part of a person's characteristic identity, and which, if desired, can be shared with other peoples (Daes, 1993).

Cultural preservation of dance in Corsica is vital for the maintenance of cultural identity, tradition and history of inhabitants. Considering that globalization has contributed to the homogenization of societies and to the potential disappearance and loss of cultural heritage, it is likely that cultural preservation is in danger. Globalization has been associated with the destruction of cultural identities, victims of the accelerating encroachment of a homogenized, westernized, consumer culture (Tomlinson, 2011:269). Safeguarding a culture does not denote solely maintenance of national and cultural identity, but also defence and preservation of cultural diversity. When societies are becoming more diverse in terms of immigration, religion, gender roles and traditions, it is important to preserve cultural heritage for keeping alive each culture in a world which constant changes due to the influence, interaction and possible clash of different values, beliefs and lifestyles among different cultures. That's why it becomes more vital to be able to co-exist in diverse societies where there are harmonic relationships and mutual respect despite cultural differences.

### **Ethnography and participant observation as a methodological approach**

Communication exists in all the actions that construct a society and its culture. We are talking of a social phenomenon, coextensive to culture, as every action of transmission depends on communication. People from a specific culture participate in social communication, as the members from the same orchestra (Winkin, 1998:114). The observer of this orchestra becomes a part of it. It is not by chance that anthropologists consider participant observation as the only way to study the act of communication. This study is situated within the borders of contemporary anthropology, where communication is not defined by its objects but by how it deals with them, by the objects it deals with, by how it communicates with social actors, and finally by how it expresses these experiences in public (Winkin, 1998). Ethnographic research is associated with the anthropology of communication and is based on three competences: know how to observe, know how to live with others, and know how to transfer all these experiences on a piece of paper (Winkin, 1998:113-114).

This research is based on the field study of observation where the researcher lived and experienced, during five (5) years (2003 to 2007), the cultural environment of this study, the researcher became the observer and the observed at the same time. She was actively participating at Corsican dance ateliers. She became part of this culture and its intangible heritage as a member. She was watching and recording their moves, their activities, their comments, their interaction and she had the opportunity even to participate and interact with three or four different groups of dance. The way people move, dress, interact and use space is very much a part of how particular social settings are constructed. Observation is the key method for collecting data about such matters (Muhall, 2002:307).

To explore the role of Corsica's dance associations, in the process of dance communication and cultural preservation, the approach of this research was mainly iterative and exploratory, to allow the researcher to be open to new information (Bernard, 1995; Jacob, 2009). Participant observation was an important exploratory data collection tool for this study. The task [of ethnographers] is to document the culture, the perspectives and practices, of the people in these settings. The aim is to 'get inside' the way each group of people sees the world (Hammersley, 1992). One of the main advantages that ethnographic research offers is the social interaction element that is created between the researcher and the participants. The researcher has the opportunity to achieve a deeper understanding of the motivations for certain social acts of the participants. Additionally the researcher can make out how the participants actions are depicted within society and consequently within the social and cultural organizations that they are member of or represent, as such of dance associations. This type of research allowed an exploration as to which certain tasks or roles, dance associations, are supposed to perform within society from a socio-cultural perspective, and what kind of relationship or relationships are developed between the two.

### **Sampling: Dance associations, activities and structure**

The associations which participated in the study were mostly situated in Corsica (94.11 %). Only one association maintained habitual dance activity both in Corsica and in continental France (Paris). Associative projects concerned research, promotion, transmission and diffusion of the island's cultural patrimony (dance and music). Most of the associations' members (73,33%) learned how to dance in an associative environment. There was no annual calendar or agenda for dancing events. All the associations had a place to rehearse and practice.

The associations communicated their events with the use of the media and new media (radio, newspapers, magazines and the Internet). They did not target a particular public, although they would like all to include younger ages in their dance seminars. All the associations claimed to have difficulty to find the necessary resources in order to promote their actions. Finally, most of the associations (88,23%), believe that wearing a costume is not necessary for their representations in public.

The biggest communication challenge, among the different associations, seems to be the diversity of the dance figures they use. Almost all the associations maintain different tactics concerning the way that a dance figure is practiced.

### **Semi-structured interviews**

For the purposes of this study apart from participant observation, seventeen (17) semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with key-members of the seventeen (17) more active dance associations. These associations were chosen based on the frequency of the dance seminars they organised. More particularly each of these associations had to organise at least one dance seminar per week. These associations are namely: *Estudiantina Aiaccina*, *Sirinata Aiaccina*, *A Mannella*, *A Cirnea*, *A Paghjella*, *Cantu di cirnu*, *A Riesciuta*, *I Macchjaghjoli*, *A Squatriglia*, *Ochju à Ochju*, *Tutti in piazza*, *Quatrigliu in Aiacciu*, *A Piazzetta*, *A Liscinosa*, *Ballettustrintu*, *Musical* and *A Casarella*. The questions addressed to the associations were first of all sent by e-mail. More than one telephone discussions followed. Then face to face interviews took place, in order to examine in depth and triangulate some of the participants' answers.

All the interviews were conducted in French, with the exception of some words (dance figures and expressions), which were expressed and transferred in the local Corsican dialect.

The interviews took the form of an open dialogue, between the researcher and the informants, as close to a normal conversation as possible (Bernard, 1995). In the course of the interview, questions included data about Corsican dances (dance figures and movements), actual activities and actions of the associations (seminars, dance courses), and future possible activities to promote dance events. Questions addressed to the dance associations were mainly organized in three parts: membership, technical elements (dance figures), function and functionalities.

