The Effects of Transformation of Public Sphere with the New Media in Academy

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ABSTRACT

When technology has successfully penetrated in all aspects of life, a discussion on public sphere and its relevance in today's scenario is becoming more complicated. It is needless to say that opinions will differ as the post-modern critics dissect Habermas' concept of public sphere with full acuity. As the mass media is being dominated by the Information and Communications Technology industry, the perceptible change and the aspect of critical publicity that Habermas emphasized on with a higher sense of responsibility is worth discussing. Computer-mediated communication and its uses in education is dominating today's age and the issue like commercialization, commodification, media ownership, instructional technologies are sometimes considered to be challenging the power of free, rational thinking and freedom of speech. This age of digitalization is definitely getting dependent to cyberspace more for every reason or the other, but what needs to be assessed is if this dependency is effecting the freedom of democratic discussion.

Keywords: critical thinking, democracy education, public sphere, new media tools, technology education

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to discussion about public sphere, Habermas' analytical probing of the public sphere in civil society, which was published in 1962, cannot be missed. The much renowned work deals with the emergence of *public opinion* from *opinion*. The way opinion got molded in sync with the socio-cultural needs lays emphasis on the commercialization of the whole concept of participation, discussion and deliberation. According to Habermas, the emergence of mass media made public more passive and that dominant political character of participation got swapped by entertainment and commercialism. The ace in his theory condemns the intermixing of literature and journalism, which mass media brought about reciprocating to the changes that consumerist culture breathes in. The democratic power of a common man to raise his voice, express his opinion took a back seat. The true essence of critical debate also lost its flavor as the touch of personalization that journalism offered on the selection and presentation of facts, represented only that was good to the ears, filtered form of crude information.

When throwing light in electronic mass media, Habermas argued that information started to be offered to the people in a nice packaged and the formidable line between fact and fiction often got blurred. When compared to print media in terms of being impactful, electronic media often seem to win hands down. According to Habermas, common man did not get the power to disagree or come up with arguments, but only be passive

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State of the literature

- Public sphere is like an abstract forum facilitating the free sharing and transmission of ideologies, public opinion, embedded on the different levels within the society.
- Social networks in higher education has produced pedagogical enthusiasm under longstanding educational goals such as greater democratization.
- Media culture and ethos coupled with and new technologies are paving the way for formation of a new public sphere.

Contribution of this paper to the literature

- This study observes that was the academics' role is also transforming with the public sphere, from a basic educator with a full control to a more of guide showing the way for a better education.
- This knowledge can spur the generation of activities that get a greater number of students to join in, which is consistent with the subject's pedagogical aims.
- The notion of public sphere is not getting obsolete; it is only becoming more dynamic with the need for digitalization to be embraced.

participants and absorb what is being fed by electronic media. The ways news is offered to public is adulterated often resorting to sensationalism and less attention started to be paid in presenting facts with acute details.

Habermas points out that the changing nature of communication environment made public sphere the dais for advertising. There is a bold line of difference between advertisers and the Public Relations (PR) practitioners. The sole motive that an advertisement is infused with is to appeal to the targeted audience, raise their curiosity and desire, making them to take the call-to-action infused with a sales pitch. The PR people walk that extra mile and they create and formulate facts and events in such a way that influence public opinion. Their job is to make people nod to what they say, which leads to staged public opinion.

The main purpose of media is to act as an organ facilitating debate and discussion of the public. However, the media serve as managing and garnering consensus, which in turn, gives a boost to capitalist culture. Habermas propounds that the 'basic rights of man' should be enjoyed liberally by people as a whole and not restricted to only a favorable group or a privileged class. When the public opinion exhibits a diluted nature, then arguments lose its critical charm. He proclaims that mass media takes the monopoly capitalist culture to the next level. Mass media is supposed to brighten, enlighten and inform people by disseminating information that is true and reliable, but it got actively involved in forming public opinion. He stresses on the importance of critical publicity, democratic nature of debate to prevail in an open society where opinions will be formed and not fabricated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is public sphere?

