

Introduction to media studies

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Habermas Thesis on the Public Sphere by Jurgen Habermas in his famous work “ The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere” created the basis for understanding of the public sphere in modern society. The author traced the evolution of this concept within historical development of the society and explained it by political evolution of the power. According to Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere was eventually formed in the nineteenth century in European countries and in the United States. It appeared as a means of opposition to authoritarian power, monarchical or feudal, which did not differentiate between public and private matters. Under the influence of a number of political, cultural, philosophical, and social factors a new bourgeois order emerged. With appearance of this order the relationships between public and private also transformed and the possibility of public discussions of existing situation became possible. Society understood the necessity of polemizing over crucial issues important for its development. That was the period when society learned to express its opinion.

According to Habermas, public sphere was and must be characterized by the possibility of people to express that opinion, by common access to it, lack of any political or financial control, and the possibility to debate over general rules (1991; 435). Further capitalism influenced transformation of bourgeois public sphere as it determined an appearance of free competitive market. As a result new institutions specializing on active discussions, such as newspapers, magazine, salons where people got a chance to express this opinion have spread.

However, Habermas points to the fact that public sphere underwent more profound transformation with evolution of capitalism. Fast social changes,

industrialization of the cities, urbanization, and growth of educational level of society put public sphere into a new reality. Further the boundaries between public and private matters started blurring again and the prevalence of rational- critical debate that was an attribute of bourgeois society was substituted by consumerism. The status of a person was no longer determined by the ability to express valuable opinion regarding political questions and was substituted by the ability to buy and use things. So eventually public sphere has become a sphere of dominance of media and public opinion became dependent on media manipulation. What is more important that introduction of advertising made press, Television, and the Internet a means of trade, thus the initial function of public debate has disappeared almost completely.

There is a possibility to return the primary function of media according to Habermas. It is necessary to implement a discourse-centred theory of democracy when basic public problems solutions will be “rationally motivated but fallible result of a discussion concerning the judicious resolution of a problem, a discussion that has come temporarily to a close because coming to a decision could no longer be postponed” (1991: 450). Therefore the access to public sphere and the possibility of free expression disappeared and became a tool of media. That is why it is important to recognize the role of media for society evolution and utilize it according to its primary function. Media must be free from economic and political influence in order to stimulate the progress of democracy worldwide

References

Habermas, J. (1962) English Translation 1991). The Structural Transformation

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