

The Comment: The ‘Telomere’ of News and Public Communication

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Abstract

Public communication is extremely challenging and complex in practice. The comment as a public information and communication tool adds to that. Examining the practice of comment and its Infoganda frame by the media and government at the broadcasted news media, the public information and political communication and power frame game in the public sphere is revealed and the challenges and difficulties of public information and communication and civic awareness are indicated. The research analysis is enhanced by the semi-structured personal interviews of persons that are engaged in public information and communication in the political or the media level.

Keywords: Public communication; Comment; Framing; News media; Commentariat; Journalism; Government Public awareness

Introduction

The scope of this paper is to look at the physiology of the news a) by investigating the resonant practice of comment in news coverage and b) by studying the Commentariat; the commentators appearing in the news bulletins (Figures 1 and 2). In order to research the forenamed, the study is grounded on the framing theory which is approached through a biological imagery and metaphor by dint of relating theory to a more ‘physical’ science.

Something is happening in the news and it is so inherent and naturally presented that, in order to trace it, an analysis of this activity and its active basic units is required. Molecular Biology deals with biological activity going down to the molecular basis. In the same way, this study approaches the news down to their ‘molecular’ basis which is the public information itself and attempts to understand and observe the interactions within the system of the news and public communication through a biological metaphor which facilitates searching below the manifestations of classical news and communication framing approaches, as we are able to inquire at the same time into genesis and function.

According to Molecular Biology, all known living organisms have their development and functioning instructions written in the DNA, which is organized in Chromosomes. The sequence at each end of a chromosome is the Telomere, which is a single piece of coiled DNA that protects the end of the chromosome from deterioration or from fusion with neighboring chromosomes [1,2].

In this optic and systemic thinking, the News and Public Communication are likewise a living system; an ‘organism’ of today’s society as they are the ‘organ of sense or apprehension’ of the societal reality and the news ecosystem. Therefore, figuratively speaking, public information and the news a) have also a ‘DNA’ organized in ‘chromosomes’ which are the Public Information and b) have also their ‘telomere’, which is the practice of the public Comment; the formation of the commentary presentation which got introduced to public communication and the news reality (Figure 1).

Telomeres (the ‘cap’ at each end of the DNA chromosome) are replenished by an enzyme called Telomerase, which is actually the genetic enzyme that forms and builds them [1,2]. What if, the Comment, which, as already mentioned, is the ‘telomere’ of the public information (which in turn is the chromosome of the DNA of public communication and the news), has a ‘telomerase’. In other words, what

is the genetic ‘enzyme’ that builds the news and acts as a catalyst in public communication forming public’s (re)actions? The paper argues that the ‘telomerase’ is the Commentariat; the commentators appearing in the news bulletins (Figures 1,2).

At first thought, there is no negative attribute to that. Indeed, comment phased in public communication and the news ‘system-organism’ so that the system’s ‘chromosomes’ which is the news and public information, do not wear off before public opinion a) makes sense of the public information that is being communicated to it, or b) gets prompted to link the news information, stories and events so

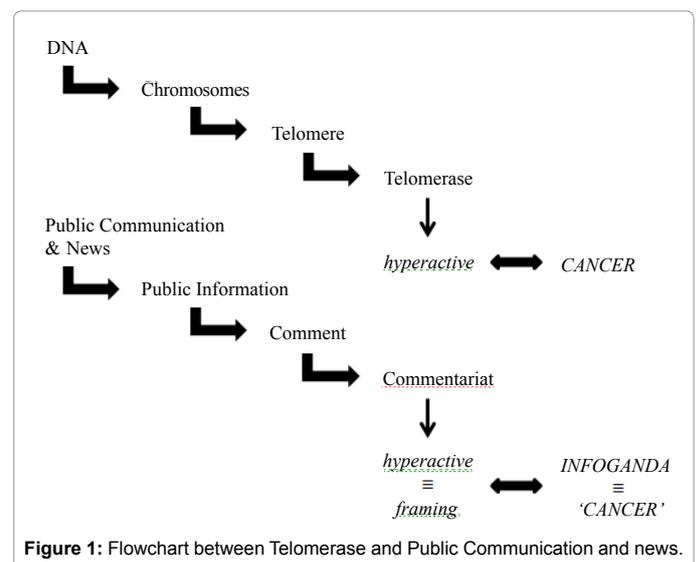


Figure 1: Flowchart between Telomerase and Public Communication and news.

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that the full picture of the public things is formed in the public minds.