The German term, Öffentlichkeit, is popularly known as its translated version "public sphere,". It is conceptual rather than physical. It necessarily does not denote a marketplace, a coffeehouse, an organization and the like but the pivot point where people meet to discuss share and deliberate on different themes, choice of subjects based on their preference. It is like an abstract forum facilitating the free sharing and transmission of ideologies, public opinion, embedded on the different levels within the society.

The power of reasoning indispensible for communication

The need to communicate is a human impulse and it got to be backed by reason. Habermas stresses that we have to believe in reason as it can strengthen democracy, helping in doing away with prejudices.

Habermas is a name to reckon among philosophers and social thinkers. He is an important member of the Frankfurt School. All the exceptionally gifted minds met at the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt and the Frankfurt School developed a critical theory. This was the well thought out weapon of applying philosophic ideas to analyze, dissect problems in the social structure of the society. What is quintessential in Habermas' thinking is that quality of society is judged based on the standard set by its ability to communicate, deliberate and discuss where reason is embedded.

The New Media: Weighing the Pros and Cons

The higher degree of dependence and involvement on the virtual medium, which is the snapshot of today's present world has led to the emergence of the virtual communities. The question, which is probed, is that whether virtual communities can break in with the role for the revival of the public debate. It is also being questioned whether it is only a mere distraction or the virtual communities has a significant role to play.

When weighing the efficiency of computer-related communication in relation to face-to-face communication, Fernback and Thompson opine that appearances do have an important role to play in conducting proper conversations and online mode of communicating is at a disadvantageous point, here. They argue and criticize that there is lack of knowledge on the part of the people about how to keep a tab on the new technologies that is coming up. Fernback and Thompson sum up that cyberspace citizenship has not done much for resolving the democratic issues in the US and other parts of the globe.

Rheingold, another great thinker is open to this change where technology is raiding into our lives and he believes it is for good of the public. He argues that the conclusion that Fernback and Thompson came up with was premature. Whether it is the networking concept that is advocated by social media or the Internet opening the gate for active participation, Electronic media is also acting as an effective organ for publishing and communicating, which is infused with the essence of democracy.

The most important point that Rheingold advocates is that the call-to-action through the virtual community is a subjective thing and it is no way different in the physical world also. It is good to be associated with something, to feel involved, but it is the urge of an individual whether to sit back just feeling contented of being involved or takes actual measures, which can bring back a change in the society. It is not desirable only to touch the waters simply near your feet, but go deep down when you have set a mission for. Participating in the real sense of the term can bring in a new lease of life for an individual's neighbors and communities as a whole.

Public Sphere and the new media

In this age of digitalization, the landscape of communication and interaction is getting revamped. With networking becoming the norm as there is a greater presence of a number of social networking channels, the concept of public sphere is also getting revitalized. The 18th century concept developed by Jurgen Habermas where public sphere got to be known for its undiluted, critical nature backed by the power of reasoning. Another ace in this field, Hauser, says that public sphere refers to a broad place not only capped with a physical identity, but where people participate and there is exchange of opinions, sharing of knowledge to create a common judgment that emerges out of a debate, with no bias whatsoever. He emphasizes on how this critical nature is facing the brunt of mass media, which is changing society into a passive one. It is the signs of consumerist culture, which is visible.

Networking is in vogue and there are no two ways about it when talking from the standpoint of this age where there is greater dependence on cyberspace. It is often being noticed that now-a-days personal communication even within a closely knitted family has narrowed down and people are more glued to the virtual medium. It goes without saying that the development of the Information and Communications Technology industry and the rapid pace in which it is progressing has made it possible for the world to become a small space. The Internet has blurred geographical boundaries and has made communication, discussion and debate possible in the virtual zone. It is argued that this networking system and the heavier dependence on the Internet definitely give the essence of a public sphere, but with weaker ties.

