

Digital Dynamics in Public Discourse: Analyzing the Relationship Between Digital Media and Counter-Public Spheres

Kamusal Söylemde Dijital Dinamikler:
Dijital Medya ve Karşı Kamusal Alanlar Arasındaki İlişkiyi Analiz Etmek

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of the study is to investigate the question of whether digital media encourages the expansion of the counter-public spheres by allowing greater participation and representation, or whether it leads to fragmentation and polarization. While digital media is welcomed for providing spaces for marginalized communities to express themselves, there are also concerns about the isolation and fragmentation of the public sphere, such as creating echo chambers and filter bubbles. This study aims to contribute to this ongoing debate by employing thematic analysis of recent empirical research in literature. By examining studies on various online activities related to counter-public spheres across different countries, this research analyzes the current situation in the literature concerning digital media's impact on the public sphere. Moreover, a comparative study of conditions in different countries also allows the identification of common patterns and differences in how digital media shapes opposing activities in diverse cultural, political and social contexts. Additionally, the research reveals the prevailing approaches and gaps in the literature.

Keywords: Digital Media, Counter-Public Sphere, Online Activism, New Media, Alternative Media.

ÖZ

Çalışma dijital medyanın daha fazla katılım ve temsile alan açarak karşı-kamusal alanların genişlemesini mi sağladığı yoksa parçalanma ve kutuplaşmaya mı yol açtığı sorusunu araştırmaktadır. Bir yandan dijital medyanın dezavantajlı topluluklara kendilerini ifade edebilecekleri kanallar açtığı söylenirken, diğer yandan yankı odaları ve filtre baloncukları ile kamusal alanın parçalanmasına ve izolasyona yönelik endişeler de dile getirilmektedir. Bu çalışma, karşı kamusal alan ve dijital medya ilişkisini inceleyen güncel araştırmaların tematik analizi ile süregelen bu tartışmalara bir katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda çeşitli çevrimiçi hareketleri inceleyen amprik araştırmalar, dijital medyanın karşı kamusal alanlara sunduğu olanakların veya neden olduğu sınırlılıkların pratikteki karşılıklarını görmemize imkân verecektir. Farklı ülkelerde gerçekleşen örnekler, farklı toplumsal bağlamlarda gerçekleşen pratiklerin karşılaştırmalı bir şekilde incelenmesi, dijital medyanın farklı kültürel, politik ve sosyal bağlamların muhalif hareketleri nasıl şekillendirdiğine dair ortak örüntülerin ve farklılıkların belirlenmesine de olanak sağlayacaktır. Ayrıca güncel ve çeşitli olan bu örneklerin analizi ile konunun literatürde özellikle hangi boyutları ile tartışıldığını görmemize, ve böylece hâkim yaklaşımların ve geri planda kalan tartışmaları tespit etmemize de imkan verecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Medya, Karşı Kamusal Alan, Çevrimiçi Aktivizm, Yeni Medya, Alternatif Medya.



Introduction

The public sphere encompasses processes of participation, representation, and negotiation, which are integral to the functioning of democratic societies. In a democratic ideal, citizens' access to information and participation in political processes are essential. Therefore, it has always been studied closely in relation to communication technologies and media. Every innovation in communication technology is evaluated for its potential to enhance participation and representation, focusing on new opportunities for information access and interaction. In this respect, digital communication technologies have also become central to discussions about the public sphere due to the advancements they bring to communication and information dissemination processes. Accordingly, while it is argued, on the one hand, that digital communication technologies will facilitate access to information and expand participation, thereby strengthening the pluralism of voices through broadened scope and diversity in the public sphere, on the other hand, digital media is mostly discussed in terms of ownership, control, security, transparency, privacy, and surveillance from a critical perspective.

With the effective use of social media in various oppositional social movements worldwide, digital media has come to attract more attention in connection with the 'counter-public spheres'. In social movements such as the Arab Spring and Occupy protests, social platforms provided an important space for those who did not have access to mainstream media. Particularly for countries experiencing political pressure on mainstream media, social networks have served as an important tool for expressing opposing views, organizing movements, and spreading them globally. Within this scope, it has been argued that digital media provides an important platform for disadvantaged groups to challenge dominant narratives and circulate their own discourse, thereby encouraging broader and more inclusive public discourses. However, the extent to which digital media enables

a truly democratic and egalitarian communication environment is discussed around issues such as control, algorithms, commercial orientation, echo chambers, and filter bubbles. These concerns arise from the commercial orientation of social media platforms, which play a key role in social communication, and the impact of algorithmic regulations. In this context, the main question is whether digital media leads to an expansion in participation and representation or causes fragmentation and polarization.

