

Theorising the Public Sphere

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the criticism of Jürgen Habermas's idea of the public sphere, which is essential for sociology to comprehend the possibility for consensus in the communication processes of modern society. The main objective of this paper is to examine the evolution of the notion of the public sphere. This will be achieved by investigating the traditional concept of the public sphere and scrutinising its mechanisms. The public sphere is crucial in providing a platform for thoughtful discussions that strive to involve society in the process of constructing society itself. Undoubtedly, the evolution of social interactions in contemporary times is influenced by the standard possibilities and limitations imposed by public discussions. Amidst the era of digital advancements, the discussion around the public sphere has gained significant significance and complexity. Given the abundance and variety of public areas. This paper aims to elucidate the evolution of the traditional notion of the public sphere and analyse its defining features.

INTRODUCTION

Public sphere is the place where people gather to discuss issues of public interest, engage in rational discourse, and sphere "public opinion" (Habermas, 1962). Public sphere refers to a social setting where people can gather to openly discuss and determine societal issues, and by doing so, have an impact on political decisions. The term used to describe this type of discussion is public debate, which refers to the expression of opinions on topics of public importance. Typically, participants in the discussion hold competing or differing perspectives. The examination of the public sphere centres on the concept of participatory democracy and the process by which public opinion is translated into political engagement. The ideology underlying public sphere theory posits that governmental laws and policies need to be guided by the public sphere, and that only governments that heed the public sphere's voice are considered legitimate (Benhabib, 1992). This paper traces the evolution of the public sphere concept, beginning with its original formulation and definition by Habermas. It then examines the subsequent stages of its development and theoretical analyses, focusing on the study and analysis of the characteristics of the public sphere. Consequently, the intricate history of the public realm is thoroughly emphasised to facilitate the reader's comprehension of this concept. The aim is to examine the definition of public sphere, explore various approaches to it, and determine the feasibility of applying the classical notion of public space in different contexts. Additionally, the study will assess the extent to which the concepts of public sphere are implemented in various locations. It also concludes by raising a question regarding the applicability of the principles of public sphere to contemporary social media in the digital sphere.

PUBLIC SPHERE

After publishing his great book entitled *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), which can be considered as the cornerstone of the concept of Public Sphere, the latter has attracted the attention of thinkers, politicians and philosophers in the West. The basis of the Public Sphere relies on the central communicative action based on the critical thinking of the actors in the process, starting with the normal and the simplest social aspect and moving through the various life aspects that are more complicated and organized. The concept of the Public Sphere is also related communicative rationalism, and Habermas has been keen on studying and investigating this concept, publishing his book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas, 1962).

THE CLASSIC TREND OF PUBLIC SPHERE THEORIZING

The concept of the Public Sphere has its origins from the language of ancient Greek. It is derived from the Greek word “koine” and the Greek city “polis”. It means the being “free” and “visible”, which means that a group of citizens meet and discuss one common topic in a plain and straightforward way, as everything is clear or can be seen clearly. Moreover, any individual can participate and compete the others, so that he or she can win if he or she has the best performance in an activity (Habermas, 1989). Finally, the concept of Public Sphere spread in all over the European countries by means of the Roman Law, and the Latin equivalent is “*res publico*”.

Even though the origins and roots of the concept of the Public Sphere date back to the era of the emergence of nation states based on ethnicities and ethnic majority, such as Germany, the spread of this concept can be credited to the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724- 1804), who also has the credit to think of publicity, as he distinguished between private and public use of intellect. After that, Habermas came up with what is called “Public Sphere”, which is the realms and common environment of specific individuals in order to establish a realm that frames political practices and guides public opinion through the communicative action (Johnson, 2011). In this context, Kant is regarded, for Habermas, as the actual founder of the Public Sphere for Habermas, Habermas stresses that the Kantian publicity necessitated the transition from individualism to universalism at the level of morality and politics. The aim of this publicity is to create a civil society that establishes the truth on a comprehensive level, in line with the capacity of practical intellect to establish an illuminating publicity.

