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Call For Papers • Special Issue

(Re)creating public sphere, civic culture and civic engagement : public service media vs. online social networks

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The net generation, growing up with the internet and other online media, is widely assumed to consist of more responsible citizens, using their technological expertise to campaign on social and political issues, exercise closer scrutiny over their governments, genuinely being more politically engaged. Citizens of the so-called 'global village', 'virtual democracy', 'electronic agora' or 'blogosphere' are said to fulfil the dream of a unified and interconnected world. The unprecedented expansion of Online Social Networks (OSN) such as *Facebook*, *MySpace*, *LinkedIn* & *Twitter* offers vast opportunities for communication, entertainment & chatting. These online forums differ from traditional media, such as Public Service Media (PSM), in that they allow more *interactivity* and *many-to-many communication*. But they have some similarities to Habermas' concept of the public sphere: net spheres are public places that are outside of control by the state; they allow individuals to exchange views and knowledge as well as critical points of view; they are spaces where public-minded rational consensus can be developed.

The advantages of cyber-media are that they are not confined to frequency bandwidth; any one can be a 'publisher' (ability to voice one's opinion; collective action); they provide *access* (to all with internet account); they are *self-generating social networks*, allowing networks to form from participation, rather than structuring relationships from the top. However, the net can turn to be a *noisy, uncontrolled environment*; the open participation may turn chaotic, so there can be no model rules of behaviour or structured conversation; texts and voices may result in anarchic, rather than democratic forms of participation. What is more, there are linguistic barriers and blogging sites are typically dominated by white male voices & polarized opinion. The very notion of openness is at stake as there is limited competition among providers. Inclusiveness can be an issue too – not all people use the Net due to cost considerations or lack of skills, especially in the developing world. Most crucially, critical discussion – the very notion of the Public Sphere – is often absent on the Net, whose content is highly partisan.

So, is it a myth that the Internet can revamp the Public Sphere, tackle political apathy and mobilize citizens? Not entirely, for there are plenty of good examples to show the opposite, as evidenced by Barack Obama's online campaign to activism on *Facebook* and *Twitter* and the *Twitter*-aided demonstrators in Moldova and Iran against the fraud parliamentary election results and the Iranian authoritarian government respectively. Groups in *Facebook* can choose to support the linearisation of Tibet; *Twitter* often has real-time updates on events like the Mumbai terrorist attacks. These examples highlight the Net's informative and mobilising power.

Subject Coverage

This special issue seeks research articles and case studies that can address the broad theme of (re)creating public sphere, civic culture and civic engagement through Public Service Media vs. Online Social Networks and offer argumentation and analysis on the following issues:

- Has the mobilising and democratising power of the Internet been exaggerated?
- Has the Net the ability to offer critical political discussion?
- Can the OSN contribute to the (re)creation of Public Sphere, Civic Culture, Civic Engagement, and therefore address the Democratic deficit?
- Is violation of privacy in pursuit of profit an issue of concern?
- Will the networks be viable, or are we heading for another Internet bubble, given that people log in to *chat* with friends, thus not paying attention to ads, as well as ad firms' scepticism to advertising their products and services next to user-gen content?
- Is it about time we looked again at PSM for recreating the Public Sphere, tackling political apathy, and offering a better space for rational debate and culture dissemination in light of their openness to all at affordable prices; offerings of new open forms of distribution & access, including archives, pod-casts and digital distribution; *trustworthiness* as credible information source and safe spaces for discussion?

Notes for Intending Authors

Submitted papers should not have been previously published or be currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.

All papers are refereed through a double blind process. A guide for authors, sample copies and other relevant information for submitting papers are available on the IJEG [Submission of Papers](#) web-page.

All papers must be submitted online through the [IJEG On-line Submissions System](#). If you experience any problems submitting your paper online, please contact submissions@inderscience.com, describing the exact problem you experience. Please include in your email the title of the Journal.

Important Dates

Deadline for paper submission : September 10, 2010
Notification of review results : December 10, 2010
Submission of revised manuscripts : January 10, 2011

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