

Revitalization of the Public Sphere: A Comparison between Habermasian and the New Public Sphere

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Abstract: “Public sphere” is an important component of modern polity. Civil society brings the state in touch with the needs of the citizens through the medium of public sphere. However, Habermas argues that “public sphere” experienced refeudalization owing to various factors i.e. propaganda, cultural industry, market and state intervention. The “public” was condemned to be mere spectator again. This article argues that modern technologies enabled new public sphere (NPS) can help restore public status as participant in the democratic process. By employing interpretivist approach the article compares the Habermasian ideal of public sphere with NPS and constructs a matrix, depicting the various related aspects between the two models for highlighting the revival of the public sphere.

Keywords: new public sphere; jurgen habermas; communication technologies; globalization; civil society

1. Introduction

Public sphere refers to a collection of “communicative spaces” within society that facilitate the flow of “information, ideas, debates”, and shape public opinion in an independent manner. Mass media and now the rising social media plays significant role in this realm, which also performs an intermediary role by facilitating communicative links between citizens and centers of power in a society (Dahlgren, 2005).

Habermas provides the prominent text on the subject (Habermas, 1989). He argues that public sphere declined owing to various factors and resulted in the demoted status of the citizens as mere spectator. However, it is argued that information and communication technologies (ICTs) provide numerous opportunities for the revival of the public sphere. The ICT enabled public sphere shares some of the features of Habermasian ideal, however, it also distinguishes itself from this ideal in various other respects.

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This article relies on interpretivist approach and juxtaposes the findings from existing major works on the subject. Thematic analysis has been conducted to highlight the significant findings.

2. Public Sphere and its Refeudalization

Habermas defines the 'public sphere' *"as a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed"*. All citizens have the right to access this realm. Citizens act as a "public body" when they interact with each other in an unhindered manner-that is they have freedom to assemble and associate and the liberty to articulate and circulate their opinions about issues of common interest. This type of communication in a large public body involves precise ways for conveying information and swaying its recipients. The "public opinion" offers a tool for criticizing and controlling the state and its various agencies informally or formally through periodic elections in modern era. (Habermas, 1974)

The public sphere is a realm which mediates between society and state. In this realm public presents itself as the vehicle of public opinion. The public sphere is based on the principle of public right to information which has been acquired after long struggles monarchies and which since then has facilitated the democratic or in other words public control of state authorities. For Habermas, public opinion emerges only in the context of a reasoning public (Habermas, 1974). Critical and lawfully guaranteed public debates about the use of political power, have not always existed. They emerged out of a particular epoch of bourgeois society and entered into the constitutional system of the bourgeois state only due to a particular assemblage of interests. (Habermas, 1989)

To be precise, Habermas work is based on his research into 18th century bourgeois class in Great Britain, France and Germany. He saw that in this period normal people, rather than experts, entered into rational critical debate about issue of public's common concerns. There was a nascent public sphere, with such environment that raised the possibility of ideal speech for public. This public sphere first appeared in Great Britain towards the end of the 17th century with the Licensing Act of 1695, which permitted newspapers to publish without the Queen's censorship. This is envisioned as significant enabler. (Gordon, 2004)

Habermas articulates in great detail how the concept of "public" underwent a transformation with the rise of bourgeoisie society. Representation in the context of bourgeois public sphere, for example the representation of the nation or of specific mandates, has no relation with the representative public sphere of middle ages which was directly associated with the physical being of a ruler. Given that the prince and the estates of the realm still "are" the land, in place of simply working as deputies for it, they are competent to "re-present"; they symbolize their power

“before” the people, “instead of for the people” (Habermas, 1974). The feudal political authorities of medieval era, around which the representative public sphere was first constituted, collapsed during a long process of schism. Towards the end of 18th century these authorities had disintegrated into private and public components.