However, according to Molecular Biology, when telomerase is highly active, an implosion and damage of the cells occurs and cancer appears [1,2]. Could it be the same case with public information and communication in today's times? Could it be that public information and communication have 'damaged cells' and news has 'cancer'? If so, what is that makes the 'telomerase' which is the Commentariat, hyperactive and, what is this activation affected by? In other words and by interlocking Molecular Biology and Framing Theory, the question of what is the frame that, as substrate, determines the 'metabolic pathway' occurring in public communication, arises. The paper argues that this frame is the Infoganda frame which is inherent in public communication, information and the news as the implosion of information and propaganda [3] (Figure 1). Infoganda frame delivers the message in a communicative form simulating Information and News reporting and, at the same time, propagates via targeting and managing. It combines the communication functions of Information and Propaganda constituting an act of publicity appearing to be neutral in its presentation as news information whereas in reality it bears an agenda within, for the promotion of the opinionated views and vested interests of the communicator, either through the support or the contraposition. Consequently, this paper suggests that researching the DNA and the traceability of public information and the news, may lead to the exploration of new public information and communication tools and frames, and the revelation of hybrid formats of public communication such as Infoganda, being immanent in the act of framing of information and communication by the public and political communication actors. It also argues that in the news is presented the apparent, the obvious, the visible, and the available to the public as Information, but there is also an act not visible, opaque, and not observable inherent in the news through the practice of comment, which concerns a limited group of public and political communication actors [3]. Therefore, through the biological metaphor and the general hypothesis that the news 'has cancer', it can be further implied that there can be some way to 'repair' it.

Research Data and Methodology

The 'molecular biology lab' of the study is the Greek public information and communication scenery. The study constitutes an empirical analysis of broadcasted news in the news bulletins of Greek TV stations. The research sample is sizable and consists of 1.015 broadcasted news of 107 news bulletins of seven (7) TV PanHellenic stations (5 private and 2 public) covering the main TV landscape and the biggest audience share in Greece [4]. In this sense, it provides a representative sample of Greek broadcasting media environment. The reason for focusing on broadcasted sources (TV stations) is that researching broadcasted news in Greece is still an underutilized area of research activity within public communication field and it constitutes a challenge because an organized electronic audiovisual database and archive for research and scientific purposes does not exist [5].

In the present study, the comment is signified as a framing device of public information and communication that accentuates the multiple meanings of the information in the news and, for that reason it is examined within the framework of the Infoganda frame concept. The Infoganda frame i) is established as the new 'suit' of the public information, ii) is applied by the communicator which is the public and political communication actors [3,6-12], iii) suggests that the news is led to a particular kind of frame where factual and pragmatic news information are being presented with a new 'wrapping' being applied

through the comment and the attachment of opinion and viewpoint to the news, and iv) is the upshot of a hyperactive Commentariat. The solid foundation for the methodology developed for this study and the Infoganda frame employed is being provided and built on previous analyses of media news and propaganda [3,13-18].

The identification of the salience of the practice of comment in the broadcasted news bulletins and within the framework of the Infoganda frame concept is not a frequent, if not an inexistent, aim of the Greek researchers. Broadcasted news comments have limitedly been researched –if not at all– as a framing mechanism for public information and communication and as a potentially important exposure variable related to changing attitudes and behaviors of the public. And all these, when Greece: a) belongs to the Mediterranean communication model according to which, the influences exerted by external environments are combined with the country's own peculiarities, limitations and idiosyncrasies and, end up to be converted or to change the original outside influence [19,20], b) is ranked 70th among 179 countries world-wide in 2012 and 84th in 2013, according to the World Press Freedom Index which reveals the degree of freedom that journalists, news organizations, and citizens enjoy in a country [21] and, c) is sited around the middle (80/177) worldwide scoring 40/100 in corruption perception index (CPI) 2013, is characterized by the ongoing tendency of the increase of corruption in the last three years by 75% change (73% change has EU) (Global Corruption Barometer, 2010), and the country's most affected institutions by corruption are political parties, parliament and the media, according to Transparency International [22].

The aforementioned argument constitutes also another reason for being motivated to research the specific subject and choosing broadcasted news bulletins as research unit in this study. Moreover, it is also the reason for choosing 32 key-persons engaged in public information and communication in the specific environments (the Media, and Government), to be interviewed [23]. The interviewees enhance with their sayings the research findings as they disclose the meanings embodied in the news and reveal the intensions and trends of the commentaries between what is said and what is left unspoken in the news. The interviews were conducted in 2008 and include the main viewpoints right before the global financial crisis (2009).

