



**“THE SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PUBLIC SPHERE: THE RISE OF SOCIAL OPPOSITION”**

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**Abstract**

In The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, Habermas described the bourgeois public spheres of the 18th and 19th century in England, France, and Germany. These spheres arose as arenas of cultural critique often arising from reading societies that focused on novels and the like. Cultural critique became political critique as these groups turned to issues of public concern fighting policies of censorship and for freedom of opinion. The public sphere is in the work of Jürgen Habermas conceived as a neutral social space for critical debate among private persons who gather to discuss matters of common concern in a free and rational way. This public sphere is open and accessed for public. Habermas pointed out that media has contributed to the decay of the rational-critical discourse and causing the decline of the public sphere.

Political public spheres include social movements, media that monitor and criticize the state, and groups that take political action. In recent times have seen an explosion of debate, blogging, theorising and hype around the role of the internet in today's social movements. Social media -internet applications such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube which facilitate the creation and exchange of user-created content- have been identified as key to events as diverse as the rise of student protests in Britain at the end of 2010, the outbreak of revolution in the Arab world - the role that social media played in the Egyptian uprising is striking- and the protests of the Wall Street against the global capitalism in the USA.

Discussion of the political impact of social media has focused on the power of mass protests. Social media's real potential lies in supporting civil society and the public sphere. The social media has become contested terrain, a new form of class struggle, national liberation and pro-democracy movements. In this study, the role of social media in a democratic society, the power of social media on creating a public sphere and the rise of social opposition through social media have been debated on latest examples of global social opposition.

**Key Words:** Public sphere, social media, democracy, social opposition.

**Introduction**

The idea of "the public sphere" in Habermas's designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state. Habermas's "liberal model of the bourgeois public sphere" is the rise and decline of a historically specific and limited form of the public sphere. It is believed that new form of public sphere is required to salvage this arena's critical function and to institutionalize democracy (Fraser, 1990). Deliberative democratic public sphere theory has become increasingly popular in Internet-democracy research and commentary. In terms of informal civic practices, advocates of this theory see the internet as a means for the expansion of citizen deliberation leading to the formation of rational public opinion. According to many internet-democracy commentators, researchers and practitioners, internet is a deliberative public sphere as the ideal for citizen participation in politics. In contrast to the mass media, the Internet is seen as a force for 'radical democracy'. The Internet is seen as helping marginalized groups – those groups associated with discourses excluded from the mainstream public sphere – develop their own deliberative forums, link up, and subsequently contest dominant meanings and practices.

Before the advent of new media, the earlier mass media of press and broadcasting were seen as adequate and beneficial for the conduct of democratic politics and the sustainment of public opinion in the public sphere. These forms of media enabled the information about public events to be passed to all citizens and politicians and governments were able to be criticised by the society. However, information flow was predominantly vertical or unidirectional and the heightened commercialisation of the media market lead to the neglect of democratic communication roles between the public itself and the leaders, institutions and organisations within mass media. Thus, earlier forms of mass communication limited access and discouraged active political participation and deliberative dialogue within the public sphere. The new media have been hailed as a potential way to break away from the vertical information flow and 'top down' politics where most political decisions are made without negotiation or input from grassroots support. Instead, new media provide means for the provision of political information and in this way almost unlimited access to different voices and feedback between leaders and followers are established. New media promise new forums for the development of interest groups as well as the formation of public opinion. New media also allow dialogue between politicians and active citizens and thus it provides an arena where public discourse can take place and public opinion, as its function, can be formed (McQuail, 2005: 150-151).

Internet's expansion in access to information and exchanges of ideas as enhancing political participation, civil society, and democracy have provided the rise of social movements. In our era, communication to hundreds of people has been easy and cheap in the social media. Social media have played a significant role in the movement in spite of the mass media ignoring the protester's subject. In the Arab world, the majority of opinion leaders are male, since traditionally women are expected not to engage in the political discourse. However, the Internet provides women the opportunity to express their opinions more freely. There are bloggers and Facebook activists who enthusiastically engage in online activism, but do not speak up publically in the real world. This co-existence of different public spaces (offline and online) allows more people to speak out and disseminate ideas to influence their networks – in other words to become opinion leaders. For social movements this means that their ideals can be spread faster and to more people, which in turn widens the opportunity for social and political change. The horizontal communication structure, which is provided by social media, can thus foster social movements and as a result social change. Social media provide activists from all over the world the means to coordinate activities, exchange best practice examples and gain attention for their cause.

