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**Mass Communications and the Idea of Global  
Public Sphere**

Dissertation Submitted in Candidacy for the Degree of Master in Literature and Civilisation

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*Dedications*

*To my dear parents*

*To my sweetheart supervisor*

*To my best friends*

*Bendjelloul Nabila*

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## **Abstract**

The public sphere concept came as a result of the idea of Jurgen Habermas which states that public sphere is a space where individuals could freely practice their political rights and share their concerns and interests. In this view, public opinion needs a platform to spread out and reach every individual and this could happen through the different broadcasting services such as the internet network. This network offers the possibility to improve democratic communication and the state of public sphere. Furthermore, institutions were created to broadcast discussion about the power of the states. Institutions are newspapers, internet networks and different broadcast platforms came into existence and established what was called culture industry. Hence, this research work is an analysis of how the public sphere and its different aspects could form public opinion. The analysis of internet network's contribution confirms the democratic potential of it. But this does not mean that there are no problems that hindered the establishment of this potential. In total, these networks were formed as contributive to the public sphere and every fast way of information dissemination.

## **List of Acronyms**

*STPS: The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*

## **Contents**

Dedications.....	II
Acknowledgment.....	III
Abstract.....	IV
List of Abbreviations.....	V
Contents.....	VI
<b>General Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>

### **Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere**

1.1. Introduction.....	6
1.2. Public Sphere.....	6
1.3. Approaches to Public Sphere.....	8
1.3.1. Lippmann , Tonnes , Habermas.....	8
1.3.2. Lehman’s System Theory.....	9
1.4. Theories of the Public Sphere and Culture Industry.....	10
1.4.1. The Bourgeois Public Sphere.....	10
1.4.2. The Theory of Communicative Action.....	14
1.4.3. Civil society “in the theory of communicative action”.....	17
1.5. Critical Reflection on Habermas.....	20
1.5.1. Nancy Fraser and Rethinking the Public Sphere.....	20
1.6. Culture Industry “Theory and Critique”.....	21

1.7.	Conclusion.....	22
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## **Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting**

2.1.	Introduction.....	26
2.2.	The Public Sphere.....	26
2.3.	Public Sphere and Public Service Media.....	29
2.4.	Types of System and Public Service Media.....	30
	2.4.1 Social Devolutionary .....	30
	2.4.2. Liberal Corporativist.....	31
	2.4.3 Public Service .....	32
2.5.	Changes of Public Service Broadcasting.....	33
2.6	Key Reasons for the Crisis of Public Service Broadcasting.....	34
2.7.	Technological Change.....	38
2.8	Conclusion.....	41

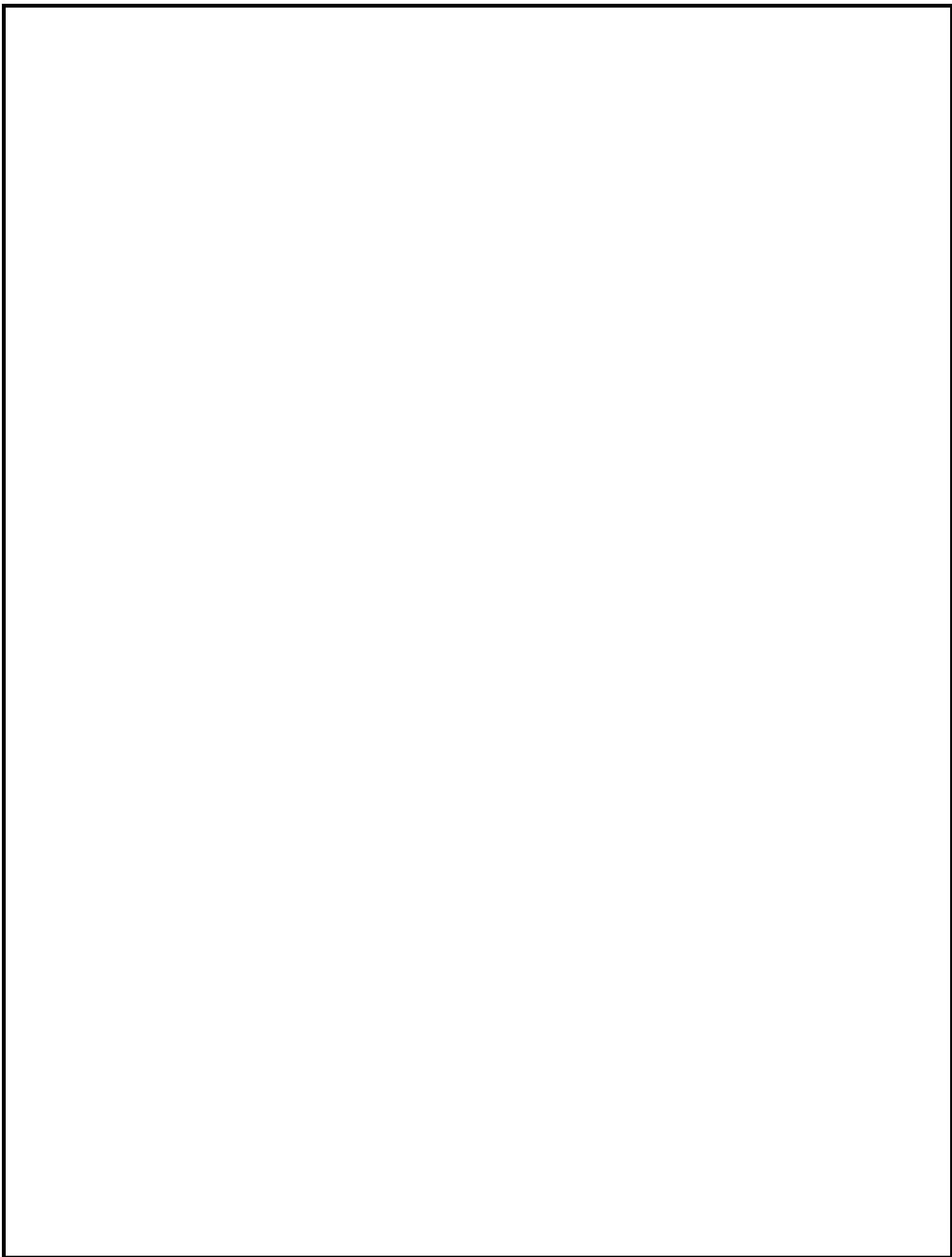
## **Chapter three: The Internet Network Institution**

3.1.	Introduction.....	44
3.2.	Mass Media Communication “The Internet as a Study Case”.....	44
3.3.	The Importance of Internet.....	45
	3.3.1. The Importance of Media in Contemporary Societies.....	47
3.4.	The Representation of Democratic Rule through Media.....	48
3.5.	The social role of the Use of Internet.....	48
3.6.	Features of Internet Network.....	53
	3.6.1. The Discursive Aspect.....	53
	3.6.2. The Spatial Aspect.....	54

3.6.3. The Communal Aspect.....	55
3.7. The role of mass media.....	56
3.8. Conclusion.....	57
<b>General Conclusion.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>62</b>

# **General Introduction**





## General Introduction

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The concept of public sphere was deeply discussed in Jurgan Habermas's book "*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*". He described public sphere as a rational platform where independent individuals meet together and exchange information on important matters and concerns. Therefore, the public sphere was considered in this research paper as a corner stone, which contributed in establishing legitimate democracy. Starting from this concept, Habermas assumed that public spheres are guaranteeing the role of specific section of the society over an entire state.

Understanding the meaning of the key concepts of this thesis, it would be accessible to set an overview about the importance of this research work. In the light of this, the choice of such a subject aims to set a clear understanding of the importance of public sphere, which highly contributes in sharing public opinion. Moreover, this work also shines on how mass media could affect both the public sphere and the culture industry. Furthermore, this research focuses on the importance of the internet network as a way in legitimizing the democratic rule.

As far, the main research question that rises in this work is: how do Mass Communications really contribute and push the wheel of Public Opinion and Democracy? Thus to answer the problematic mentioned above the following research questions should be asked:

- What is the background behind the two key concepts of public sphere and public opinion?
- What is the link between broadcast and public sphere? And what is the role of this link in establishing culture industry?
- Can the internet network influence public opinion and affect communities?

Hence, three important hypotheses emerged as follows:

- Public sphere and public opinion relationship reciprocal encourage in setting the pillars for democracy.

## General Introduction

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- Public opinion could be only shared to the rest of the society through the different institutions of broadcasting , which forms the basis for culture industry.
- The internet network importance sets connections between publics and individuals. This basis where people could share opinions and sense of responsibility, which leads to democracy.

Thus far, this research work will be divided into three main chapters. The first one deals with the formation of public opinion, this term that came first as a result of the different meetings and gathering of individuals from the Bourgeois society. Hence, these circumstances gave birth to what is called public sphere. This concept was contained people sharing topics of the same interests. Furthermore this chapter focuses on how public sphere can encourage the development of public opinion.

Whereas, the second chapter, the focus would be on the different institutions that contributed in promoting public opinion through the rest of society. Henceforth, the link between broadcast means such as mass media and public sphere will be formed a platform establishing what was called culture industry.

On the other hand, the third chapter discusses the importance of the internet network and its contribution in legitimizes a democratic rule. As a result, a very important question should be asked, which is “can this internet network influence or change real life communities?” Not only that, but the potential of creating a democratic society was in one way or in other pushed forwards by these networks.

# **Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere**

<b>1.1.</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.2.</b>	<b>Public Sphere.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.3.</b>	<b>Approaches to Public Sphere.....</b>	<b>8</b>
	<b>1.3.1. Lippmann , Tonnes , Habermas.....</b>	<b>8</b>
	<b>1.3.2. Lehman’s System Theory.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.4.</b>	<b>Theories of the Public Sphere and Culture Industry.....</b>	<b>10</b>
	<b>1.4.1. The Bourgeois Public Sphere.....</b>	<b>10</b>
	<b>1.4.2. The Theory of Communicative Action.....</b>	<b>14</b>
	<b>1.4.3. Civil society “in the theory of communicative action”.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>1.5.</b>	<b>Critical Reflection on Habermas.....</b>	<b>20</b>
	<b>1.5.1. Nancy Fraser and Rethinking the Public Sphere.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>1.6.</b>	<b>Culture Industry “Theory and Critique”.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>1.7.</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>22</b>

# Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere

## 1.1 Introduction

Opinion can be defined as subjective beliefs that are based on the interpretation of facts and emotion. Usually there are many elements that influence how a person forms opinion, such as cultural background, education, understanding, beliefs, and desires. Where different opinions are present, the subject is not fully supported by factual information and some of the factual information is not being accepted by one side of the opinion. Hence, the overall goal of this chapter is to highlight an overview about Public Opinion, its Approaches and the different theories of public sphere and culture industry.