The sample of the interviewees is inherently limited in number (32 in-depth personal interviews) because of the status of the subjects [13 parliament members and ministers having also served as Government Spokesman/Government Representative [24] and 18 media people (news directors, newscasters, news commentators that serve as opinion leaders and participate actively in the broadcasted news bulletins and their structure, political editors, journalists reporting government, communication and media specialists and consultants)]. The special common characteristic of the interviewees is that they have a diachronic and dominant presence in the media landscape and in the public communication and political reality in Greece from the Metapolitefsi (regime change from the fall of the dictatorship to the Greek legislative elections of 1974 and the democratic period immediately after these elections) and onwards. They all have experienced: a) the time where the state and later the public television has been introduced (1975), b) the change and the transition with the entry of the non-state private television (1989), and c) the today's technological and digital media developments. Furthermore, they participated and continue to participate in and shape the developments or changes in the processes of news, public information and communication, as well as in Politics [25]. Moreover, they have never been studied scientifically before

in Greece, although they constitute key players in shaping public awareness and communication in Greek societal and political reality and the Greek media.

Both sources of data and information (broadcasted news and interviewees) were collected through content analysis and processed with descriptive statistics, depict the whole political, economic and broadcast media environment in Greece and thus, are utilized to approximate the exposure to a public comment and its frame.

The study period¹ has characteristics that synopsise uniquely historical features for Greece. It is conducted in 2005, because, in that year, Greece finds itself: a) 30 years after the Junta and the restoration of Democracy (Metapolitefsi), b) half a century (55 years, 1979) after it was introduced to the television, c) 15 years (1989) after the entry of private television and the deregulation of the media and broadcasting landscape, d) experiencing the first political party change in government after 20 years (conservatives take the lead from the social-democrats) [28], and e) dominating in the news and timeliness cases of opacity, corruption and collusion which as issues are for the first time at such large outbreak and under such attention by the media and government communication (e.g. conflict on the Law and the Bill for the 'main media shareholders', public debate on the media concentration and licensing, public statements by the Prime Minister on corruption phenomena and his public intervention and commitment to remove such kind of phenomena from the public life, questions in the parliament on issues of transparency and collusion, corruption in the media and the economy, political scandals and resignations of governmental actors, etc.).

The study's hypotheses that are designed based on former research on Infoganda [3], attempt to test the following:

- H1: The comment is salient in the news bulletins of Greek TV stations and it has specific characteristics that correlate to a framing mechanism, facilitate Infoganda and make it to be the 'telomere' of news and public communication.
- H2: If the news commentaries are framed as Infoganda, then the carrier and conveyor as well as symbol- and frame-handlers of the framed news and public communication, is the Commentariat and it constitutes the 'telomerase' that builds the news and acts as a catalyst in public communication forming public's (re)actions.

Research Findings and Discussion

The research findings confirm the tendency of the salience i) of the comment and ii) of the activity of the Commentariat, both within the framework of the Infoganda framing concept and by the two main public and political communication actors (the media and the government). Specifically,:

- **H1:** The comment is salient in the news bulletins of Greek TV stations and it has specific characteristics that correlate to a framing mechanism, facilitate Infoganda and make it to be the 'telomere' of news and public communication.

According to the findings, the comment is salient in the news physiology. In particular, the broadcasted news has a morphological

¹The exact period researched is 15-25/10/2005 and 07-11/11/2005 (16 days). October and November are the most representative months during a year in Greece in terms 1) of governmental work and the broadcasted public information during everyday governance, and 2) of TV audience measurement, because, according to AGB Hellas that produces television audience data in Greece using the people meter system [27], TV viewing rates generally begin to increase from October each year and peak in January or February next year.

structure that is comprised by a) reports and reporting (54%) and b) comment (46%). Each broadcasted news story lasts 4'35'' in average; where reporting runs for 2'29'' and comment for 2'6'' in average. So, in Greece, the practice of comment in the broadcasted news bulletins is indeed, prominent and resonates with the news reporting [28]. News, although it still has its classic traditional informational role, is enriched and placed in the overall reality context according to various framing and organizational criteria (e.g. existence of commentaries and commentariats, thematic categorization, news placement hierarchy, space and time allocated for the news presentation) [29,30]. The reason for that is that, in Greece, all news stories are potentially and implicitly considered to be major issues of huge stake and therefore, when they are presented in the news bulletins, they are 'invested' with opinions, views, criticism and 'TV windows'² or, in other words, with commentaries [31]. This, in turn, means that broadcasted news are given an especial character and that, in today's times, the two morphological features are being integrated resulting to news being fused with comment.

Public opinion, nowadays, while watching a broadcasted news bulletin, receives the factual information that reporters and journalists have through their network of sources-named and unnamed. Yet, simultaneously, public opinion imbibes the opinionated views of the commentator. News gets editorialized. Public opinion listens to the commentators³ who comment and opine, either systematically or in a daily basis, in the news and who are valued as the heavy powerful 'voices' in the journalistic and public information field and are considered to be credible and valid. They constitute the 'heavy artillery' of the news, as the added value of the TV station is based on or evaluated from having these people at its TV 'front'. After all this is the reason why these people enjoy special recognition, publicity and are paid exorbitant amounts [32].

