

The Public Sphere in Cyberspace

The Criteria of Formation and Operationalization Impediments According to Habermas's Theory and the Recognition of Axel Honneth

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Abstract:

The following study aims to investigate the ability of cyberspace to host public sphere discussions. This is according to the Habermasian perspective, which is based on evoking rational arguments in public deliberation, the communicative equality between social subjects, among others. In addition, it attempts to evoke a paradigm of Honnethian recognition and search for its standard trilogy (love, solidarity, rights) within the cyber platforms on which it relies as an incubating environment for the Habermasian public sphere and seeks to achieve reciprocal recognition between interacting selves.

Keywords: virtual public sphere, cyberspace, mutual recognition.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

The rapid technological transformations at the level of the new communication media have created a cognitive debate about the potential of these media as new mechanisms of liberation and democratization in creating new arrangements in society. Thanks to its features based on openness and ease of access, it gives the individual / user unparalleled power to freely create, publish and share content and access to various content.

Technology optimists saw cyberspace as an enabling environment to embrace public debate, and a symbolic outlet for subjects to obtain their right to social visibility in the public sphere. It is for them an environment that renews their hope in the ability of this space to form a virtual public sphere, to which access is easy and equal among all social subjects without excluding any group and away from all socio-cultural coercions, and electronically reviving the Agora Square. As for those who are worried about the outputs of technology, they saw that the Internet, with its various platforms, would be followed by what happened to the traditional media. In other words, after being astonished with it, doubts about its capabilities will come, where it will try to adapt to the constraints imposed by social structures, and it will submit to the dictates of the market and politics.

Between this optimism and worry, stands the problematic of our study of the intersections of the public sphere with cyberspace: does cyberspace contribute to the formation of a virtual public sphere? A set of questions emerge from this problematic, which are summarized as follows:

-What is the definition of the public sphere?

- What is the definition of the public sphere, what are its characteristics, and the criteria for shaping it according to the Habermasian theory and the Honnethian recognition paradigm?

- What are the obstacles to forming a public sphere in cyberspace?

Conceptualization:

1. On the concept of cyberspace:

Linguistically, the term cyberspace is formed from cyber, which is derived from the Greek *kybernetes* meaning instructor or leader. The use of the word cyber is related to meanings that refer to computer and the Internet (cybercafé, cyberspace...). The term cyberspace was first used by William Gibson in his 1982 story *Burning Chrome* that was published in *Omni* journal, but it was only after the publication of his novel *Neuromancer* in 1984 that the term became popular.

From a terminological point of view, the concept of cyberspace refers to the digital environments resulting from the connection to the Internet that possess some of the spatial characteristics and social settings that characterize traditional social spheres. These digital environments allow the production and exchange of various forms of data and content (بن عمرة، 2019). It also formed spaces for communication, interaction and discussion of various issues between users through various digital platforms (such as social networking sites, blogs,...).

2. On the concept of the public sphere:

Habermas defines the public sphere as “a world of our social life in which it is possible to form something that approaches public opinion, where access into it is guaranteed to all citizens. A part of the public sphere arises in every conversation in which certain individuals come together to form a public body, and they do not act like businessmen and professionals who deal with private affairs, or as members of a constitutional system subject to legal restrictions ... But citizens act like a public body where they debate without restrictions on matters of public interest with the possibility of publishing it (Habermas, 1974)

Charles Taylor defines it: “the public sphere is a shared space, in which members of society meet through a number of media to discuss issues of common interest, and through that, to form a common thinking on these issues”. (تشارلز، 2015)

2. Habermas's approach to the public sphere:

The concept of the public sphere was associated with the German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas in his book entitled: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society), published in 1961, which is a message of rehabilitation. This concept became famous and intellectual discussions raged about it in various fields of knowledge, including sociology, philosophy, communication sciences, political science, anthropology, art and architecture, after this book was translated into English in 1989.

Habermas's public sphere represents the arena of public debate in which debates take place, and opinions and positions are formed on issues that embody people's interests and concerns. According to Habermas, this sphere started forming in Western societies, within literary salons and cafes in London, Paris and a number of other European cities. People used to meet in these places and discuss emerging issues through what they read in bulletins and newspapers that began to be published at that time, and political discussions gained special importance despite the small number of their participants. Indeed, salons played a vital role in the growth of democracy in its early stages, and provided an opportunity to exchange views on political issues through public debate (غدنز، 2001).