One of the main purposes of the interviews was to invite participants and key actors of dance seminars, to give concrete examples, describing specific situations that in their opinion had affected their participation in dance events, especially with regard to other members and other associations. Anthropology of communication research needs concrete examples to be developed, as we speak of an ethnographical approach that deals with live places, real situations and personal experiences, and examines the way that culture is accomplished in everyday life (Winkin, 1998:116). Semi-structured interviews served as an opportunity to triangulate the data from those of participant observations.

A second sample study followed, this one concerned the views of young members of the community about their oral inheritance, age group between 17 to 26 years old. More specifically, fifteen students in Corsican languages and culture of 'Pascal Paoli' university were interviewed about their dance activity.

### **Discussion of results**

In regards to the students' interviews in this particular discipline, it was expected that they would be more familiarized with their own culture and this is why they were chosen. Nevertheless, results showed that only a 10% from the student sample knew that a dance culture exists in the island that is familiar with the popular dance of Corsica, named quadrille. Surprisingly, none of the students knew how this dance was danced. Nevertheless, the positive element of this is that, most of the students (90%) would like to learn how popular dances are practiced. The students explained that tradition for them was a very important part of their culture and that they shouldn't let it disappear. They also explained that in their own opinion there were not a lot of events that promoted popular dance, and that they had not yet been invited to participate in such an event.

### **The experience of a Greek dance atelier – A connection**

The fact that this research refers to the importance of intangible cultural heritage and cultural preservation, makes it important to share the personal experience of one of the authors. For the purposes of this research a Greek dance atelier was initiated for a period of ten months (September to June). The main purpose of such an initiative was to identify feelings and possible reasons as to why the younger generation felt reluctant to be part of the dance culture. In this atelier some steps of the most well-known Greek dances were taught such as: Kalamatiano, Sirto and Hasapiko. The thoughts of a twenty-two (22) year old male student, originated from Corsica that participated in

one of these dance courses can demonstrate how uncomfortable young people in Corsica feel with their 'exposure' to other people while dancing: "I would like to participate in the Greek dance course as long as my friends and family are not aware of it. Additionally, I would not in any way want to dance in public". The main conclusion that can be withdrawn from the above statement and the observation of other young people reactions is that their non-participation in dance events is mostly due to their shyness and reluctance to express in public. Younger people in Corsica seem that they do not have the habit to express emotions via dance, as this is not part of their usual habits (cultural expression), like in Greece for example, where it is common to express emotions (joy and pain) via dance.

### **The benefit of intergroup contact**

As it has been suggested in this study so far, the noncommunication which exists among the different dance groups in Corsica is a major issue. To be more specific, each group follows different dance rules and figures, which makes the dance transmission challenging and consequently its preservation. The issues which arise focus not only on ways of transmission but also on what to transmit. For Jacques Thiers (1989:144), the inhabitants should accept the fact that we live in an era of sharing and exchange and that it is impossible to keep something intact. Intergroup contact could help resolve the communication insufficiencies. According to the Intergroup Contact Theory, contact amongst groups that takes place under optimal conditions can improve intergroup attitudes. The conditions to promote favorable intergroup relations are: equal status amongst groups, common goals, co-operation, institutional support (Allport, 1954) and the projection of trait positivity (Stathi & Crisp, 2010). Speaking of the last condition (the projection of trait positivity), positive contact evokes greater self-outgroup similarity, which increases outgroup liking via the projection of positivity. Both the projection of positivity and reduced anxiety, but independently from one another, results in improved out-group attitudes.

Positive impact of cultural communication are sharing and exchanging. Cultural advantages are always accompanied by economic and social benefits. Direct and indirect contact share similar social location and personal predictors (Pettigrew *et al.*, 2007). Indirect contact has also positive consequences not only for the participants but also for the non-participants, whose friends and associates experience contact.

Intergroup contact is a necessary but insufficient condition, by itself, to resolve intergroup conflict (Pettigrew 2008). Based on the assumption that ignorance promotes prejudice (Stephan & Stephan, 1984), Pettigrew (1998) proposed that 'learning about others' is a critical step in how intergroup contact improves intergroup relations. Even if lacking interaction among dance groups is not the only insufficiency related to the communication problem of dance associations in Corsica, it represents an important cause for dance disregard. Researchers dealing with social categorization, emphasize that similar organization members interact more with each other than with non-similar individuals (Tsui *et al.* 1992). Nevertheless, most of the associations' members that we examined were mainly originated from the island. Turner (1987), argues that if group membership is unsatisfactory, members will attempt to leave that group. Even when that is not physically possible,

individuals may engage themselves in other forms of reduced attachment, such as psychologically withdrawing from the community (Turner, 1987).

To avoid such situations, a global working environment needs to be created. The aim is to mix individuals from different cultures with different knowledge and perspectives, and let them communicate, share and exchange. This is possible during the annual dance festivals that are organised on the island. At the time, people from all over the world, with different nationalities and cultures, participate in summer dance courses and festivities. By creating teams with criteria such as nationality and avoid groupings based on cultural and linguistic affiliation, it can nurture possible narrow minded or ethnocentric viewpoints.