Further, the findings reveal that:

- in 7,4% of the 1.015 news stories (76 news stories), the news report follows the comment; meaning the comment precedes the reportage in the news story presentation.
- 11,5% of the 1.015 news stories (117 news stories) are presented without any news reporting at all. They just have the lead

²TV windows' have emerged as a communication practice, encompassed at least in Greece keenly, because of a) the trend of broadcasted journalism to involve more direct broadcasts and real-time recording and analysis of happenings [33] leading the TV stations to turn to live links and broadcasts from the scene of the action and b) trend of political communication to have telegenic politicians and 'politic-genic' journalists. Specifically, 'TV windows' a) are live links with people placed in slots in a window formation on the screen and are shaped like a conversation-chat which evolves live on the TV screen in order to debate a subject giving a new dimension to the news [34], b) function as TV opinion editorials, in which the people who appear in them contribute to the framing of the public information and the creation of the 'world' around the core of the news story by adding new elements, views and opinions or even vested interests and 'lines' [29,35] (Figure 2). The initiator of the idea, trend and practice of 'TV windows' in Greek broadcasted media is Michalis Malelis and, Elli Stai [34,36] is the first Newscaster of the primetime broadcasted news bulletin in this new scenery (1993).

³Commentators: a) are journalists who have gone through various media, and their transfer on broadcast media and their involvement in the broadcasted news bulletins constitutes a proof, an acknowledgement of their sense and percept of the news reality (professional competence-experience) and their public appearance and mien [37,38]; they are considered to be pundits on current affairs and closely associated with political and media circles, b) are experienced journalists whose job is to seek the borderline between documented facts and substantiated views on an issue [38]; they analyze the events and discuss their implications, c) are people who actively participate in the broadcasted news bulletins' structure by appearing in 'TV windows' and contributing to them as permanent collaborators of the TV station, or as its guests, and are known for their validity, reliability and access to information and networking, d) are the people who ensure that new or different perspectives of the issues in the news will be presented.

and the Commentariat's comment.

- 25% of the 1.015 news stories (254 news stories) are combined with multiple 'TV windows' and the Commentariat. In these cases, by 54% (137 news stories) the comment precedes the reportage in the news story presentation.
- 33% of the 1.015 news stories (330 news stories) were a subject and an issue of discussion in the briefing of the journalists given by the Government Spokesman/Government Representative taken place earlier in the day and prior to the time of the broadcasted news bulletin. And, 39% of these news stories (128 news stories) are being commented by the Commentariat.

Noteworthy is that the presentation or not of the governmental act is determined from and is dependent on whether there is a return and a benefit (economic or political) for the TV station. The private TV stations need and tend to use the commentary as a field on which, not only they 'organize' public information, but they also assert their share in shaping the news agenda; by exploiting even the government itself as a news source. The objective of these choices and strategic actions of private TV stations is then showcasing their power and the pressure they can exert in the field of public information and communication and in government [36,39-42].

So, the Comment:

- is not always a comment. It may include news or last minute evolutions. It is an instant, quick and intrusive way of presenting news. Under this optic, indeed, the term Commentariat is unrealistic because its members (i.e. the journalists participating in the 'TV Windows' of the broadcasted news bulletins) just transmit information and, actually, do reportage and not publicize viewpoints by commenting [43,44].
- is a communication practice and technique and, constitutes a communication effort.
- denotes, by default, power. It constitutes an attempt to communicate an -in communication terms-interpretation of meaning of a message and not the message itself. So, comment is not a simple transfer and transmission of the message. It is a communicative interpretative act that adds something to the news story. News gets extensions, which result, via the comment, to an analysis and a position or side taken by the Commentariat [36]. Through this prism, comment by definition involves power in the sense that it is an action that incorporates the strength to be able to lead and enjoin one to think, evaluate and act in a certain direction⁴ [45].
- means 'I'. The Comment is an interpretation of meaning containing the subjective viewpoint as an essential component [46]. "The overall picture which is offered in the news bulletins is divided into a) the picture given from the news report which provides the factual material, and b) the view of the Commentariat who provides the interpretation of meaning of the news story." The corollary of this is the salience of a news story to actually derive from the views contained therein that are expressed by the Commentariat and are considered

⁴It is characteristic that media people, especially those of the broadcasted media and more specifically the Commentariat, see themselves as holding—having power precisely because they consider that when they comment publicly, people see them and hear them. So, it is gained the impression that they self-identify themselves not only as public opinion leaders but also as 'formateur'-creators of social and political reality [47]. Vivid example of that is that, during a broadcasted news bulletin, phrases like 'get me the minister now' can be heard. Evidently, beyond that journalists like to think they have great power; they do indeed have, because, for example, a minister or a politician easily answers their phone call, which is something that does not happen to everyone [39,48].

as the real evidence material. Thus, the comment could mean 'I, the Journalist', 'I, the Medium' (the TV), 'I, the TV station', 'I, the owner of the TV station', 'I, the Government', 'I, the Lobby/ists', etc.