This principle of publicity is what makes Kant's notion, the Public Sphere, an attraction and interest for Habermas. It can be said that the general agreement among people (especially those who are members of “rational-critical debate”) lies in the essence of publicity. In addition, this general agreement is at the same time a practical question and examination of the “truth” (Habermas, 1989: 105). However, Habermas found that publicity alone is not sufficient, as it needs to be accompanied with communicative rationality and debate among persons, based on discussion and deliberation among the group of persons. It also relies on the consensus which is based on the reality of social practice. Kant's view of the people and citizens involved in the public domain is vague, as Habermas indicates. For example, according to Habermas, the view of Kant concerning the public represented by the people who take part of the Public Sphere is not completely obvious. On the one hand, it is said that these people need guidance, as they do what they do according to what they are taught to do. In spite of this, they are said to be

sufficiently 'enlightened' to use their minds and intellects in public places (Habermas, 1989: 105).

Publicity is one of the basic principles that shapes Habermas's political thought. In his book *Public Sphere*, the principle of "publicity", on which contemporary bourgeois states have relied, emerged. Accordingly, Habermas views that 'Public Sphere and Publicity' is a study that seeks to examine the foundations and structure of the liberal bourgeois model. Habermas also stresses the spatial dimension of the public sphere. He mentions that the term 'public sphere' comes mainly from G. W. F. Hegel's philosophy of right, as it denotes the place of producing and exchanging goods, where all other economic relationships are determined, and the civil society is subject to economic laws (Habermas, 1989: xvii).

Habermas sees the social domain as a world of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Publicity is one of the basic principles that shapes Habermas's political thought. In his book, *Public Sphere*, the principle of "publicity" on which contemporary bourgeois states are based, and from here Habermas goes that "Public Sphere and Publicity" is a study that seeks to examine the foundations and structure of the liberal bourgeois model. Habermas also emphasizes the spatial dimension of public space, as Habermas mentions that the term public space comes mainly from Wilhelm Hegel's philosophy of right, as it denotes the place of production and exchange of goods, and where all other economic relations are defined, and civil society is subject to economic laws. Moreover, Habermas defines Public Sphere as "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (Habermas, 1974: 49).

According to Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere can be understood first and foremost as the domain or realm of a group of specific people gathered in the form of audience, and these people are calling for this domain codified and organized by the authority, but they are demanding it directly against the authority itself, so that they can discuss public rules, the field of exchanging goods and social work, which is a field that remains fundamentally subordinate, but whose importance has become of a public nature (Habermas, 1991: 33).

Habermas's contribution to the public sphere is one of the first contributions to this concept in the twentieth century. The importance of these contributions is evident in rethinking about the concepts associated with public sphere such as legitimacy, consultative democracy, and the formation of a free public opinion. Habermas tries to have a perception in which the political process is implemented in its best form, in accordance with the stage in Europe, especially the post-Nazi stage. Accordingly, Habermas traced the structural transformation of public sphere. In his book *The Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas investigated the development and history of Public Sphere "from the eighteenth-century salons to the contemporary physical or virtual spaces where citizens partake in conversations regarding the common good" (Habermas, 1989). According to Habermas (1989), the bourgeois public sphere evolved through the feudal and aristocratic societies and royal courts. It first appeared as a "public sphere in the realm of letters," as a literary public field, or it appeared as a political public domain, "public sphere in the realm of politics." Furthermore, the development of the literary public domain, as Habermas views, went in parallel with the development of capitalist economy and the withdrawal of feudalism. Habermas also argued that with an increasing number of

national and regional states within a capitalist economy at its first stages, public and private domains turned to be discrete in the modern concept (Habermas, 1989: 10-11).

The domination of towns and the institutions of the civil society over the royal courts as the place for cultural activities for the public went with the detachment between state and the civil society. In other words, individuals got together and joined as a public (Habermas, 1989: 10-32). Among the new establishments of the seventeenth-century European towns were cafés in England, salons in France, and table and literary societies in Germany. These institutions became the centre of political criticism, after it had been the centre of criticism, among the nobility and the bourgeois thinkers (Habermas, 1989: 10-32).