### **The benefit of Cultural Education**

The contribution of cultural education can be invaluable in such a step towards the support of a global networking environment, so as to prepare young adults towards the appreciation of such cultural activities. Already, this research has shown that young generation in Corsica is not familiar with its islands dance culture. Cultural education, in the form of knowledge transfer, can introduce young people and adults the essence and importance of culture, and of certain cultural activities such as dance. We believe that a socio cultural intervention incorporating dance education in the official educational curriculum of Corsica can enhance the cultural awareness of Corsicans at an early age by connecting dance education with culture and contributing to the better understanding and appreciation of their cultural heritage. Johnson (1992) supports that our bodies and bodily experiences are shaped by history and culture. He sees the body as a viewpoint and claims: *“My body-its sensibilities, movements styles, reaction patterns, and health – is not simply an individual reality governed by its own biophysical laws and idiosyncratic effects on my personal history. I am also a result of the ideologies within which I move”*. A bodily and dance experience are products which are generated within society. Culture and society are two systems which coexist, they are not viewed separately, but they influence and develop each other. As it has been already discussed in this paper, culture is learned, shared and acquired through social systems, with education being one of them.

One of the main aims of education in general is to create responsible individuals who are characterized by competencies, attitudes and mindset that help them to appreciate and respect cultural differences and diversity, by engaging and interacting successfully with people from different cultural groups. A global networking environment supported by cultural education could result in the development of cultural empathy among members which is a fundamental trait in a globalized world and towards the development of harmonic intercultural relationships. Cultural empathy signifies understanding, respect and recognition of differences and similarities that exist among different cultures. It refers as to whether the individual can empathize with the feelings and behaviors of people from different cultures (Arabski & Wojtaszek, 2011:51). The more exposure and interaction that one's develop with people from different cultural groups, higher his or her tolerance levels are. Thus, culture is viewed as not something prone, waiting to be discovered but an active meaning-making system of experiences which enters into and is constructed within every act

of communication (Barro et al., 1998:83). Then, group members' identification could help Corsican dance promotion.

### **The benefit of identification promotion**

Identification implies a feeling of being part of the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). High levels of identification with the organization might occur, despite low perceived similarity in cultural values, when the intercultural group climate remains strong (Luijters, 2008). The important for the dance association members' identification is that from the moment that members identify themselves with the association, they will also put effort in the achievement of its organizational goals: "Organizational identification aligns individual interests and behaviors with interest and behaviours that benefit the organization. This means exertion on behalf of the organization is also exertion on behalf of the self" (Dutton et al. 1994:256). At the same time, perceived similarity in values is lower when many different cultural identities are present (Luijters et al., 2008; Hofstede, 1999; Schwartz, 2002).

The role of perceived similarity and an intercultural group climate, as far as identification promotion is concerned, is examined in the research of Kyra Luijters et al. (2008). Different studies were conducted in a public place known for its diverse population (the Netherlands, Amsterdam central station) and in a large Dutch employment agency's employee. Results showed that perceived similarity in cultural values is positively related to identification with the team and the organization and that the negative effect of low perceived similarity in values on identification with the organization can be buffered by an intercultural group climate. Differently said, despite low perceived similarity in values, identification levels can be equally high as a result of a strong intercultural group climate. The above statement can offer a clear guideline for the situation of dance associations in Corsica: in order to enhance identification within a diverse organization, an intercultural group climate, in which diversity is perceived as a positive feature, should be developed. This is how a common direction that would permit a common program with common dance figures and functionality could be achieved. Then, the associations' communication problem(s) could reduce and even disappear.

Additionally, according to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987), people particularly identify themselves with a group when they perceive to have similar characteristics as their fellow group members. This is the case of dance associations' members in Corsica. Dance associations are mainly created by homogenous groups that perceive similarity in cultural background. However, culturally diverse group members do not perceive this similarity, fact that creates lower identification than with culturally homogenous groups (Chattopadhyay Tluchowska & George, 2004; O'Reilly et al., 1989; Tsui Egan & O'Reilly, 1992).

It is also important to mention how mutual respect can help the communication process of a group. Mutual respect can give positive results on identification, as it can contribute to better intergroup relations (Luijters 2008; Barreto & Ellemers, 2002; Huo & Molina, 2006; O'Brien et al., 2005). From the moment that association members learn how to interact with one another, they can easily reconcile their values. This is how they can learn to respect one another, find common purposes,

identify themselves with the group and finally improve their internal and external communication. This process is much more likely to occur on a team level, where people frequently interact and have the opportunity to discuss their values, than on a more abstract organizational level (Campion *et al.*, 1993; Anderson & West, 1998).

### **The benefit of following a common tactic**

As far as dance figures rules are concerned, our research showed that if a common route is agreed and followed by all the associations, a common tactic concerning figures rules can be accepted as well. In this way, all the associations could work in a common project that would help dance practice and promotion. Additionally, the encouragement of dance creation, the announcement of events dates with the help of a detailed calendar, the proposal of dance contests and the creation of adequate structures for dance events, would help dance transmission and promotion. The moment of the research only three adequate places for the organization of dance spectacles seemed to be active, namely *Aghja* in Ajaccio (70 places), the municipal theatre of Bastia (850 places) and the *Propriano* theatre (400 places).

Wanting to examine the actual situation of dance practice in Corsica some years after this study, we contacted (12/12/2019) Bernard Pazzoni, responsible of the Corsican museum music archives library. He explained that unfortunately dance patrimony is almost a lost practice. Dance associations have stopped their practice, apart from very rare occasions<sup>48</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

This study contributes scientifically to cultural studies in action, proposing ways to accomplish better interaction among cultural practitioners and associations, with a goal to improve intergroup relations and help with dance promotion. It has been examined that an oral patrimony in risk of disappearance has the choice to innovate, promote, adapt and avoid a cultural loss. The purpose, was first of all to understand in what ways an oral patrimony can be affected by social changes and globalisation, suggest actions to avoid a possible cultural loss and promote intercultural communication.