The influence of network in our society

The two popular theorists Castells and Granovetter have stated that power resides in the network that now structures the society and forms the backbone and not in the institutions. Networks should not only be created, but how far every chain of network is buzzing and vibrating adding to the social cause or forming undiluted public opinion, which needs to be answered. With cyberspace getting intertwined in everyone's life, whether it is weaker or stronger ties, the world can now stay connected via the various modes of communication. Granovetter says that it is not only the personal soil that we can fertilize or, in other words, our relationships, a online social platform can act as the big stage also for shaping public opinion.

With the penetration of technology in today's world, the tools for communication and participation has becomes easy and cheap to create. Forming and sustaining ties has become way too easy. So most citizens, no matter how socially or financially placed they are in the social structure, can have access to these public platform with the advent of Internet.

Social capital online

Social media is the new trend in vogue and whether it is the brands yenning for visibility or people talking about their personal lives, their views and opinions about a current movie, a new legislation or the book that feed the glutton reader inside them, the snapshot of the virtual world is on the same lines.

Social networks in higher education has produced pedagogical enthusiasm under longstanding educational goals such as greater democratization, fostered by the apparent flatness of social media (Buckingham & Martínez, 2013), and a much closer relationship between educational institutions and the social environment, to be achieved. The possible educational virtues of social networks are based on their enormous communication potential, and there is already evidence that students may respond positively to their use (Gómez-Aguilar, Roses & Farías, 2012). Some teachers argue that students are already present in social networks with their relationships and interests, and this offers an opportunity to make learning more attractive by joining informal and formal channels together (Bugeja, 2006).

The emergence of the social networking sites and the soaring popularity of the concept of virtual networking have led to a variety of media panics. With the word 'Selfie,' which is the self-click of an individual uploaded in the social media that got hugely popular and got added to the Oxford dictionary in 2013 and ' twerking' the word which stormed into the globe, thanks to Miley Cyrus, shows the narcissistic side of a social networking channel.

The rising concern Livingstone puts forth is that if people or the youth is always glued to the virtual realm, it is the personal interaction with their closed ones and their community, which is getting narrowed down. The urge to spend time with their community, think about the existing problems or coming up with solutions for the betterment of the society as a whole is also taking a back seat.

The idea of social capital refers to online media consumption, which, in turn, is decreasing the amount of quality time that individuals can participate and think of remedies of the lingering issues that need to be taken care of. So the stress is on the personal involvement of the people, who want to do something good for their community. The entertainment use of the Internet, the bold hues of narcissism, which is grabbing the attention of the people in a bigger way is harming the social capital online, by making get depleted and diluted.

Commodification of the Public Sphere

A social and economic order that encourages the purchase of goods and services in greater amount can be termed as consumerism. It is being witnessed that the consumer society model has become the base for human behavior and political decision-making. Many experts believe that increasing dominance of consumerism and commoditization is posing as a threat to the existence and functioning of the public sphere. They feel that major corporations are manipulating the political system and they are creating unnecessary needs and false demand among consumers apart from invading their privacy. Skeptics fear that electronic communications media is

forestalling public discussions and is turning media content into commodities. It is being believed that electronic media has now merely become a channel that changes perceptions and shapes beliefs by using publicity. As a result, the process of rational discourse emerging from civil society gets lost.

Biesta (2012) in parallel mentions that one way to think of public pedagogy is as a pedagogy for the public. The main pedagogical 'mode' in this interpretation is that of instruction. In this conception, the world is seen as a giant school and the main role of educational agents is to instruct the citizenry. This involves telling them what to think, how to act and, perhaps most importantly, what to be. Such a form of public pedagogy is therefore basically orientated towards the erasure of plurality and difference.

According to Dahlgren, modern democracy should no longer be viewed as a system that expresses the will of the people. Instead it has become a setup that offers a wide range of choices to the consumer. He says that the centralized political systems are losing power and new forms of political cultures are taking shape due to the changes in the social structure. He states that participation in political discourse is falling. He says that democracy and an active public sphere, which includes the media, is possible only when there is a balanced relationship between the state and the civil society. Socio cultural interaction is very important and the public sphere should not be just treated as a "marketplace of ideas" or "information exchange depot"; instead it should be viewed as a means via which culture generates and spreads. Discussion is of great relevance in the public sphere for journalism.