One of the most important tasks of the public sphere mentioned by Habermas in the eighteenth century is the use of the public sphere to have rational and critical discussions. The cities of Europe contained new institutions, cafés in England, salons in France, and table and literary societies in Germany, where they became the centre of literary criticism, and later among the noble and the bourgeois intellectuals. Concerning the political public sphere, it fully developed for the first time in Britain in the eighteenth century. The public sphere became adopted within the constitutional and bourgeois European states, where public opinion was used as a means of pursuing hegemony and criticisms of the state. After the demise of the representative publicity that prevailed in the early eighteenth century, the literary public sphere emerged and then turned into the political realms in the public sphere. The latter was represented in the bourgeois constitutional state as the sphere of the bourgeois sphere, representing in private institutions such as periodicals, the press, and cafés, which remained an integral part of the economic and social conditions that are related to and affect them (Habermas et al, 1974: 49). Cafés, salons, and table societies had some important principles in common despite their differences in size, public make-up, styles of procedures, and others. These principles, as Habermas argues, include common characteristics, such as:

- a. the best common power of an argument is based on having the equity and equal opportunities among the participants as well as full ignorance of their social status.
- b. Within these public arguments, there is the problem of having previously unquestioned topics.
- c. Every person has the privilege to participate in discussing the topics and the questions raised in a discussion (Habermas, 1989).

The public sphere discusses the structures of constitutional states, the press, and the parliamentary debates open to the media. This made the political authority subject to the judgment of the mental and legal opinion of an elite group of the public who use their minds within a space of freedom and independence framed within a dialogue, which is considered an argument for the will of authority and power. However, the public sphere was formed for a specific audience of people. For example, women were excluded from political issues, but they participated in the literary sphere. (Calhoun, 1993) argues in a persuasive way against how Habermas excluded and ignored women's identities from the public sphere. According to Calhoun, these identities are often shaped in the context of public debates. This is what Calhoun has argued convincingly. "Feminists have pointed to the gendered nature of the private and public distinction and to female forms of public action" (Pateman, 1983; Ryan, 1990). On the other hand, some scholars drew attention to controversial counter-public spheres that involve subordinate groups, contrary to Habermas' unitary public sphere (Eley, 1992).

The family is the first important social and economic structure, as it is the first passage for individuals to participate in community. As for Habermas, he believes that the family provides the individual with a certain emotional training that prepares him or her to interact within the community. The family is the source of personality or individuality and privacy, and this privacy is an important part of the characteristics of the community in the public sphere. Therefore, the bourgeoisie needs the economic credentials and the emotional readiness of the communities participating.

The second main structure, after the family, is the literary public sphere, which serves as a passage between the representative publicity and the bourgeois public sphere. The literary public sphere prepares people for political thinking by giving them an opportunity to discuss art and literature critically. Then it evolves into challenging the community to criticize the State's authority. The last and most important structure is the passage from the literary sphere to the political one, where the community in cafes and salons have turned to discuss political issues directly (Habermas, 1974). The main factor in the transformation of the literary public sphere into political powers has been the press, as magazines have begun to publish political articles, and eventually newspapers and political magazines have emerged. Habermas emphasizes that the power of the press has contributed to the transformations in the public sphere from its literary form to its political one (Habermas, 1989).

THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC REALM

The relationship between the public and the private goes back in history. It has always been there to show their differences in many different meanings related to the concepts of the private and the public in various social notions and situations. In ancient times, the words 'private' and 'public' tended to be used, according to the Greek culture, to differentiate between two different societal spheres. In those days, there had been a clear division of the Greek society into two main societal groups. The first one was called 'the Sphere of the Polis,' while the other one was called 'the Sphere of the Oikos.' As for the sphere of the polis, it represents a public societal group including a number of different citizens socializing and communicating in public meetings to talk about political themes and issues. Concerning the sphere of the oikos, it involves a specific societal group of individuals who meet and talk in private about domestic themes and issues (Habermas, 1989: 3). The Greeks have distinguished between political activity and natural, domestic bond which is centrally based on the family, then on the city Polis-Oikos; therefore, from this perspective, man, according to the Greek philosophy, has a second life to be added to his normal life, so that each individual belongs to two levels of existence. The first one expresses his own lifestyle, and the other expresses his common lifestyle.

Both the public and the private spheres are central historical concepts of the structural transformation in the public sphere that Habermas focuses on. Habermas describes the relationship between the public and private sectors as dynamic and complex at the same time. He traces the two concepts from ancient Greece to the Middle Ages as well as how these two concepts change and are influenced by economic and social conditions. The public sphere is related to the political power, while the private one is related to the family and society. Hence, these two sectors are defined and separated in terms of law and institutions. "The Enlightenment category thus is different from its classical Greek ancestor, just as it is different from its transformed contemporary descendant" (Calhoun, 1992b: 6).

