NEW MEDIA, PUBLIC SPHERE and DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between media and democracy within the framework of the characteristics of the hegemonic political economy of different eras. Thus, it is examined the way public sphere has been transformed by media (manuscripts-books, newspapers-radio-television, internet-new media respectively) in feudal, modern and late- or post-modern periods. Using this method, it is elaborated on the effect of dominant media on the understanding and practice of democracy in certain periods through ‘the transformation of public sphere’. Then it is questioned the relationship between the current new media and democracy using this historical model. It will be examined the relationship between democracy and media (information and communication tools) through the transformation of “public sphere” or, as it was called in Ancient Greece, the ‘agora.’

Keywords: New media, democracy, public sphere, hegemony, neo-liberalism, political participation.

INTRODUCTION

In this study, the effect of current information and communication tools, or new media, on democracy will be discussed via the key concept of ‘public sphere’, with the hope of narrowing and materializing the subject to a certain extent. Think of information and communication technologies as tools for closing the gap between the current and the ideal forms of democracy is not a new idea. The main motivation of this study is the criticism of the optimistic assumptions by certain technophile researchers that democracy can be improved with new media. According to this approach political participation will become easier and higher than it has ever been in history as electronic/digital communication tools become more widespread, which in turn will spread and deepen democracy. In other words, the multilateral, interactive and bottom-up communication mechanism created by more advanced media offers an unprecedented opportunity for the development of democracy (Bentivegna, 2006; Norris 2001, 2003). This determinist approach, which can be summarized as “internetization=digitalization=liberalization=democratization,” reduces the social-political process to a “thing” that is easily influenced by an external factor.

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Today we witness the self being absorbed in itself, everything that belongs to the society melting and the public person collapsing even as an understanding (Sennett, 1992). In this process we wonder whether new media integrates the masses to the neo-liberal order. Is new media a means to sustain the neo-liberal hegemony? Does the ownership structure of the information and communication tools replicate the hegemonic relationship model created by the private (monopolistic) ownership of the means of material-production? The fundamental issue is whether a needed real global public sphere will be able to emerge, or if the ‘network society’ can become a global society, in an age when the ‘public’ has been captured and emptied out by the ‘market’ and the ‘private’ (Bauman, 2008). All these questions determine the main subject of this study, which is the coordinates of the relationship between new media and democracy.

A critical analysis of the role of new media in the expansion and deepening of political pluralism and democratic participation is necessary for making realistic analyses and reliable predictions. In the hope to make a contribution to meeting this need, even if limited, this study examines the relationship between media and democracy within the framework of the characteristics of the hegemonic political economy of different eras. Thus, we examine the way public sphere has been transformed by media (manuscripts-books, newspapers-radio-television, internet-new media respectively) in feudal, modern and late- or post-modern periods. Using this method we will elaborate on the effect of dominant media on the understanding and practice of democracy in certain periods through ‘the transformation of public sphere.’ Then we will question the relationship between the current new media and democracy using this historical model. In short, we will examine the relationship between democracy and media (information and communication tools) through the transformation of “public sphere” or, as it was called in Ancient Greece, the ‘agora.’