The representative public sphere of medieval era, transformed into that new sphere of “public authority” which surfaced with national and territorial states. Public authority united into a solid opposition for those upon whom it was to be exercised and who at first, felt them to be on the negative side in this context. These were the “private individuals” who had been debarred from public authority since they occupied no office. “Public” no more referred to the “representative” court of a monarch gifted with authority, but rather it signaled to an institution organized according to capability, it simply referred to a gadget bestowed with a monopoly on the legal application of authority. Private individuals who merged in the state, form the public body, and the public authority was directed upon them. (Habermas, 1974)

Society on the one hand turned to be a realm of the private and occupied a position opposite to the state. That society, on the other side, had developed into an area of public interest to the extent that the reproduction of life in the context of the market economy had developed beyond the limits of private domestic authority. *The “bourgeois public sphere”* could be comprehended as the sphere of private individuals brought together into a public body. That public body almost instantly claimed the right to use the publicly regulated “intellectual newspapers”, in opposition to the public authority itself. These private individuals, in such newspapers, and journals, debated that public authority on the general policies of social interaction in their essentially privatized but still publically related sphere of labor and commodity exchange. (Habermas, 1974)

Habermas argued that certain developments in the European society brought decline to the bourgeoisie public sphere. He contended that the commercialization of the public sphere, and the emergence of cultural industries including commercial advertising and public relations, have refeudalized the public sphere, and the status of the public has once again demoted to be mere spectator, and a new phenomenon “expert opinion” has began to replace the “true” public opinion. (Ubayasiri, 2006)

The objective journalism transformed into that of commercial journalism around 1830s at about the same time in England, France, and the US. The literary journalism of private citizens converted into the public services messages addressed to masses at large during this transformation. Consequently, the public sphere was distorted by the incursion of private interests, which got particular significance in the mass media. (Habermas, 1974)

The expansion of press and propaganda, led to the expansion of the public body beyond the confines of the bourgeoisie. This resulted in the loss of social exclusivity, and coherence of the public body, which was shaped by the social institutions of the bourgeois class, along with a comparatively high standard of education. Social conflicts which were previously limited to the private sphere now encroached into the public sphere as well. Selfish group needs which could not be satisfied in a free market now looked towards state for regulation. The public sphere, meant to mediate these demands, turns into an arena for the struggle of interests, which at times become violent. (Habermas, 1989)

The extension of the public sphere led to the decline of critical public debate, the basic “principle” of the public sphere. This happened because of the fact that its very basis in the private realm was damaged (Calhoun, 1992: 18). Habermas advocated that the undermining of the footings of the public sphere occurred because of the “refeudalization” of society. The bourgeois public sphere assumed firm distinction between the public and the private realm (Habermas, 1989). However, the structural transformation took place when private associations and organizations increasingly started to take for granted the public power on the one side, and the state began to infiltrate into the realm of the private on the other. The distinct spheres of the state and society became interlocked. The public sphere was unavoidably transformed because the line of distinction between the realms of public and private got blurred.

As a result of these transformations, the public sphere has turned into a theater for advertising than realm for rational critical debate. The public sphere has become a field for states and market actors to get legitimacy not by taking action to appease a free and critical public, but by trying to sway public opinion by regulating the society and its mediums of communication to maintain dominance of state and market. (Calhoun, 1992, p. 26)

3. ICTS and the Re-Emancipation of the Public Sphere

The revival of the public sphere in perspective of social media has been articulated by many researchers (Crack, 2007; Castells, 2008; Khan et al. 2012). The ICTs enabled new public sphere (NPS) refers to the realm of social life within and/or beyond nation-state in which citizens irrespective of their national identities come into contact with one another through ICTs to form a virtual public body that engages in formal and/or informal debates about issues that are common across globe. This public body at times manifests itself as a “physical” public body as well, a new type of affinity binds them together. Global civil society (GCS) actors steer these debates through various means and try to negotiate with the “state”, centers of global governance and corporations for the interests of the individual.