Habermas offers a socio-historical reading of the changes in the structure of the bourgeois public sphere. He does not research the concept of the public sphere in general, but rather allocates and examines the bourgeois public sphere in its relationship to the concept of public opinion, which requires revealing the truth of this vast and intertwined sphere. That is, Habermas examines it on the basis of the liberal paradigm of the public sphere's approach in terms of its historical transformations, its social structures, its political function and its relationship with the state (2017، علالي و ممدوح)

According to Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere developed in the heart of the

tension-charged sphere between the state and society, in a third sphere located between the state from above and society from below (Simon, 2011).

3.1 . The normative property of the bourgeois public sphere:

The normative property of the bourgeois public sphere stems from the fact that it possesses emancipatory possibilities. According to Simon Susen, this means that the bourgeois public sphere should be ideal as an original space for social cooperation and human liberation, and its whole existence depends on its ability to enhance civic participation in the processes of communication and will formation (Simon, 2011). He adds that it cannot be an exaggeration to emphasize the importance of Jürgen Habermas's insistence on the emancipatory possibilities in the bourgeois public sphere, as he demonstrates the social significance of the enabling nature of communicative practices performed by rational actors. Criticism of legitimacy in the public sphere inherent in communicative processes directed towards mutual understanding can rise to become a coordinating driving force for rational social (Simon, 2011).

According to Habermas, the discursive nature of bourgeois public space manifests itself in three forms of criticism (Simon, 2011):

-The criticism of the authoritarian state: the democratic discourses produced by the bourgeois public sphere have always criticized the arbitrary power exercised by the authoritarian state. Given this anti-authoritarian position, the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere is evidence of the ideological and material transformation from pre-modern society to modern society.

-The criticism of the democratic state: The bourgeois public sphere constitutes an exploratory world that enables collectively organized individuals to act as the primary observers of the democratic state in modern society.

-The criticism of the public sphere as a mediating force between the state and society: the public sphere is a world of individuals who communicate socially alike,

who are able to create complementary spaces for solidarity and a space for individuals who criticize each other and who are able to create discursive spaces that

are reflexive. The bourgeois public sphere is not only important for pre-modern countries, but it is also important for modern countries as well as for its own sake because it constitutes an intersubjective world based on open and reflexive discourses, as it "provides a training ground for critical public thinking that is still, however, preoccupied with itself." (Habermas, The structural Transformation of the public sphere-an inquiry into category of bourgeois society, 1989).

3.2. The role of publicity in shaping the public sphere:

Publicity for Habermas is the demystification and disclosure of politics before the court of public use of reason(2010-2009، العباسي). It is based on the principle of publishing everything related to public affairs and bringing it out to the public so that it can be discussed by using argument and mental criticism about what is published to reach a general consensus. The principle of publicity was associated with the emergence of the written press, it contributed to its prosperity, the independence of the field, and the formation of public opinion among the urban and bourgeois citizens. The bourgeois have adapted their reading habits with the new from the publications, and especially with the entry of critical analysis into the daily press, an intense network of public communication has formed at the heart of the private sphere(2013، علوش). Consequently, new forms of social relations appeared based on discussion and the use of reason, and debates within salons where people comment on news received from newspapers and every individual gives his opinion and justification.

Thus, the principle of publicity or propaganda is first and foremost the principle of control that bourgeois public opinion exploited to stand in the way of power and put an end to the secrets of the absolute state and eliminate the principle of enclosure. In addition, publicity also has the principle of mediation between private and public thinking, by proposing every general matter for deliberation using argument and

rational criticism in order to reach a general agreement. The third principle of it is the principle of publicity between the moral and the political, whereby state legislation and decisions are subject to moral control and public thinking, as in Kant's tradition, a law is not just without an ethical standard(2010-2009، العباسي).

3.3. Structural transformations of the bourgeois public sphere:

According to Habermas, the public sphere has witnessed a decline in Western democracies, as discussion of political issues was confined to the framework of parliaments and traditional media. Consequently, partisan political and economic interests dominated the public interest, and public opinion, as he saw, became the outcome of the process of appeasement by political forces through propaganda campaigns(2011، حمزة), and the public sphere turned towards the space of cheering after bypassing the critical propaganda* and replacing it with cheering propaganda and discourse has been replaced by political marketing(2013، علوش).

Simon Susen summarizes three main points that represent the basic oppositions upon which the process of degradation in the public sphere is based (Simon, 2011):

- **Tension between public and private interests:** The formation of the modern public sphere in capitalist societies is paradoxical because of its *'preliminary'* openness as a 'civil' space directed towards political *'integration'*, and its *'practical'* closure at the same time as a 'bourgeois' world based on social *'exclusion'*.