Based on this question, by examining studies on various online activities related to counter-public spheres across different countries, this research will analyze the current situation concerning digital media's impact on the public sphere. In this regard, 15 studies from the Web of Science database, published in the past decade, have been selected. These studies investigate this relationship through different case studies from various countries. The thematic analysis of this research will contribute to the debates in the literature about whether digital media leads to expansion or fragmentation in terms of counter-publicity. The studies are examined within the framework of the perspectives on the counter-public sphere and digital media, the possibilities or limitations highlighted by the findings, and the similarities and differences in cultural, political, and social contexts. Also, a comparative analysis of these studies, conducted in diverse cultural, political, and social contexts, will allow for the uncovering of common patterns and differences regarding this relationship. Additionally, this research will help identify dominant approaches in the current literature and gaps in the field concerning digital media and counter-public spheres.¹

The Strength and Challenge of Multiplicity: Counter-Public Spheres and the Debate over Inclusion versus Fragmentation

Discussions on the counter-public sphere developed primarily within the literature as critiques of Habermas's conceptualization of the

1 I would like to thank to Gamze Polat Sürav for her contributions in reviewing and improving this article.

bourgeois public sphere, as presented in his work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Among the early objections to Habermas, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1993)² and Nancy Fraser (1990) problematize some basic presuppositions of Habermas's bourgeois public sphere model and propose a different understanding of the public sphere. These critiques and approaches are important because they provide an analytical framework that has shaped and continues to shape counter-public sphere debates and studies.

Criticisms of Habermas's idea of the bourgeois public sphere as singular and encompassing all viewpoints are central to the debates on the counter-public sphere. These critiques emphasize the unequal and exclusionary nature of this dominant public sphere, highlighting how it excludes certain groups and interests from full participation. Negt and Kluge argue that "the bourgeois public sphere is founded on an abstract principle of generality" and "this claim to represent the general will functions as a powerful mechanism of exclusion" (as cited in Hansen, 1993: xxvii). Accordingly, for the bourgeois public sphere to fulfill this claim, it must be pruned of diversity until it is as perfect and rounded as Mr. K.'s laurel tree in Brecht's story (Negt & Kluge, 1993: xlvi). Similarly, Fraser (1990) contends that despite its claims of openness and accessibility, the bourgeois public sphere is based on exclusions. Asen (2000: 425) further emphasizes this point, arguing that a singular understanding of the public sphere inherently suppresses socio-cultural diversity by excluding differences. Consequently, it is argued that a public sphere that encompasses all of society is impossible without excluding certain groups and interests, and referred to the existence of different public spheres that have historically been excluded by this claim of generality. Within this framework, scholars highlight alternative forms of public spheres established by marginalized groups

that challenge the narrative of a hegemonic and singular public sphere. While Negt and Kluge (1993) examined proletarian public spheres, Nancy Fraser (1990) investigates women's public spheres as alternatives to the bourgeois public sphere in this context. By embracing the existence of these alternative public spheres, counter-public spheres represent a pluralistic understanding of the public sphere.

The concept of counter-public spheres also draws attention to and critiques the unequal power dynamics embedded within discursive practices. A singular, consensual understanding of the public sphere can limit the issues considered for negotiation. Certain interests gain priority, while others are excluded from this forum. This exclusion often occurs by labeling certain issues as 'private' which effectively marginalizes the interests and concerns associated with those topics. In this context, Fraser (1990) critiques the notion that public deliberation should always strive for a single 'common good' for everyone. She argues that this approach frames discussions from a singular, all-encompassing 'we' perspective, silencing the voices and interests of specific groups (Fraser, 1990: 72). Similarly, Negt and Kluge (1993) challenge the exclusion of certain topics from public discourse. They contend that issues traditionally labelled as 'private,' such as childrearing or childhood education, can have significant public implications and deserve open discussion (Negt & Kluge, 1993: xliii, 2). The authors highlight how social inequalities shape what is considered a public issue and the common good. According to them, issues excluded as 'private' may be substantial for a wider public. However social power dynamics ultimately influence which topics are selected for public discussion based on prevailing notions of 'common good' and 'consensus.' This can lead to the exclusion of important concerns of marginalized groups.

2 Although Negt and Kluge's book was translated into English in 1990, the original German edition of the book dates back to 1973: Negt, O. & Kluge, A. (1973). *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit*. Suhrkamp.