## 1.2 Public Sphere

The term Public Sphere is mainly formed around the ideas of Jürgen Habermas which he expresses in his work “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society”. This work has been very influential, especially after its translation to English in 1989, and is often used as a conceptual foundation of other public sphere theories. Although the ideas expressed in this book are often discussed controversially and many of them are criticised by a great variety of scholars, it still remains “**the most significant modern work on its subject**” (Calhoun, 1999: 5). In this book, Calhoun (idem) defines public sphere according to Jürgen Habermas’ point of view as follows:

**The historically specific phenomenon of the bourgeois public sphere created out of the relations between capitalism and the state in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Habermas sets out to establish what the category of public meant in bourgeois society and how its meaning and material operation were transformed in the centuries after its constitution.**

This means that the growing from the need of merchants for accurate information about distant markets, the public sphere evolve providing a space for private individuals and government authorities to freely meet and discuss about public topics,

## Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere

issues, and concerns. In his analysis, Habermas explains the role of the so called “institutional criteria” as a precondition to the public sphere. He refers to the coffee houses of Britain, salons of France and others. Where the Bourgeoisie have met and served as a discursive core where public opinion was expressed and through which public sphere developed. Habermas further identifies four “institutional criteria” which are essential for the emergence of the new public sphere, which are the disregard of status, rational argument, domain of common concerns and the inclusivity. In this regard, Habermas (1989: 27) maintains that:

**the new bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor.**

It has to be understood that Habermas does not mean to suggest that what made the public sphere Bourgeois is simply the class composition of its members. Rather it was society that was Bourgeois, and Bourgeois society produced a certain form of public sphere. Habermas develops his ideas on the observations that new civic societies evolved during the Renaissance in Western Europe and the United States of America due to specific socio-economic and cultural circumstances.

### **1.3 Approaches to Public Opinion**

#### **1.3.1 Lippmann, Tönnies, Habermas**

Public Opinion describes the dominant opinions around certain topics of general interests or specific interest like politics, sports, and economics in a society. These special interests are often from interest to partial publics which differ from the general

## Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere

public. In this vein, Lippmann (1922: 253) highlights that:

**since Public Opinion is supposed to be the prime mover in democracies, one might reasonably expect to find a vast literature. One does not find it. There are excellent books on government and parties, that is, on the machinery which in theory registers public opinions after they are formed. But on the sources from which these public opinions arise, on the processes by which they are derived there is relatively little.**

In 1922 Tönnies has published significant analysis on public opinion in Germany. Unfortunately at that time, there were little connection between American and German scholars with the effect that the theoretical approaches from Tönnies and Lippmann were not able to influence each other and the academic research around the topic of public opinion was scarce until later researchers such as Habermas and others were able to build on the foundation of the theoretical basis by Tönnies and Lippmann. According to Habermas (1989: 219) the general public opinion is a result of democratization in modern history, as the following statement demonstrates:

**Publicity was, according to its very idea, a principle of democracy not because anyone could in principle announce, with equal opportunity, his personal inclinations, wishes, and convictions – opinions; it could only be realized in the measure that these personal opinions could evolve through the rational-critical debate of a public into public opinion.**

Henceforth, Public opinion in the Habermasian sense is more than the sum of all opinions of all individuals in a society. It is based on the rational-critical debate among individuals who themselves have to be interested and engaged in topics of interest to form their proper opinion.

Criticism for Habermas' theory of public opinion was expressed by various authors, although often from an ideologically fixed position. The most valuable criticism came from Nikolas Luhmann, arguing from the perspective of systems



## **Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere**

theory, who over the course of decades had ongoing conversations with Habermas which were very influential for the further development of Habermas' theory. Although Luhmann's premise agrees with Habermas, who pursues the question of how and to what extent the concept and function of public opinion have changed.

### **1.3.2 Luhmann's Systems Theory**

According to Luhmann (1995), society is the sum of all communication and systems within individuals. There is a great variety of different systems, like the political, the religious, and the economic systems. Communications are the operations of systems in society. To further clarify this model Luhmann introduces the term environment which is everything that is not part of a specific system.

Communication in a system is reduced to limit amount of information available in the environment. This reduction of complexity is based on meaning (in German, Sinn). Based on this characteristics, every system has developed an identity, based on what is meaningful and what not, that is constantly used in the system's communication. If a system fails to maintain its identity, it breaks apart and dissolves back into the environment, a process Luhmann calls autopoiesis. Luhmann's model of systems theory stands in contrast to other models, like the differentiation between politics and society by Hegel, or a simplified “politics, economic ,social system” model that is often been used.

In Luhmann's systems, the orypublic opinion is a form of structural coupling between the two systems of politics and mass media. These systems develop collectively obligatory decisions by improving their chances of consensus. Mass media has a preference for conflicts with the result that communication about conflict usually leads to ideology. According to Luhmann, mass media creates the topics that politics are going to treat. Because of the amount of information that is diffused via mass media, an individual observation of the environment is no longer necessary. News, announcements, and reports are observations of observers. This indirect nature of topics can have many levels.

## Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere

### **1.4 Theories of the Public Sphere and the Culture Industry**

#### **1.4.1 The Bourgeois Public Sphere**

Habermas “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere” was originally published in 1962. Its first English translation came to daylight more than 30 years later. This volume used the concept of public sphere in reference to all the places and events which accommodate critical and reasoned discourse, that is where participants put their reason to public use, to formulate a common public opinion, and thus to reflect on and to legitimate the operations of a government. The Structural Transformation is about the history of this public sphere present a theory that is at the same time a narrative story.

The story of the real public sphere begins, according to Habermas, in the eighteenth century. Prior to that, in the middle ages, no meaningful public sphere could exist, what could have been termed "public sphere" of the Feudalism of the middle ages was a sphere of representation, a social place where ruling classes of the society could present the symbols that were supposed to legitimate their most certainly undemocratic rule. A public sphere in the modern sense of the word could not exist not least because of the lack of privacy, it is a crucial point in Habermas theory that the notions of public and private presuppose one another, but under the regime of Feudalism, there was no real distinction between these two categories, everyone being merely a link in the feudal chain, representing the ownership of the land. (Habermas 1989:10–25.)

This changed by the 18th century, with a combination of the development of early capitalism, technologies such as mass printing and transportation, the weakening of the role of the church, and the strengthening of the Bourgeoisie, originally referring to the layer of society whose members gained wealth and power because of their trade and profession, not because they were born into Aristocratic families.

In Germany, Britain and France, it was the members of the educated Bourgeoisie, property owning, white males that according to Habermas, could experience a hitherto

## Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere

unknown type of subjectivity, and through this develop a certain self-awareness, a reflexive group identity, which made it possible for them to act as a public. This public, for the first time in history, could act as a social and political force that could articulate collective political demands against the old estates and the states. Importantly, Habermas makes a distinction between the cultural and the political public spheres, the former being the place where the audience oriented subjectivity and reflexive group identity could develop, and the latter being the place where these forces were put to political use (Habermas, idem).

Members of this public would convene in various settings, for example in French salons, British coffee houses and at the meetings of German reading societies, they would discuss about public matters, phrase their own thoughts about the desired ways of organizing state affairs, had these thoughts published in letters and in newspapers, and as a result of this intellectual activity, combined with the growing economic weight of the Bourgeoisie, the concept of modern democratic nation states could be born.

The connection of democracy and public sphere is crucial. One cannot exist without the other. If democracy means exercising the power of the state in line with the will of the citizens, then there needs to be some kind of a public opinion that would represent the general interest of the people, and that would guide those who make decisions in the name of the state. And it is in the debates and discussions of the public sphere that this general interest is crystallized. **It is the public sphere that could rationally justify the political domination of a few people over an entire state** (Habermas ibid: 180).

Moreover, at the birth of the public sphere stakes were high, because the initial question was not what is the general interest of the citizens? But rather "**Should the general interest of the citizens replace the interest of the aristocratic ruling class in exercising power?**" (Habermas ibid: 28). The Bourgeoisie represented the general interest in that it promoted the values of the Enlightenment (equality, freedom, justice, comfort and solidarity). Habermas pointed that democracy is naturally preferable to

## Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere

practising state power without reference to the will of the citizens. The link between the public sphere and democracy also means that a democratic public is necessarily a discursive public or that a public is not merely a bunch of people together, without interaction, a public is a public because of the communication of its members; it is more than a mere sum of the parts. (Habermas *ibid*: 21.)

The golden age of the Bourgeois public sphere did not last long. Perhaps it was a natural development that it had to compromise itself. Capitalism became more aggressive affecting more and more areas of everyday life, and, partly in order to counter the negative effects of such a development, partly in order to provide more and more services such as education or social security insurance, nation states interfered more and more with private lives of the citizens. The role of the institutions of employment also grew, coming to represent something that is between the private and public spheres, and therefore the crucial dividing line between private and public became blurred. One could say, it simply lost its original importance at least from the point of view of the original Bourgeois public sphere, because once democracies were established and the idea of monarchies and hereditary ruling seemed to fade into the past, there was no need to fight for them any more. What becomes a given can no longer be a force to propel change in a society ( Habermas, *idem*).

In addition, as democracy became generally accepted, the Bourgeoisie, also beset by fragmentation and internal differences of opinion, lost its exclusive role: if democracy meant public participation in the political domination, then working classes wanted to take part, too as well as other groups of the society most importantly women. The public became more and more fragmented, first only in that more and more groups of people gained voting rights, and later in the course of history in the sense that various groups, usually tagged as "new social movements," such as feminist, gay or ethnic right movements, gave proof of their self- consciousness and demanded recognition beyond voting rights ( Habermas, *idem*).