Modern public sphere is no more woven around the nation-state institutions; rather it is increasingly anchored around the modern media system (Volkmer, 1999). The NPS is anchored in the cyberspace, which is characterized by multitude of communication processes. It is believed to be the real locus of the new “electronic public sphere”. It supplies new opportunities for stimulating an active and attentive “public” (Oblak, 2002). The modern media system relies on networks of communication that facilitates many-to-many two-way exchange of information with capability to bypass mass media and avoid state control as well (Crack, 2007). These ICTs have enhanced dialogic prospects between geographically scattered and distinct actors, thus have provided the opportunities to extend public spheres beyond the realm of nation-state. (Khan et al. 2012)

These information civilization innovations are shaping a new global consciousness, founded on growing “awareness of the world’s ecological and economic interdependence, cultural clashes and the need for dialogue and democracy” (Tehrani, 2004). This consciousness provides the basis for the rise of global ‘public’ joined together as a virtual body by a sense of global affinity which springs out in response to mundane issues of the twenty first century. This ‘affinity’ substitutes the ‘common’ interests which were defined in the nation-state context in Habermas theory that brought private citizens together to form a public body. As the mundane issues today are global in nature, therefore the emergent “affinity” is equally global. However this affinity would be effective when there would be more and more terms of references. (Crack, 2007)

There is a stark distinction between the new “public” woven around digital gadgets and Habermas refeudalized “public”. Habermas stipulated the decline in public sphere for the fact that due to mass media and cultural industries the ‘public’ turned into mere spectators. This is not the case with the digital ‘public’. The digital “public” is or at least theoretically has the opportunities to be active and participative (Dahlberg, 2001). The Internet and related technologies have become a forceful medium for dialogue and deliberation. GCS actors are increasingly using it for various purposes. Besides discussion forums, huge amount of material is published online in various formats (Hara and Shachaf, 2008). Global protests against capitalist globalization and Iraq war, and more recent London riots and Arab democratic movements reflect the powers of ICTs in this respect. This reflects the active nature of the new public.

4. Comparison between Habermasian Public Sphere and Tthe New Public Sphere

Through the post-modern analysis of a fragmented public opinion, rises more bright prospect for the internet as public sphere. The cyberspace turns out to be a “virtual world” and specific locales with in this immeasurable digital space become

equivalent with 18th century European coffee houses that supplied the physical space conducive to the generation of intellectual forum that Habermas termed as the “bourgeois public sphere”. Within this framework, in spite of the structural modifications in society that has supplied physical locations such as coffee houses, salons and public squares, geographically spread intelligence can meet in cyberspace to engage in rational-critical discourse. (Ubayasiri, 2006)

4.1. Comparing Characteristics

a) The Public/Publicness

The notion of the “public” is directly linked to democratic ideals that require public engagement in public affairs. The word “public” implies concepts of citizenship, commonality, and such things that are not private, but are common for all (Papacharissi, 2002). In Habermasian perspective the term “public” is defined in the context of nation-state.

The common concerns of the “public” provided the required bond to form the “body of citizens” in the bourgeoisie society. The idea of common interest was also powerful enough to eliminate status differences in the public sphere (Calhoun, 1992). However, ICTs led globalization has not only transformed the conventional “temporal” and “spatial” conceptions, but also concepts about publicity, activity and engagement. (Oblak, 2002)

People are gradually becoming aware that social issues whether far or near are interdependent and intertwined. It is increasingly being recognized that everything affects everything else (Taylor, 2002), this refers to a rising progressive global consciousness, which is based on growing awareness of the entirety of human social relations (Shaw, 2000), incremented by the enhanced connectivity of this era (Castells, 2008). This global human consciousness is providing a new affinity to the citizens of different states to be united as a virtual ‘public body’. This is a new publicness, woven not around national identities and national concerns but around human consciousness and human desires for peace and prosperity irrespective of territorial confines (Tehrani, 2004). Issues like climate change and epidemic diseases are good examples that link people living in different parts of the world with one another guided by human consciousness. World Values Survey data also support the assumption that people today feel themselves to be the citizen of the world. This consciousness of world citizenship is prevalent across the world irrespective of existing socio-economic disparities (World Value Survey 2005-2008).