- **Tension between the instrumental and the communicative rationality:**

The opposition between the *communicative* and *instrumental* reason demonstrates that the public sphere in liberal capitalist society constitutes not only a discursive domain of critical inter-subjectivity, but also a purposeful domain of commodity tools. To the

extent that discussion forums generate critical rational public spheres, profit-driven markets create commodity public spheres.

-**Tension between empowering and weakening potentials:**

Ironically, the increasing expansion of the public sphere contributed to its gradual degradation. The necessity of commodification in capitalist society seems to transform public sphere into market sphere, and neutralize the rational critical power of the public.

4. Habermas's reviews of the concept of the public sphere:

Habermas's study of the public sphere was the subject of intense critical debate which led to revisions in later writings and fostered extensive historical and conceptual research in the public sphere itself.

In the 1990s, Habermas Jürgen provided a detailed commentary on the structural transformation and his most important new ideas about the public sphere based on some of the criticisms leveled at him by several researchers in his article entitled " Additional Reviews on Public Space". He, later on, returned to studying issues of the public sphere and democratic theory in his monumental work "Between Facts and Standards".

Habermas's critical reading of his virgin model focused on overcoming "ideal normativity" by overcoming the bourgeois model and abandoning spatiotemporal investigation (temporal: the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, spatial: Western Europe)(2018، مسعود) . This is in addition to retreating from the notion of the deviation of the public sphere in its singular form. It is incorrect to talk about a single public sphere as stated in his reviews, in which he also indicated that from the beginning there is a dominant bourgeois public that clashes with a general public, and he realized that he underestimated the "opposing and non-bourgeois public sphere" (Habermas, Furter Reflections on the Public Sphere, 1992). Thus, instead of envisioning a single liberal or democratic public sphere, it is better to theorize the plurality of public spheres, which are sometimes overlapping and also conflicting.

These general areas include excluded groups as well as more dominant groups (Douglas, 2000). In response to the objections of feminist critics, he acknowledged the patriarchal nature of his model, which excluded the presence and participation of women in public affairs deliberations.

In his revisionist reviews, Habermas overlooked "bourgeoisie" as a condition for democratic transition in European societies. Instead of dropping the bourgeois paradigm on societies and contexts that live either after the bourgeoisie (such as Europe), or before them (some Arab countries), or in opposition with them (rentier states), the research is directed towards the social and political roles assigned to media and civil actors in the public sphere (مسعود, 2018).

Habermas's revisions to his first model of the public sphere did not address all the foundational rules upon which the first model was based. He, in fact, preserved the principle of the symbolic mediation of the public sphere between power and society. This is in addition to the rational argument, the communicative rationality, the relational linkage between the debate being of the paradigm and the democratic transition in a manner that does not conflict with the requirements of the environment as an explanatory model that seeks to withdraw on more than one context (مسعود, 2018).

The illustrative table presented by the researcher Amin Masoud (أمين مسعود) in his article entitled "Cognitive Excavations in the Concept of the Public Sphere" highlighted the discrepancies between the public sphere models from the 1962 Habermas model to the 1992, the date of the additional revisions to the Habermasian public sphere. Based on what was mentioned in his article, the post-review Habermasian model is based on communicative realism, open based on the communicative structure and mediation between the state and society based on the following foundations:

- The power of communicative action in the power of rational debate.
- Discussing public issues in depth, presenting them in a dramatic way, and proposing solutions about them: In this context, Habermas describes in his book "Facts and Standards" the current public political sphere as a "probe " for the problems that the political system must solve, and a "warning system" with sensors that are not specialized but still sensitive to all segments of society. Habermas not only identifies problems, but also deals with possible solutions. He even exaggerates the press until the message reaches the official policies. This is usually the task of the ad hoc groups in civil society (the social base of the public sphere) and the press in a coordinated fashion (Rasmussen, 2014).

Open to everyone in communication, limited to those who master the argument when debating (the strongest argument) to reach consensus with the aim of formulating a public opinion that turns into an influence force and then a procedural force: The more reasonable and more convincing arguments generally get the highest authority. All individuals must contribute to the establishment of facts and arguments that they

consider persuasive, and which in turn will be subject to critical scrutiny (Habermas, 2009, 171).

5. The Public Sphere: Characteristics and conditions of formation from the Habermasian-Honnethian perspective

From Jürgen Habermas's perspective, the public sphere is shaped by creating spaces and forums for discussion on political and public issues available to all individuals. This contributes to reorganizing the opinions presented on the issues, crystallizing and filtering them according to their merits, and according to the public interest they receive from the participants.

The success of the public sphere, as defined by Habermas, also depends on several factors, including:

- The extent of access, spread, and degree of autonomy: Citizens must get rid of control, domination and coercion, and reject hierarchy. Everyone must participate in the discussion with others on an equal footing, where they all realize the clarity and effectiveness of the role of law, and they share understanding and confidence in the

media content within an appropriate societal context (خمش، 2019).