As a result of this fragmentation, and the blurring of the private public distinction, the public sphere became once again refeudalized, meaning that it once

## Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere

again became a public sphere of empty representation, as Habermas (ibid: 25) states:

**This refeudalization means closed doors politics (a system in which parties seek popularity so that they get into power, but once there, they make important decisions behind closed doors, without referring to the discourse of the public sphere and possibly without following the general interest of the populace), the misinterpretation of public opinion, and the public sphere becoming a sphere of advertising.**

In other words, even if the formalities of democracy are maintained, this does not legitimate the rule of the leading few. On the contrary, those abusing their power can hide behind the fact that this power was acquired through formally perfectly democratic procedures. In addition, while in the case of the Bourgeois public sphere the activity of reading literature was seen as a way to develop and cherish an independent, individual subjectivity, in the new public sphere, the cultivation of subjectivity in works of art is no longer appreciated, thanks to the commercialization of the culture industry (Habermas, idem).

### **1.4.2 The Theory of Communicative Action**

Responding to criticism of its original theory, Habermas made some adjustments to it most importantly, admitting that his original notion of the public sphere, focusing solely on members of the Bourgeoisie, was both idealized and too restrictive (Habermas 1992). But he also presented a new, much less historical theory about the legitimitative powers of unrestricted communication: the theory of communicative action.

The theory of communicative action starts from a simple question: how can secular, non-sacred domination be legitimated? Why do people accept others as genuine rulers or leaders, if these leaders cannot legitimate their rule with supernatural concepts such as being direct descendant of gods or having been given power by God?

## Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere

The standard answer to this question had been, for many important scholars, that in modern societies the morality of laws is transformed into "**externally imposed law**"(Habermas 1987: 80). In other words, if people abide by laws, that is because they are forced to do so by the state.

But Habermas rather supports the idea of Émile Durkheim: Durkheim proposed that secular law can be accepted as legitimate because of an unspoken agreement among members of the society, that states that rulers will follow the best interest of the society. This common interest is, in Habermas' understanding, by no means the sum of, or a compromise between people's individual interests; instead, it is reflective on them. This common interest is distilled, or communicatively shaped and discursively clarified in the public sphere. This is what explains the importance of the public sphere: it serves as a proof of legitimacy of political domination, as Habermas (ibid: 82) highlights:

**The unity of the collectivity can be established and maintained only as the unity of a communication community, that is to say, only by way of a consensus arrived at communicatively in the public sphere.**

The fact that makes such a consensus possible is that, according to Habermas, speech acts are always potentially rational. This rationality means that whoever is communicating is capable of arguing for their best interest. Every act of meaningful social interaction in an undistorted situation could be described as steps of communicative action in order to establish a mutual understanding between the participants, with rational claims about their respective best interests. The key to democracy is the equality that is offered by the universally human, universally equal faculty of language (Habermas, idem).

The theory of communicative action distinguishes between two great social spheres in modern societies: life world and the economic administrative system. Life world refers to "life as it should be lived:" it comprises of all the rational,

## Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere

"communicatively structured" spheres of life, all the social interactions where communicative action is practised. The life world is even less tangible concept than the public sphere: **“it is a loose, unorganized sphere that refers to instances of communicative action taking place in an ideal society”**. (Habermas 1989: 319) In the original volume introducing the theory of communicative action, the public sphere is incorporated **"in an unspecified manner" in the life world** (Malmberg 2006: 5), however, Habermas himself returned to the issue.

In contrast to the life world stands the economic administrative system, the invisible and intangible construct of power in a society. The aim of the system is to maintain the stability of, and to reproduce society. As this vein, Habermas (1987: 319) highlights the following:

**These relations describe how labour is offered from the individual to the uses of the system, which, in return, provides the individual's income and so, a person's private sphere becomes partly dominated by the system.**

The system is made up of the economic and administrative, efficient organization of actions, and all the rules and actions that derive from this organization. Ideally, the life world and the system would form a society together, and the connection between them could be described in terms of exchange of money and power.

The latest development is the colonization of the life world by the system, which is showed by Habermas (ibid: 325) as follows:

**The communication practice of everyday life is one-sidedly rationalized into a utilitarian lifestyle. As the private sphere is undermined by the economic system, so too is the public sphere by the administrative system. The bureaucratic disempowering and desiccation of spontaneous processes of opinion and will-formation expands the scope for engineering mass loyalty and**

## Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere

**makes it easier to uncouple political decision making from concrete, identity-forming contexts of life.**

The system lacks the reflexivity of the communicative action. Political and economic decisions get disconnected from the life world, but because it is in the life world that communicative action is practiced, this means that these decisions lose sight of what the best, common interest of the citizens is. In addition, the invasion of the system into areas of the life world also brings about a cultural impoverishment (Habermas, idem).

### **1.4.3 Civil society (in the theory of communicative action)**

Habermas further elaborated the concept of the public sphere in the light of the life world and the system in his 1996 book *Between Facts and Norms*. **"Public sphere is a communication structure rooted in the life world through the associational network of civil society"** (ibid, 360). Habermas (ibid, 359) writes, that it is not a single institution or organization:

**The public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view; the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions. Like the life world as a whole, so, too, the public sphere is reproduced through communicative action.**

This definition points to another concept that is of great importance in trying to see the public sphere as not an abstract, theoretical construct, but an empirically existing phenomenon. This concept is that of civil society. As Dahlgren (1995: 151) puts it: **"all of civil society is not equivalent to the public sphere, but civil society constitutes the settings for the interactional dimension of the public sphere"**.



## Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere

In the same vein Habermas (2004: 367) highlights the following:

**Civil society is composed of those more or less spontaneously emergent associations, organizations and movements that, attuned to how societal problems resonate in the private life spheres, distill and transmit such reactions in amplified form to the public sphere. The core of civil society comprises a network of associations that institutionalizes problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest inside the framework of organized public spheres.**

An important part of civil society is made up of the so called "new social movements:" movements that are alarmed by the colonization of the life world by the system, and that try to directly influence the political system and to revitalize and enlarge civil society and the public sphere (Habermas, idem).

The spontaneity of the organization of civil society also gives an insight into what the single and unified public sphere means for Habermas (ibid: 374) as the following statement shows:

**Public sphere in practice does not mean that public discourse is always, everywhere about the same issues. Different groups of people meet in different conditions and have different conversations; for example, the audience of a rock concert might not have anything in common with a think-tank of economists. But the different discourses of these different publics are porous to one another, they all represent different aspects of the same basic issues, the one text of the public sphere is divided by**

## Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere

**internal boundaries into arbitrarily small texts for which everything else is context.**

This is a much looser interpretation of the concept of the single public sphere than the one that could be understood from Habermas earlier works. It also evades the modern vs postmodern debate, there is only one meaningful Public Sphere, but it does not mean an exclusion of other public spheres, because the Public Sphere is the complex cooperation of all the particular public spheres, and all of these public spheres are relevant as long as they are intelligible to one another, but none of them represents the Public Sphere in itself (Habermas, idem).

An institution that contributes immensely to the cooperation of the public spheres as well as to the operation of the civil society and the state is the mass media. Habermas remained uncertain about the effects of the mass media domination.

Nevertheless that the media represents a certain information inequality, where a small group of people such as media experts, programme directors and representatives of the press in general can decide what topics the public spheres should focus on and discuss about. This could also be seen as a sign of the decoupling of the life world and the economic system.

### **1.5 Critical Reflections on Habermas**

#### **1.5.1 Nancy Fraser and ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere’**

The critical feminist Nancy Fraser is arguably the ‘mother’ of neo-Habermasian public sphere theory. In “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” (1992), a mere three years after *Structural Transformation* was published in English, she laid out the solid foundations upon which a host of other theorists have built. In it, she recognises the public sphere as an **“indispensable resource” for democratic theory** (ibid: 109), but contends that the specific form in which Habermas has elaborated this idea is not wholly satisfactory. Drawing upon the alternative histories of Landes, Ryan, and the previously discussed historical criticisms that they inform, Fraser attempts to answer the consequential

## Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere

question of whether the Habermasian public sphere is best seen as “**an instrument of domination or a utopian ideal**” (Fraser 1992: 117). Her answer is that it is neither; it is a valuable concept that is simply predicated on erroneous assumptions, and as such should be reconstructed rather than jettisoned. This call to action is the critical engine of this thesis, and her theory provides the backbone for the generation of the neo-Habermasian framework.

### **1.6 Culture Industry: Theory and Critique**

The theory of the culture industry has been developed by Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, two philosophers that escaped the Nazi Germany for being persecuted because of their Jewish origin. It was most probably the booming capitalism and increased capitalization of the entertainment industry of the United States that inspired their ideas; main arguments of their original theory can be summed up as follows (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1999).

Culture under the umbrella term "entertainment" has become a line of business. This fact has even become its own ideology, as if it offered an excuse for the rubbish [it] deliberately produces. The operations of this particular line of business are tied to economies of scale, it is profitable to employ technologies of mass production, and cater for the largest audience possible, instead of producing smaller amounts of product that are possibly better crafted. Culture has also become tied to, and reliant on, other industries, such as the electricity industry or banking and finance.

The theory of the culture industry must have influenced Habermas when he conceptualized the contemporary public sphere as the public sphere of advertising, as he (1989: 165) confirms in the following statement:

**He is speaking of a "dumbing down" of products of the culture industry, so as they are easily accessed by the biggest possible audiences. "Mass culture [...] achieves increased sales by adapting to the need for relaxation and entertainment on the part of consumer**

## Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere

**strata with relatively little education, rather than through guidance of an enlarged public towards the appreciation of a culture undamaged in its substance".**

However, he also notes how the capitalization of culture helped the access to valuable, deep, substantial works:: **"Through paperback series printed in large editions, a relatively small stratum of readers educated or ready to be educated have high quality literature made available to them"** (Habermas *ibid*: 166–167).

In summary, a critical review of Adorno's and Horkheimer's theory sees the term "culture industries" more suitable than "culture industry" (in the singular), because the phenomena that it refers to are complex, ambivalent and contested. Culture industries today cannot be described simply by deploring everything they produce as output, as it also would be a mistake to suppose a general, overarching, all-encompassing ideology behind every single aspect of these industries, serving but one purpose" capitalist domination"( Habermas, *idem*). This of course does not mean that capitalist domination could not be one of the purposes, should one suppose that the culture industry is a single entity following the business interests of a "power elite." For sure, industries involved in the production of cultural products seem to be capable of helping the discursive construction of legitimizing, soft power.

### **1.7 Conclusion**

This chapter was devoted to explore a very concept which is related to the concept of opinion, this term which needs deep study to get the core. Therefore public opinion was tackled by dealing with approaches and the different theories. Furthermore, many scholars and researchers discussed the idea of public sphere relating it to the Bourgeois society. The public sphere was developed by those Bourgeoisies who were meeting discussing public topics issues and concerns. This chapter also explored that public sphere which created the basis for public opinion that

## **Chapter One: Public Opinion and Public Sphere**

is a sum of all opinions of individuals who are interested in topics of interests.