Last year (2011) started with revolutions in the Arab World; and political uprisings in Spain, Israel and Greece followed. Inspired by these social movements the Occupy Wall Street movement began to take off in September and by mid-October the protests went global. The root causes for these protests are similar; high unemployment, especially among young people, frustration over political corruption, corporate greed and the financial sector as well as general dissatisfaction with the political situation. In order to organize protests, provide views alternative to those of the mainstream media and spread their message social movements have made use of social media tools. Social media tools will continue to play a pivotal role for social movements, especially for the global democracy movement that is unfolding. The protesters are demanding from the political system; they allow for the participation of all and represent the views of the people, not those of economic elites. But social networking technologies will neither overthrow tyrannical regimes nor create a "real democracy" themselves, but under certain circumstances, they create a communication environment which is favorable for the emergence of social movements.



In the last several years, we have witnessed the power of the Internet help citizens change the regimes that govern them. From the 2008 presidential campaign to the revolutions now sweeping the Arab world, organizers have used online tools to gather support, disseminate information, raise money, and mobilize citizens on a massive scale (Leighninger, 2011). Debates about the role of the Internet in political mobilisation became increasingly polarised in the wake of the online element of Barack Obama's presidential election campaign in 2008 and the supposed "Twitter rebellion" in Iran in 2009. Increasingly, the proponents of new technologies were labelled "cyber utopians", arguing against the dinosaurs that still held to outmoded forms of organisation. In Britain the emergence of the student movement saw a proliferation of online campaigning in order to mobilise for street protests. Alongside this came a renewed preoccupation with the notion of "networks" when discussing political organisation (Jones, 2011).

Social media provides rapid flow of information to mobilize the social opposition. For the social opposition the internet is first and foremost a vital source of alternative critical information to educate and mobilize the "public" – especially among progressive opinion-leaders, professionals, trade unionists and peasant leaders, militants and activists. The internet is the alternative to the capitalist mass media and its propaganda, a source of news and information that relays manifestos and informs activists of sites for public action. The internet has played a vital role in publicizing and mobilizing "spontaneous protests" like the 'indignados' (the indignant protestors) mostly unaffiliated unemployed youth in Spain and the protestors involved in the US "Occupy Wall Street". In other instances, for example, the mass general strikes in Italy, Portugal, Greece and elsewhere the organized trade union confederations played a central role and the internet had a secondary impact (Petras, 2011).

To deepen our understanding of the relationship between social media and political change during the last events -Egyptian uprising of early 2011 in Tahrir Square, Occupy Wall Street, the Spanish Movement 15 M- must be situated in a larger context of media use and recent history of online activism. In this study, the power of social media on creating a public sphere and the rise of social opposition through social media have been debated. To understand this social opposition that emerged by social media, a literature review and theoretical debate methods have been used.

### The Review of Theoretical Framework

The public sphere is in the work of Jürgen Habermas conceived as a social space for the 'rational-critical debate about public issues conducted by private persons willing to let arguments and not statuses determine decisions'. Directed against the absolute will of monarchs, the bourgeois public sphere emerged in the 18th century as a neutral social space independent of the public authority and 'made up of private people gathering together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state' (Calhoun, 1992: 1, 21). The public sphere is in the work of Jürgen Habermas conceived as a neutral social space for critical debate among private persons who gather to discuss matters of common concern in a free, rational and in principle disinterested way. Praised as a normative ideal – especially by the advocates of participatory democracy – and criticised as a working model, the concept of the public sphere has triggered many controversies. Habermas's account of the bourgeois conception of the public sphere stresses its claim to be open and accessible to all. Although Habermas himself saw the media as contributing to the decay of the rational-critical discourse and causing the decline of the public sphere, numerous revisions of the concept, quite the contrary, have recognized the capacity of the media to initiate public discussion and give it a constructive spin. Habermas defines and discusses the rise and fall of the bourgeois public sphere, noting the problematic effects of commercialization, capitalism, and the rise of mass media on rational-critical debate. Although undoubtedly influential, Habermas' argument has been subject to many critiques, particularly since his idealized conception of the public sphere centers on the principle of universal access. It is essential to outline the idea of the public sphere. Here the concept of the public sphere is used in a very general manner, as a synonym for the processes of public opinion or for the news media themselves.