PUBLIC SPHERE AND MEDIA: THE HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATION OF DEMOCRACY

This study, which is built around the dialectic and history of the relationship between media and democracy, will proceed with a number of interwoven premises and assumptions. First, like many political-social concepts and phenomena, democracy is in crisis today. This state of crisis has two faces (that coalesce): a) the understanding and practice of democracy that was shaped and given content by the social-political reality of the 19th century does not match the current social-political reality; b) if the essence of democracy is the ‘rule of the people’ and if that is only possible with public participation, the level of political-social participation is at an unprecedented low, so much so that we observe a widespread indifference towards politics-democracy that is bordering on hatred (Putnam, 2000). Second, democracy is only possible with public sphere. There is a direct correlation between the extent and democraticness of the public sphere and democracy (Bauman, 2006). Third, the effectiveness and functionality of the public sphere (and democracy) depends on transparent, qualified and democratic information and communication. Fourth, the level of technology (media) needs to allow active information exchange and communication. Fifth, technically, current (new) media has an unprecedented potential to offer this opportunity (Bentivegna, 2006; Norris 2001). However, the ownership structure of media is not democratic. Therefore, since media is excluded from social control, its democratizing effect is considerably limited. Despite all the technological
transformation, media is still in the hands of a small minority. Partly as a natural outcome of the oligopolistic and monopolistic ownership structure, it provides a type of ‘information’ and ‘control’ that reproduces and consolidates neo-liberal hegemony. That said, sixth, if information and communication tools are controlled by a certain minority and the circulating information is manipulative and controlled, the freedom of the public sphere and the veracity and quality of the information that people communicate and interact with are questionable. Seventh and finally, democracy requires an aware and informed group of people that share common/public grounds and demands.

Throughout its historical development, from sheets of papyrus to social media, media technology of a period has always reflected, or has been the product of the techno-cultural-economic-information level of humankind in that period. The use of media (like other technologies) has social-political consequences. However, these consequences are shaped according to the objective conditions of the historical period that the media is used in. To put it simply, the media of a certain period contributes to the production, legitimation and continuation of the hegemony, which can be called the political economy of the period.

As the sphere that reflects and determines power relations, public sphere is the foundation for democracy as well as where it is fleshed out. It can be asserted that the public sphere emerged with the emergence of the private sphere. After the agricultural revolution the ruling classes, who were detached from agricultural production with the transition to the settled lifestyle, ‘privatized’ the social surplus. Having appropriated the social surplus, the ruling classes displayed the privileges they gained and maintained this way in the ‘private sphere’ such as palaces and castles, since these spaces were also their private property. The unequal power relations, where ruling classes were able to appropriate a big portion of the agricultural product despite staying outside production, cannot be explained merely by their ownership of basic means of production (land, slaves-oxen, plows) and tools of violence. The ruling classes also owned thought, which can be called the ‘ideology’, and the communication tools, which can be called the ‘ideological apparatuses’ of the period. This way, in addition to the private properties of the rulers, places that are thought to belong to the society were also considered public sphere. In other words, public sphere emerged as a result of a settled, class society/a social system based on a more complex division of labor. However, this sphere was not controlled by the society. Public sphere was the space of ideological manipulation and control which concealed and normalized economic exploitation.

In short, public sphere has been the key concept and space of every social-political system since the emergence of class societies. Who and to what extent they will participate in the public sphere, the subjects to be discussed and the ideas that are circulated in a certain period give us a good idea about the social hierarchy and the quality of democracy in that period. What allow information and ideas to circulate and be discussed in the public sphere are communication tools. Therefore, what is the dominant communication tool and who controls it shows us the quality of the dominant information and ideas, or actually, who benefits from them. In every social system, as in slavery, there is a direct relationship between political economic hegemony and the media that produces and carries information. The quality and methods of the hegemony that includes and sustains inequality and domination changes as the social-
political system evolves, while control over information and communication (and communication tools) is essential.

Just as human history, democracy and the public sphere are also dynamic entities. Indeed, the evolution of the social-political system and the transformation of the public sphere are almost synchronized. From the agora of Athenian democracy to today, the agora (and the marketplace) has constantly expanded to include city squares, televisions and virtual mediums such as Facebook and Twitter today. What made this possible were the information and communication technologies that advanced hand in hand with the means of production. Therefore, there is a dialectical relationship between democracy and the socio-economic and technological conditions and technological and economical changes in particular can change democracy, as well as the opinions, perceptions and models of it.