All in all, the public sphere that leads to the formation of public opinion is a powerful basis where rational dialogue built between citizens and between citizens and the state. Therefore, this public opinion needs a public service broadcasting to be spread all over.

# **Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting**

<b>2.1.</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>2.2.</b>	<b>The Public Sphere.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>2.3.</b>	<b>Public Sphere and Public Service Media.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>2.4.</b>	<b>Types of System and Public Service Media.....</b>	<b>30</b>
	<b>2.4.1 Social Devolutionary .....</b>	<b>30</b>
	<b>2.4.2. Liberal Corporativist.....</b>	<b>31</b>
	<b>2.4.3 Public Service .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>2.5.</b>	<b>Changes of Public Service Broadcasting.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>2.6</b>	<b>Key Reasons for the Crisis of Public Service Broadcasting.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>2.7.</b>	<b>Technological Change.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>2.8</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>41</b>

## **Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Jürgen Habermas seminal *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989; German original published in 1962) provides a basis for discussions of the public sphere/s in contemporary societies. In the following I attempt to summarize Habermas' thesis and place it within the framework of recent debates on the public sphere and media, our aim is to draw attention to the role that Habermas attributed to mass media in the disintegration of the public sphere and to discuss whether he understands mass media as playing any other than a negative/destructive role in relation to the public sphere.

### **2.2 The Public Sphere**

In his historical narrative informed by the Frankfurt School tradition Habermas traces the development of the Bourgeois public sphere and its consequent transformation. According to him, the bourgeois public sphere reached its peak in the early to mid-19th century; Habermas argues that the public sphere emerged as a space in which private individuals came together as a public to use their own reason to discuss the power of the state. The bourgeois public sphere thus came into existence as a result of struggle against despotic states. The development of competitive market capitalism led to the creation of institutions within civil society that occupied a space distinct from both the economy and the state. These institutions included newspapers, debating societies, salons and coffee houses. Although Habermas understands the bourgeois public sphere of the early 19th century as an ideal model, a peak of rational discussion, he identifies problems with its universalism. To be part of the public at the time meant to belong to the property-owning class and to be literate. Habermas also points out that the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere went together with an institutionalization of privateness, with the constitution of a clear distinction between public and private.



## Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting

With the height of laissez-faire capitalism the public sphere underwent significant, and according to Habermas detrimental, changes. The decline of the public sphere is connected with rapid social developments, industrialization, urbanization, growth of literacy and popular press and other related factors. These changes, to use Dahlgren's (1991:4) summary, resulted in **“a blurring of the distinction between public and private in political and economic affairs, a rationalization and shrinking of the private intimate sphere (family life) and the gradual shift from an (albeit limited) public of political and cultural debaters to a public of mass consumers.”** The mutual penetration of state and society (which Habermas terms refeudalization) dissolved a private sphere, also the basis for a relatively homogeneous public composed of private citizens engaged in a rational-critical debate was threatened and competing organized private interests invaded the public sphere. The rational-critical debate that characterized the Bourgeois public sphere at its peak was replaced by consumption (or such a debate is entirely shaped by the media) and for Habermas it continues to exist as a public sphere in appearance only. Further changes in the public sphere followed with the emergence of the welfare state. Habermas argues that public opinion is no longer the result of rational debate but the outcome of media engineering. The public sphere has become a platform for advertising and the press has become mere trade. In order to restore the function of the public sphere, Habermas proposes a discourse-centered theory of democracy, according to which a majority decision must be a **“rationally motivated but fallible result of a discussion concerning the judicious resolution of a problem, a discussion that has come temporarily to a close because coming to a decision could no longer be postponed”** (1997: 450). Thus a political public sphere would be characterized by at least two crosscutting processes: communicative generation of legitimate power and a deployment of media power to procure mass loyalty, consumer.

Habermas identifies a particular problem which is a consequence of the conflation of journalism and literature and results in conjuring a peculiar reality, even a conflation of different levels of reality: **“instead of doing justice to reality, [journalism] has a tendency to present a substitute more palatable for consumption and more likely to give rise to an impersonal indulgence in**

## **Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting**

**stimulating relaxation than to a public use of reason”** (1989: 170). However bleak this picture may seem, it was to get worse with the emergence of radio and television, as the following statement by Habermas (ibid, 171) declares:

**With the arrival of new media [radio and television] the form of communication as such has changed; they have had an impact, therefore, more penetrating (in the strict sense of the word) than was ever possible for the press. Under the pressure of the “Don’t talk back!” the conduct of the public assumes a different form. In comparison with printed communications the programs sent by the new media curtail the reactions of their recipients in a peculiar way.**

Habermas (ibid: 171) declares that they draw the eyes and ears of the public under their spell but at the same time, by taking away its distance, place it under “tutelage,” which is to say they deprive it of the opportunity to say something and to disagree. The critical discussion of the reading public tends to give way to “exchanges about tastes and preferences” between consumers, even the talk about what is consumed, “the examination of tastes,” becomes part of consumption itself.

In more concrete terms Habermas identifies the degree of economic concentration and technological organizational co-ordination in media as a threat to the critical functions of publicist institutions. Due to the high degree of concentration, governments often opted for putting media under public control rather than private ownership, as Habermas (ibid: 188) points out:

**Thus the original basis of the publicist institutions, at least in their most advanced sectors, became practically reversed. According to the liberal model of the public sphere, the institutions of the public engaged in rational-critical debate were protected from interference**

## Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting

**by public authority by virtue of their being in the hands of private people.**

Habermas concept of the Bourgeois public sphere and its transformation has been criticised mainly on three grounds (Dahlgren, 1991, Garnham, 1990, Fraser, 1993). Firstly, although Habermas admits the exclusionary nature of the Bourgeois public sphere in terms of class, he omits the question of gender altogether. Secondly, he remains silent on alternative public spheres. In this respect, the work of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (Jameson, 1993) provides an interesting comparison, with their notion of a proletarian counter-public sphere. However, Polan (1993) convincingly argues that Negt and Kluge tend to idealise this counter-public sphere similarly to Habermas idealisation of the Bourgeois public sphere. And finally, as Dahlgren (1991: 1) points out, Habermas Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere is characterised by an **“absence of reference to the complexities and contradictions of meaning production”** as well as **“to the concrete social settings and cultural resources at work”**

Habermas (1997: 438) himself acknowledges that some of his arguments need revision and in particular that his diagnosis of a unilinear development from a politically active public to one withdrawn into a bad privacy, from a culture-debating to a culture-consuming public is too simplistic. Yet, he maintains that the Bourgeois public sphere as it existed in the early nineteenth century provides an ideal model, arguing that a single political public sphere that is built on the principles of communicative action can serve contemporary societies.

### **2.3 Public Sphere and Public Service Media**

Keane (1995: 3) suggests that in contemporary societies **“the public sphere ideal is linked to the institution of public service broadcasting, which is seen to have an elective affinity with public life and to be the best guarantee of its survival in the era of state-organized, consumer capitalism”**. Carpignano et al (1993: 93) argue that in the debates about mass media, politics and the public sphere **“there is a common ground, a mutual acceptance of basic premises, shared by**

## **Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting**

**participating politicians, conservative ideologues, and leftist cultural critics. Its unquestionable truism is that the mass media today are the public sphere and that this is the reason for the degradation of public life if not its disappearance”.** Husband(1998: 136) argues that mass media are **“a core element in civil society and a fundamental prerequisite for the promotion of civic trust in complex multi-ethnic societies”**.

In classical liberal theory, media are understood as crucial in providing the space between government and society in which private individuals exercise formal and informal control over the state: **“formal control through the election of governments and informal through the pressure of public opinion”** (Curran, 1991:29). The media plays a central role in this process as it distributes information as well as facilitates the formation of public opinion and provides an independent forum for debate.

### **2.4 Types of System and Public Service Media**

#### **2.4.1 Social Devolutionary**

We find this type for example in Italy and the Netherlands, according to McQuail (1992) it can be characterised by external diversity, for example. Various channels or time blocks are allocated to various interest groups within the society. To make the example clearer, we provide a brief description of the Dutch public broadcasting system which reflects the Dutch social system that can be summarized in one word: pillarization. In this VeinBrants and McQuail (1997: 154) highlight:

**Dutch society between the beginning of the twentieth century and the mid-1960s (and notably the first 20 years after the Second World War) was a principal example of ‘segmented pluralism’, with social movements, educational and communication systems, voluntary associations and political parties organized vertically (and often cross-cutting through social**

## Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting

**strata) along the lines of religious and ideological cleavages**

The Dutch public broadcasting system works on the principle of allocating access to associations with different outlooks and priorities. According to the law” **a broadcasting association should aim, as laid down in its statutes, to represent some clearly stated societal, cultural, religious or philosophical stream and to direct itself in its programming to the satisfaction of some actively present social, cultural, religious or philosophical needs**” (McQuail, 1992:100). Added to that McQuail( *ibid*: 101) argues that the idea of diversity as expressed in the Dutch broadcasting system mainly relates **“to an ‘external’ and exclusive diversity in which different ‘voices’ and outlooks have their own separate channels, rather than to the more commonly encountered ‘internal’ diversity, according to which all tastes are catered for by channels serving large, heterogeneous audiences”**. In practice, **“the allocation of broadcasting time was based on the number of members and/or subscribers to the broadcasting magazines produced by the different organizations”** (Brants and McQuail, 1997:155). Dutch public service broadcasting is financed by licence fee, advertising and membership dues and magazine subscription. Commercial broadcasting was legalized in 1990.

### **2.4.2 Liberal Corporatist**

This type exists for example in Norway, Finland, Denmark and Germany, the basic principle is to ensure the participation of various interest groups in the supervisory and regulatory organs which is understood as a guarantee of diversity. In Germany the responsibility for broadcasting lies with the states of the Federal Republic, **these results “in a uniquely decentralized broadcasting system with production centers in every region of the country”** (Kleinstauber, 1997:85). All broadcasting corporations are governed by an independent broadcasting council whose representatives are supposed to **“reflect the ‘socially relevant groups’ of society”** (Kleinstauber, *ibid*:87). The representatives are either elected in the parliament or are delegated by various groups (including political parties, churches and labour organizations). Despite these provisions political parties have been able to

## **Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting**

gain influence in the Broadcasting Councils because **“German parties are relatively strong in all segments of the political and social system and penetrate practically all of the ‘socially relevant groups’”** (Kleinstauber, idem). In the mid-1980s commercial competition challenged the public broadcasting system and a dual system was established. Private broadcasting is regulated by special licensing and supervisory institutions. Public service broadcasting is mainly financed by a monthly licence fee and advertising revenues (limited to twenty minutes each weekday).