Habermas recognised three institutional criteria which act as the preconditions for a public sphere to exist. The first precondition refers to the *disregard of status*. If status is disregarded, the influence of rank is absent and thus the better argument will uphold against the hierarchy imposed by the society. In this way, the uniformity of "common humanity" is asserted. The idea of the public sphere became established as an objective forum independent from the authority of rank and status. The second precondition for a public sphere to emerge is that it needs to be a domain of *common concern*. Before the development of the public sphere, authority of interpretation lay in the hands of the state and the church. These two institutions had a monopoly of interpretation in the fields of literature, philosophy and art. The monopoly persisted even at the time that specific spheres adhered to the rational thinking which flowed from the development of capitalism where more information was required. During this time philosophy and literature works as well as works of art became commercialised and were accessible to private citizens. These items no longer remained components of the churches' and courts' publicity of representation. Thus the private individuals, for whom these cultural products became available, determined meaning to it by the use of rational communication with others, verbalised it and stated the implicitness for so long they could assert its authority. Cultural products and information thus became the common concern of private citizens and this paved the way for other issues of common concern to be introduced as topics of deliberation (Habermas, 1989: 36). The final precondition is the idea of *inclusivity*. The process that commercialised cultural products and information, made it inclusive. Even at times when the public strengthened its boundaries to exclude people, it was never able to fully close itself to disallow participation. The public sphere has always been immersed within a more inclusive public of private individuals. These private individuals could gain from this process. Issues discussed, which were previously confined to the debates amongst secluded groups now became general in their significance and accessibility. Thus everybody had to be and was able to participate. The public sphere was not necessarily founded on an institution which constituted a stable group of discussants. It did however equate itself with being the mouth piece and to form the bourgeoisie representation. Even when the first public spheres developed as specific groups of people, it was ever conscious of being part of a larger part and acting as a representative group of that larger public. The potential of it being a publicist body was evident as its discussions did not merely remain internal but could be directed to the outside world (Habermas, 1989: 37).

In contrast to Habermas's idealistic notion of the bourgeois public sphere and the critical view of the declined and distorted contemporary public sphere. Some scholars have attempted to extend or reimagine this concept of the public sphere. In *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres*, Hauser (1999: 11) offers a uniquely rhetorical take on the public sphere by "explor[ing] the discursive dimensions of publics, public spheres, and public opinions", the result being a model of the public sphere that is discourse-based. Rhetoric, then, is central to this concept of the public sphere, and, in contrast to the idealized public sphere posited by Habermas, Hauser suggests a "vernacular rhetorical model" that allows for partisan rhetoric; therefore, this model does not attempt to conceal multiple publics and marginalized voices. Fraser pointed out that concept of Habermas's public sphere excluded plebeian men, women of all classes and ethnicities. It is a necessary condition for participatory parity that systemic social inequalities be eliminated. Political democracy requires substantive social equality. Fraser argued the bourgeois conception of the public sphere is inadequate insofar as it supposes that social equality is not a necessary condition for participatory parity in public spheres (1990).

To explain the internet as public sphere, the institutional criteria as set forth by Habermas (1989: 36-37) is recalled: disregard of status, common concern and inclusivity. Within the internet, these three criteria are, at least, to some extent adhered to. People access the internet



via virtual identities similar to their own. If individuals' socio-economic status allows it, he or she has the skills needed to access and use the internet and when individuals have access to the necessary network infrastructure, all people can use the internet. The internet does not only allow for private individuals to access it. The mass communication medium is used by online journalists, web-based interest groups and other organisations to explore and use the information available on the internet. These groups are often ignored by mainstream media and the internet thus reinforces the idea that new media can open up new channels of communication and instigate new forms of public discourse and ultimately public opinion (Debatim, 2008: 65-66). Social media has the potential to form a public sphere for the dissemination of counter hegemonic discourses, or to mobilize public opinion outside the centralized authoritative state control.

The classical liberal theory sees the media as vertical channels of communication between private citizens and the government. In contrast, the radical democratic approach recognises the media as a complex articulation of vertical, horizontal and diagonal channels of communication which occurs between individuals, groups as well as power structures. The role of the media is thus extended so that it includes the facilitation of the systems of representation and democracies it by exposing the decisions made by the organisations to public disclosure and debate (Curran, 1991: 32-35). In relation to the Internet, these deliberative public sphere advocates are interested in the extent and quality of argumentation being facilitated online, particularly given claims that the Internet's two-way, relatively low cost, semi-decentralized and global communications, combined with evolving interactive software and moderation techniques, offer the ideal basis (particularly when compared to the mass media) for rational deliberation. A general public sphere norm can be identified. This norm involves rational-critical deliberation over disputed validity claims, aimed at reaching understanding and agreement. This rational-critical communication is ideally *inclusive* (formally); *free* (non-coercive, including autonomy from state and corporate interests); *equal* (communicatively); *sincere* (as far as this is possible), *respectful* (putting oneself in the position of the other); *reasoned* (framing arguments in terms of why particular claims *ought* to be accepted) and *reflexive* (identity re-constituting). It is important to note that here 'public' refers to the form and not a particular content or place of communication: the public sphere comes into existence whenever people engage in argumentation over problematized validity claims (Dahlberg, 2007: 49).