Another criticism of Habermas centers on the 'bracketing inequalities of status' issue. Fraser questions whether it is possible -even in principle- to negotiate as equals in a social context dominated by inequality (1990: 65). Referring to Mansbridge's statement that "deliberation can serve as a mask for domination", she asserts that this situation will function as a mechanism to reinforce the inequalities (Fraser, 1990: 64). Dahlberg also addresses the problem of power asymmetries in the negotiation and compromise process, and with reference to Mouffe, he argues that negotiations within these limits and the resulting compromises are always intertwined with these unequal power relations and the struggle for domination (2007: 835). Therefore, it is pointed out that the illusion of negotiation between equals in the context of social inequality strengthens the dominant power structures. In this context, it is argued that a consensual, singular, and inclusive understanding of the public sphere will exacerbate social inequality by prioritizing the interests and discourses of dominant groups under the guise of a universal "we" and the common good. Therefore, it is possible to see that, within an unequal society, instead of consensus, an understanding takes shape that highlights the struggle among multiple competing public spheres. Asen argues that multiple public spheres will reveal the power relations that differentiate between various publics and influence public debates (2000: 425). When these inequalities are visible, they cannot be concealed under the mask of equality.

Nonetheless, when such a diverse understanding of the public sphere is developed, concerns arise about how the interaction between these different publics will unfold. In this context, there are concerns that homogeneous groups, which are self-contained and do not interact with others, may lead to fragmentation and polarization, posing a threat to democracy (Habermas, 1991; Sunstein, 2007, 2017; Calhoun, 1992). According to this view, people's tendency to distance themselves from opposing views and engage in dialogue only with like-minded individuals leads to the development of self-contained, isolated

communities. Specifically, avoiding confrontation with differing perspectives rather than engaging in mutual negotiation often results in self-affirmation and the adoption of a stronger version of their initial views. These isolated communities pose significant risks, as they may increasingly turn to extremism and marginalization (Sunstein, 2007: 78-79; Sunstein, 2017: 75-76). In this respect, multiple public spheres are considered a loss (Calhoun, 1992: 37).

Although it points out the potential difficulties associated with multiple public spheres, this perspective does not advocate a single, unified understanding of the public sphere. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of interaction and dialogue among various public spheres. Yet, there is an acceptance that multiple public spheres may increase the difficulty of interaction and compromise, potentially leading to fragmentation. However, in understanding the counter-public sphere, enclaves are not perceived as issues of fragmentation and isolation. Instead, it is considered a sphere of where disadvantaged groups construct their community identities and common languages, fostering interaction and exchange among themselves. According to Negt and Kluge (1993), this is an area where experiences arising from people's own lives' contexts are organized. In Fraser, this space is where group members can negotiate among themselves about their needs, goals, and strategies, engaging in a communication process that is not under the control of the dominant (1990: 66). Regarding fragmentation debates, Dahlberg (2007) suggests that rather than assessing the volume of negotiation between different publics, attention should be directed to understanding the development and expansion of counter-discourses and the scope and effects of the struggle between discourses.

The public sphere, where public opinion forms, is inevitably shaped by power dynamics, including political structures, economic relations, cultural elements, and technological advancements (Schlesinger, 2020: 1547). Fraser argues that

although counter-publics may not always be progressive—some are in fact anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian—insofar as they emerge in response to exclusions in the dominant public sphere, they help expand the discursive sphere (1990: 67). In this respect, according to Fraser, the proliferation of discourse will always be more democratic than a singular public sphere. Counter-public spheres reveal the power structures in discursive areas, emphasize the presence of marginalized or dissenting voices, and challenge dominant narratives and representations. They are alternative spaces where participants resist hegemonic narratives and exclusions, revealing unequal power relations while also expressing a will to restructure them (Asen, 2000: 425). As Asen argues, counter-public spheres not only represent a multiplicity but also emerge as a critical term in this sense (2000: 425-426). For this very reason, the idea of the counter-public sphere emerges as a critical concept because it expresses inequality, conflict, and disagreement within these multiple public spheres.

The Duality of Digital Media in the Counter-Public Sphere

Debates surrounding digital media and the public sphere continue to address the issue of broadening versus fragmentation within the public sphere. On the one hand, the inclusivity and democratic potential of digital media is highlighted. Unlike the centralized, one-way structure of traditional mass media, digital media has a multi-centered, multi-faceted character that fosters greater mutual interaction and participation. This open characteristic is seen as an opportunity to broaden the public sphere and promote democratization. From this point of view, digital media platforms facilitate the circulation of alternative discourses, empowering previously marginalized groups with limited access to mainstream communication channels to participate in public discussions. On the other hand, concerns regarding the potential for fragmentation within the public sphere emphasize that the ownership structure, commercial orientation, and inherent technological qualities of digital media can reinforce existing power

structures. This can perpetuate the dominance of certain viewpoints and suppress the expression of diverse voices. Recent discussions regarding the platformization of digital media and the impact of algorithmic regulations on shaping the main lines of public discourse underscore these concerns.