FACEBOOK AS THE NEW PUBLIC SPHERE

It is not only about you only, 21st century media is social media and it's about winning with other people.

The commercialization of the Internet in the 1990s was a very significant event that had a huge impact on human society. The Internet, which was earlier only used by scientists and experts, became a major communication platform and emerged as a popular public sphere. In this regard, social media websites has played a major role.

When Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook in the year 2004, no one could predict that one day it would become a billion-dollar company. This widely used social media network has various features that make it a useful arena for public discourse. Facebook is an independent website and it does not promote any particular political agenda or affiliation. However, it does possess a series of tools that allows the exchange of information and perspectives.

Facebook is endowed with a host of applications like Pages, Groups and Events that facilitate the formation of public opinion. These relevant applications are discussed below.

- **Pages:** A Facebook page is a public profile that is created for personalities, organizations, products and so on. It is made by a person who is known as the administrator and the people who add it to their profiles are referred to as supporters or fans. In this page information on the relevant subject can be shared and the people can also post on the Wall. Thus, here the Wall acts as the prime field for information sharing and discussion.
- **Groups:** Facebook users can create and join up to 200 groups. These groups are generally centered on a particular interest or activity. It has a Wall and News Feed that helps members to post messages and get notifications on group activities.
- **Events:** Users of Facebook can also organize and advertize events. People get invited to attend various events via this application. Here, people communicate by posting on the Wall. Moreover, the administrators can also send a group email if required.

So, it can be observed that the above-mentioned applications can be used as means to bring people from various walks of life together for a common cause, interest or belief. People can contribute to the discussions irrespective of their geographic location. They also have the freedom to choose the time and manner in which they want to contribute to the conversations.

In the year 2013, Super Bowl and the government shutdown were the most talked about topics. On the global level, the word "election" appeared in many different languages. The high-profile elections in countries like India, Kenya, Iran and Italy is the chief reason behind this phenomenon.

From the mentioned data, it can be said that Facebook is being used by people to discuss pertinent issues like elections. People are debating important issues here and from there on popular opinions are emerging. It also encourages participation from people belonging to various social groups. Any individual who has access to Internet and knows how to use a computer or phone is free to give his/her opinion.

Facebook is also the most widely used social network by academics aiming to improve teaching methodology, create an attractive learning environment and develop communities of practice (Ractham & Firpo, 2011; Piscitelli, Adaime & Binder, 2010).

Essence of participation in Twitter: The power of tweets

Over the years, Twitter has transformed itself to a great extent and has emerged as a popular newswire. This is an online social networking and micro blogging service, which enables its users to send and read messages of 140 characters known as "tweets". It empowers its members to become broadcasters of important events taking place all around the world. It has gradually become a popular platform, where people discuss their political issues. In the past, many significant news broke out first in Twitter before they reached the news stations. The Edward Snowden / NSA leaks are one such recent example.

The world is a small place with Google+

With 540 million monthly active users, Google Plus is now the second largest social networking website in the world after Facebook. Now it is not merely a social site, it has become a very powerful tool for human communication. It provides various tools via which people can share information and carry out discussions with each other. With the help of Circles, Community and Hangouts people from various walks of life can come together and discuss issues of common interest. People have the option of being a part of a private or public community and they have the freedom to choose what, how and when they will share.

TECHNOCAPITALISM

Another greater thinker, Kellner uses the term "technocapitalism" to elucidate the merging of capital and technology. There is no point being in denial about the important role of technology and the sustained supremacy of capitalist structures.