On the other hand, the definition of democracy changes from age to age, class to class, person to person, etc. With each attempt to define it, democracy becomes even more ambiguous and difficult to understand (Sartori, 1987). That said, ‘participation’ is the essence, the foundation of democracy (Almond & Verba, 1989). In other words, the participation of people in political-social processes with a say, authority and decision in all fields and issues is both the purpose and the precondition of democracy. Although the form and the quality of participation are important as well, the channels for social communication and interaction, in other words participation, must be open in any case. In terms of the point reached by technological advancements, today, information and communication tools have become both the main tools that carry information and opinions, and the public sphere, the space of participation itself. To summarize, the media itself has long been the agora. Moreover, since the emergence of newspapers, the agora has been becoming detached from space and new public space definitions such as ‘cyber agora or virtual agora’ are becoming popular (Margolis and Resnick, 2000).

However, as emphasized above, inequalities in ownership and unequal power relations also apply to communication tools or the media. The political economy of media is both the reflection and the most decisive piece of the mechanism that sustains the political economy of class society. Therefore, the ownership structure of communication tools determines the quality of public sphere and political participation. The public sphere that is determined by the media, which is independent from social control, is controlled by a small group rather than working for public interest. The information and ideas that enter the public sphere are geared towards reinforcing and continuing hegemony. The democracy built on this controlled public sphere, then, is an illusion that conceals and normalizes political-social privileges. In other words, due to the ownership structure of communication tools (media) the communication process and democratic participation have always been limited and controlled.

Therefore, the quality and the technological level of the means of production in a certain period determine the technological level and quality of that period’s media. Moreover, the ownership structure and political economy of media in a given period is not independent from, but is a reflection of, the general political economy of the period. As a result, public sphere and democracy in a certain period is affected by the political economy of the media and is also determined by the social-political hegemony of that period.
To exemplify this, Athens had a social order based on slavery. Agricultural production relied on human and animal labor. The means of production, slaves and animals, belonged to a few Athenians as their private property. This small minority appropriated both the means of production and the products of agriculture. This minority was the population that was literate, thinking and arguing about social matters, making and implementing decisions. Slaves, women, the poor and the foreigners were excluded completely from public sphere, more precisely the agora, and therefore from the decision-making mechanism. The agora was, so to speak, the shared private property of the Athenian landowners. Public discussions were held verbally and with face-to-face participation. Knowing, learning and thinking, and as a result the communication process that allows participation in government, were under strict control of this minority. Usually called direct democracy, in Athenian democracy rulers were determined by drawing lots where everyone, meaning every member of the minority that can participate in the public sphere, ruled together. This order and regime where the public sphere was controlled by a small minority was called democracy. In fact, democracy was the regime that maintained the privileges of this small group.

In the feudal society, which also relied on agricultural production, there was no Athenian-type slavery. Yet the land and the means of agricultural production still belonged to a small group of people. Literacy was also exclusive to property owners and the clergy, who were also in the ruling class. Public sphere was almost non-existent, because when everyone belongs to the landowner there is almost nothing that can be called public. The language of the privileged classes was Latin. The dominant media was books and manuscripts. The printing press did not exist and the writing and copying of books, even non-religious ones, were under strict supervision and control of the church. City squares were spaces of punishment instead of communication and discussion (Foucault, 1995; Huberman, 2009).

This social formation transformed as a result of the development of commerce and the mercantile class (the bourgeoisie) gaining power against the aristocrats. The social-political structure of the middle ages went through drastic transformation with Renaissance, Reform and Revolution, led by the interests and guidance of the bourgeoisie (Hazard, 2013). With the economic, social and political support of the industrial revolution the modern age was shaped (Polanyi, 2001). In this process, the bourgeoisie’s need to mobilize the masses, especially the working class, for its struggle with aristocracy and later with kings, led to the ‘rediscovery’ of democracy. The nationalism process involved not only market expansion but also the democratization of information and communication. Reproduction of books with the printing press, introduction of a new communication tool (the newspaper) and popularization of literacy created a larger public sphere than ever before in history. A class of intellectuals emerged in the process of modernization and the newspapers that conveyed the pro-bourgeoisie ideas of the intellectuals to the masses became an effective tool and medium for public discussion. Also in this period, the halls and cafes where especially intellectuals and the bourgeoisie (later other sections of society at different levels) made their appearance emerged as a new space for discussions and the new public sphere. Large squares were constructed in city centers for gatherings during the modern age, when the masses were mobilized as political figures. This way, at the dawn of modern life, with the leadership of the bourgeoisie, a new social-
political hegemony was being built, along with the foundations of a new, representative democracy, with the help of new media and new public spaces.