In contrast to the mass media, the internet is seen as a force for radical democracy. The Internet is seen as helping marginalized groups –those groups associated with discourses excluded from the mainstream public sphere– develop their own deliberative forums, link up, and subsequently contest dominant meanings and practices. There are three parts to this argument. First, the Internet provides communication spaces for members of groups associated with marginalized discourses to develop counter-publics– 'alternative' discursive arenas constituted by a number of participants engaging in debate and criticism that strengthens and develops oppositional discourses (identities, interpretations, social imaginaries and languages) to those dominating the mainstream public sphere. Second, the Internet's interactivity and reach assists politically diverse and geographically dispersed counter-publics in finding shared points of identity and forming counter-public networks and coalitions (or articulations) of radical discourses, leading to the development of more powerful oppositional discourses. Identification is particularly found through common experiences of exclusion and domination. This articulation of identity and discourse gives strength to marginalized publics weakened by isolation. Third, the Internet supports online and offline counter-public contestation of dominant discourses, and hence the contestation of the deliberations of the mainstream public sphere (Dahlberg, 2007: 56).

Castells (2009: 55) defines mass self-communication as "a new form of interactive communication (...), characterized by the capacity of sending messages from many to many, in real time or chosen time, and with the possibility of using point-to-point communication, narrowcasting or broadcasting, depending on the purpose and characteristics of the intended communication practice. He argues that it is a form of mass communication, since it has the ability to reach a global audience, but also self-communication, because "the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages or content from the World Wide Web and electronic communication networks is self-selected." Castells argues that in the society we live in today, which he calls the network society, social movements have a greater chance to enter the public sphere. By means of mass self-communication, their images and messages can be disseminated via multiple outlets, ranging from social media to the mainstream media. This way, social movements and insurgent politics can endorse social and political change, even "if they start from a subordinate position in institutional power, financial resources, or symbolic legitimacy" (2009: 302). Castells has presented some explanations for the potency of social media. His analysis of communication in the network society suggests that mass self-communication can foster social movements, due to its autonomy from the mainstream media and its horizontal structure.

### The Use of Social Media in Social Movements

The growth of the Internet and its rapid expansion has led to extensive researches of the possible implications it might have for democracy. The bulk of it has been addressing interactivity as the main element to change the nature of citizens' participation in politics and public life in general. The advocates of the so-called 'electronic democracy' (Street, 2001: 214) argue that the Internet may either improve the existing form of democracy or revive the ancient form of direct democracy. Internet may offer solutions for the problems that have been obstructing political participation – 'time, size, knowledge and access'. The Internet has overcome the boundaries of time and space and it is no longer necessary for citizens to be physically present to contribute to a discussion. The limited political knowledge of ordinary citizens and the unequal distribution of resources, which has been hampering their capacity to get involved in the process of deliberation may no longer be a problem. The Internet has been recognized as a platform for public deliberation and the solution for other problems modern democracy may encounter: 'The net seems to provide a way around the practical problems posed by democracy, whatever its form; citizens can exercise their vote, deliberate on public policy or participate directly' (Street, 2001: 217- 218). Social media may be viewed both as technology and space for expanding and sustaining the networks upon which social movements depend. The Arab revolts exemplify how online social networks facilitated by social media have become a key ingredient of contemporary populist movements. Social media are not simply neutral tools to be used or adopted by social movements, but rather influence how activists form and shape the social movements (Lim, 2012).

Since the "Arab Spring" burst forth in uprisings in Tunisia and in Egypt in early 2011, scholars have sought to understand how the Internet and social media contribute to political change in authoritarian regimes. Social media are just one portion of a new system of political communication that has evolved in North Africa and the Middle East. News coverage of the recent uprisings tends to concentrate on catchphrases like "Twitter Revolution" or "Facebook Revolution." However, the connectivity infrastructure should be analyzed as a complex ecology rather than in terms of any specific platform or device. This new system involves three broad, interrelated components. First, satellite TV channels such as Al-Jazeera contributed to the formation of a new kind of public sphere in the Arab world. Second, the rapid diffusion of the Internet and the rise of dedicated platforms such as Facebook and Twitter dramatically changed the infrastructure of social connectivity. Third, the falling costs and expanding capabilities of mobile phones have enriched dispersed communication with picture and video capabilities. In the span of a decade, societies in which it had long been difficult to access information were transformed into massive social experiments fueled by an explosion in channels of information (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012).