- is a strategic tool and frame. Comment leads to strategic framing of news. It serves the strategic foundation of the presentation of news in which selfish intentions, self-partialities, goals, and interests are located or can be traced. The commentators in the 'TV windows', provide frames for the public to think, to evaluate or even to act similarly to what it is defined by the provided frames. Indeed, what is presented to the public is not spontaneous but coordinated. The news bulletin has a scenario and preparation. The news broadcaster knows to whom to address ('give the floor') and knows beforehand what will be said. The members of the Commentariat know how the dialogue in the news bulletin will unfold itself, since they 'go on air' prepared. Each of them has a role and each one says one part of the news story, so that to appear that it is presented spherically and with as much information as possible [36].
- is a message of power. News coordination, management and handling show the intention of the Medium to have a specific target in terms of what it says and how it says it. Comment can therefore be seen as an expression of power, since it exploits the privileged position of the media to operate in the name of the citizens and their right to know. Through the framing of public information via commentary, power is being exercised and the understanding of the public and political world is affected. This is even more true when the comment is being put in front and precedes the actual reportage. Basically, this is what creates the 'line' of the Medium. Behind the phrase 'the audience wants us', often is hidden an additional phrase 'the central ownership of the Medium wants it'. It can even be added the phrase 'the government wants it' while the media flatly and categorically deny this⁵ [35].
- affects the quality of public information, awareness and communication, especially on broadcasted media, and it does that at various levels⁶.

In view of all the above, it can be argued that the comment pertains to technique, certification tool, strategy and framing device together. It is an interpretative act in news, which has an internal structure, a central organizing idea at its core, a frame that is being managed by the public and political communication actors [51-54] and that gives meaning to a shapeless reality far from the simple presence or absence of information [53,54]. Moreover, the Comment as a communication practice is utilized as a message to power, but it appears that it is also a message of power itself and a power message that forms a powerful Commentariat. That is the reason why public and political communication actors (such as the Media, and the government) during their public act and communication, rival for the comment in news and compete over the framing of public information and communication via their actors and commentators.

Nevertheless, the ability and power for publicly commenting and thus, framing and communicating, can be unilateral and lopsided and does not ensure that all public and political communication actors will align with it. Actors become involved in the framing of public information and communication for various reasons, occupy different positions, and aim at different, often conflicting, but sometimes corresponding interests. The actors are active participants, partners, and opponents. Moreover, they invest their 'capital' in order to maximize profits, minimize losses, and safeguard or improve interests and positions. Public information processes are employed in the actors' attempts to secure or improve their positions and interests. Not every

actor, though, has the same opportunity to influence the outcomes according to its own interest [55]. Further, the strategic efficacy of competing comments in the framing contest among different actors depends on the socio-cultural and political environment [56].

So, as the study argues, the analysis of the Comment, which is signified as a framing device, can provide with useful insights into the framing strategies applied (i.e. Infoganda) by the public and political communication actors for the best opportunity to have an effect on public opinion and the impact of a behavior and perception change [58].

• **H2:** If the news commentaries are framed as Infoganda, then the carrier and conveyor as well as symbol- and frame-handlers of the

⁵This is happening because, as noted by the interviewees, "this style is what the media like, especially broadcasted media. They enjoy (enjoy: in the sense of being satisfied but also in the sense of being benefited) influence. It is their message of power." [49]. The media are claiming for themselves the role of representing power. At this point, the fundamental difference between power and authority must be noted; "power does not decide, is being enforced. Thus, it needs an authority to consent and to change its willingness into a decision. Therefore, there is a need from the entity of the power to persuade, to manipulate or to redeem the entity of the authority. Consequently, the entity of the power does not have decision making power, it only asserts itself" [50]. So, the media have power as they have evolved into an institution in the contemporary societies, but not authority. In democratic set ups, authority is performed in the legislative, executive and judicial functions by the state.