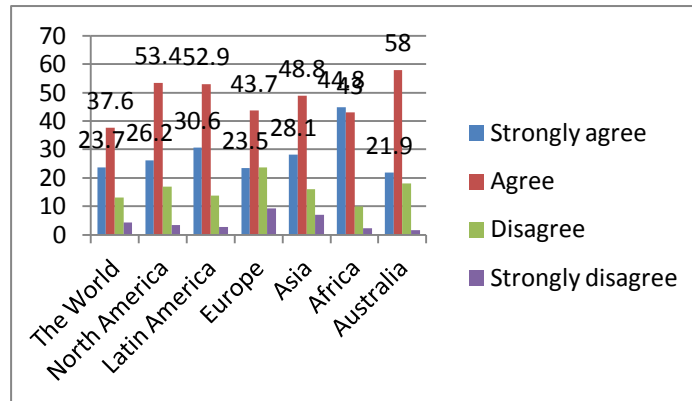


Figure 1. I see myself as a world citizen

Source: World Value Survey

The question wording were, “People have different views about themselves and how they relate to the world. Using this card, would you tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about how you see yourself? I see myself as a world citizen.”

b) Access to information

Access to information is the basic principle of Habermas theory of public sphere. It is the principle and in actuality a right which was achieved through struggle against the arcane policies of monarchs. It also imposes the responsibility upon press to provide objective information. Thus, access to information is part of the enabling conditions i.e. “publicity” which exposes state before public for scrutiny. (Habermas, 1974)

The NPS is matchless in this regard as it is facilitated by such communication systems that enable greater number of citizens to access unlimited information. The role of the Internet is paramount in this respect. One can find millions of web pages on almost every subject over the Internet. Furthermore, it is increasingly becoming user friendly and any one with some fundamental computer skills and access to the Internet, can retrieve information of his/her need from the Internet. Speedy and efficacious access to information raises transparency and answerability of the government. Similarly by providing citizens information regarding rights, facilities and services, citizens can be empowered and opportunities for debates can be augmented. (Weigel & Waldburger, 2004)

c) Disregard for status (inclusivity)

The bourgeoisie public sphere was inclusive in nature. “A kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status

altogether” (Habermas, 1989). This facilitated inclusivity within the bourgeoisie public sphere. Everyone with access to information had the right to speak about public concerns. Of course, this was difficult to be fully realized on ground, however the idea itself was very significant. (Calhoun, 1992)

However, critics believe that it is quite sarcastic that this notion of democracy from its very origin was rather undemocratic in its composition by excluding women or people belonging to lower social strata. An over-idealised depiction of the public sphere was conceded by Habermas himself (Habermas, 1992). He was not adequately thoughtful to the multiple eliminations that framed the public sphere, for example class, race, gender, and sexual orientation etc. (Crack, 2007)

Like Habermasian model “inclusivity” is one the basic feature of NPS. Just as in Habermas theory anyone with access to information (which was primarily provided by press) was welcomed to participate in debates and discussion in the public sphere, similarly anyone with access to information today can be part of the new public body. However the difference is that today people have far more options as compared to bourgeoisie public of 18th century for getting information which enabled them to participate in public deliberations. (Papacharissi, 2002)

Just as it required certain qualifications to be met by users in order to retrieve information from the press, almost similar are the prerequisites for getting information from the ICTs enabled sources. Using the Internet and mobile today does not require high qualifications. Anybody with some kind of educational background and basic computer skills can use Internet. Moreover language is no more an issue as ‘windows’ and a range of social software are available in many major languages of the world (Weigel & Waldburger, 2004). There is growing evidence that cell phones are frequently being used by even illiterate persons. (Katre, 2008)