### **2.4.3 Public Service**

This type is characterised by a high degree of internal diversity, for example the needs of various interest groups are catered for by a large scale of programmes on the same channels. This system is typical, for example, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The United Kingdom has a highly centralised communications system. Public service media are guided by the principles of high quality programming with a diversity of contents and general accessibility. Public service broadcasting in the United Kingdom tends to be central and national. Independent television companies run local television channels. The British Broadcasting Corporation is regulated by a Board of Governors, consisting of amateur regulators appointed by the government of the day. The BBC is required to commission twenty five per cent of its programming from independent producers. It is financed by a licence fee and its Royal Charter has to be periodically renewed. Commercial television was introduced in the United Kingdom in 1955 with the establishment of the Independent Television network. **“In Britain commercial television adopted the traditions of a public broadcast service. It was modelled to redress weaknesses in the BBC, to make broadcasting more sensitive to popular taste, to promote regional culture and to oppose Londonism”** (Coleman and Rollet, ibid:23). In 1990 the duopolistic arrangements came to an end with the deregulation of the Independent Television network.

## **2.5 Changes of Public Service Broadcasting**

## Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting

There appears to be a prevalent notion that public service broadcasting is going through a crisis, or at least significant changes. Garnham argues that **“our inherited structures of public communication, those institutions within which we construct, distribute and consume symbolic forms, are undergoing a profound change”** (1990:105). This change is characterised by the ever increasing power of the market, by a focus on television as an increasingly privatised, domestic mode of consumption, by the increasing gap between the information rich and the information poor and the shift from national to international markets in the informational and cultural spheres. Keane (1991) argues that there are three principal reasons for the decline of public service broadcasting: fiscal squeeze, legitimacy problems and technological change. He argues that to treat the current public service media as **“a bulwark of freedom against the confusions and limitations of commercial media”** is highly problematic, just as it is problematic to think of public service media **“as the paragon of quality, balance and universal accessibility. “The public service claim to representativeness is a defence of virtual representation of a fictive whole, a resort to programming which simulates the actual opinions and tastes of some of those to whom it is directed”** (1991:122). Garnham argues that public service broadcasting is characterized by a **“failure sufficiently to distinguish between two communicative functions within the public sphere: the collection and dissemination of information, and the provision of a forum for debate”** (ibid: 111). Murdock (1992: 31), draws attention to consequences for citizens when he writes that the current public discourses, has produced a crisis in the relations between public broadcasting and the viewer-as-citizen. This crisis in representation is exacerbated by the increasing tension between broadcasters, state agencies and government broadcasting system failed to keep pace with the proliferation of political and social.

### **2.6 Key Reasons for the Crisis of Public Service Broadcasting**

Hall identifies four key reasons for the crisis of public service broadcasting: technological, economic, political and social. The technological justification of the existence of public service broadcasting is no longer understood as valid by many,

## Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting

further, Hall points out that we live in an economic and political climate of a wholesale assault on **“the very idea of a ‘public sector’**”(1993: 26-27) amidst the growing social diversity of the audience and **“the consequent pluralisation of cultural authority, which makes it increasingly difficult for broadcasters to see society as ‘a public’ at all or to speak to it as if it were still part of a homogeneous, unified national culture”** (ibid:28). Raboy (1996: 2) alerts that **“problems of financing, mandate, and interpretations of purpose are all indications of a more fundamental problem of political will”**. He (ibid: 4) goes on to argue that in relation to the broader policy framework **“the principal normative question will remain: What should be the public function of broadcasting in a democracy?”**In the same vein Garnham (1986: 39) makes the significant point that **“the public service, state-regulated model, whether publicly or privately funded, has in effect always been seen, not as a positive good but as an unfortunate necessity imposed by the technical limitations of frequency scarcity”**.

Carpignano (1998: 96) relates the crisis of public service broadcasting, among other factors, to **“a crisis of legitimacy of news as a social institution in its role of dissemination of information about and interpretation of events (i.e., the social construction of public life)”**. Curran (1998: 175) gives a concise summary of Katz’s arguments about the decline of television as public broadcasting. Firstly, Katz suggests, the multiplication of television channels results in a fragmentation of the public thus **“television has all but ceased to function as a shared public space. Except for occasional media events, the nation no longer gathers together<sup>1</sup>”**. Secondly, civic communication is exchanged for high rating programs due to **“the combined constraints of the new media technology, the new liberal mood, the economic and political burden of public broadcasting, and the seduction of multinational corporation<sup>2</sup>”**. Finally, liberal democracy itself is endangered due to the growing separation between the television system and the nation state and the presumed weakening of national identities because it is in nation states where liberal

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<sup>1</sup>As quoted in Curran (1998: 175).

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in Curran (idem).



## Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting

democracy is practised and national identification is crucial in maintaining involvement in the democratic project.

Underlying this argument appears to be a notion that maintaining national unity is a desirable objective. Bulck (2001: 54) alerts us to the crucial role of media in the nation building project

**In looking at the role of the media in creating a certain uniformity within the nation-state, we are in essence looking at the process of nation-building, and at how the media are consciously brought into play to construct a “national” culture and a “national” community. Nation-states must have a measure of common culture and civic ideology, a set of common understandings and aspirations, sentiments and ideas, that bind the population together in their homeland.**

Bulck follows the same line of argument when stating that the system of public service broadcasting can be described as a typical and vital modern institution which played a crucial role in the modern process of nation building. She applies this to the case of Flemish public service broadcasting and demonstrates that it was given **“the task of contributing to the creation and development of a national identity and culture. As such it had a threefold responsibility: education (as an extension of the national educational system), information (to create a political consciousness) and entertainment (to articulate a national culture)”** (ibid:57). In this respect attention needs to be drawn to Hall’s identification of one of the threats to public service broadcasting: **“on the basis of what cultural authority can a public service organisation speak to the nation?”** (Hall, 1993:31). He (idem) goes on to argue that broadcasting has a major

**perhaps the critical role – to play in this “re-imagining of the nation”: not by seeking to**

## Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting

**reimpose a unity and homogeneity which has long since departed, but by becoming the open space, the “theatre” in this which cultural diversity is produced, displayed and represented, and the “forum” in which the terms of its associative life together are negotiated. ... This cultural negotiation about the terms on which the centralised culture of the nation can be reconstituted on more openly pluralistic lines, remains broadcasting’s key “public cultural” role – and one which cannot be sustained unless there is a public service idea and a system shaped in part by public service objectives to sustain it.**

However, arguments relating to the role of public service media in nation building or the promotion of coherence should not only address the issue of inclusion in the mediated nation but also the equally crucial question of exclusion. The question of exclusion from public spheres is a central one as states by Fraster (1993: 140) **“public discursive arenas are among the most important and under recognized sites in which social identities are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed”**.

It is important to remind that the establishment of public service broadcasting was not linked only to spectrum scarcity and an understanding of the spectrum as a public good but also to the view that broadcasting should not be part of the new publicity system for consumerism but should provide resources for citizenship, should provide the kind of information, spaces for debate that people needed in order to participate fully in the new political process

In this respect it is worthwhile discussing issues of citizenship and broadcasting. Murdock (1992: 21) argues that there are three important ways in which the communications system is implicated in the constitution of citizenship:

## **Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting**

- 1. The communications system provides access to information that is related to personal rights;**
- 2. it enables access to information, interpretation and debate on areas that involve public political choices and**
- 3. citizens recognize themselves and their aspirations in the range of representations on offer within the central communications sectors and are enabled to contribute to the development and extension of these representations.**

According to him public broadcasting played four key roles in organizing the new system of representation which aimed at extending citizenship rights. It enabled a public forum where platforms of the major political parties and legitimated interest groups were presented and packaged for consumption by the public at large. Further, it provided a new source of surveillance and feedback to those in power as well as creating associations between ideals of citizenship and definitions of the nation and its culture. It also redrew the boundary between the public and private spheres.

Curran (1998) points out similar issues when arguing for a rethinking of the rationale of public service broadcasting and the reform of its actual practice and organization. In addition, Curran argues, there is a need for a revision of the objectives of public service broadcasting in Britain which would foster a change in its style of journalism.

This is still profoundly influenced by a civil service/professional model which stresses the disinterested mediation of information, the imparting of knowledge and the impartial umpiring of differences of legitimate opinion. It is a mandarin-like conception in which the electorates, the rulers of democracy, are briefed by intelligent and responsible public servants rather than merely entertained by market spectacle (Curran, 1998:195). He (ibid: 196) continuously stating that:

## **Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting**

**This change is especially important as “an over-great stress on legitimated forms of public knowledge and accredited speakers unduly restricts participation in this dialogue. Indeed, this is a constantly repeated refrain of much academic research which suggests that TV news and current affairs is often defined by elite assumptions and sources”**

There is, nonetheless, Curran (idem) suggests, a reform movement within the broadcasting community **“which is intent upon extending social access and expanding the range of voices and views on air”**. Moreover, this reform movement manifests itself in the form of new phone in programs, audience participation formats and access slots.

### **2.7 Technological Change**

In relation to the possibility of creating an overarching space for public discussion the Internet immediately comes to mind. A number of politicians understand new technologies as playing a central role in bringing about social and political change.

In this respect, it is enough to think of Al Gore and Clinton both of whom envision the World Wide Web as a means for a global conversation that would bring about fundamental change. However, as Robins and Webster (1999) point out this argument is flawed as it presents social problems and inequalities in contemporary societies exclusively in terms of a failure to communicate. Murdock and Golding (2004:245) argue that the Internet appealed to politicians because

**As a solution to the problems generated by the accelerating dynamics of marketization and the decline of public welfare systems, it offered several advantages. It was relatively inexpensive in terms of the public investment**

## **Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting**

**required, it offered scope for partnerships with private companies, and it could be presented as a creative and forward-looking response to the inevitability of technologically driven change.**

Keane (1991) as well as TodGitlin (1998) argue that the World Wide Web is possibly providing the means for the creation of an international civil society and increasing the possibilities for a plurality of publics. Yet, as TodGitlin (1998:172) points out, **“there is one problem which the new means of communication do not address and may even worse: the existence of a two-tier society. To those who are information-rich (or information-glutted) shall more information be given”**.