To summarize, in the process of modernization/nationalism/industrialization: a) a (semi-virtual) public sphere that was based on non-face-to-face communication for the first time in history, thanks to the newspaper and later radio and television, b) city squares where the masses gathered or were brought together when necessary, and c) halls and cafes where groups of intellectuals discussed ideas, mainly obtained from newspapers and other sources, and where face-to-face communication was dominant, emerged. This was how public sphere, more precisely the modern agora that consists of multiple micro-agoras, emerged. In other words, agoras were nationalized with the emergence of national markets. In the same process, as the parliaments became the highest tiers of the public sphere, the understanding and practice of representative democracy was shaped.

In parallel with these political developments, there was a significant transformation in the economy as well. In this process, capitalism had a considerable contribution to the nationalization/nationalism process. For instance, Anderson (2006, 45) associates the emergence of national communities, the subjects of modern representative democracy, with the communication technology and capitalism that he calls ‘print-capitalism’: “(…) the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation.”

To sum up, in the process of nationalization/nationalism and modernization that was shaped and determined by the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, and then the proletariat, public sphere expanded and pluralized. A new public sphere that consists of city squares, cafes, newspapers (later radio and television) and the parliament, as well as new ways and subjects of public discussion came about. This is how the model that we call representative democracy today emerged. This new democracy is also called liberal democracy since it includes certain bourgeois values, despite belonging to the masses. Representative or liberal democracy is quite different from and much more democratic than the Athenian model, both in terms of the number of participating actors and the class diversity of participants, as well as due to the expansion, nationalization, virtualization and pluralization of the public sphere. However, this democracy is not direct. Therefore, the current modern or liberal democracy has little in common with Athenian democracy. Yet, both models are given life and meaning by the agora/the public sphere. What democracy cannot do without is the ‘public sphere’ that allows encounters, influence, being informed, decision making, control, voting and being elected. The common and indispensible component of democracy in any age and time is this real or virtual agora.

Meanwhile, liberal democracy was also controlled by a certain social group. The content and form of public discussions were arranged according to the interests of the bourgeoisie. The ownership of the communication tools such as newspapers and later radio and television was once more concentrated in the hands of a few. Liberal democracy was reflecting the class-social hegemonic power relations of its time. Just as Athenian democracy resulted from and sustained the balance, or the hegemonic relationship, between the landowners and the slaves, liberal-representative democracy was fulfilling a similar function despite its complexity and a certain level of democraticness. In other words, liberal democracy reflected the hegemonic character
of the modern/industrial society that generates inequalities and privileges, although it was under pressure for democratization and partial compromises, to a certain extent and for a while (until the neo-liberal order), due to the rising labor movement.

Liberal representative democracy, in the final analysis, was a bourgeois democracy that resulted from the power balance between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, under the conditions of labor intensive industrial production. The bourgeois democracy was made more democratic to a certain extent with compromises to the rising proletarian movement and their political parties. After the great structural crisis of capitalism and the following world wars, social participation in the public sphere was observed to have increased to a certain extent thanks to the social state practices that leveled the inequalities generated by liberalism. In this process, state and capital were sharing control over the often nation-state centered, centralized communication tools (newspaper, radio and television) that allowed the market, the identity and the public sphere to be dominated by the state. However, in the neo-liberal process during which labor intensive production was gradually decreasing, public sphere and democracy, especially capitalism and the market, were to transform.