Both (Habermas, 1991) and (Arendt, 1958) emphasize the fact that before modern times, the private sphere represented the sphere of both the family and economy at the same time. In modern times, a society, however, witnessed the increase in capitalism, so that the capitalist economy and the modern situation are both relatively independent but interlinked spheres. Accordingly, the concept of economy would no longer include just family and its expenses, and a new distinctive realm of society would emerge, involving merchandise production and employment for specific wages, i.e., wage-labour (Habermas, 1991).

According to (Habermas, 1984), a public realm is seen stronger in a bourgeois layer through supplying its individuals with “familiar intimacy” and the consequent impact of this familiarity and intimacy on these individuals. For example, providing such intimacy and familiarity can be seen in making sleeping and living rooms in one space and under the same roof, “and since the privacy of one depends on the public nature of the other, the subjectivity of the private individual is from the beginning linked to publicity” (Habermas, 1984: 67-68).

Some scholars, such as Arendt, had an influence on Habermas, so that will be a good idea to have a look on Arendt’s point of view. According to (Arendt, 1997), such a relationship can be simply explained in the form of a metaphor: “the discussion table.” In the beginning, one needs to have his or her own place at the table, controlling his or her cosy necessities. After that, he or she takes part of an activity that makes him or her separate and united at the same moment, for each individual has his or her seat at the table and all of them are doing their desired activities that suit their comfortable necessities and desires. In other words, this process gives each individual an opportunity to intermingle with the others by sitting on different places but in one environment and to do their preferable activities (Arendt, 1997). As for the modern industrial society, the private sphere has integrated into the public one. In other words, there is nothing left from the private one except that thought and intellect have shifted to the level of production and consumption.

Arendt (1958), the political philosopher, distinguished between the private sphere and the public sphere. Since she had such a great influence on Habermas, it is a good idea to present some of her ideas and critiques. She believes that the erosion and decline of the public sphere in modern society is a decline that coincides with a decline in freedom and thought, and she also sees that the freedom and thought depend on the separation between political life as a public sphere and social life as a private one. The private sphere gives the individual the space he or she needs to think, and it protects him or her from the hegemony of the public sphere as well. The Greek city with the democratization of participation which prevailed in it has achieved for the individual a special place through which he or she can think, reflect, choose, judge and understand the meaning of things. There is no existence of freedom in the absence of a public sphere which is a meeting place, a gathering point and a freedom of both opinion and thought (Arendt, 1958).

One of the questions that rise itself here is: “What are the main factors which led to this gradual transformation of the relation between the public and the private in the modern era?” Habermas answered this question, saying that “the development of mercantile capitalism in the sixteenth century, together with the changing institutional forms of political power, created the conditions for the emergence of a new kind of public sphere in early modern Europe”

(Thompson, 1995: 69). To say it differently, this deep shift of the economic and the emblematic structure of society in this new age prompted the creation of a public sphere that had never existed or been created before. The major shift in the modern world that Habermas sees is the loss of distinction between the two terms. The public and private sectors are replaced by a single huge “communal” society, like that of the feudal state in the Middle Ages.

SUMMING UP SO FAR: THE IMPLICATIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE FOR HABERMAS

Depending on the ideas discussed so far above, we have already seen that thinking in the public sphere is the individual's thinking in a set of social and political frameworks as well as historical transformations, including all the actions of an individual in a society, ranging from the processes of communal integration to his or her participation in political life, and his or her contribution to the consolidation and strengthening of democracy, which are the matters that occupied Habermas and tried to present his contributions to achieve them. This automatically leads us to distinguish between two issues: The public sphere that includes the state and its institutions from the one hand, and the private sphere that has a relationship to the individual, his or her personal life, rights and civil practices from the other hand.

Habermas analysed the public sphere in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the period of the rise of public sphere at the hands of the bourgeois class at the time. He also monitored the workplaces of the public sphere, such as literary salons, newspapers and magazines which accompanied the emergence of the bourgeoisie with the economic development at the level of production and the development of the industrial capitalist market. Habermas used the analytical historical method to analyse and monitor the concept and structure of public sphere in terms of its composition and transformations related to the economic, political and social situation, as well as its basic function of protest, debate, persuasion, deliberation and its activation with the elements of the bourgeois society, as well as its connection with the public opinion. However, criticisms and explanations about the concept of public sphere have been rolled out among researchers and thinkers in political philosophy and sociology, and we can summarize these criticisms in several aspects.