Losing the memory of our past is like forgetting all the elements that create our own personality (Salini, 2004:12). Nevertheless, when a cultural activity is no longer practiced, it will soon or later disappear. Dance activity in Corsica, was at the time of the study, considered, by many people, especially the younger ones, an unknown practice.

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<sup>48</sup>« Eh bien les associations de danses comme le quadrille se sont essouffées. Et dans les villages il n'y a plus d'anciens pour participer. Les mariages sont complètement américains avec DJ. Il n'y a que quelques apparitions, comme les danseurs (originaires du Continent) de la région de PortiVecchju , l'autre soir qui ont dansé les 2 Muresche .... à la Festa di a Nazione à CONCA .... bref la Corse devient bientôt les DOM TOM , La GUYANNE etc.... ». Bernard Pazzoni, interview, 12/12/19.

The moment of the research, dance associations in Corsica were the only places where popular dances were practiced. This field study research showed that there is a problem of communication among dance associations. Mutual respect and better understanding of the situation could help the associations propose and follow a common project to ameliorate the actual situation. Follow common rules, propose a specific agenda with dance events, invite younger people to dance, achieve members' identification by creating intercultural groups, mixing the teams with regard to nationality, promote cultural education and research, follow a common tactic of dance figures, are some of the actions that could help dance activity's transmission and promotion. Furthermore, better communication among the different dance groups in Corsica, the cultural actors and the society, would contribute to the protection of this oral patrimony in risk of disappearance.

Culture includes collective practices, like the celebrations and the models of social interaction. Its comprehension by different members of the community is very crucial (Warnier, 1999:9). People from different cultures could eventually communicate successfully and learn to respect one another by being sensitive to cultural diversity, avoid stereotyping and prejudice and learn how to negotiate communication barriers. Cultural practices, like dancing, could provide a solution to a society's miscommunication.

Suggestions for future research could examine to a greater extent the mediating and moderating role of group processes and power relations linked to oral patrimonies, as well as the economic and generally the social benefits that are related to dance promotion and transmission.

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## **Athens as a Major Congress Destination and the Role of Professional Congress Organizers (PCOs)**

**Athina Papageorgiou<sup>49</sup>  
Aristidis Papagrigoriou<sup>50</sup>**

### **Summary**

The aim of this study was to investigate the factors that contribute to the attraction of major congress events in Athens, Greece and the role of professional congress organizers (PCOs) in this process.

To meet this aim we used a well-structured questionnaire distributed through Google Forms to 30 PCO executives in the major Athens area. This questionnaire approached the topic using qualitative and quantitative methods and contained both open and closed answer questions.

Result showed that most PCOs organize local events with medical congresses being the main activity (96.7%). The vast majority of PCOs use the social media or digital marketing to approach clients (with Facebook being the principal tool, 89.7%), as only 33.3% of the Greek PCOs can afford to participate as exponents to major congress tourism exhibitions worldwide because of their small size and limited resources. This means that the role of PCOs in the attraction of major congress events in Athens is limited. Additionally, PCOs revealed that most congresses organized in Athens last only 1-2 days (74%), with a mean number of participants on average about 300 persons. Responders also think that Athens can become a major congress tourism destination as it has certain advantages (good congress infrastructure, excellent weather, priceless archaeological sites, a unique sea front, night life, good shopping places and opportunities for short excursions) that need to be exploited, as well as the Athens Visitor & Conventions Bureau of which they share a positive view.

From this study it is apparent that conjoint efforts of the state, the private sector and certain congress tourism stakeholders are needed (adopting advanced development strategies and using intensive marketing tools, including ambassador programs and adequate bidding processes) in order for Athens to attract international congress events and be established as a major congress tourism destination.

**Keywords:** Athens, congresses, professional congress organizers (PCOs), events

### **Introduction**

Conference tourism represents one of the most profitable forms of alternative tourism in the world today. This means that countries like Greece, especially during an economic crisis, urgently need to

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become a major conference tourism destination, using its infrastructure and comparative advantages to attract major events and gain important financial benefits.

The aim of this study is to investigate the factors that contribute to the attraction of major congress events in Athens, Greece and the role of professional conference organizers (PCOs) in this process.

Here we have the main questions we asked the PCOs:

- What are the principle characteristics and major advantages of congress tourism in Athens?
- How do PCOs evaluate current congress tourism status of Athens?
- How do PCOs run their business, contact clients and do business?
- What is their view on the actions needed in order to further develop congress tourism in Athens?

To meet the purposes of this study and investigate the role of PCOs in the process we used a well structured questionnaire distributed through Google Forms to PCO executives in the major Athens area. This questionnaire approaches the topic using qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell, 2014) and contains both open and closed-answer questions.

### **The Research (questionnaire)**

Question one refers to personal data, while questions 2-7 obtain data from previous congresses organized by each PCO. The clients' country of origin and the ways that the clients were approached are recorded using questions 8-13, while the PCOs' participation to major congress tourism exhibitions and international organizations is stated in questions 14-18.