Social life is also getting reshaped with the racy pace at which technology is evolving with every passing day. It is media culture and ethos coupled with and new technologies, which are paving the way for formation of a new public sphere. Cyberspace is something not to be abhorred, but the strength of the virtual realm, its communities need to be realized, propagating cyberdemocracy, which is a new food for thought for many. Internet is definitely one of the best platforms for one and all across geographical boundaries to unite, share, discuss, think and deliberate on a massive scale. The public intellectuals need to be aware of technoliteracy so that with the aid of technologies a social transformation can be brought about.

Kellner argues that it is the ideology of information society, which is infused in technocapitalism. With the advent of new technologies coming into the foray, there is a hot boil of controversy going on between whether this technical reliance is our salvation, technology is the new demon bringing forth more problems and crippling normalcy in everyday life.

Kellner firmly believes that with the changing age when things are getting revolutionized in this digital age, it is time to be more live, dynamic and animated. It does not necessarily mean that it will be without that democratic character. The progressive new technologies can be used for democratisation, for a more free democratic society, where every individual will be invested with power.

METHODOLOGY

New media, especially social media, is also effecting the academic education since it started dominating our lives. The evolution of the public sphere is reshaping the education and this is transforming the way of the courses thought. The aim of this study is to analyze these changes and its effects on the students and courses by discussing this process with the academic personnel. A qualitative research method was used by conducting a case study in the Cyprus International University. In this context, the data were collected through a face to face interviews with the academic personnel at the university.

The Participants

The participating group was formed from 20 academic staff from the Cyprus International University by using purposeful sampling methods. All the participants had at least 15 years of academic teaching experience. This was crucial as the rise of the new media, mainly social media, corresponds to the beginning of the 2000s.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The data was collected through structured interviews with a set a of questions. Every interview took around 30 minutes and the aim was to get participants', whose are the part of university's academic staff, experience and view of the transformation of public sphere related to the academic education and the new media's effect on students in classrooms and also outside of the university. The researches gave basic brief of the what is public sphere, how it is evolving with the today's technology and general history of the information technologies to the academic staff before asking questions from case study to increase the awareness about the subjects, helping them to answer question with more detailed answers.

The interviews were scheduled, revised and supervised by 2 experts from area of education and communication, from the Department of Communication and Media Studies and Faculty of Education, who have expertise in qualitative studies. The detailly defined data from the interviews was interpreted through qualitative research stages. The findings that come from qualitative data was converted to the weighted scores to increase the readability, reliability and to make the comparisons more robust.

RESULTS

Open ended questions were analyzed in detail and the results were given weight according to the context of the answers from the academic staff. The weighting used and the results table follows;

- 1 for Strongly Disagree
- 2 for Disagree
- 3 for Neutral
- 4 for Agree
- 5 for Strongly Agree

FINDINGS

The impact of the information technologies (IT) can be easily observed all around, so the results of the first question, the importance of the information technologies, could be anticipated. Most of the participants reflected the impact of IT throughout the interview and gave many examples from both their personal lives and also from the academy.

Classroom strictness was not directly asked but during the interviews it was reflected throughout other questions. When the data of this statement is compared to the other statements, it could be seen that the same participants have similar scores with the 'learning outside of the academy can be more unscientific' statement. Also, this group of participants frequently disagreed on the positive effects of social media on people also on students.

Table 1. Evaluation of the questionnaire

Question	1	2	3	4	5	Median
Importance of the information technologies in general	0	1	2	5	12	**4.4**
The need of strictness in the class	3	6	6	3	2	**2.75**
"I see myself as a progressive educator"	1	2	3	7	5	**3.35**
Social media has more positive effects on people	5	3	5	3	4	**2.9**
Social media has more positive effects on students	6	3	3	5	3	**2.8**
"I am a frequent social media user"	2	4	3	4	7	**3.5**
The academy needs to transform itself with the technology	1	4	7	4	4	**3.3**
Social media can be used as a tool to increase productiveness in class	2	3	6	5	4	**3.3**
Social media can be used as a fun factor to keep students interested	4	6	1	4	5	**3**
Education is moving out of academy to distributed online world	5	4	5	4	2	**2.7**
Teachers, academic staff should start to be guide instead of educator	2	3	7	5	3	**3.2**
Students concentration/attention span are getting lower	0	1	2	2	15	**4.55**
Learning outside of the academy can be much more unscientific	7	5	4	4	2	**2.75**
More people can be educated with the use of technology	1	1	3	4	11	**4.15**