CRITICISM OF HABERMAS'S CONCEPT OF PUBLIC SPHERE

Habermas's viewpoint of the public sphere has been subject to many criticisms. The Italian sociologist, Armando Salvatore, criticized Habermas's view of the development of the public sphere in Europe as to how Habermas limits the public sphere to the “Western” world and considers it as a source of Western modernism and how it could not have the roots and heritage of non-European civilizations and societies that really contributed to the formation of the public sphere, according to (Salvatore, 2007). As for Salvatore's concept of public sphere, it was not very different from Habermas. It only focuses to some extent on the relationship of individuals to each other within the society, thus on the relationship of individuals to the state more than on individuals as independent rational actors.

The biggest difference in Salvatore's perception of public sphere is his point of view of the origin and evolution of the public sphere phenomenon. Salvatore believes that the public sphere is neither a modernist phenomenon that did not exist before the modern era, nor is it a phenomenon that is limited to Western societies only, but is found in other societies and civilizations. Later on, Salvatore focuses on studying the history of the public sphere, up and

down in different European, Christian and Eastern Islamic cultures, by concentrating on the role of heritage in drawing the map of development. He sees that the idea of public sphere in its modern form has previous roots in different forms in heritage. Moreover, he believes that these distinctive images of heritage confirm the existence of historical alternatives to the way the relationship between society and power was formed to create the public sphere (Salvatore, 2007).

On the other hand, postmodern thinkers, including Makke Allen, in his book *The Public Sphere: An Introduction* (2005: 44), criticized the idealized public sphere in Habermas and that the public sphere must be approached completely as one unit which is culturally or religiously indivisible in a rational way. Arendt (1998) also approached the public sphere in its public and private concepts in his book *The Human Condition*. She agreed with Habermas on some points and disagreed with him on several others as Arendt linked the public sphere directly with political theory. Furthermore, she compared the public sphere to theatrical performance in which the political participants declare themselves and their needs in speech and actions. On the one hand, Arendt considered the Greek city-state as a standard model of active public sphere (Arendt, 1998: 49). After the publishing of "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere," a lot of criticisms were raised. Most of them were "related to the fact that the concept is centered on bourgeois society - which would generate a "hegemonic public sphere" to the detriment of alternative public spheres - and to the excessive appreciation of the emancipatory potential of liberal discourse, which would not take into consideration the impacts of discrimination" (Susen, 2011).

Nancy Fraser (1990) also criticized Habermas's thesis on public sphere, specifically the imperialist model, where she sees the imperialist model for the bourgeois public sphere as inappropriate for the contemporary critical theory, as she considers the necessary and serious need for a post-bourgeois perception to know the truth, components and roles of public sphere in it. One argument raised by (Fraser, 1990) on the ground that the liberal public sphere that Habermas suggests does not take into consideration other non-liberal spheres. (Fraser, 1990) states that it is not true that having many spheres is crucial to democracy; in contrast, the author acknowledges that in the societies which have many cultures, "several publics are needed, since there are different identities and cultures" (Fontana, 2014; Losekann, 2009). Furthermore, the societies which are divided into different classes and social layers tend to have less equality and more domination when they intermingle and interact with each other in only one public sphere (Fontana, 2014). "For this reason, subordinate sub-publics, denouncing the 'vices of origin' of national public spaces, are not forces of destabilization, but of democratization and expansion of the national policies" (Avritzer and Costa, 2004: 711).

Fraser understood the political value of public sphere, specifically its contribution in creating various new social movements like political, minority, ethnic, feminist, cultural movements, and so on. Fraser's criticism also points out the supposition of equality that leaves various groups out, without taking into consideration the differences in their power. She claims as well that it is very hard to try to draw a clear distinction between public and private, remarking that by restricting taking private issues into account, both people and these issues would not be included in the debate (Fontana, 2014). Seyla Benhabib's criticisms also follow the same grounds (Losekann, 2009). Fraser's attention is paid on approaching the public sphere in

contemporary critical theory, and then examining its political-philosophical foundations and the roles that it can play, especially on the political level, in a thesis that there is a possibility of a post-bourgeois public sphere. Fraser views the public sphere as a domain through which solutions to contemporary problems in the State can be found particularly in regard to the political action of the masses and the practice of participation and democracy.