It is possible to say that in this period, where communicative activities are largely carried out through social networks, digital platforms have gained a central position within the communication ecosystem. Dalota defines these platforms as digital, database-driven, and algorithmically-structured socio-technical systems that enable information exchange, coordinate communication, and offer a wide range of services (2019: 183). Since public communication takes place mostly through these platforms, they are becoming increasingly important in the circulation of information and in shaping the discourse. Sevignani, emphasizing the strong interdependence between profit motivation and communication dynamics on media platforms, argues that the main parameters of communicative activity on these social media platforms are set by the commercial character of these platforms (2022: 105). In other words, the drive for profit shapes the communication processes and activities on these platforms. This shows how economic interests can influence public discourse. Since social media platforms are commercially oriented, they are not simply neutral communication channels; rather, they are complex socio-technical systems, as Dalota (2019) and Sevignani (2022) point out, that leverage data and algorithms to curate content and shape user behavior. These algorithms are designed to curate content, capturing user attention and interest in both production and distribution (Dalota, 2019; Holtzhausen, 2016). In other words, algorithms designed to attract and retain user attention on social media platforms not only shape the content we encounter but also influence the dynamics of social interaction and play a crucial role in shaping public discourse.

These debates about how certain content and discourses gain broader circulation and influence

public discourse also connect to concerns about the public sphere, which commonly refers to spaces for open and critical discussion. In this context, algorithms that promote the prominence and wider dissemination of interesting content encourage the proliferation of dominant discourses. This issue is discussed along with the concerns about manipulation, influence, and control in the public sphere. According to De Blasio et. al., the initial celebration of digital media allowing for disintermediation and its potential to bypass traditional media gatekeepers give place to concerns about unregulated opinions generated on or through social platforms and the potential for manipulative environments to flourish (2020: 2). They argue that this reintroduces traditional media studies concepts like ‘manipulation’ and ‘influence’ into public and academic discussions (De Blasio et. al., 2020: 2). Algorithmic regulations replace the gatekeeper and significantly determine what information we encounter. In this context, the idea that digital media allows disintermediated communication has been replaced by reintermediation (See Sevignani, 2022).

Algorithms and big data significantly influence the public sphere and the formation of public opinion by prioritizing certain types of content over others. Informative content often takes a backseat to interesting or sensational content that’s more likely to generate clicks and interactions. These algorithmic regulations lead to a narrowing of the ideas and topics represented in the public sphere, where “popular” content dominates the conversation. Marazov argues that big data, with its vast interconnected databases and questionable algorithms, creates “invisible barbed wire” around our intellectual and social development which restricts our ability to grow politically and socially by confining us to a limited space that appears pleasant but offers no real freedom or control (Marozov, 2012 as cited in Danaher, 2014). In this context, the consideration is algorithmic regulations will dictate patterns and trends in public discourse, potentially perpetuating hegemonic discourses and marginalizing alternative perspectives. Social media platforms,

in particular, have a significant impact on our social interactions, forms of expression, representation, and meaning (Brantner et.al., 2021; De Blasio et al., 2020). Indeed, there is a serious apprehension surrounding big data and algorithms that they can result in discriminatory practices. Podesta et al. (2014) express concerns that big data, even when used unintentionally, can lead to discrimination, including ethnic profiling or increased police surveillance, as well as manipulative information delivery, which can severely disadvantage individuals (as cited in Holtzhausen, 2015: 24). Indeed, there is a great risk that this data may be used to create and support stereotypes about different groups within society, or to distribute manipulative information targeting certain segments, which may ultimately lead to unfair and discriminatory practices.

While critics acknowledge its limitations in creating a truly democratic environment, they also recognize some positive aspects. For instance, according to Brantner et al., protests and public events strengthened by social media expand the communicative areas of social interaction (2021: 16). In this way, various issues raised by people can reach a wider audience and become open to their participation. This situation, as Sevignani points out, relates to the fact that agendas beyond those determined in the mass media, can now be included within the boundaries of the public sphere (2022: 106). Downey and Fenton suggest that this will lead to the expansion of virtual counter-public spheres, making the mass media more open to different points of view, which will potentially evolve into a mutually reinforcing process (2003: 199). Besides, as digital media allows for a wider range of voices and agendas to be heard, critical voices that challenge the current hegemony become more prominent. Although Sevignani argues that digital media makes reaching a consensus harder and potentially lead to fragmentation, he also points out that within hybrid and antagonistic media environments, the contradictions of ‘common sense’ become more clear and publicly observable, and “existing hegemony comes under pressure more easily” (2022: 106). As these contradictions become more

visible, they distort the appearance of a certain consensus being created, as was the case in the mass media era.