The story of social media in developing nations so far is one of individual empowerment. Social media not only connects deprived nations to the outside world, but provide the power to shape the Internet in a way that is relevant to their peoples' lives, the power to organize in scale,



and the power to speak. These features make social media incredible tools that should be embraced by anyone with an eye towards development. The democratizing impact of social media is particularly relevant in nations with authoritarian regimes because state censorship of social media is a particularly difficult task. It is for this reason that Egypt was initially forced to take more indirect and ineffective routes, such as discouraging the use of social media, arresting activists, and banning mobile phones in police stations and ultimately to take the drastic step of shutting down the internet (Ali, 2011). The social media have been an integral part of political activism of the Egyptian for years, showing, for instance that 54 out of 70 recorded street protests from 2004 to 2011 substantially involved online activism. Hence, the power of networked individuals and groups who toppled Mubarak presidency cannot be separated from the power of social media that facilitated the formation and the expansion of the networks themselves. The genesis of online activism in Egypt can be traced to the rise of the Kefaya movement in 2004, followed by the emergence of oppositional activists in the Egyptian blogosphere. Inequalities, looming unemployment, and the rising cost of living were the roots for contention in the region. With comparatively lower political rights and civil liberties ratings, widespread perception of corruption, a quarter of the youth unemployed, and consumer price inflation running over 10%, most Egyptians shared common grievances. Unemployed youth to participate in an oppositional movement against Mubarak, she or he first needed to recognize that many other individuals shared the same grievances, the same goals, and a common identity in opposition to Mubarak (Lim, 2012: 2-4). This emerging communication system has profoundly transformed the Arab public sphere by increasing citizens' ability to document and share, by greatly increasing the odds that misconduct by authorities will become widely known, and by overcoming barriers to individual political participation and the coordination of collective action (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012).

On 15 May 2011 thousands of people, mainly young, demonstrated all over the Spanish state under the slogans "For real democracy now" and "We are not commodities in the hands of politicians and bankers". Young people make up the overwhelming majority of the activists of the 15-M. The core activists tend to be university or ex-university students, often unemployed or under-employed, in their mid to late twenties. However, the movement is much broader than just this sector. Claims that it is "middle class", apart from misunderstanding class as such, ignore the fact that most of the youth involved have little hope of finding anything but badly paid temporary jobs (Durgan and Sans, 2011). The new, networked activists have revealed a side of Spain few thought existed: a politicised public eager for real change. "Spanish spring" of 2011, it has been seen how what started as a small, inarticulate and youth-centred movement has transformed itself into what some here call the most interesting political development since the death of Franco in 1975. A hybrid and novel experiment of online and offline activism that has steered clear of the traditional and weary avenues of political engagement, the 15-M movement was the harbinger of the massive Israeli protests in the last year and the Occupy Wall Street movement taking shape in the US. The movement has studiously avoided engaging with ideological agendas, unions and, most importantly, professional politicians. It has filled city squares, co-ordinated online actions and targeted specific topics like banking and electoral reform. It has experimented with bottom-up networked approaches to challenge the rigid, top-down, party driven system that has dominated Spanish political life since 1978. Most of the actions pop up spontaneously after information is exchanged on Twitter and then co-ordinated through the use of hashtags. The actions such as these have been started to change the perception and the dynamics between citizens, government regulators and economic interests. Furthermore, they have been forced politicians to reconsider how they take part in the policy-making process – a growing trend here is public officials voluntarily disclosing assets. It is possible to say that this is a networked public sphere (Beas, 2011).

Disciplined and coordinated groups, whether businesses or governments, have always had an advantage over undisciplined ones: they have an easier time engaging in collective action because they have an orderly way of directing the action of their members. Social media can compensate for the disadvantages of undisciplined groups by reducing the costs of coordination. The anti-Estrada movement in the Philippines used the ease of sending and forwarding text messages to organize a massive group with no need (and no time) for standard managerial control. As a result, larger, looser groups can now take on some kinds of coordinated action, such as protest movements and public media campaigns, that were previously reserved for formal organizations. For political movements, one of the main forms of coordination is what the military calls "shared awareness," the ability of each member of a group to not only understand the situation at hand but also understand that everyone else does, too. Social media increase shared awareness by propagating messages through social networks. The anti-Aznar protests in Spain gained momentum so quickly precisely because the millions of people spreading the message were not part of a hierarchical organization (Shirky, 2011: 7).