NEW MEDIA, HEGEMONY AND DEMOCRACY

Public sphere, which constitutes the ground on which people interact at a certain time and space as well as this interaction itself, is dependent on information and communication. It is not only the place where sharing and interaction happens but also where time and space converge and clash. To simplify, public sphere is the ‘cyber-space’ where information and demands that are obtained at a certain time, and are necessary and important for that time, get exchanged in a certain space and this cycle is continuously repeated. The level of democracy, then, is determined by the extent that this public space is built over a foundation of equality and freedom in a historical period, as explained above.

In the current process, which is given various names such as ‘post-industrial society’, ‘post-modern society’ or ‘globalization’, public sphere has expanded even more, and more importantly, gained an almost virtual quality with the help of new technological advancements. The expansion and globalization of the market; transnational corporations and organizations becoming hegemonic actors; the unstoppable rise of the finance-capital; the erosion of national identities; transition to technology intensive production; post-fordist production; the diversification of workplaces and characteristics of workers; deregulation of capitalism; and the emergence of a consumerist society, are some of the developments that characterize our time. In this process the class discourse and structures based on class have receded and a new political economy process called neo-liberalism emerged, where capital became increasingly freed from the social and the political and completely dominant over the social-political. To put it simply, it can be assumed as a considerable explanatory premise that, the market and the capital, which until recently, relatively speaking, was “under control of the society/state and politics”, has been out of control for a while now and is determining the social-political cultural sphere and structure. Just as many concepts and establishments that are obsolete and in crisis in the neo-liberal social-political order, which is shaped in favor of the capital, liberal/representative democracy is also in crisis and it is far from meeting the emerging needs of the world today.
Communication and information technologies took a forward leap during the construction of the neo-liberal hegemony that is shortly described above. It is even asserted by many researchers that neo-liberal hegemony, manifest as the proliferation and deepening of the market relations and which capitalism uses to renew itself, is only possible with information and communication technologies, or the new media. Indeed, technology, and especially communication tools, made all the trademarks of neo-liberalism possible: division and distribution of production processes; encouraging consumption; rapid movement of information, capital, people and products at the global level, freed from (national) space/territory; etc. Additionally, these new technologies made information and technology intensive production possible and radically transformed public sphere, and therefore democracy.

A new, virtualized form and field of communication-interaction, where face-to-face communication is minimized, has emerged and this had an impact on democracy. Technically, the new communication tools that make participation, immediateness (even if virtual) and bottom-up control possible deepened the crisis of liberal representative democracy, since the characteristics of the public sphere dominated by the new media has changed. Today, the sense of belonging/loyalty to politics itself and its institutions and social trust towards these are more eroded than ever before. The concerns over the problems of representative democracy are, however, ever increasing (Putnam, 2000; Gibson et al. 2008: 112, Dahl, 2000).

Like conventional media, the new media of our day, led by the giant leap in information and communication technologies, is not independent from ownership and power relations, class inequalities, in other words neo-liberal hegemony. New media also reflects the quality and workings of the public sphere, and therefore of democracy. As a complex and inclusive meta-concept, hegemony determines the social-political-cultural structure at a certain technological level and also is affected by this structure. Therefore, the relationship between democracy and new media is always connected to hegemony and examining the quality of today’s neo-liberal hegemony will make it possible to a) understand why our assumptions about and expectations from democracy do not correspond to the conditions of today, b) explain the connection between neo-liberalism and the weakening of democracy, c) show how is it that the crisis of neo-liberal hegemony goes hand in hand with the crisis of democracy, and finally d) make predictions about the future of democracy or the democracy of the future.