The NPS is more inclusive than Habermas public sphere for its usage of multidimensional media. It is up to the taste and needs of the users to retrieve information in whatever the type that suits them; audio, video, texts or symbols. ICTs are entirely blind towards race, color, religion or even nation-state, ‘disregard for status’ is evident in the very nature of ICTs, so inclusivity in the NPS is higher than the Habermas model of public sphere. (Crack, 2007)

d) Rational critical debate

Habermas believed that members of the bourgeoisie “public” due to their somewhat high educational backgrounds, professional experiences, common concerns and availability of literary journalism engaged in rational critical debate which manifested itself in public opinion. So the speaker itself due to his status was not significant rather the rationality of his idea was paramount. Rational critical

debate fostered public opinion which brought the concerned political authority in touch with the needs of the citizens. (Habermas, 1989)

The conduct of “critical debate” is an important aspect of Habermasian public sphere. Though, there is emerging consensus that ICTs enabled NPS theoretically has the potential to facilitate critical debate online however, there are severe challenges to achieve Habermas ideal situation of critical debate. Anonymity of the presenter, state and market influence, local political cultures and individual differences pose serious challenges to the rise of critical debates online (Dahlberg, 2001). Undoubtedly political life offline also faces these challenges, so one can not anticipate an ontological transformation simply for the fact that debate moves to cyberspace. (Dahlgren, 2005)

Dahlgren quotes Tsaliki (2002) and Stromer-Galley (2002) studies for empirical evidence regarding the Internet role as a deliberative forum. A comparative study of online deliberative forums in Greece, the Netherlands, and Great Britain by Tsaliki discovered a very satisfactory level of public debate. Moreover, the Internet appears to provide opportunities to those citizens for participation who otherwise find many restrictions and also have to face embarrassments at times in discussing political issues in their actual social environment (Dahlgren, 2005). Despite various predicaments, a superficial assessment of the huge number of varied conversations occurring everyday online, where anyone with access to the Internet can participate, shows the expansion on a planetary scale of the loose networks of rational-critical discourse that shape the public sphere. (Ubayasiri, 2006)

Moreover, Habermas also thinks that there is an inherent link between the technology of an age and the construction of “purposive-rational action”, the prior inevitably supports to the latter interests (Salter, 2003). In the same terrain it is expected that in the due course of history with the proliferation of ICTs across the world, decreasing cost of ICTs, and increasing literacy rate, opportunities and trends of rational critical debate will augment. However, the rise of multiple public spheres hints that the debate will be more fragmented in nature. Public spheres of particular interests help initiate debate on topics common to like minded people and the Internet will serve as a network of public sphere, as a space that supports multiple public spheres simultaneously. (Papacharissi, 2002)

e) Universality

The emerging bourgeoisie “public” shaped itself as inclusive in its standards. This led to the rise of a universalistic public sphere. Anyone with access to information through books, plays, journals, or any other source had at least the right to be part of such debating societies. Habermas believed that members of bourgeoisie class being propertied and educated had the required prerequisites to be part of this public sphere as readers, listeners or speakers and as a result the emergent public sphere was universal in nature. (Calhoun, 1992)

Generally, the term “public sphere” is often used as a singular, however sociological realism refers to the plural as well. Many argue that in today’s large distinct modern societies, public sphere might be comprehended as constituting several distinct spaces. In comparison to mass media, ICTs have expanded the communicative sites for politics along with their ideological breath. However, this pluralization extends public sphere on the one hand and on the other disperses the comparatively grouped public sphere of the mass media. (Dahlgren, 2005)

Very diverse communication takes place over the Internet everyday, some of which really involves critical debate of disputed issues. Some of the participants just look for like-minded groups while in other discussions member’s interests, values and biases are strengthened rather than challenged. This results into fragmentation of Internet enabled debate into mutually exclusive cyber-communities (Dahlberg, 2001), and there springs multiple public spheres instead of Habermas universal public sphere.