The impact of digital media on the public sphere is a controversial issue. While it offers the potential for greater inclusivity and democratization, there are also serious concerns about fragmentation, manipulation, and discrimination. Unlike the mainstream media, digital platforms provide a space for marginalized groups to express themselves. Since issues other than those that can enter the mainstream media's agenda can now be brought to the fore, there is the opportunity to create a multifaceted public debate environment. However, there is also a risk that algorithmic regulations may prevent encountering different perspectives or marginalize them by creating filter bubbles and echo chambers. And this may further reinforce existing biases and lead to polarization. Various studies in the international literature examine counter-public sphere practices on different digital platforms which provides important data that allows understanding this relationship from different aspects. An analysis based on the data obtained from the review of these studies will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the potential and limitations of digital media in the context of counter-public spheres. Additionally, comparing studies conducted in different countries will help us see common trends and differences in diverse political, social, and cultural contexts and thus achieve a more holistic understanding.

Method

Within the scope of the study, publications in the Web of Science database were scanned in December 2023 for the concept of the "counter-public sphere" appearing in the title, abstract, or keywords, alongside any of the terms "new media", "digital media", "social media", "alternative media" or "online media." The initial search yielded 70 publications. The results were then filtered to include article-type publications published in

English within the last ten years. Because it was determined in the preliminary investigation that in some publications, the term "counter-public sphere" was used merely descriptively rather than as a conceptual framework, purposive sampling was preferred. Purposive sampling is employed to identify and select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest, optimizing the use of limited resources (Patton, 2002; Palinkas et al., 2015). In this study, this technique has been used to select publications that would provide sufficient data on the relationship between digital media and the public sphere. The selection criteria have been determined based on the objectives of the study. The primary aim of the study is to understand how the relationship between digital media and the counter-public sphere is discussed in the current literature. Given the scope of the study, it was ensured that the sampled studies include discussions on both the counter-public sphere and digital media. Secondly, studies involving field research were selected because field research can provide more concrete data regarding the practical possibilities and limitations of digital media as a counter-public sphere. Therefore, publications that engaged only in theoretical discussion were excluded from the sample. Finally, to focus on current studies, the year of publication was used as a criterion. Two publications were selected from the last five years and one from the preceding five years. In cases where there were multiple publications from the same year, preference was given to studies sampling diverse countries to obtain data on different social contexts (See Table 1 for details).

Table 1

The information of the 15 publications selected from the Web of Science database.

Publication	Area	Subject
Lowenstein-Barkai (2023)	Israel	The Facebook page "Write it down! I am an Arab," serving as a public forum for Arab citizens in Israel to share narratives of marginalization and discrimination, is scrutinized as a case of counter-publicity. Participant interviews were conducted, and comments on the page were analyzed for examination.
Trauthig & Woolley (2023)	USA	The study investigates encrypted messaging applications (such as Telegram, WhatsApp, and WeChat) utilized by diaspora communities in the United States as an instance of the counter-public sphere. Interviews were conducted with members of the diaspora community.
Lien (2022)	Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark)	The study investigates counter-publicity manifested in discourses concerning Islam. Reader comments posted under news articles on the Facebook pages of mainstream news organizations in Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, Denmark) were subjected to analysis.
Zeng et. al. (2022)	China	The study examines discussions related to artificial intelligence on People's Daily Online, an online platform representing official discourses in China, and WeChat, another platform facilitating citizen discussions. It seeks to determine the extent to which social media serves as a counter-public sphere, allowing for the questioning of official narratives.
Bodrunova et.al. (2021)	Russia	The study explores the impact of offensive language on the dynamics of political discourse within online environments. Specifically, it analyzes comments (with a focus on speech aimed at humiliation and insult) posted under the 15 most viewed videos on YouTube between July and September 2019, coinciding with the protests in Moscow.
Schwarzenegger (2021)	(German-speaking countries) Germany, Austria, Switzerland	Considering that the anti-public sphere may not always be democratizing and progressive, the study investigates the users of alternative media platforms and their engagement patterns to elucidate the correlation between alternative media and anti-democratic inclinations. Interviews were conducted with users of alternative news channels for this purpose.
Birkner & Donk (2020)	Germany	The research investigates the capacity of social media to function as a counter-public sphere, within the framework of a local dispute over the renaming of a square in a German municipality.
Thakur (2020)	India	The study examines the internet activism and online mobilization of the Dalit community in India as an example of a counter-public sphere that contributes to the questioning of the dominant caste narrative and thus to the mobilization of resistance to caste-based discrimination. Twitter handles, Facebook pages, and online forums run by the Dalit community were examined and activists were interviewed.
Mpofu (2019)	South Africa	The research scrutinizes the utilization of Twitter, particularly Black Twitter, as a counter-hegemonic force and an alternative public sphere during South Africa's 2016 local elections and the National Congress anniversary celebrations. It investigates how citizens and voters utilized this platform to voice their opinions. The study analyzes hashtags and memes circulated on Twitter.
Nikunen (2019)	Finland	The study examines the "Once I Was a Refugee" campaign on social media, targeting the anti-immigrant political climate in Finland. It involves an examination of Facebook and Twitter posts, alongside interviews conducted with participants.
Roslyng et. al (2018)	Denmark	In the study, the blurring boundaries between the political and cultural realms within the online public sphere are underlined. Counter-publicity is examined through the political and cultural discourses and activities of Yahya Hassan, a Danish Muslim poet and politician, within the context of Danish minority culture and politics.
Lee et. Al. (2017)	Hong Kong	The potential of social media as an alternative public in Hong Kong citizens' struggles against Chinese hegemony is examined. A survey was conducted with citizens.