Similarly, the occupation of Millbank Tower in London on 10 November 2010 marked a significant turning point in the battle against the Tory-led coalition. The return of radical student protests transformed the nature of the debate around resistance to the cuts. What is of particular interest in this context is the way in which the failure of the National Union of Students (NUS) to support the occupation saw subsequent demonstrations organised outside the structures of the NUS. The 10 November protest—organised by the NUS and the University and College Union under the name "Demolition"—saw over 50,000 protesters take to the streets. This turnout could not have been achieved without the structures of the NUS, which invested time and money promoting the demonstration and laying on coaches. In an echo of the G20 mobilisations, there was a reciprocal relationship between the bourgeois media, student activists and social media. In the absence of official NUS structures (or, indeed, of left wing student organisation in many parts of the country), Facebook became a way for students in disparate areas of the country to find out about what was going on, who in their area was going to protest. It was able to give school students with little or no experience of protest the confidence to get large numbers to walk out of school. The student revolt shows that social media can play a real role in solidifying the confidence of potential protesters in areas where the structures of the left are weakest (Jones, 2011).

## Conclusion

The public sphere is an ideal model that has probably never existed. As Calhoun (1992: 39) remarks: 'Habermas constitutes historical category of the public sphere and attempts to draw from it a normative ideal'. This normative ideal of an independent social space where private citizens join in a rational-critical debate to discuss matters of common interest has been scrutinized as a working model. Doubts have been raised about its singular and homogenous nature, rationality of arguments, quality of discourse and the probability that debate will reach a consensus. In modern democracies the media do have the potential to initiate public debate and provide a forum for it. The features of this mediated public sphere and the role of journalism, lay public and experts within that sphere, depend on the notion of the role of the media in democracy. A significant contribution to the public sphere lies in the capacity of the media to structure public discussion and give it a constructive spin. The concept of the public sphere and the model of deliberative democracy are inseparable. What underlies them is the rational-critical debate. Its biggest value lies in the procedure itself. Each decision is a subject of a critical debate, which is a value in itself, and the results are justified by the procedure. Habermas's notion of the public sphere, despite all its features that simply lack the sense of reality, is a wonderful contribution to the theory of the human society: people are encouraged to participate in a process of deliberation and access is guaranteed to everybody; they are respected as equals and are expected to behave in a disinterested way contributing to the common good; power elites are held accountable to the independent public body (Grbeša, 2003).





In the contemporary context, the modern public sphere and public discourse cannot be separated from the mass media. Public opinion has been facilitated by various forms of media including newspapers, magazines, television talk programs as well as the internet. The internet has been heralded as a new potential public sphere as it opened new channels for political communication and public discourse. Within the internet, SNSs are seen as a potential development which could act as a new narrower form of this public sphere. Social media helped organize massive protests demanding justice and an end to violence. The role of social media in the Egypt revolt can be understood through its relation to social networks and mobilization mechanisms. In Egypt's oppositional movements, social media provided space and tool for the formation and the expansion of networks that the authoritarian government could not easily control. Social media helped a popular movement for political change to expand the sphere of participation. Facebook and Twitter activities of high-frequency posters also translated into offline participation. In the case of protests in Egypt, it appears that social networks, often mediated through the new online platforms in the emergent networked public sphere, played a crucial role.

The events demonstrate in Europe, ABD, North Africa and the Middle East are now being shaped by a new system of political communication which sets into sharp relief the importance of digitally mediated interpersonal communication. This system is characterized by the increasingly interrelated use of satellite television, the Internet (particularly social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter), and the widespread use of Internet-enabled cellphones capable of transmitting photos and video. This study was pursued in the attempt to discover whether Facebook, as a SNS, can be seen as a possible forum where public discourse takes place and public opinion, as function of the public discourse, is facilitated. The possibility for a modern public sphere has also been realised. In the contemporary context, the modern public sphere and public discourse cannot be separated from the mass media. Public opinion has been facilitated by various forms of media – including newspapers, magazines, television talk programs and, most recently the internet and the internet has been heralded a new public sphere which opened new channels for political communication and public discourse. In this study, the internet and SNS were discussed. The notion of the internet as a public sphere has explained. Social media has been a basis for a more democratic, participatory public sphere.

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