Murdock (2004) draws attention to the fact that exclusion from the Internet is not only the result of the financial costs involved with being connected but also to feelings of incompetence, symbolic exclusion, and the irrelevance of what is currently on offer.

The World Wide Web has been seen as an open, fluid and flexible space that makes direct and immediate contact possible thus facilitating new forms of community in which the basis of social conflict and for that matter difference are overcome. A number of authors have written critically in relation to the utopian notions connected with the Internet. For example, Murdock (2004) points out three problems with the Internet. First of all, access to it remains highly stratified (in terms of income, age and education). Secondly, it segments its audience, and finally, it just like any other branch of the culture industries became an arena for corporate activity. Webster (2002:22) points out that **“what we have here [in the utopian visions of the Internet] is the assumption that quantitative increases transform – in unspecified ways – into qualitative changes in the social system.”** It does not come as a surprise that Habermas<sup>3</sup> remains skeptical of the potential embodied in the Internet:

**Whereas the growth of systems and networks multiplies possible contacts and exchanges of**

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<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Downey and Fenton (2003:189).

## Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting

information, it does not lead per se to the expansion of an intersubjectively shared world and to the discursive interweaving of conceptions of relevance, themes, and contradictions from which political public spheres arise. The consciousness of planning, communicating and acting subjects seems to have simultaneously expanded and fragmented. The publics produced by the Internet remain closed off from one another like global villages.

In relation to broadcasting the most significant development is the advent of digitalisation. According to a dictionary entry (Watson and Hill, 1993: 122) digital communication involves **“a process whereby the transmission of information – letters and numbers, voice, facsimile or video – is coded into discrete on/off electronic signals, in contrast to analogue transmission in which a signal is a measure of time of a continuous flow of electricity.”**

To explain this very rigid definition we outline the implications of digitalisation for television. Digital broadcasting involves the transmission of digital signals to a digital television set; these signals can be broadcast over the air or via cable/satellite. As stated by Jones (2003: 149), **“With its brilliant, high-definition images, CD-quality audio, and the possibility of transmitting multiple programs and information simultaneously, the quality of digital television is a vast improvement over the analogue television that most of us experience today”**.

Digitalisation enables the transmission of more visual information without increasing the broadcast frequency spectrum as data is in a compressed form (the frequency that carried one analogue television channel can carry at least four digital television services and radio and text services.). The introduction of digital television appears to be a matter of the next few years (US by 2007, Sweden by 2008, Australia by 2009, UK by 2010, EU mostly by 2015) and public service broadcasters are expected to lead the way in its implementation (Jones, idem).

## **Chapter Two: Public Service Broadcasting**

### **2.8 Conclusion**

This chapter began with an evaluation of Habermas' concept of the public sphere which exists primarily as a discursive space with a distinctly critical role. Despite the various criticisms related to Habermas' seminal work there are at least three features that are of key importance when assessing public spheres in contemporary societies. Namely: the link between mass media and democracy; material resources required for the public sphere and last but not least the fact that media in their critical role are threatened by both the market as well as the state.

This chapter has also dealt with the presumed crisis of public service broadcasting; even those who object to the term crisis acknowledge that the last decade has brought a serious questioning on the role of public service broadcasting in contemporary democracies.

**Chapter  
Three:  
Internet Net  
Work  
Institution**



<b>3.1.</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>3.2.</b>	<b>Mass Media Communication “The Internet as a Study Case” .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>3.3.</b>	<b>The Importance of Internet.....</b>	<b>45</b>
	<b>3.3.1. The Importance of Media in Contemporary Societies.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>3.4.</b>	<b>The Representation of Democratic Rule through Media.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>3.5.</b>	<b>The social role of the Use of Internet.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>3.6.</b>	<b>Features of Internet Network.....</b>	<b>53</b>
	<b>3.6.1. The Discursive Aspect.....</b>	<b>53</b>
	<b>3.6.2. The Spatial Aspect.....</b>	<b>54</b>
	<b>3.6.3. The Communal Aspect.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>3.7.</b>	<b>The role of mass media.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>3.8.</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>57</b>

## Chapter three: Internet Network Institution

### 3.1 Introduction

The internet network importance sets connections between publics and individuals. This basis, where people could share opinions and sense of responsibility, leads to democracy. Thus, mass Communications are really contributed and pushed the real of Public Opinion and Democracy. In this view, this chapter discusses the importance of the internet network and its contribution in legitimizing a democratic rule. Additionally, it will also focus on the importance and role of mass media in contemporary societies, and on the regulations on it.

### 3.2 Mass Media Communication “Internet as a Study Case”

Habermas downplays the importance of the internet in redemocratizing the public sphere that is shown in the way he addressed the question in a footnote attached to his keynote speech at a conference. In the speech itself, he examined the normative theory of deliberative democracy and a model of public sphere in it, in which model he attributes a key role to the mass media, and especially the national quality newspapers, which would serve as pillars of opinion formation in the public sphere. In contrast, the only positive development he attributes to the internet is that of undermining the censorship of authoritative regimes as it is demonstrated in his speech (2006: 9) as follows:

**In the context of liberal regimes, however, the online debates of web users tend instead to lead to the fragmentation of large mass audiences into a huge number of isolated issue publics. The rise of millions of fragmented chat-rooms across the world endangers only political communication *within* established public spheres, when news groups crystallize around the focal points of print media, e.g., national newspapers and magazines, which are the pillars of national public spheres.**

## Chapter three: Internet Network Institution

Henceforth, Habermas goes so far as saying that online communication had a parasitic role insofar as it could only exist feeding upon the traditional media institution. But grassroots online communication cannot significantly alter the discourse that is created by media professionals; it might help a larger number of opinions to come today light but it cannot decide which issues are relevant and how these issues are framed.

This view of Habermas is criticized for example by Bruns, an advocate of online communicative cooperation. In his part, Bruns claims that the example Habermas used to illustrate the insignificance of online communities is misleading. In his view, there are many citizen news and commentary projects which can be identified all over the web that spread to life independent of the mainstream media.

Addressing the issue of the fragmentation of the public sphere, Bruns underlines

The internet's inherent ability to connect different discussion groups, blogs or any other homepage via the use of hyperlinks. **"To speak of online audiences as fragmented and isolated ignores or rejects the reality that especially online, individual publics are multiply connected both implicitly through shared membership and explicitly through a network of hyperlinks connecting postings right across the boundaries of individual fora"** (Bruns, 2007:12). In his view, an egalitarian decentralization of access does not necessarily fragment debates, because there are effective quality control mechanisms built in the online discussion forums. Information overload has not arrived as networked information has grown, so have the tools available for making sense of it (Bruns, idem).

### **3.3 The Importance of the Internet**

Today the internet becomes as to mean much more than just the connection between computers; it is a very complex package of services, of which the multimedia pages of the World Wide Web are just one example. But even if it was not so, the internet could not be compared to the telephone networks because unlike these latter, the internet can be used as a device of mass communication too. Therefore, the internet is media in the sense that it is a **"transmitter of meanings between an addresser and an addressee"** (Hartley 1996: 3).

## Chapter three: Internet Network Institution

On the other hand, the internet would still exist and fulfill an important task if no messages are transmitted on it, just as smaller computer networks can function, allowing computers to share their resources such as storage or computing capacity. And even when it acts as a transmitter of messages, it is significantly different from other, traditional media. In the case of the press, the television and the radio, the basic technology seems much more intertwined with the message and the use of the appliance itself, there are in fact very limited uses of a TV set or a radio appliance, but the ways people can use the internet are numerous. Some of these uses involve the role of clear "producer" of texts, just like in the case of traditional media, but some do not, for example, one could use the internet solely for the purpose of e-mail. If we look at the internet from the point of usability, it is media and non-media at the same time.

We get to the same conclusion if we look at the internet from the point of view of Nieminen's theory of hegemony. Although the internet might not **“act as an instrument in competition between different elite groups, and it is certainly not part of this competition itself, pursuing the interests of the media elite, because it is not owned by such an elite, but it does provide the public a more or less pluralistic view of society, reflecting differing interests and rendering items for identification for different social and political groups”**(Nieminen, 2000:126). Put shortly, the internet represents some of the qualities of whatever media is, and it seems to have shed others.

It is very important to understand that the ambivalence concerning the internet stems partly from an ambivalence of definitions. While the term internet originally only referred to the actual physical components of the network, nowadays it is used as a synonym for all the services that became available on the network. If we speak of the network itself, it cannot be media any more than a piece of telephone wire, but if we speak of the services, then the internet can indeed act as a media.

### **3.3.1 The Importance of Media in Contemporary Societies**

### Chapter three: Internet Network Institution

Dahlgren underlines the importance of media in contemporary societies. The media is a line of business, and it has to face technological barrier that prevents interactivity or effective feedback from the part of media consumers. This leads to a problem: **"those media institutions which are of most significance for the majority of citizens are to a great extent beyond the reach of citizen practices and interventions. That is the rub: this duality is a central source of tension within the public sphere"** (Dahlgren, 1995: 155).

One way of improving this would be to conceptualize the media as consisting of common and advocacy domains. The common domain is **"where we find for the most part the dominant media, which ideally provide information, debate and opinion for all members of society"**(Dahlgren, idem).Moreover, it is also in the common domain that citizens can cultivate their common identity of being fellow citizens, members of the democracy. Reiterating a thought of Garnham, Dahlgren underlines that **"an important criterion and assumption here is the relative goodness of fit between the geographic boundaries of political entities and the reach of the media to which they correspond"** (Dahlgren, ibid: 156). This idea might just be the key to explain the inability of the internet to actualize its democratizing potential.

The advocacy domain, on the other hand, would be **"the setting for all citizens who wish to pursue special interests, and generate group-based cultural and political interpretations of society"**(Dahlgren, idem). It would provide a communicational channel to alternative public spheres to cultivate their internal discussion and, importantly, to bridge the gap between different public spheres. **"The net result would be multi perspective journalism, which would help counter the prevailing understanding that there is only one version of what constitutes truth or reality and only one way to talk about it"**(Dahlgren, idem).

Dahlgren also notes that the advocacy status of civic media means that they will be portraying the world in ways which may differ from the canons of professional journalism.