Svetlana & Anna (2016)	Russia	The study discusses the relationship between online media and publicity through the political polarization of social groups and, their media consumption behaviors in Russia, particularly within the framework of echo chambers. The research involved interviews and a survey conducted with users.
Harlow (2015)	El Salvador	The study explores the utilization of the social media platform Política Stereo in El Salvador to promote citizen engagement, debate, and activism. In the study, contents of the site were analyzed, and interviews were conducted with its administrators and readers.
Guo & Harlow (2014)	English Speaking Countries	The study investigates the portrayal of African Americans, Latinos, and Asians in YouTube videos, exploring the platform's capacity as a counter-public sphere, particularly concerning racial and ethnic representations and stereotypes. A sample of 150 videos was selected and analyzed for this purpose.

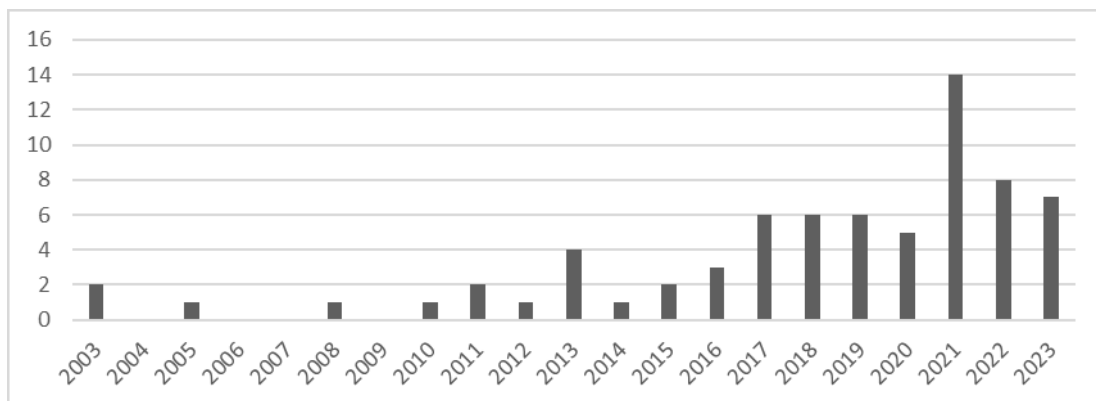
Findings

A review of the initial screening results reveals the dominance of communication studies in publications. Among the 70 publications identified, over 50% (or 39 publications) fall within this field. The initial focus on communication studies is complemented by publications from other humanities and social science disciplines, including sociology and political science. These publications represent a diverse range of countries, with the United States, Germany, and England leading the way in terms of contribution. The 70 retrieved studies cover publication dates from 2003 to 2023. There has been a noticeable rise in the number of studies on this topic since 2017 (See Figure 1 for details). This growing interest coincides with the rise of social movements effectively utilizing social media, leading to a notable increase

in scholarly research in this field. Reflecting this shift, recent studies often use case analyses that emphasize examples from social media platforms. The primary data sources for the research are typically posts and comments on these platforms, sometimes supplemented by interview data. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the findings of the study. Braun and Clarke define thematic analysis as “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79). Identifying and defining recurring themes enable a clearer understanding of their relationships (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Thematic analysis was chosen for this study because it reveals connections and patterns in the data, illustrating how different aspects are related to each other and providing a more comprehensive understanding.

Figure 1

Distribution of articles retrieved from the Web of Science database by year.