The leap of information and communication technologies in recent decades has definitely had significant impact on social life. The arrival of new communication tools (cable and satellite telecommunication tools, internet, etc.) has transformed the notion of mass communication tools by increasing the existing differentiation among the products of media and the audience (Heywood, 2007). For instance, the appearance of internet in the 1990s as the new mass communication medium/tool carried political communication to a new phase (Gibson and Ward, 2002, 99). Concepts like “global village, electronic plebs, virtual democracy, cyber democracy, electronic agora and virtual communities and netizens” have been “magic” and “sympathetic” concepts brought in circulation by the defenders of an optimistic approach towards the future of democracy in the new world order thanks to new communication tools. “Cyber optimists” such as “cyber messiahs” or “cyberterians” also used concepts such as “wired” citizenship, “online” citizenship, new communication agora etc. and claimed
that humanity was at the dawn of a revolution (Gibson and Ward, 123; Luke, 2004, 372).

Meanwhile, it was predicted that internet in general and social media in particular would lead to radical transformations in the democratization of representative democracy and the ruler-ruled relationship (Römmele, 2003; Coleman and Spiller, 2003), and the elimination of the lack of participation in representative democracy (Norris, 2003), which will help democracy spread and deepen. Indeed, it has been frequently indicated that social media (blogs, Twitter, Facebook, etc.), as the current derivative or opportunity of the internet, constituted a “soft power” (Nye, 2004), beyond being just communication mediums-tools. These ‘extreme optimists’ or ‘cyber democrats’ were promising that democracy would be strengthened by (virtual) participation in the digital world. Some were highlighting the immense democratic potential of the virtual society while others claimed that the ease of participating in the political process on internet and the technological democratization would have a radically positive impact on the exchange of ideas, mobilization of the public and social capital. Moreover, it was stipulated that the use of new information and communication technologies would tighten/close the gap between the ruler and the ruled, and the Web would make direct democracy easier (Norris, 23; Drezner, 2010).

According to this optimistic argument user-driven information Technologies - including Blogger, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Wikipedia- are reshaping our professional activities, our subject matter, and even the constitutive rules of the discipline itself. The advent of “Web 2.0”: the second revolution in communications technology that redefined the relationship between producers and consumers of online information (Carpenter and Drezner, 2010, 261). For example, according to Farrel (2005) blogosphere could be called as “a carnival of ideas” and digital technologies may provide a way of making themselves more accessible to the public (Coleman and Spiller, 2003).

Thus, if there has been a radical transformation in information and communication tools, or if conventional communication tools and models are about to be sent to the ash heap of history with a revolutionary move, then conventional politics and society (with all their actors and habits), which rely on conventional media for their existence, will not be exempt from this revolution and will transform radically. With this determinist argument we reach the last step on the ladder of inference: old media (offline media) was centralized, elitist and hierarchical, and the reader-watcher-listener was passive. To simplify, the (traditional) social-political system was organized like the old media, as a highly centralized, hierarchical, top-down vertical model. Yet, the current new and dominant communication tool (the internet) is a ‘centerless, individual-oriented, many-to-many’ communication medium where user-consumer is an active part of the process. Therefore (and inevitably), the soon to emerge political-social system will also be bottom-up, egalitarian, populist, participatory and pluralist.

However, soon enough, it became evident that these conclusions were too hasty. The mood of optimism cleared not long after. Skeptical opinions and critical approaches rapidly spread. The enthusiasm for technology was replaced by concern over the ability of “new media” to tie people down to the ‘old type’ of politics. For instance, it was argued that the asymmetrical, unequal scene in democracy and political life was continued with the internet, that internet continued/reflects “politics as usual” (Margolis and Resnick, 2000). Some researchers pointed out that internet
alone could not mobilize people who lack information and interest on politics (Gibson et al., 112; Margolis and Resnick 2000). In other words, there was no technological magic wand around that could eliminate the illness (in terms of not participating in the political process).