Fraser defines the public sphere as the sphere of modern societies, the sphere of the citizens who fight for their common interests, and the sphere that establishes a deliberative interaction. She criticizes Habermas's definition of the public sphere in which the bourgeois public sphere falls on modern societies, as it limits the participation of an educated public who is proficient in using the mind critically. Undoubtedly, the eighteenth and nineteenth societies are different from contemporary societies. However, she goes back to what is central in Habermas's view, which is the connection of the public sphere to the critical theory of political practice, and the public sphere being a place for the production of critical discourse towards the State, and the relations of deliberation, discourse and debate (Fraser, 1990: 56).

Frazer also criticizes Habermas for not theorizing a public sphere as an alternative to the liberal model that is compatible with the new conditions for the democracy of the masses, and the functions of contemporary critical theory, which Habermas should have paid attention to and attached the utmost importance to. Therefore, Frazer calls for transcending Habermas's theory of public sphere with his liberal model, to think of a post-bourgeois public sphere. For her, Habermas did nothing but dissecting the bourgeois public sphere and show its formations, elements, components, and tools, while he had to deal primarily with it as problematic in a role that fits the critical function that Habermas is primarily concerned with. He also had to propose an alternative to a post-bourgeois public sphere that would preserve the critical function in its domain (Fraser, 1990).

Accordingly, it is extremely important to know and understand the concept of the Public Sphere, taking into account the criticisms raised about it, as Habermas has done throughout his research and works, especially when a person wants to apply this concept outside Europe (Avritzer and Costa, 2004: 710). For this reason, even with the incorporation of these transformations, various criticisms would remain in regard to the type of the Public Sphere and its formulation as it is formed by Habermas, which means it is crucial to have all of these developments in advance. Perhaps among those developments is the rise of virtual spheres, which play an important role in shaping the public opinion and have the same features and characteristics as classical spheres. However, with the development of the means of communication and the emergence of the internet, a public sphere has emerged on the scene that made individuals directly reach a global forum that enables them of free expression and open debate without mediation, choice or oversight.

CONCLUSION

This paper addressed the critique of Habermas's notion of public sphere, while also examining the origin and evolution of this concept. An in-depth examination of the public sphere is essential for a sociological comprehension of the liberating capacity embedded in the communicative mechanisms of contemporary society. The foundation of the public sphere is in the primary communicative action, which is centred around the critical thinking of individuals

involved in the process about problems of public importance. It serves as the platform for the rational utilisation of public reasoning and the formation of "public opinion" (Habermas, 1962). While Kant is recognised as the original creator of the public sphere, according to Habermas, this is primarily due to his ideas on publicity and his differentiation between private and public thought. However, Habermas observed that mere publicity is insufficient; it must be complemented by communicative rationality and dialogue among individuals, based on group discussions and deliberations. Habermas defines the public sphere as a domain in our social existence where a semblance of public opinion can be shaped (Habermas, 1974: 49). Habermas's contribution to the public sphere is among the pioneering contributions to this notion in the twentieth century. The significance of these contributions is apparent in the reconsideration of ideas pertaining to the public realm, such as legitimacy and the development of uninhibited public opinion. Habermas aims to envision the optimal implementation of the political process, taking into account the current stage of development in Europe. Habermas emphasises that a crucial function of the public domain is to facilitate rational and critical discourse and shape public opinion.

Nevertheless, Habermas's notion of public space has encountered critique on multiple fronts. Salvatore expressed his disapproval of Habermas's work due to its narrow focus on the public sphere in Western society, while disregarding the historical origins of the public sphere in pre-modern civilizations and cultural legacy. Nancy Fraser (1990) and other postmodern thinkers have criticised Habermas's thesis on the public sphere, particularly the imperialist model. Fraser argues that the bourgeois public sphere, as depicted in the imperialist model, is unsuitable for contemporary critical theory. Instead, she advocates for a post-bourgeois society, emphasising the urgent need for such a transformation. Fraser suggests moving beyond Habermas's idea of the public sphere by adopting her liberal model to consider the post-bourgeois public sphere. It is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of the public sphere notion, including the criticisms it has received. Habermas extensively explored and analysed this concept in his study and work.

This understanding becomes particularly relevant when attempting to apply the concept in non-European contexts (Avritzer and Costa, 2004: 710). One of the notable advancements is the rise of virtual sphere that significantly influence the public's opinion and possess comparable attributes to traditional domains. It is crucial to inquire whether the contemporary virtual world and social media platforms may be considered an expansion of the public sphere as defined by Habermas. Does it facilitate the attainment of rational communication and the formation of a semblance of public opinion?

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