When examining studies on the conceptualization of the public sphere, it is evident that Fraser's approach predominates in the majority of them. Accordingly, the diverse understanding of the public sphere in which different publics engage in discursive struggle is more common. In this context, the counter-public sphere emerges as a reaction to the exclusion of the hegemonic, as pointed out by Fraser (1990). However, these studies lack a clear definition of the hegemonic public sphere's characteristics. It is not clear what 'dominant' refers to or whether it is something homogeneous or unitary. Research in countries facing political oppression suggests that hegemony is often identified with political power and the state. In the examples from China (Zeng et al., 2022), South Africa (Mpofu, 2019), Hong Kong, (Lee et al., 2017), El Salvador (Harlow, 2015), Russia (Swetlana & Anna, 2016) and South Africa (Mpofu, 2019), the dominant public sphere is shaped by the discourses of the political power. In these examples, the state's control and pressure on the mainstream media are highlighted, identifying it as a platform where dominant political hegemony narratives circulate. In this context, the situation in countries where political power prevails can be evaluated within the framework of authoritarian media in Fuchs's study. Fuchs says that the production of information and the circulation of meanings and representations mediated by authoritarian state media, whether private or state-owned, are closely related to state ideology and propaganda (2024: 9). On the other hand, digital media are considered relatively free areas where oppositional discourses can also circulate. For example, in the case of China (Zeng et al., 2022), how citizens use social platforms to question official narratives of political power is examined. In the example of South Africa (Mpofu, 2019), similarly, social media is assessed as an area of criticism and counter-discourses against political power. However, in studies conducted in countries without clear political oppression, it is seen that the dominant discourse is defined concerning social hegemony rather than directly to the state. In studies conducted in countries such as Finland (Nikunen, 2019), the USA (Trauthig & Woolley, 2023), and Denmark (Roslyng et al., 2018),

identities such as religion or nationality emerge as hegemonic, rather than political power. In these countries, although the mainstream media is not directly controlled by the state, the discourses are determined within the framework of social power relations. Therefore, although they are not under state control, they still emerge as platforms where hegemonic discourse dominates.

Counter-public spheres emerge in connection with social or political hegemony and with regard to the specific socio-political and cultural environments of the countries concerned. Examples of counter-public spheres therefore vary across countries and are each associated with the positions of different social groups in specific political, social, and cultural contexts. While in some studies they are defined according to identities such as race, ethnicity, nation, or religion, in other studies they represent a heterogeneous group of citizens who are positioned against the political power, on the axis of a current political debate, rather than a specific identity. The common feature of all counter-publics is they are social groups that are excluded or marginalized from participating in and expressing themselves within the dominant public sphere. Diaspora communities and refugees in the examples of the USA (Trauthig & Woolley, 2023) and Finland (Nikunen, 2019), and discourses on Muslim communities and Islam in the examples of Scandinavian countries (Lien, 2022; Roslyng, 2018) are examined as examples of counter-publicity. In articles examining the examples of China (Zeng et al., 2022), Russia (Swetlana & Anna, 2016), El Salvador (Harlow, 2015), and Hong Kong (Lee et al. 2016), dissident citizens who stand against the political power are defined as the counter-public. They are not homogeneous, but they are united around a certain discourse identified against the hegemonic discourse of political power in the public sphere. Therefore, different forms of counter-publicity are pointed out, varying according to their relationship with the politically and socially hegemonic. While it is sometimes defined as being associated with a specific ethnic, religious, racial or similar identity, sometimes it is defined as a community of citizens not expressed with a

specific identity, positioned on the axis of a current political debate, and in a discursive struggle against the hegemonic discourse of the political power. For example, in studies of India (Thakur, 2020) and Israel (Lowenstein-Barkai, 2023), where identity-based conflict is high, social identity comes to the fore instead of political pressure. In India, Dalits who are at the bottom of the caste system, and in Israel, Israeli Arabs are examined as counter-publics based on their marginalized social identities.

When examining the role of digital media in counter-public spheres, studies reveal that the idea of digital media providing significant opportunities is widely accepted. It is emphasized that digital media provides space for social groups and alternative discourses excluded from the mainstream media to participate in public debates. In this context, wider access to the public sphere and the circulation of alternative discourses are frequently mentioned issues regarding the broadening of the public sphere. Digital platforms enable the construction of networks that facilitate the establishment of solidarity between different social groups and organizing and acting towards common goals. In addition, some studies also point out that digital platforms open space for actors outside institutional politics and forms of expression and activism different from traditional norms (Lee et al., 2017; Roslyng et al., 2018; Nikunen, 2019). These studies highlight that digital media creates an environment that allows actors and forms of action and expression outside established political institutions. In this context, studies examine how online environments such as blogs, forums, podcasts, messaging, and sharing applications are used by those who do not have access to mainstream media to participate in public debates. In the context of relevant examples, these online spaces serve as a forum where disadvantaged groups can discuss and build solidarity among themselves, as well as challenge dominant discourses and meanings. Thus, it is pointed out that it contributes to the expansion of the public sphere by opening a space and environment that allows a wider segment

of society to participate in mainstream public debates.