There is another negative point about internet and new communication tools while thinking of their effects on politics. As Sunstein put that (2001) new technologies are dramatically increasing people’s ability to hear echoes of their own voices and to wall themselves off from others. Putnam (2000) also underlined this development and warned about the emergence of “cyberapartheid” and “cyberbalkanization” in virtual public. According to all these researchers, social media has corrosive effect on the politics. In Sennett’s words (2009) “Technology itself now works against engagement.” Citizen participation and social activism are falling into disfavor. With Putnam’s description, a “post civic” generation, so to speak, is emerging. It is worth being skeptical that new-social media will have a revolutionary effect (despite its theoretical potential) that transforms the so-called citizenship of people into a full participation. The impact of neo-liberal hegemony must be taken into consideration.

As we try to emphasize, what these optimistic approaches towards the impact of new media on social-political life and democracy have in common is their failure to take into account the fact that democracy is dependent on historical and political economic conditions. Moreover, the dialectical connection of technology and new media to existing hegemonic power relations must be taken into account. The contrary would mean omitting the possibility that new media (can) reproduce the social-political structure itself (with all its inequalities) which is shaped by inequality (Luke, 373).

Thinking of the relationship between new media and democracy today, the striking paradox, as Richard Sennett (2009, 113) indicated, is the fact that people actively participate in their own passivity. The most important factors that enable this might be the spread of information and communication technologies and the way these are used. Antonio Gramsci’s concept “passive revolution” mentions that power groups utilize various ideological and cultural tools in addition to tools of oppression in order to prevent large movements for change from the grassroots. As an “ideological apparatus of state” according to Althusser, media is a primary medium and tool that is used to establish, maintain and break hegemony as it is used to generate individual and social “consent” or submission and conformity. The struggle for hegemony is omnipresent. Such ideological hegemony may, in fact, be successful precisely because it operates behind the illusion of free speech, open competition and political pluralism – what Herbert Marcuse termed ‘repressive tolerance’ (Heywood, 2007).

To sum up, today there is a need for realistic and critical approaches towards media and democracy, in other words an analysis of the role of new media in the expansion and deepening of political pluralism and democratic participation without exaggeration. Many quantitative studies assert that it is too early to make conclusive comments about the effects of new communication tools on political participation (Sara & Stolle, 2014; Norris, 2003). As Bauman (2006, 3) states, a new public sphere is needed to restore the damages brought about by neo-liberal hegemony and establish a new politics:

The chance of changing this condition hangs on the agora – the space neither private nor public, but more exactly private and public at the same time. The space where private problems meet in a meaningful way – that is, not just to draw narcissistic pleasures or in search of some therapy through
public display, but to seek collectively managed levers powerful enough to lift individuals from their privately suffered misery; the space where such ideas may be born and take shape as the 'public good', the 'just society' or 'shared values'."

CONCLUSION

The assertion that the network society created by new media will make political mobilization easier and make government units transparent and accountable, is not a fact but a possibility that deserves to be taken seriously. In other words, it can be claimed that the optimistic approaches towards the impact of new media on public sphere, democracy and political participation are actually hypotheses that are not tested satisfactorily. Moreover, the impact of new media on social-political life, and especially on democracy, is more of a political discussion than a technical issue and it is necessary to be deliberate in evaluating this subject.

As shown in this study, examining the relationship between media and democracy in terms of the transformation of public sphere, there is a dialectical relationship between the political economy of media and the social-political formation. With a historical point of view, it is observed that new media functions to control public sphere and continue neo-liberal hegemony. Public sphere has never been taken so much outside social control in history. Public sphere today is under pressure of the market and the “private” and just as political participation, democracy is constantly weakening. The “network society” that is created by new information and communication technologies is not public sphere. Therefore, the function of new media cannot be claimed incompatible with the characteristics and needs of neo-liberal hegemony. The role that new media will play in the present and the future of democracy is directly related to who has command and control of it, and therefore, how the public and the public sphere are created and defined.
REFERENCES