In the cyber public sphere, multiple special interest “publics” coexist and exhibit their shared identities of dissent, in a way this reflects the sociopolitical conditions of the real world (Fraser, 1992). This idea of the actual virtual sphere comprises of multiple spheres of counter-publics that have been barred from mainstream political debate, yet utilize cyber communication to reshape the mainstream that expelled them (Papacharissi, 2002). However it can be contended, that in place of a single public sphere, multiple public spheres “with fluid and overlapping boundaries, loci of rational and critical debate would” certainly promote the cause of democracy today. (Ubayasiri, 2006)

f) Virtual space and interaction

Unlike coffee houses or saloons of the eighteenth century, NPS is anchored in virtual spaces which have the potentials to make the people interact. The Internet enabled interaction is no less significant than face to face interaction in fostering useful mobilization. ICTs have changed the character of social relations, particularly the meaning of co-presence. For instance, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), which connected around 1,000 NGOs in about 60 countries, never had a bank account or even a physical postal address (Taylor, 2002). In reality, “virtuality” has always been a primary characteristic of the public sphere: “the discourse has been conducted at a distance” (Warner, 2002). A critical public is actually an imaginary entity, shaped by the circulation of spontaneous debate, “so the ‘public’ is a virtual entity”. Mediated dialogue is an important characteristic of any extensive, intricate social organization, supplying the only mechanism of engagement among dispersed actors. Hence it is not erroneous to believe that ICT-mediated communication can also be compatible with critical publicity. (Crack, 2007)

4.2. Comparing Enabling Conditions

Generally speaking, the notion of public sphere could only be envisioned in an operational form, once the state was formed as an impersonal sphere of authority. Contrary to the old concept of the public, therefore, the modern concept relied on the likelihood of counter-posing spheres of state and society (Calhoun, 1992). The state facilitated institutional basis for national public spheres for three good reasons. First, the media like newspapers and journals with primarily national flow facilitated the public debate. Second, state being a sovereign body, presented itself as a political authority to which the public deliberation was addressed. Third, the common citizenship of discussants supplied a motivation for all to sustain the basic standards of publicity in debate, so the public comprised of civil society institutions that mediated with state to secure the interest of the body of people. (Crack, 2007)

However, leaving aside the nation-state context, the new public sphere can be recasted in the emerging globality - a social whole that exists beyond nation-state at the planetary level (Bartelson, 2009). It has no center and no periphery. It institutes from the human conscious, and centuries old human desires for peace and prosperity (Tehrani, 2004). It finds its manifestation in the cyberspace-the arena of intensive information and connectivity. The logic of networks supplements Habermas structural conditions of public sphere, but not in the Habermasian sense with contours of nation-state rather in its own unique ways.

Transnational networks are providing opportunities to new types of ‘publicity’ beyond nation-state and supplying such structural conditions that can help recast public sphere at the transnational level (Crack, 2007). These structural conditions are “*communicative networks, global governance networks, and global civil society.*” (Castells, 2008)

a) Media

According to Habermas, the public depended on media institutions. Public discourse was mediated by means of local public spaces or instruments that enabled national circulation of information and opinion such as coffeehouses and newspapers. To put it differently, the public sphere depended on both the physical space of the coffee houses and salons as well as the virtual space of print media. (Crack, 2007)

In contrast to conventional media in the Habermas model, the communication networks in the NPS facilitate public participation across state borders. The precondition of a global media for NPS seems to have already been satisfied. The new technologies have not simply extended the conventional communication media, but are entirely different in their “structure, speed, and scope” (Crack, 2007). ICTs have effectively removed the time and space issues in distanced communication and have thus created new spaces for public deliberation. The NPS to a large extent is dependent on the local as well as global communication media

system. This media system comprises of both the conventional media like printing press, television, and radio, and modern social media like the Internet and horizontal networks of communication. (Castells, 2008)

b) Addressee (political authority)