## **Chapter three: Internet Network Institution**

### **3.4 The Representation of the Democratic Rule through Media**

Some of the changing mass of information is made up of advertising and sometimes it is not clear at all whether or not a piece of content on the internet is actually advertising, or something else. The internet is about possibilities and breaking down barriers. Similarly, the dividing line between fact and opinion is easily blurred on the internet. Not necessarily in the case of the online representation of conventional media (e.g. the homepage of a newspaper or a television company), but in the case of the works of self-appointed journalists, who are not necessarily forced by any set of conventions, rules or obligations that bound media professionals.

In connection to this, there is also a certain degree of uncertainty considering the reliability of information found on the internet. The precise source of information might be unknown, either in the sense that it is completely unknown, or in the sense that the internet identity of the source can be traced, but the internet identity gives to us no clue about the real life identity of the person who provided the piece of information in question. Naturally, it might be that even if the real life identity of the author of a certain text is known, it conveys no information about the reliability of the text, and should that particular author be unknown to the reader. With such uncertain identities, it might prove more difficult to decide whether or not a source can be trusted than in real life, and in communication situations taking place outside the internet. So shortly speaking modes of representation can vary from service to service.

### **3.5 The Social Use of the Internet**

The internet is decentralised and in theory provides a communication channel that is available to everyone with a minimal computer literacy, regardless of their whereabouts or nationalities. Thanks to continuous innovation, the technology that is needed to establish computer networks are becoming cheaper and, therefore barriers to entry are becoming lower and lower.

### **Chapter three: Internet Network Institution**

Naturally, here comes a big "but:" that in the Western world access to the internet is becoming an everyday commodity is positive development, but in large parts of the world and especially in developing countries, the situation is markedly different. This poses the danger that when we talk about a "global" public sphere, we in fact mean a "Western" public sphere, forgetting economically less prosperous and thereby politically and from a military point of view "insignificant" countries.

The internet also provides anonymity to its users, and even more than that, free-to choose identities, or at least roles. Using the internet is the most private and most public experience at the same time, it is public by definition, but it is also deeply private, because the self can remain invisible to everyone else on the internet. One can take on as many and as detailed disguises as they want, and there are few limitations that have to be observed when deciding what to do or where to go inside the cyberspace, or to the business interests of other parties (i. e. some areas of the internet are of restricted access, and available only in exchange of a fee). But this free to choose identity might, also act to the detriment of the public sphere. This is because this practice gets rid of a very important factor in every occasion of real life social interaction. It is hard to hold someone accountable for what they said if acts of speech are tied only to fictitious identities. Surely, this might be positive, the internet can be used to establish an alternative to freedom of speech, and should there be censorship active outside the cyberspace.

But the evasion of consequences can also serve the interests of those who, willingly or unwillingly, act to the detriment of reasoned critical discussion. It is just as easy to spread misinformation on the internet as it is to take part in a constructive discourse. All sorts of personal motives could incite users to obstruct debate, make false claims or promote ideologies of questionable ethics, and one can get away with it easily, hiding under the imaginary identity that is only made up of a user name and an e-mail address. However, this is but one possibility, and to suppose that willing or accidental crooks can subvert the operations of public spheres is to suppose that either the majority of internet users are malevolent or at least ignorant, or that the majority of internet users are dumb. But there is another aspect of "consequences," which brings us back to Granham's (1992: 371) crucial point:

### Chapter three: Internet Network Institution

**the problem is to construct systems of democratic accountability integrated with media systems of *matching scale* that occupy the *same social space* as that over which economic or political decisions will be made. If the impact is universal, then both the political and media systems must be universal.**

In other words, there must be a goodness of fit between the public sphere and the political entities that they influence; otherwise there will be no meaningful consequences of the activities of the public sphere. Or to put it another way, the discursive power of a public sphere can only be translated into political power in an institution that has the same scope of authority as the scale of the discussion.

Already on the national level, this goodness of fit might be slightly damaged, as everyone can take part in on-line discussions about internal affairs of a nation, regardless of whether they are actually citizens or residents of the nation state in question, or foreigners who merely speak the language of discussion and have an opinion about the matter. Naturally, this gap between those who are affected and those who can have a say in the matters might also lead to positive consequences. But when thinking of a possible global public sphere, it is immediately bump into a bit of a problem, at the moment; there are very few global political institutions that could act as an executive mechanism to the common opinion crystallized in the global public sphere. As Habermas says: **"The political public sphere can fulfill its function of thematizing encompassing social problems only insofar as it develops out of the communication taking place among those who are potentially affected"** (Habermas 2004: 365).

In 1994 Tomlinson establishes a more practical point of view, taking into careful consideration that it is, in practice, not always so easy to decide who is actually potentially affected, and who is not. He also reflects on the differences in the experience of the sociocultural interaction, talking face to face with a friend is a different experience from talking with him on the phone, and again it is entirely different from seeing a televised speech of an important person of another country. The internet offers various new; other ways to experience interaction with a participant



### Chapter three: Internet Network Institution

or participants who is (are) at a physically remote location. However, Giddens, argues that although everyone lives a local life, phenomenological worlds for the most part are truly global," Tomlinson proposes a cautious in between stance. **"Even if the immediate here and now still commands most of our attention, the geographically and temporally remote is no longer, by definition, irrelevant. The processes of mediation are altering people's cognitive maps, loyalties and frames of reference"** (Dahlgren 1995: 89–90). And this, if we turn back to Habermas' idea, might just mean that practically or at least phenomenological we might indeed be potentially affected in global issues. After all, if we accept that nations are imagined communities, it is just one step further that we find the imagined global community, or several imagined global communities which include everyone who considers themselves affected. Habermas refers to these communities, built around certain causes as **"issue publics"** (Habermas, 2006: 25).

Habermas uses the term "issue publics" perhaps in a bid to emphasize that these publics are not necessarily formed in opposition to a dominating, majority discourse and group identity. An issue public merely means the totality of people interested in a particular problem, which may or may not be part of the "relevant discourse" taking place on the "virtual stage" of the national political public sphere. The fragmentation of the public sphere into issue publics is, according to Habermas, an unwelcome development. However, he adds that the multiplication of these publics might actually act to the benefit of the political public sphere: **"while a larger number of people tend to take an interest in a larger number of issues, the overlap of issue publics may even serve to counter trends of fragmentation."** (Habermas, *ibid*: 24–25.)

Lash in his theory of flows, in which he tries to **"embed the public sphere both within an historical milieu and within wider social relations"** (Crossley and Roberts, 2004: 16), he proposes that **"the global is in fact more important than the local. It is the global flows of information, communication, images, money, ideas and technology that have a decisive impact on local politics, economics and culture"** (Lash, 2002: 28). He speaks of **"the erosion of the national 'society',"** and

### Chapter three: Internet Network Institution

the weakening power of nation states: "**politically, supra- and sub-national institutions begin to threaten the hegemony of the institutions of the nation state**" (Lash, *ibid*: 26). On the other hand, in reference to Habermas, he also draws attention to the changing nature of institutions. He argues that institutions in general will more and more become "**small, mobile and flexible groupings sometimes enduring, often easily dissoluble formed with an intensive affective bonding**" (Lash, *ibid*: 27). Monstrous bureaucracies are expected to die out, as quick and flexible institutions thrive. According to Lash, it is more likely that several global public spheres will be spawned, as he positions the above mentioned trends as part of the post modernization of societies.

The theory of Keohane and Nye (2002: 161–178) explores the possibility of a global public sphere from yet another point of view. This theory posits that a global public sphere in the classical, Habermasian sense cannot become reality, but in a more restricted manner it exists. In their essay, Keohane and Nye arrive at three conclusive points.

First, they claim that the so-called "**information and communications revolution**" (Keohane and Nye, *ibid*: 177), will not have an equalizing effect on the distribution of power among states, partly because strategically important information will not become significantly more easily available on the net. Second, however, cheap flows of free and commercial information have already multiplied the number of channels of contact between nation states, thus leaders will have more difficulty in maintaining a "**coherent ordering of foreign policy issues**" (Keohane and Nye, *idem*). Third, soft power, the symbolic, discursively constructed, legitimized power become more important in relation to hard power, than before.

In this theory, the abundance of information is expected to lead to the increase in the value of credibility. For Keohane and Nye credibility is "**a key resource for governments and,**" and "**asymmetrical credibility is a key source of hard power**" (Keohane and Nye, *ibid*: 172). This is because credibility is the basis upon which "**foreign policy occurs,**" (Keohane and Nye, *idem*). Credibility is required in deals on

## **Chapter three: Internet Network Institution**

capital markets, and last but not least soft power can only be persuasive if it is credible.

To sum it up, Keohane and Nye exclude the possibility of a classic global public sphere, but they name credibility, synonymous with the term reliability as an important factor in international power relations. This falls in line with the idea that discursive power can be transformed into hard power. It also means that one way of challenging undemocratic rules would be to undermine their credibility, and the internet, with the possibility of presenting all sides to stories, by making all sorts of un official sources available, looks quite promising from this point of view.

### **3.6. Features of the Internet Network**

#### **3.6.1. The Discursive Aspect**

The internet is a rich warehouse of opinions and a place for discussions. On the first look, it seems that it also can provide valuable, in depth knowledge about a large array of topics, and even presented in interesting, innovative and interactive ways, for example as video tutorials uploaded to a video sharing site such as YouTube, or as interactive seminars carried out in the virtual university of second Life. But on a second look, so to say, the question of reliability of information pops up its head. Wikipedia, this user edited global encyclopedias, is a case in point. It is currently the 9th most popular website of the internet, and apparently even the National Security Agency of the USA uses it, in the terrifying practice of gaining data from it to establish whether or not a certain individual is a terrorist or not.

There are many talks nowadays about web or the so called community web, web services that are built around user-generated content. Taking advantage of the wisdom of the masses might provide you not only with knowledge, but also information on how to obtain knowledge. For example, a lot of community internet services focus on the idea that the best way to find interesting and important content on the internet is through the assistance of others. Hence the basic concept, share and rate whatever you find on the network, and thus help organize the information on the internet in a democratic, nonprofit driven way. Naturally, this also prompts the question of

## Chapter three: Internet Network Institution

reliability, although not quite like in the case of Wikipedia or other primary sources of information.

In any case, it is here to mention Thompson's (2002) idea on the role of misinformation, inspired by the Madisonian approach to democracy. According to Thompson who, perhaps deliberately opposing Habermas, downplays or ignores the role of privacy as the crib for publicans, an important consequence of the abundance of information is that the quality of all the available information will vary. But the fabrications and falsehoods to which the Internet gives voice may admittedly serve some useful purposes, because if the unreliability of information is kept in mind then it will incite critical thinking in the consumers of this information. **"Even while half believing the rumors they find on the net, most citizens, I trust, will seek guidance about which ones they may fully believe"** (Thompson 2002: 36–37).