Apart from 1 participant, nearly all of the academic staff interviewed had social media account and the frequency they were using social media, mainly Facebook, was in high rates. There was an even divide between the participants for the positive effects of the social media on people and students. As the answers were researched further from the full data, most of the negative comments could be pinpointed to the personal fear of social media's unknown effects that could affect the next generations.

The first part of the feedback discussed above were mainly relational to the general views of the social media which helped participants concentrate more on the details and the questions following them. As the public sphere and its transformation was discussed, participants were asked about if this transformation needs to be mirrored also in the academy. Most of the academic staff agreed on the needed change and also discussion included the slow pace of the progress in this manner at the academic institutions.

Most of the participants agreed on that social media can be used as tool to increase productivity in the class and also outside of lessons as a medium to learn, receive feedback and to discuss the topics about the lesson or other subjects. As the social medias robustness increases, educators and students could use its features to easily organize lesson structures, act together by helping each other not only one by one, but as a more active group of people and overcome the problems, increase the learning curve more effectively.

The participants also showed more interest in using social media as a tool to create engagement in more fun way during the lessons especially after talking about the technical benefits of social media. They generally agreed on that using Facebook/Instagram socially in the classrooms, in limited amounts, were increasing the motivation of the students and helping the instructors to form a unity and harmony between their students. They expressed this need mainly after nearly all of them agreeing that the attention spans of the students falling very fastly in the last 10-15 years.

Even though the academics uncertainty of the educations moves out of academy and the fear of the information outside being unscientific, there was the certainty of the academics' role is also transforming with the public sphere, from a basic educator with a full control to a more of guide showing the way for a better education.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The concept of public sphere has been the hot topic of controversy since the days of Habermas. It has been associated with media theory like commoditization, which propagated the presence of a capitalist culture in the society. The concepts of ownership and culture, democracy losing its political character have been talked over a lot. The emergence of electronic media having a greater impact on the public sphere making them passive participants, where they could not do much but agree was criticized. The precipitation of new technologies in everyday life led to the mapping of the virtual communities and it has been put to test whether they can act as the new-age public

sphere in the true sense of the term. Habermas has typically advocated physical appearances but the new media or Internet transcends that concept as it is about connecting the world, bringing people in the online dais to express, share, opine and act in tune with an individual's democratic nature. The human capacity to look into a problem, probe it and then offering the solutions can be possible in the physical as well as in the virtual realm.

The notion of public sphere is changing because it is becoming more dynamic and animated with the racy pace at which technology is invading the lives of the people. In this digital age, where network society exists, it is only the power of reasoning, which Habermas stated in his theory, which can be brought to effective use. Virtual communities are capable of taking democracy to the next level where individuals express their opinion; put forth their voices, the difference being that the potential of the online mode needs to be explored.

As Gewerc, Montero & Lama (2014) notes the network centralization index shows that participation was not only focused on one dominant node, but that «power» was distributed. We saw that at the beginning the teacher was the system «connector», but afterwards a core group was empowered and gained autonomy to produce exchanges and interrelations. This knowledge can spur the generation of activities that get a greater number of students to join in, which is consistent with the subject's pedagogical aims.

Digital media has immense power and it needs to be realized. The future of public sphere exists in networking in this age of digitalization. Digital network can change social structures and the power of the people, their democratic rights is not going to be snatched away from them. The groups and communities that actively participate online for the betterment of the society as a whole via the aid of communication technology and take communicative action, definitely uses reason as the backbone. Habermas, who was a great thinker, could really foresee what could be better for society to make it a better place to live in. The notion of public sphere is not getting obsolete; it is only becoming more dynamic with the need for digitalization to be embraced.

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