The debates in the public sphere regarding issues of common concerns were addressed to the sovereign state (Habermas, 1989). Citizens emphasized on the receptiveness and accountability of political authorities to public opinion. This association permeated public deliberation with real political ramifications (Crack, 2007). Though there is no world government however, global society is governed. There is a multitude of rules, regimes, and norms through which world is administered and these enjoy extensive legitimacy. Rosenau says that there are hundreds of thousands of such mechanisms that help manage the global policies. (Rosenau, 1995)

Global governance structures could help meet structural condition for the transformation of public spheres, for the fact that it supplies a political-institutional framework for public discourse and mobilization. These novel structures of governance become the addressee of global political debate like state that served the same role at national level. Reinstatement of the connection between public debate and political authority is an essential, but not sufficient prerequisite of critical publicity. Reciprocity is very significant for an effective public spheres. Put it simply, global governance sites should be responsive to public discourse. (Crack, 2007)

c) Civil society

In Habermas formulation civil society plays important role in the functioning of public sphere by steering the debate towards issues of common interests. The rising incapacity of nation-states to deal with the contemporary global issues has stimulated the emergence of a GCS which can perform a similar function as described by Habermas (Castells, 2008).

GCS is a “dynamic non-governmental system of interconnected socio-economic institutions that straddle the whole earth”, that has intricate consequences for the whole world (Keane, 2003). GCS is comprehended as a space for the formation of “regimes of tolerance, civility and pluralism” and its proponents believe that activism within civil society will encourage these norms and values at global level. (Chandler, 2007)

For John Keane GCS includes not for profit, non-governmental organizations, social movements, activists campaigns, professional organizations, business, media organization, social movements, and issue oriented activist’s global campaigns, these have been the manifestations of GCS (Kean, 2003: 9). These actors strive for progressive agendas across the world and have acquired the potential to steer the

public debates on issues of common concern across the globe. Thus, this precondition of the public sphere seems to have been satisfied with GCS acquiring, at least theoretically the technological means to motivate public opinion and civic action beyond the territorial confines. (Castells, 2008)

Table 1. Matrix of comparison between Habermas Model and NPS

| Habermas Model of Public Sphere | | | New Model of Public Sphere | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | <i>Remarks</i> | | <i>Remarks</i> |
| Features | Representative publicness | Pitched against state, linked by common interests within a territory | Global Publicness | Pitched against state/networks of global governance, linked through emerging global human consciousness |
| | Inclusivity | Inclusivity within bourgeoisie class | | Universal inclusivity with disregard for classes |
| | Territoriality | State borders defines limits | Borderless | Potentials to extend beyond state territories |
| | Universality/singleness | | Fragmentation | Multiple public spheres |
| | Civic interaction | Not necessarily but mostly physical | Civic interaction | Not necessarily but mostly virtual |
| | Common interests | Limited within state borders | Common interests | Global common interests |
| | Rational Critical debate | The above features enabled critical debate | Low critical debate | Variety of factors results in low level of critical debate in NPS |
| | Autonomy from state & Market influence | Ideally, state & market should not influence debate in public sphere | Autonomy from state & market | State and market seem less likely to influence NPS as compared to traditional public sphere |
| Enabling condition | Media | These conditions were defined in nation-state context | Global communication networks | These conditions are based on beyond state approach |
| | Political authority | state | Global governance structures | Global structures of political authority |
| | Civil society | Territorially bounded | Global civil society | Extra-territorial |

5. Discussion

Habermas and several of his commentators have a common assumption. All accounts of public sphere have been based in the context of the nation-state framework. An unsaid equivalence is referred between the virtual space of the public sphere and the physical space of the nation-state (Crack, 2007). It is only logical to comprehend that the physical locales of Habermas theory i.e. saloons or coffee houses only served the purpose of the centers of information and ideological exchanges and the citizens who visited these places carried away these ideas with them and the actual debate took place most of the time far away from these centers in a virtual atmospheres which have nothing to do with any kind of physical space. Thus, the debate has been conducted at a distance (Wessels, 2008), and NPS also facilitates this opportunity.