It seems logical that this beneficial effect of misinformation applies to certain topics more than to others. For example it might not be apparent at all concerning topics which require the reader's expertise in a specific science or field of knowledge, for example.

### **3.6.2. The Spatial Aspect**

The internet is something truly unique. First because the placelessness of cyberspace is such that it permits being in several places at the same time. Not physically, but through participating in several acts of communication at the same time, creating the illusion for all the other participants that one is at the same indeterminate, virtual place as they are. This is what happens when someone is talking to different people at the same time on chat or messenger programs, playing in an online multiplayer game etc. It is creation that takes place in the mere interpretation of the flows of information. In Habermas' idea the placelessness nature of the internet means openness of communication in a very practical way, it simplifies staying in touch with others and thus helps the spread of information.

Concerning the spatial characteristics of the internet, it is noteworthy also that the biggest, almost infinite resource of cyberspace is, in fact, space. It is amazingly easy to set up new places of discussion on the internet; one could count the clicks of mouse it

## Chapter three: Internet Network Institution

takes to register at a free forum provider company. The only question is: does this possibility not undermine the credibility and value of such spaces? And if there is always an alternative public space of discussion to everything, how can someone know which ones are meaningful, which ones are not, and how can someone participate in all the relevant discussions at the same time?

There is also another question concerning the modes of consumption of the internet. Is the verbality of the internet the same as that of real life speech acts? What are the non-verbal communicational devices that are used? Simply: in what physical ways do people communicate over the internet, how do these modes of consumption fit into the theoretical framework of late modernity, and what are the implications of such modes of communication as to the theory of communicative action? Can a public sphere exist solely in cyberspace? Dahlgren(1995: 20) argues that it cannot, however there must be an interaction to it, too.

### **3.6.3. The Communal Aspect**

Finally, the communal aspect brings once again to the question of identities. But not only to the question of identities, as it is aptly described by William Galston. He examined online communities according to the criterion set up by Bender (1982): according to these, **“a community, held together by shared understandings and a sense of belonging, is a group of people where membership is limited, norms are shared, ties between members are (at least partly) personal and affective, and where there is a sense of mutual obligation among the members”** (Galston 2002: 44).

In Galston’s understanding, most internet communities fail to be communities in this real sense of the word. Membership in online communities is more often than not voluntary, and therefore, given that **“for most people, diversity is a nice place to visit, but they do not really want to live there – these communities are more likely to be heterogeneous than homogeneous”** (Galston, *ibid*: 55–56). Being a member in an online discussion group is often preaching to the converted; what’s more, groups tend to radicalize easily, further lowering the chances of productive inter-group

## **Chapter three: Internet Network Institution**

discussions. **“Online groups may intensify current tendencies toward fragmentation and polarization in civic life”** (Galston, *ibid*: 54).

However, the author acknowledges that "online groups can fulfill important emotional and utilitarian needs, **“even if they cannot be taken as solutions for our current civic ills, let alone as comprehensive models of a better future”**(Galston, *ibid*: 56).

But even if most of the online groups are not communities but merely groups organized around the idea of sharing information among like-minded people, it might still be interesting to put Galston’s skepticism to the test through examining concrete examples of well, so-called communities, for a lack of better word.

This is reasoned partly by the fact that Galston could not have written about the phenomenon known as the "community web". This loose umbrella term refers to all those services of the internet that somehow revolve around the concept of community or user generated content. These sites try to function in ways ordinary groups’ discussion forums, newsgroups.

Social networking sites can be seen as an attempt to eliminate the factor of distance from real-life social networks; it does not matter whether my friends live next door or two continents away, it is easily to maintain contact with them through “Facebook”. The interesting point in such sites is that they only make sense if everybody actually uses them under their own names; and in this respect, they differ from all other potential "communities" on the internet.

### **3.7. The Role of Mass Media in Democratic Societies**

According to the political scientist Negrine (1996, 107), the internet network acts as an important link between the public, and the opinion, and the decision-making processes of government, it is also as a key player in the construction or creation of the public and opinion. Moreover, internet is a means by which the public can come to play a direct and indirect part in the democratic process.

In generally, mass media in democratic societies are expected to perform different functions (Strohmeier 2004, 71-99). Their primary function is the creation of

## **Chapter three: Internet Network Institution**

a public sphere as described above. Mass media constitute the public space that is the direct basis for their secondary and the indirect basis for their tertiary functions. Secondary functions are information and control. As for information the mass media **“provide a forum for candidates and political parties to debate their qualifications for office before a national audience”** and **“contribute to informed citizenship by providing a variety of perspectives on the important issues of the day”** (Iyengar and McGrady, 2007: 19).

Furthermore they control and monitor politicians, government agencies and other authorities by serving as “watchdogs”, exposing possible mismanagement, abuses of power or corruption, thus holding the government accountable to the public. Strohmeier names political socialization and integration by conveying the shared values and rules of a society; political education by providing basic knowledge about political institutions and processes; and the formation of public opinion by setting topics, acting as gate keepers, and shaping the public debate: **“Media not only survey the events of the day and make them the focus of public and private attention, they also interpret their meaning, put them into context, and speculate about their consequences”** (Graber, 1997: 10).

The importance of the mass media for the political process has significantly increased over time, mainly due to a phenomenon known to political scientists as dealignment. It describes **“the process by which partisanship or loyalty to one party, among the electorate has reduced over the last half century”** (Lilleker, 2006: 66). For many decades voters held strong affective, often lifelong attachments to one political party and this was usually heavily influenced by social status or class.

### **3.8. Conclusion**

This chapter was devoted to explore the very important subject of public sphere, in which Habermas downplays the importance of the internet in making it more democratic, and named its help in tackling censorship as its single important positive contribution. Furthermore, from this part it is obvious that many scholars argue that the internet network establishes a democratic organization and production of information on the internet, and thereby offers its users meaningful participation in the

### **Chapter three: Internet Network Institution**

affairs of the public sphere. Besides, this chapter has also dealt with the importance of the internet network in contemporary societies, to exchange products, resources and information.



# General Conclusion

## General Conclusion

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This research work was devoted to explore the very important concepts which are public sphere and public opinion. In his book “*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*” Habermas sets a basis for these two concepts. Therefore, starting from this point, it was assumed that public sphere is a sphere of private people who join together to form a public. It was also found that the Bourgeois’ class of the society came as a representative voice behalf of the rest of the society.

Moreover, Habermas emphasises the role of public sphere as a way of civil society to discuss and articulate its interests. Furthermore, the public sphere was interpreted and took shape in the concept of public opinion. This later, which is a sum of all opinions and views of individuals, who have common interest and concerns. As a result, a rational dialogue was built between citizens and the state.

In the light of previous information, public opinion could spread over through the different broadcasting institutions that could really offer both public sphere and culture industry. Hence a strong link was established between public opinion and mass media. This gave a way to the rise of new discipline such as advertising and public relations. Thus, from this point it could be assumed the importance of the internet network as a powerful institution in legitimising the democratic rule. So, the internet network can highly influenced public opinion and affect communities. In his book Habermas emphasised the importance of the internet in making it more democratic and offering its users meaningful participation in the affairs of public sphere. In fact the potential of creating a democratic society could be realised by the internet network which was considered as a platform for global discussion. So here is the importance of social news sites emerged, since it provides its base for the promotion of products of the culture industry.

It is true that the internet in general, wherever it is available, democratises access to information. But at the same time, the supposedly democratic tools and services of information production and dissemination still rely on the institutionalized, organizational media for raw material. Briefly speaking, internet has the potential for enabling individuals to the democratic field and practices their rights and contributes in building democracy.

**General Conclusion**

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## ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث لدراسة المجال العام، وهو مفهوم مهم جدا الذي نتج عن جورج هابرماس. الفكرة التي تؤكد أن المجال العام هو ذلك الحيز أين مختلف الأفراد يتطلعون إلى التمتع بحقوقهم ومصالحهم السياسية. و تظهر هذه الدراسة القواعد المختلفة للتقدم للرأي العام. هذا الأخير بحاجة إلى وسيلة للنشر والوصول إلى جميع المواطنين، و ذلك من خلال مختلف وسائل الاتصال، و تتمثل هذه الموارد في الصحف والتلفزيون والإنترنت. حيث ساهمت كل هذه المفاهيم في العملية الديمقراطية لتبادل المعلومات والربط بين الدولة والأفراد. وعلى العموم، تشير هذه الدراسة أن هذه الشبكات قد تساهم إلى حد كبير في بناء المسار الديمقراطي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المجال العام، الرأي العام، جورج هابرماس، البث، الشبكات

## Résumé:

Ce document de recherche tend à examiner la sphère publique, qui est un concept très important qui résulte l'idée de Jürgen Habermas qui affirme que la sphère publique est un espace où des individus différents cherchent à jouir de leurs droits et intérêts politiques. En outre, cette étude montre aussi les différentes bases de l'avancement de l'opinion publique. Ce dernier besoin d'un moyen de diffuser et d'atteindre tous les citoyens de la société, ce qui a été réalisé grâce aux différentes moyennes progressions. Ces moyens consistent aux journaux, à la télévision et au réseau Internet. Toutes ces moyennes ont contribués au processus démocratique qui est le partage de l'information et le lien entre l'État et les individus. Dans l'ensemble, ce cas d'étude attire également que ces réseaux ont contribués de manière importante à la construction d'un parcours démocratique.

**Mots clés :** Sphère publique, opinion publique, Jurgan Habermas, Diffusion, Réseaux.

## Summary:

This research work tends to examine the public sphere, which is a very important concept that comes as a result of the idea of Jurgen Habermas which states that public sphere is a space where different individuals are seeking to enjoy their political rights and interests. Furthermore, this study displays also the different basis for the progress of public opinion. This latter is in need for a way to spread and reach all citizens of the society, and is achieved through the different broadcasting means. Those means consist of newspapers, television, and internet network. All these concepts contribute in the democratic process of sharing information and make a link between the state and individuals. All in all, this research work attracts attention towards the point that these networks help into a large extent in building a democratic parcours.

**Key words:** Public Sphere, Public Opinion, Jurgan Habermas, Broadcasting, Networks.

