

## Chapter 4

# Digital Democracy and Trade Unionism: The Case of Precariously Employed Workers in Greece

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### ABSTRACT

*The chapter addresses the issue of digital democracy and trade unionism, particularly unions in the field of “precarious employment” mainly in the (to a great extent) globalized tertiary sector of the economy. These unions are considered “new” due to their network modes of horizontal organizing and their use of civil disobedience mobilizing compared to those of “older” and “traditional” unions that were characterized by bureaucratic structures and conventional repertoires of action (collective bargaining and strikes). In this chapter, the authors present the cases of four such unions from the banking and telecommunications sector and from the wide fields of publishing and translating. In order to evaluate the factors that determine their uses of the Internet and the social media, the authors analyze the unions’ digital strategies through a) static or dynamic and interactive usage of digital media and b) technocratic or agitating rhetoric of uploaded texts and informative material.*

### INTRODUCTION

The chapter will address the issue of digital democracy and trade unionism, particularly unions in the field of “precarious employment” mainly in

the (to a great extent) globalized tertiary sector of the economy. These unions are considered “new” due to their network modes of horizontal organizing and their use of civil disobedience mobilizing compared to those of “older” and “traditional”

unions that were characterized by bureaucratic structures and conventional repertoires of action (collective bargaining and strikes). Moreover, these “new” unions use the internet and the Web 2.0 social media in order to communicate with their members, potential friends and bystanders as well as to receive feedback for their strategic and tactical goals or even to organize their general meetings and assemblies. The issue will be addressed by considering case studies of a number of unions in the financial, telecommunications, education and publishing sectors, as well as courier and catering delivery services. In this chapter we present the cases of four such unions from the banking and telecommunications sector and from the wide fields of publishing and translating. In order to evaluate the factors which determine their uses of the internet and the social media, we have analyzed their digital strategies through the following axes: a) static or dynamic and interactive usage of digital media; b) technocratic or agitating rhetoric of uploaded texts and informative material. Our objective was to examine the unions’ goals and organization in connection with their usage of internet. We will argue that unions with a wider spatial orientation, a more fluid internal organization and less recognizable status employ more interactive digital strategies and use internet as a very basic tool of their political functioning. On the other hand unions with a more limited spatial orientation, a strict internal organization and a more recognizable political status prefer more static digital strategies. In both cases the medium facilitates the development of a militant discourse, although in many cases certain technocratic elements seem to appear. The research for this chapter was conducted using semi-structured and in-depth interviews with leading unionists of these organizations as well with the unions’ web administrators and by analyzing their respective websites.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Digital Politics and Trade-Unionism**

During the most recent years within the context of political science we observed that there is a continuously expanding discussion regarding the role of digital revolution in the political phenomenon. So-called digital politics is the ‘next big thing’ in political studies since day after day utilization of the digital media and the internet in political action is enhanced. It is true that all political institutions have been influenced by the digital revolution. Moreover, new fields of political development of the internet have been opened as political actors take advantage of the rapid technological evolution. For political science this is a phenomenon that first of all affects the ontology of political science, influences the political message’s articulation forms as well as the exercise of political acting. Last, it changes the core of the political phenomenon, which is the social and economic structure. The Greek case is especially fertile for the examination of the consequences of the digital revolution, to the extent that Greece displays relevantly low levels of internet penetration –compared to the other developed countries- and of digital literacy. Nevertheless, for certain structures of social and political representation, the use of the internet is possibly a necessary one-way route.

Trade unions are among the institutions that have been influenced by the developments in the digital field. For many people as well as many scholars the trade union institution is in a state of permanent decline being unable to promote its membership’s interests in an effective manner due to structural reasons, such as manufacturing industry decline, rise of tertiary sector of the economy etc. (Peetz 1990). Some believe that it is a matter of strategies and tactics (Bronfenbrenner

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