The PCOs' opinion about the Athens CVB is obtained from their answers to questions 19 and 20 and their opinion regarding the current status and further development of congress tourism in Athens is recorded in questions 21-26. PCOs were also asked to evaluate how the major advantages of Athens contribute to the development of congress tourism in the city through questions 27-30. Difficulties in client approach due to the current economic crisis are investigated in questions 31 and 32 while question 33 is optional and refers to each PCO's competitive advantage.

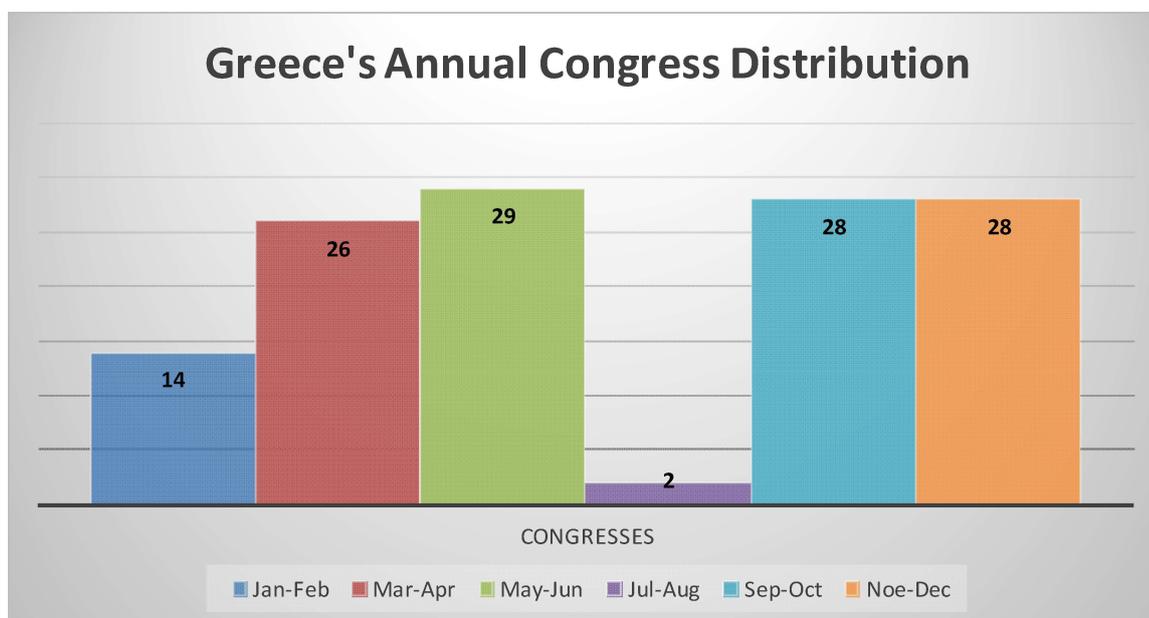
Overall 30 completed questionnaires were obtained. Data were analyzed using Google Forms and MS Excel.

It is important to notice that most PCOs (63.3%) have been active for more than 15 years, while 20% for 11 to 15 years and 10% for 6 to 10 years, reflecting good knowledge and adequate experience on the subject. Regarding the number of conferences organized annually, 33.3% of the PCOs organize a maximum of 10 conferences per year, 43.3% organize 11 to 30 conferences and 23.3% organize more than 30 conferences per year. This means that the congress market is quite undeveloped, as the overall number of congresses that these PCOs organized was only 127. Most of these congresses lasted 1-2 days (74%), while only 21% lasted 3-4 days: the mean number of participants however is satisfactory, as it seems to be around 300 persons. Time distribution of the congresses organized in Greece is shown in Table 1.

Although they organize various events, the main activity of most PCOs (96.7%) involves medical congresses, as this type is the most profitable and frequent: all other types of congresses represent only a small part of the Greek PCOs' activities.

Most PCOs (76.6%) have both domestic and foreign clients, mostly from European countries. In answering how they contact foreign clients, 65.2% of responders stated that they use a PCO operating in the country in question, who acts as a mediator between the two parties. Direct contact, through e-mail or during an exhibition is also used in 30.4 % and 26.1% of cases respectively, while Greek PCOs only rarely use ambassadors. On the contrary, for the approach of domestic clients, congress organizers mostly use their public relations department and personal contact during an ongoing congress (76.77% and 73.3% respectively). These were multiple-answer questions.