⁶The practice of comment contributes to a deficit of information as outlined below:
g.i.) Nowadays, everybody has become an expert on everything. There are no more experts who possess knowledge of and analyze specifically one or two issues. There is a peculiar appropriation of news material imposed by the new 'journalistic deontology'. This peculiar type of 'ownership' refers to the fact that some 'journalists appropriate statuses and qualities that do not characterize them and cannot be attributed to them as their professional competence and main appositeness. They only want to reap 'publicity' and to monopolize the management of news stories through their meanings and interpretations. One journalist is self-called 'political analyst', the other 'elections analyst', the third 'financial analyst' and so on. Without questioning the scientific value and contribution of these disciplines, most often they are falsified, luxurious and pompous, and not all being true, inscriptions adopted by the journalists and members of the Commentariat. They are just titles that constitute the guise of journalists' objectivity" [50]. Indeed, there is still something which is yet another Greek originality. The journalist or commentariat member who will comment on the ecclesiastical reportage in a news story one day, the next day will talk about diplomacy and next day for the economy [48].

g.ii) Comment could be said that it is still something more. It is "more like a 'parking' of personal ambitions of the journalists and politicians" [50]. The Commentariats defiantly 'become the manipulators of the public opinion and the masters of the absolute truth by revelation. Though, practically, they conveniently ruminate their obsessions or their partisan prejudices" [50]. Members of the Commentariat who participate in 'TV windows' and opine in public various opinions, promote their own vested interests. This is because members of the Commentariat are, for example, Managers - Publishers - Media Owners or shareholders and this means that they work with advertising. Someone cannot expect that these people will say all the information and the whole truth about a government action for example, since the next day they are the ones that have to pick up the phone and call a minister to ensure advertising for their mass medium and a piece from the pie of the state subsidized advertisement [39,47,50]. It is worth noting that from the journalists who participate in broadcasted news bulletins and were asked to be interviewed, the only ones who refused to be interviewed were four (N. Hatzinikolaou, G. Tragas, G. Kyrtos, N. Kakaounakis), and they are the only ones who, at that same time, are newspaper publishers and TV station shareholders.

g.iii) Through comment, broadcast (TV) journalism creates its own set of pundits [57]. That is, the journalist as public commentator is accepted as an expert and 'authority' on public things and, thus he/she receives the status of pundit and a membership in the Commentariat with all the plusses attached to this.

g.iv) Many times, the presence and the role of the Commentariat is combined with the TV ratings and the profit it can bring to the TV station [29]. The choice of the commentators 'going on air', for example, is made on the basis of how much they can 'sell' (themselves, the news stories, the frames, the 'lines', etc.). So, the journalistic 'authority' and commentary pundit can be combined and also evaluated based on other criteria, in addition to journalistic professional competence. These 'other' criteria are associated with the media centric and commercial-competitive logic and vested interests.

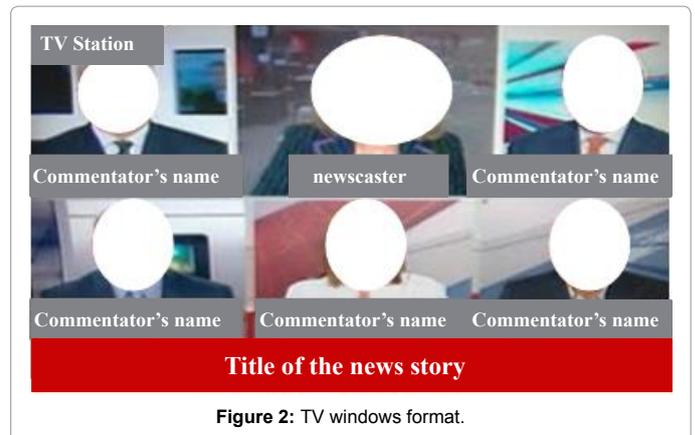


Figure 2: TV windows format.

framed news and public communication, is the Commentariat and it constitutes the 'telomerase' that builds the news and acts as a catalyst in public communication forming public's (re)actions.

According to the research findings:

• The Commentariat consists of: a) journalists-permanent partners of the TV station as news commentators that serve as opinion leaders and participate actively in the broadcasted news bulletins and their structure (32%), b) specialists and scientists (4%), c) government officials (3%), d) opposition MPs (3%), e) members of the political party in government (1,5%).

Noteworthy is the strong absence of the polity's members, the citizens, and the special interest and citizen action groups. In particular, the absence of the polity's entities representatives reveals that public administration is not perceived by the media in Greece as independent of the political leadership of the country, as it is considered that news and timeliness can be commented equally from a government official. This practice and percept of the Greek media depicts felicitously [19] Mediterranean communication model [20] and, also the pathogenesis that characterizes Greece and refers to the tendency every government and political party in power to be involved in the public administration [59]. The absence of the citizens reveals a) that the civil society in Greece is in a hybrid stage of formation and activation and, b) that the media and especially the broadcasted ones, do not give voice to citizens, nor do they consider them or treat them as an important partner of the communication triangle of influence and of shaping public information as well as actors and producers of public and political communication.

• the comments of the Commentariat are preceding the news reports in 52% (67 news stories) of the news stories that are being broadcasted in the news bulletins and were an issue of discussion in the briefing of the journalists given by the Government Spokesman / Government Representative (taken place earlier in the day and prior to the time of the broadcasted news bulletin) (128 news stories).