The notion of critical deliberation refers to the codes of open discussion meant to achieve “rationally motivated consensus”. Definitely good dialogue is preferable in all respects, but in the case of Habermasian ideal, challenging standards have been placed on the nature of political discourse. High criteria are constructive and essential to identify directions, even if one recognizes that reality most of the time lags behind the ideals (Bohman, 1998). Besides, critics like Lyotard (1984), pointed out that “*anarchy, individuality, and disagreement, rather than rational accord, lead to true democratic emancipation.*” (Lyotard, 1984)

However, Habermas concerns of state and market influence over media can not be thoroughly overruled. Some believe that the Internet is also vulnerable to the same forces that initially brought its decline (Carey, 1995). With every passing day, businesses are increasingly appearing on websites which were previously entirely free from market influence. Advertising over popular social websites is becoming commonplace. Many giant websites themselves have turned into commercial arenas. But contrary to this argument, it still remains a fact that the Internet theoretically can be termed as an unlimited space. Dominance of the Internet by the market is only limited to a fraction of it (McChesney, 1995). Even today large spaces over the Internet are virtually free of market or state influence. (Dahlberg, 2001)

Unlike bourgeoisie public sphere, NPS is difficult to censor. Authoritarian regimes generally smother communication among their citizens as they apprehend that well-informed and better-coordinated public would limit their ability to act freely. (Shirky, 2011)

It is a fact that the Internet has to certain extent been “developed, monitored and regulated by government”. Nevertheless, a huge amount of debate occurs online comparatively free of state and market influence (Dahlberg, 2001). The Internet by its structurally complex nature and advanced technologies is difficult to censor. Malaysia.Net is working successfully notwithstanding Malaysian government

censorship within Malaysia by operating from an ISP located abroad (Australian) (Dahlberg, 2001). Many dissident movements even terrorist organizations like Al-Qaida have effectively published their contents without concerns of the powerful states including United States with advanced mechanisms to trace and censor.

6. Conclusions

The revival of public sphere of the private citizens is of course in process. However, this revival is happening not only within but also beyond the nation-state, in a new social space that is indifferent to territorial confines. As a result temporal-spatial boundaries of the public sphere are becoming fluid. Therefore the emergent new “public” does not necessarily require a mandatory nation-state “identity”.

Habermas thesis on the refueledization of “public sphere” is based on the transformed concept of “public”. The “public” demoted to be mere spectator, not participant, before which the expert opinion was presented. ICTs are providing the citizens with opportunities to become participant. Information revolution has revitalized the distinction between public and private not in the sense that Habermas would have wished it to, but through a reinforced extension. The extension of ‘public’ by the mass media, Habermas argued, proved detrimental for the existence of bourgeoisie public sphere, but extension of public brought about by ICTs is rejuvenating the public sphere. The main argument for the difference with Habermas is the distinction between the two media. The mass media was a one way traffic which made Habermas think of the medieval period concept of presenting the public ‘before’ not for the people, condemning the people to be mere spectator. However, ICTs enabled ‘social media’ has reversed this condition and have created an environment in which ‘public’ need not remain mere ‘spectator’ instead they have the opportunity to be participant.

The ‘extension’ of the public, as Habermas argued may bring conflict, but researches show that conflict and difference are not necessarily bound to harm democracy, they may strengthen it. ICTs have brought unmatched extension in the public body. Today, the public- a body of citizens, need not be delimited by state borders, rather new technologies have enabled public to move beyond the territorial confines. However, this extension is entirely blind to any discrimination.

Today, the civil society is ever sprawling, multilayered, encompassing anything but state, following numerous written and unwritten codes, while sustaining its distinction it comes into conflict and coordination with state, global governance structures and market to negotiate favors for the individuals, communities and to uphold certain norms, this is no more a “borders” confined “civil society”, rather it is global in its character. Thus, the preconditions for the NPS are also materializing on a planetary

level in the shape of communication networks, global civil society and global governance networks.

7. References

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*** World Value Survey, WVS 2005-2008, corresponding to the fifth wave of the World Value Survey.