Table 1. Annual congress distribution in Greece



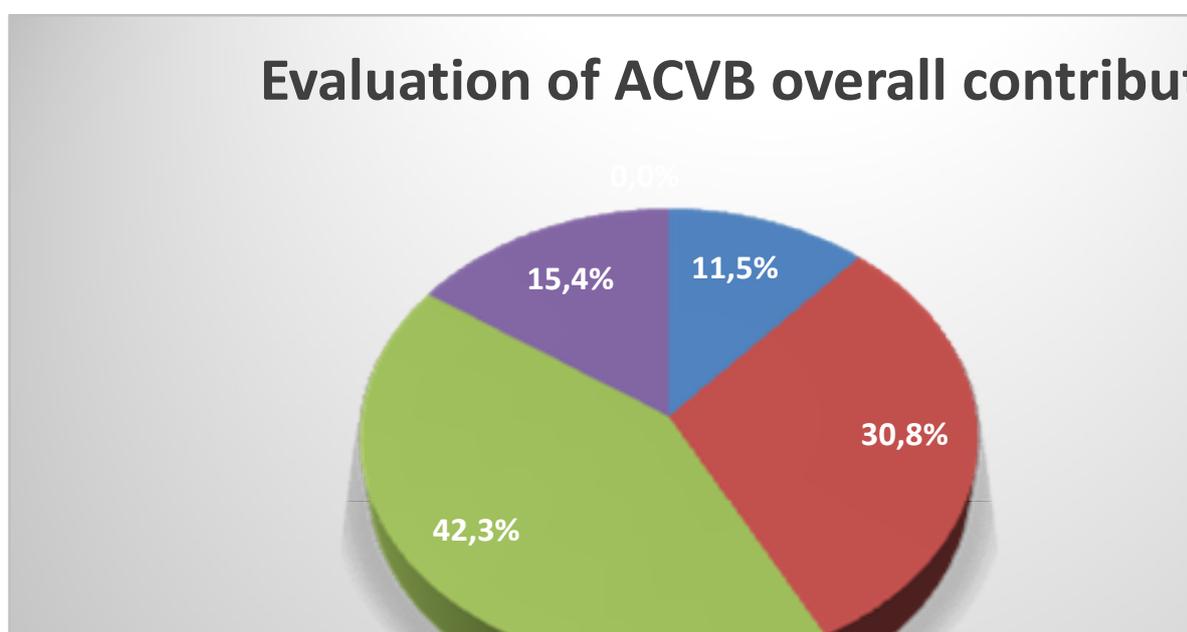
All but one PCO use social media or digital marketing to approach clients, as the internet is nowadays the main marketing tool. Facebook is used by 89.7% of the PCOs, followed by digital marketing (65.5%), Twitter (55.2%), LinkedIn (51.7%) and Instagram (3.4%). This again was a multiple-answer question.

Responders were then asked about participating in domestic or international congress tourism exhibitions. It seems that only 33.3% of Greek PCOs can afford to participate as exponents; preferred exhibitions are TMS, HBAA, IMEX, Meeting Show, IBTM, ICCA, World Travel Market, Travel Trade Athens and IMEX America. Their decision is based on the client list attending the event and the profile of other PCOs participating in a certain exhibition.

Furthermore only 65.5% of the Greek PCOs are members of a national or an international congress tourism organization, as it is not obligatory by law and the annual fees are high. Preferred organizations are HATTA, HAPCO, EFAPCO, AVCB, DSA, SELDIA, ICCA, IAPCO, ASCONET, ASTA, SITE, Industrial Chamber of Thessaloniki, IMN and GLOBAL DMC PARTNERS. Their participation aims to gain information on major forthcoming events and new developments on congress technology.

Through the next question we aimed to investigate the PCOs' view on the overall performance of the Athens Convention & Visitors Bureau (ACVB). Their view is definitely positive, as shown in Table 2.

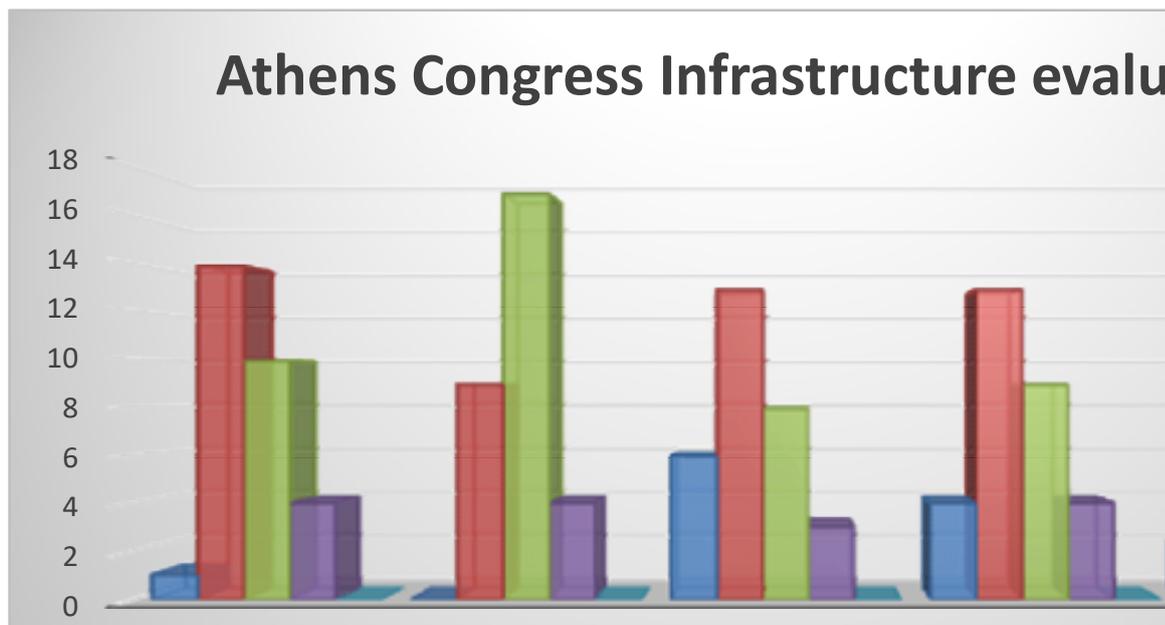
Table 2. Evaluation of the Athens Convention & Visitors Bureau



The next questions examined the prospects of congress tourism development in Athens. Most PCOs (60%) think they are good, 16.7% very good and 3.3% excellent, while only 20% of the responders share the rather pessimistic view that the prospects are average. The reasons for this are the insufficient infrastructure, the small number of large congress centers and the lack of a common strategy involving both the public and the private sector.