This can be explained as the briefing of the journalists given by the Government Spokesman/Government Representative, nowadays, does not generate news anymore. It is just a discussion or debate of the news stories already earlier publicized by the media. So, it actually follows the timeliness and does not or rarely, creates news. Hence, what is in fact happening, is the transfer of the discussion and its commentaries taken place in the governmental briefing of the journalists, from the briefing room to the TV screen in the broadcasted news bulletin where the practice of comment continues to take place. The significant difference and determinant of this transfer, however, is that on the TV

screen the Commentariat is present and the Government Spokesman /Government Representative is absent. The governmental viewpoint is presented in the news bulletin only in the report that follows and comes later in time in the news story presentation, and by the broadcast footage and videos being the visual material supporting the news report. [49,60].

Furthermore, the presence of government communication in the news bulletins accompanied by the Commentariat's active participation in its presentation, is being decided by the TV stations, especially the private ones, a) based on criteria such as 'how much the news story sells itself or, how much the government officials being part of it sell', 'if the news story can be presented and analyzed with 'TV windows', 'if criticism can be added', 'if reactions and controversies can be triggered', etc. [61-64] and b) on the grounds of the assumption that governmental communication is de facto 'marked' and that the Commentariat with its comments facilitates the balanced presentation of the news story to the public [34,44,48].

Considerable in the findings is also that 98% of this kind of news stories (the ones being broadcasted in the news bulletins and being an issue of discussion in the briefing of the Government Spokesman /Government Representative taken place earlier in the day) find their way to the front line news titles of the news bulletin and, especially in those of the private TV stations [65-68].

Titles, which work as another form of comment, sum up and give an overview of the central idea of what it will be later analyzed in the main body of the news story in the news bulletin. They are the transformation of reality in headlines. They offer visibility to a news story expressing the volume given to its coverage and the issue itself by the TV station. Moreover, titles, via their framing, are a form of intervention and a metric that can reveal the dynamics of the coverage given by the broadcasted media and the game that evolves over the meaning and its frame. They might include an encrypted comment or opinion in their framing 'package' and convey to the public the frame according to media's intents.

- in one out of three times the news story is combined with the comments of the Commentariat, when the news story is accompanied by two specific broadcast footage and video categories; when there is audiovisual material that derives from the briefing of the Government Spokesman/Government Representative (16%) and the government officials (59%).

When the footage derives from the opposition (23%) and the citizens (27%), the Commentariat chaperons the news story only in one or two news stories out of five.

This way of presentation of the governmental act in the broadcasted news bulletins reveals how strongly a news story goes out in public and that each news story is strongly presented and managed by the TV station. The combination of a news story with comments and the Commentariat is of significant value and particular importance. And, when this finding is combined with the aforementioned finding (that of the practice of comment and that it characterizes mostly the private TV stations), makes evident the role that the TV station wishes or demands for itself to play in the frame-game of public information and communication and in the power-game in Greek public things.

- when the broadcast footage is, specifically, of government officials, it is the only time (in contrast to the opposition and the citizens) that the comment precedes the news reporting in the news story (55% of the cases).

In other words, what is said for the government, via the comments, is expressed and reflected simultaneously by its image and visual representation. Namely it is attempted an identification or an associative thinking to occur and to create interpretations. Indeed, if this observation is combined with the fact that the practice of comment is adopted mainly by the private TV stations, makes evident the role that the TV station seeks and claims to play in the shaping of public information and communication and in the power-game in Greek public things.

So, nowadays, the news coincides with comment and the Commentariat. The news as information is not at all distinct from comment. News and Commentariat are intertwined in a mix of commentaries, news - facts, conjectures, speculations, opinions and views. This 'editorialization' is perceived by citizens as something compound and uniform, and the viewer and member of the public cannot distinguish factual news information from comment [69]. In other words, the Commentariat provides the context for a story to unfold in the news and in the public space [51-54]. Thus, the opinion and view penetrate to the knowledge and analysis or the linkage of the news stories and events. The latter contradicts to the journalistic ethics-deontology about respecting the public and maintaining the news being distinct from comment as well as it challenges the constitutional requirements about serving the public interest and pluralism, and ensuring the dissemination of objective information to the public. Notable is also the answer that Julia Hobsbawm and John Loyd [70] give when pondering 'what do commentators do?'. They argue that the commentators "entertain, set agendas, tell the truth, do battle, spot and set trends, address constituencies, change minds and heart ([even] their own) and make or break reputations" [70].