The researcher Stéphanie Wojcik (Wojcik, 2007) believes that public circulation, according to Habermas, is based on four foundations necessary to embody the public sphere and enable it to operate within the various disparate social systems and ensure its continuity and effectiveness, which are:

- The independence of those involved in deliberation from any economic political and ideological interests.
- Complete equality between the participators in deliberation without regard to social status.
- Relying on a rational discourse based on a reciprocity of logical arguments.
- Striving to reach agreement and consensus.

Through these foundations, we conclude that Habermas makes dialogue the precise measure that measures the validity of opinions and positions and examines the extent of their validity and authenticity by the extent to which they are accepted by the interlocutors in the public sphere. This is in the context of intersubjective divergence of opinions, diversity and tolerance, based on a deliberative linguistic field in which the rules of reasonableness and honesty are taken into account and based on argumentative discussion away from oppression, domination (بومنيير، 2010), marginalization and contempt for those participating or potentially entering the public sphere.

6. The concept of recognition as a criterion for promoting public sphere deliberations and overcoming social conflicts:

The public sphere is made up of the subjects involved in public interaction and deliberation about issues of public concern. Each subject seeks to interact and be open to the rest of the subjects participating in the discussion and to reach a convergence of views and consensus on the issues in question.

However, reaching this consensus is not automatic. Rather, it must be a mutual recognition between these selves to avoid the social conflicts present in every social system that often lead to changes within social systems.

Here, the German philosopher Axel Honneth proposes recognition as a new paradigm of social conflict and as an addition to the Habermasian proposition of the public sphere based on interactive sociological communication, which seeks to achieve consensus on issues of public interest and create a public opinion on various public concerns. In Honneth's view, mutual recognition is sufficient to put an end to social struggles based on control, domination and injustice, and thanks to it, individuals can realize themselves and identity within intersubjective relationships (بومنير، 2010). Whenever self-recognition is achieved, an open and public sphere is formed that is not subject to restriction or coercion.

Honneth identifies three standard forms of recognition:

- **Love:** He defines it as a set of primary erotic and family relationships, in addition to the friendship relations that exist between people.
- **Right:** It means the legal recognition that guarantees individuals their autonomy (individual rights).
- **Solidarity:** It is the third form of recognition that allows individuals to find self-fulfilment through mutual recognition. This criterion is the basis of self-esteem.

The endeavor to embody the right to recognition acknowledges the social existence of individuals with their plurality and diversity and acceptance of their differences as a form of struggle against exclusion from the public sphere, and the consolidation of the coexistence art (لعياضي، 2017).

7. Cyberspace and the formation of the virtual public domain: construction criteria and barriers to operationlisation:

With the emergence of mass media, the public sphere expanded greatly, and with the rise of internet platforms, it became more comprehensive, complex and interactive-oriented. Here Habermas is sadly aware that the social and cultural challenges of the contemporary public sphere are enormous. The diversity of interests, worldviews and

forms of cultural life makes convergence in the public sphere uneasy. Thus, how can all these different voices dissolve into a reasonable discourse capable of legitimizing and even justifying politics (Rasmussen, 2014)

The complexity of the public sphere has emerged strongly in terms of fields, styles, genres, and themes, and the most significant changes have emerged since the 1990s with the invention of the World Wide Web, smartphones, and social media. The real innovation that took place with the Internet from a democratic perspective eliminated the social division between speakers and listeners in the public sphere and allowed everyone to be potential participants in many public interactions and discussions, without eliminating the possibility of communicating in an expanded space.

Davis notes that many individuals have transformed themselves into narrators, reporters, editors and broadcasters through blogs, YouTube, and social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

From Benkler's view, the network allowed all citizens to change their relationship with the public sphere, as they no longer needed to be passive consumers and spectators, but rather, it became possible for them to become innovators and essential individuals (Fuchs, 2004). He argued that the transition from the public sphere, organized by traditional media, to a distributed communication structure with multi-directional links between all nodes in the information architecture has removed barriers to communication, and fundamentally changed possibilities for participation in the public sphere (Rasmussen, 2014).