When asked about certain aspects of the infrastructure, responders evaluated it from 1-5 (poor to excellent), as listed in Table 3. Certain advantages like the venues, the access, the congress services and the professional personnel, as well as Athens position and climate, the hospitality, the history and the culture made 90% of PCOs think that Athens has the ability to become a major international congress destination.

Table 3. Athens congress infrastructure evaluation



All responders stated that certain activities contribute to congress success: 93.1% of the PCOs offer a gala dinner at a high profile place, 89.7% organize a guided visit to archaeological sites and museums, 65.5% provide activities designed to satisfy accompanying persons and 55.2% organize short excursions to nearby sites. Interestingly, 3.4% of the PCOs also organize team building activities and events. As for thematic experiences offered in Athens, 58.6% of the PCOs think that they are interesting and should be included in the program.

Responders who gave a positive answer to the last question were asked if further development of thematic experiences in Athens was a matter of the public sector, the private sector or a collaboration of both of them. It seems that 78.3% of PCOs think that the state and the private sector should collaborate in producing novel thematic experiences for tourists and congress participants.

The next question examined the relationship between the current crisis and the PCOs' relations to foreign clients. Most PCOs (58.6%) think that they have experienced no difficulties, while the rest of them stated that they have faced several problems working with foreign clients, related to the economic instability, the lack of confidence, the level of the service provided and various deficiencies, mainly on technical support. Other factors were doubts on the interest of Greek participants, inadequate funding from the government and the capital controls.

Finally, there was an open question on how the responders' firm differentiates within competition. Only nine PCOs answered this question, stating that they have adequate experience and high standards of performance, deep knowledge of the congress industry, effective communication with their clients, competitive prices, flexibility in collaborating with clients and suppliers, good financial status, new ideas and an excellent partner network.

## Discussion

Professional tourism is a unique form of alternative tourism where individuals travel for business purposes but still maintain the main characteristics of the tourists who stay at a destination for at least one night, as opposed to business trips where individuals travel for business purposes but do not necessarily stay overnight. These travellers attend both public and private events organized by professional congress organizers and are considered to be extremely important for a destination. Therefore they have a prominent place in destination development and marketing planning, as well as in the competition between different destinations because they greatly affect local societies, both socioeconomically and culturally. Tourism that is associated with these events is called event tourism and has been impressively developed in recent years (Getz, 2008). The organization of these events is a rapidly growing professional tourism sector and uses several resources from various aspects of the tourism industry to achieve its goals.

Business events focus on the professional, educational and scientific activity of their delegates by organizing various forms of meetings, events and conferences. Business events therefore have become an important part of the event industry and tourism associated with it is called MICE Tourism, an acronym for

- Meetings,
- Incentives,
- Congresses & Conferences,
- Exhibitions.

MICE tourism is nowadays a highly developed and profitable part of the tourism industry, combining transport, accommodation, food and beverage, leisure, destination infrastructure, commerce and trade, information technology, finance and education (Dwyer & Mistilis, 2000, Campiranon & Arcodia, 2008, Getz, 2008, McCartney, 2008, Haven-Tang et al., 2007, Dwyer & Forsyth, 1997, Hing et al., 1998, Rogerson, 2012, Gibson et al., 2012).

In the conference industry the PCOs' role in organizing a conference event is of paramount importance, as they carry out all the necessary arrangements in order to achieve the desired scientific, social and economic result (APEX, CIC, 2011, [www.eventscouncil.org](http://www.eventscouncil.org)).

The work of the PCO is particularly demanding and requires professionalism, experience and specific skills: it is common therefore for experienced PCOs to create long-lasting and mutually beneficial partnerships with associations and organizations.

When the event is organized in a foreign country, the PCO seeks the assistance of a Destination Managing Company (DMC), which is responsible for carrying out all necessary actions at the destination (Papageorgiou, 2018). DMCs have a deep knowledge of the local market and expertise in designing and implementing events, activities, tours, travels and logistics (APEX, CIC, 2006) and this makes them necessary partners of the PCOs in the organization of successful conferences. This role is often played by Greek PCOs in international conferences organized in Athens, as revealed by this study.

Conference tourism according to the World Tourism Organization is one of the fastest growing tourism sectors. People who share common interests or capacities seek to communicate, discuss and gather information by travelling to a certain destination in order to participate in a certain event. The development of conference tourism usually presents very positive socioeconomic impacts on the destination (WTTC, 2017, Varvaressos, 2013, Archer, Cooper, Ruhanen, 2005, Mason 2003).

The structure of the conference tourism market is complex, requiring adequate destination infrastructure, quality of services, peace and security, political stability, good accessibility and excellent weather. The conference product must cover the needs for education, training, entertainment and value for money (Rogers, 2008). Due to the conference tourism's remarkable financial benefits, many destinations compete hard in order to attract major international congress events, despite the fact that, in recent years, global conference tourism underwent remarkable changes (Sirgi, 2018):

- The main duration of conferences has been gradually reduced to 3.8 days.
- The number of participants declines, although the number of conferences is increased.
- The average cost per participant is increasing.
- Enterprises and conference organizers compress costs (reducing conference duration, eliminating unprofitable activities, etc.) and excessively use technology to fully satisfy the customer.
- Technology use is intense in the conference industry and may in the future reduce the actual conference participation and increase virtual events.