Commentators have become the translators for the public; not only they present to the public what is happening (the pragmatic events), but they also explain it to it; they give meaning to it and they place the pragmatic event in a hermeneutic framework. Result of the latter is the emergence of interpretative (or interpretive) and opinion journalism, and of the argument that every transfer of the pragmatic event in the news has its hermeneutic (interpretive and/or opinionated) moment; news has comment as its chaperon or vice versa even. In praxis, the distinction between the news report and comment is blurry, often making the news story more entertaining and therefore commercially viable. However, this rise of interpretative (or interpretive) and opinion journalism combined with the Commentariat adds up to public's ignorance and decreases its awareness. It does so, because the public cannot distinguish which is the source that is actually informing it and which is the 'network' surrounding the information source [71].

News reporting is the good offered by journalists, whose fruits are reaped of by citizens who in turn exploit this good. Through this path the public gets the value of information and the power of building public and political awareness and knowledge. Therefore, when the publication and the presentation of a news story in the broadcasted news bulletins, is being chained with an attempt and effort of a communicative interpretation by the side of the public and political communication actors and, Journalism comes together with Communication and both get together with Power, then the public is being led to inability to interpret what sees and hears in the news. And, the way the Commentariat frames news by assisting to define problems and calling attention to some things while obscuring others [7,72], can affect how the public understands and reacts to them [51,55]. Thus, every actor's public and political communication plays still its informative role, but, at the same time, it expresses a will in defined

terms and is being driven by expedience. The criterion for classifying news ends up being its expedience and not its source. This version and hermeneutic development of the Information presented in the news is being done in multiple framing ways so that the public is held by it while it transvalues the importance of the Information. This shows that public information and communication concern not only information, but also the meaning and the power, and especially the power over the meaning [42]; thus, public information and communication do not constitute a harmonic process, but a competition over the Comment and its framing as Infoganda and, therefore, a political-communication game. The latter is particularly emphasized by considering that the comment is the strategic framing mean and tool to attract more supporters, mobilize collective actions, extend the impact of the influence of the actors, and increase the chances for dominance and victory in the public sphere [53]; or, in other words, and in our case, comment is a mean and tool to 'infogandize'. Further, it depicts the intensification of the practice of comment and the Commentariat's existence and dominance in the news as a telomerase. This, in turn, a) shows a hyperactive 'telomerase' (i.e. a Commentariat acting hyper actively with its publicly stated views framed in a tendentious manner), b) reveals a 'telomere' that has a negative sequence at each end edge of the 'chromosome' indicating a damaging situation of the cells (i.e. the Comment being in dysfunction and misreplenished leads public information and news to be damaged), and, c) means that the basis of the debate is not the truth of the facts but their importance and redefined interpretation via their Infoganda framing by the public and political communication actor [72,73]. Consecutively, this suggests that public information and communication is in part truth and in part 'frame' which a) reveals a damaging situation of the forming of the 'telomere' which is the Comment, and b) knocks possibly down the last bastion of the 'free' journalism or the journalism that makes claims of objectivity disclosing the diagnosis that news have 'cancer', or else that the Infoganda frame is immanent in the public information and communication and the news. A characteristic indication of the latter is the growth of blogs and opinion portals, not only among the members of the wide public, but also among distinguished commentators (journalists or other publicists), who might and can be also in government or business payroll, but in any case they leave their stigma in civic awareness and public's mobilization.

Although it was expected that the Greek media, society and polity will show, with the passing of the 50 years and the experiences gained, a maturity in the field of public information and communication; this is not substantiated.

In an era characterized by freedom and accessibility and where everyone talks about open free democratic societies and the maturity of the media [74], the public experiences issues of transparency and 'intertwined engagement' in public life, and issues of corruptness in public and political communication actors are to be raised, not allowing public information to belong to the service of collectivity and visibility as it originally should, making the concept of public interest in public information to be in flux and constituting ultimately a paradox in public information and communication. So, does news have 'cancer'?

Conclusion

In today's times, public communication, news and public comment are whip-stitched. News is not nude; it is accompanied by an attempt to give it an interpretative communicative meaning through the practice of public comment and the Commentariat.

Hence, ways of 'repairing' the 'cancer patient' news are by slowing

or shrinking the deterioration of the 'telomere' – comment and decreasing the hyperactivity of the Commentariat and, perpetually enhance the 'cells' of public information and communication for an informed and mobilized public. Under this optic, the formation of public opinion and especially the public information and its flow, will be the pole and determinants of a society and social awareness, and not the 'cancer' and obstacle of the growth and the sustainable development of a society and public's engagement.

Further directions for future study might be researching the comment and the commentariats as well as the Infoganda frame across both national and media boundaries depicting different cultural, societal, political, and economic characteristics and also between and among public and political communication actors, even the Public and the effects on it. Research on this direction will reflect the establishment of comment and Infoganda as framing practices of public information and communication and thus, could help to identify underlying common acts that are communicated to the public [75]. Moreover, the study of the dynamics of content and the Commentariat in the lens of systems thinking may generate a new methodological paradigm for public and political communication and their framing.

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