Zizi Papacharissi describes the emergence of a "virtual space 2.0", in which consumers participate and express "their opposition with a public agenda [...] by expressing a political opinion on blogs, displaying content, posting it on YouTube or posting a comment on the Internet in a discussion group " (papacharissi, 2009)

The Internet space, according to the researcher Eric George, reconfigured the concept of space, time, and physical presence, carrying promises and possibilities for realizing the public sphere with the Habermasian concept online (Eric, 2014). Participation in discussions online does not require the physical presence and face-to-face communication of the individual. However, It is sufficient for this individual to access one of the cyberspace platforms such as social networking sites or digital blogs, in which participation is easy and free to express his/her opinion freely and without restrictions or any sociocultural compulsions and to enter into virtual deliberative discussions with other individuals online.

Rasmussen argues that the Internet and personal media provide a more differentiated public space, both in terms of topics and styles, as well as with regard to the number and diversity of the participants. The current public sphere is more oriented towards personalization, due to the diversity of the communication media, and the more ethnically and culturally diverse society in general (Rasmussen, The internet and

differentiation in the political public sphere, 2008).

7.1.Virtual public sphere and impediments to operationalisation

The multiple communication tools provided by the Internet do not necessarily carry with them the potential for liberation from the constraints imposed by social contexts as regulators to which members of society are subject and ensure the continuity of its functional patterns. In addition, these cyber platforms do not always carry with them the requirements for self-fulfillment of the public sphere. The researcher, Barber, confirms that employing new communication technologies within societies dominated by fragile democratic models, limited social participation, unequal access to symbolic and socio-economic resources, and the absence of rationalism, will inevitably lead to the generation of the same patterns of backwardness and weariness that characterized the situation under the old technologies. Thus, it is not possible to rely on the new communication technologies to bet on changing the prevailing political and social practices within the societal pattern (Barber, 1998). He adds that the Internet and new media.

Technologies are not playing a positive role. This is due to a series of main characteristics of new media: their speed, simplicity and reductionism, their tendency to polarization, the strength of the user interface, their bias towards images more than texts, their resistance to hierarchical mediations and their tendency towards fragmentation rather than their tendency towards a single integrated society. All these tendencies exclude communication from the possibility of deliberation and deliberate choices. Moreover, new media technologies tend to distribute illegitimate or confusing information in contrast to reliable explanations presented by the media (Rasmussen, Internet and the political public sphere, 2014).

It is difficult to encounter the standard conditions for the formation of public circulation according to the Habermasian concept within the cyber space. The chaos that marks this space makes it impossible to reach consensus of opinion, which is the main goal of the public sphere. The researcher Abdel-Wahab Boukhanoufa (عبد الوهاب بوخنوفة) attributes the multiplicity of contradictory views in cyberspace and the failure to formulate a common position to the fluid and dynamic nature of Internet users' identities. The individual may be active in more than one identity in this space, and tend to join groups that are compatible with his opinion, orientations and ideology, and refrain from entering into any discussion that contradicts his convictions and trends (2017, لعياضي). Furthermore, users consume information and news in isolation, outside the context of social communication that limits the common understanding of this news, which is a condition of discussion(2011, الحمامي).

Regarding the standard of equal access to the public sphere, not all individuals have equal access to internet platforms, as access conditions are governed by the digital divide, which represents a new form of hierarchy, marginalization and exclusion practiced by technology.

As for the realization of the Internet spaces for the values of mutual recognition that Honneth talked about, which aims to put a remedy for social conflicts and achieve mutual recognition between subjects within the public sphere, the researcher Nasreddin Layadi (نصر الدين لعياضي) believes that social networking sites as one of the platforms

of cyberspace made it possible to easily embody the condition of solidarity. He also believes that it fulfills the first standard condition. Nevertheless, the right condition of a legal level, guarantees the individual a sense of freedom and autonomy by realizing his/her rights on three basic levels: civil rights, political rights that allow the individual to participate in the process of forming the public will, and social rights that guarantee a fair distribution of property. It, however, remains a subject of conflict and negotiation in the virtual sphere as well as in the physical sphere

8. Conclusion:

In the end, we conclude that the public sphere is not just a spatial or symbolic space that embraces the interactions and discussions of individuals about public affairs. However, it is an integrated system that includes various social, cultural and political practices, and is framed by cultural and discursive mechanisms. It can only manifest itself in an environment of equality, individual freedom, and reciprocal recognition that guarantees the creation of a rational and argumentative discourse between the various social subjects to reach agreement and consensus on the public interest.

The cyber space is open and easy to access, and it achieves equality and individual freedom for those involved in virtual discussions through various cyber platforms, which have brought with them an unparalleled abundance of communication and a mosaic of disparate and homogeneous discourses for different subjects. Nevertheless, it is not always an enabling environment for the formation of a virtual public sphere based on the characteristic of sharing through an argumentative rational discourse and mutual recognition between social subjects according to the Habermasian proposition and to the foundations of the Honnethian recognition

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