Athens presents certain advantages that could help the city become a major international congress tourism destination (ACVB, 2018). On the other hand, it also presents several inhibiting factors regarding further development of conference tourism that are:

1. The lack of a well structured marketing plan and the absence of an appropriate strategy for creating a branded conference product.
2. The absence of a National Conference and Visitor Bureau, the main tool for developing congress tourism, as well as regional congress offices that might help destinations outside Athens gain profitable events.
3. The absence of collaboration between public and private stakeholders.

As seen in previous studies (Papageorgiou, 2018), another important disadvantage of Athens is the insufficient support that the state provides to the local congress tourism industry, both financial and functional-promotional. Free bus tickets, free entrance to archaeological sites and low rent for state buildings' use could become important factors for the development of the congress industry, as well as the co-use of the official state stands in certain international exhibitions and the provision of a state warranty during a bidding process.

This study explored the current status, as well as the contribution of PCOs to the development of Athens as a major congress destination and also the actions needed in order to accomplish this goal.

To start with, although the number of PCOs included in this study appears small, as they organize almost 88.2% of the total number of the congresses organized in Greece (Table 4) we believe that the findings of this study are quite reliable.

Table 4. Number of congresses in the world (ICCA, 2018)

	Country	No of Congresses
1	USA	941
2	Germany	682
3	United Kingdom	592
4	Spain	564
5	Italy	515
6	France	506
7	Japan	414
8	China-P.R.	376
9	Canada	360
10	Netherlands	307
11	Portugal	298
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28	Ireland	158
29	Finland	156
29	Norway	156
31	Greece	144
32	Colombia	142
33	Chinese Taipei	141
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110	Algeria	5
110	Bahamas	5
110	Bangladesh	5
	Other Countries	103

TOTAL	12.563
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The vast majority of the Greek PCOs organizes medical congresses, as they are the most profitable and frequent and with good prospect of further increase of the numbers of international events organized in Athens, if appropriate policies and strategy are adopted (Papageorgiou, 2017, Papageorgiou, 2018). Athens has a good climate and congresses can be organized throughout the year: domestic events traditionally are not organized in August, due to the Greek holiday season, but international events could fill that gap (Papageorgiou, 2017, Kravaritis & Papageorgiou, 2007, Shenon, 1990).

Most PCOs seek to work with clients from abroad; the communication channels however are in our opinion outdated, despite the excessive use of digital marketing. This is mainly due to the fact that most PCOs are relatively small enterprises, as compared to the international ones. This also explains why they tend to work as DMCs for major foreign PCOs who organize international events in Athens, despite the emphasis given on networking with stakeholders, both domestic and international. On the contrary, within Greece PCOs appear to have an excellent marketing plan in claiming domestic congress events.

PCOs believe that ACVB does an excellent work in attracting major international events in Athens, a congress destination that has the potential to become an important international player. There are also many serious disadvantages however, that only the state could help improve: it is important though that the PCOs do not expect everything from the state but promote public-private cooperation as the key to resolve these problems. ACVB actions currently include ([www.athensconventionbureau.gr](http://www.athensconventionbureau.gr)):

- participation to International Tourism Exhibitions, business-to-business events, road shows and fam trips,
- participation to international award events, i.e. the European Best Destination Awards,
- advertisement in the major congress tourism magazines and the media in general,
- social media use,
- participation in international associations of the congress industry, such as the ICCA and the ECM,
- running ambassador programs,
- conducting research studies on the national congress product and
- producing and distributing brochures and videos.

PCOs offer a variety of activities to both participants and accompanying members, as conferences are not strictly professional-training activities for delegates, but also a first-class opportunity for entertainment and networking outside the narrow professional framework (Glynia, 2004). The city of Athens as well as the suburbs provide a wide range of opportunities for cultural (architectural, archaeological, historical and religious), travelling (short cruises to the islands and day excursions to nearby sites) and entertaining activities (shopping, eating, traditional and current music listening etc) that can satisfy most visitors.

Finally, it is rather disappointing that only nine out of the thirty PCOs who filled this questionnaire answered the question about the supremacy of their business against competition. We cannot

conclude whether this comes from insecurity, amateurism, small size, occasional involvement, lack of specialized personnel and other factors: the fact, however, that all responders were major independent PCO enterprises and not congress departments of travel agencies, probably explains this disturbing finding.

## Conclusions

From this study it is apparent that the actions needed to improve current situation and establish Athens as a major congress destination are:

- Further exploitation of the current level of medical conference tourism.
- Prolongation of the current conference tourism period, ideally throughout the year.
- Establishment of a major Athens Conference Center.
- Participation of PCOs, along with the ACVB and state government agencies (i.e. Ministry of Tourism, Hellenic Tourism Organization and Regional Tourism Authorities) in international conference tourism exhibitions (with a state stand that houses and promotes PCOs and other interested parties for a fair and affordable price).
- Creation of ambassador programs and participation in bidding processes, since, nowadays, this seems to be the most effective way to earn major congress events.
- Development of an effective congress tourism strategy through the participation of both the public and the private sector stakeholders.
- Provision of incentives to private companies to invest in congress tourism, build infrastructures and develop novel thematic experiences for delegates.

The results of this survey show that Athens has the potential to become an international congress destination; many actions however need to be taken for the city to exceed current competition and many good practices should be adopted by the Greek PCOs and the rest of the congress tourism stakeholders to achieve these goals.

Future research could focus on the examination of the broader context, as this study highlighted the actual situation and needs of congress tourism in Greece. A comparison with other countries and congress destinations would permit a better exploration of results could be compared to regional and global averages.

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