For instance, in the Dalit counter-public sphere study, online platforms are described as “a unique forum for the dispossessed” to express their views and “assert their presence” in the public sphere (Mitra, 2004 as cited in Thakur, 2020: 361). According to Thakur (2020), digital platforms provide Dalit communities with a techno-cultural tool that enables them to articulate the systemic injustices they have experienced and continue to experience, as well as to actively challenge hegemonic discourses by producing counter-narratives. Therefore, as more Dalits engage in the public sphere through discussions on networking sites, the dependence on traditional determinants of power may decrease significantly (Thakur, 2020: 361). Similarly, in the El Salvador (Harlow, 2015) study, Rogelio, an interviewee, highlights the empowering role of social media for ordinary citizens by pointing out the limitations in participating in political debates faced by those who lack ‘political value’ or ‘wealth’. He says, “common citizens, those without political value or money, cannot just approach a politician, attend the general assembly, or call decision makers on the phone” (Harlow, 2015: 3728). Social media, in contrast, provides them with a more accessible platform for engagement.

Digital media offers an environment that enables alternative discourses to circulate, thereby expanding the boundaries of the public sphere (Lee et al., 2017; Roslyng et al., 2018), unlike the mass media era, where the dominant viewpoint was often presented as consensus. It is highlighted that digital media, by enabling a more horizontal communication style (Swetlana & Anna, 2016; Thakur, 2020; Mpofu, 2019), has the potential to break down the vertical communication effect of mass media, where the influence of the hegemonic is more strongly felt. In this context, digital media is considered as a medium that breaks the monophony or silence of the mainstream media and enables the circulation of alternative discourses. This situation can be

observed more clearly, especially in examples from countries where the control of the political power over the mainstream media is evident (Zeng et al., 2022; Bodrunova et al., 2021; Mpofu, 2019; Lee et al., 2017; Harlow, 2015). However, even in countries where censorship and repression exist, digital media, as a relatively autonomous and free space, offers opportunities for various forms of protest and participation, and in fact, it can sometimes be the only possible channel for this. In examples of countries where the influence of political power is less but the discourses and identities of certain social groups are hegemonic (Lowenstein-Barkai, 2023; Trauthig and Woolley, 2023; Lien, 2022; Thakur, 2020; Roslyng et al., 2018; Harlow, 2015), digital media functions as a space where disadvantaged groups can circulate their own discourses, alternative meanings and representations. The structure of digital media, which allows multi-centered content production and sharing, creates an environment for different audiences to say and spread their own words. This is considered an important opportunity to expand the discursive field.

Another issue emphasized in the studies is the new forms of expression and activism that emerged with the opportunities of digital media. Research shows that different and creative forms of expression and types of activism beyond the established ones are involved in the discursive struggle within the public sphere. This occurs in a variety of forms, where multimedia techniques such as videos, hashtags, memes and captions are enriched with humor and creativity. For instance, Nikunen (2019) points out that digital media has expanded the imagination of political protest by providing means for non-traditional forms of action. The study mentions that refugees in Finland challenge the silent positions of immigrants and refugees by sharing their own experiences and stories with their photographs, in an action called “selfie activism”. By making their stories and photographs part of a political action, they tried to question the dominant narrative about refugees. Nikunen (2019) evaluates the digital environment in this respect within the framework of Arendt's

concept of ‘space of appearance’ and says that with this form of action, immigrants and refugees expand their field of appearance. In the South African example, Mpofu (2019) describes the use of humor, and in the Russian example, Bodrunova et al. (2021) consider the use of slang and offensive language as factors affecting the dynamics of public debate. Bodrunova et al. challenge the assumption that offensive language is inherently negative and point out that an aggressive tone can play a constructive role to some extent in the development of individual and group identities, as well as discursive processes, in a restrictive political atmosphere (2021: 191). According to Bodrunova et al. (2021), communicative aggression also frames criticism directed at both authorities and regime challengers, while delineating the counter-public. In this sense, hateful and aggressive discourses that challenge the notion of the public sphere as an arena for critical and rational debate are examined in terms of expanding its boundaries.

Another issue that can be addressed in connection with aggressive and discriminatory language and style is that far-right or anti-democratic publics are seen as problematic within the counter-public sphere, especially in terms of polarization and fragmentation. These anti-democratic or discriminatory discourses have also been touched upon in studies (Lien, 2022; Schwarzenegger, 2021; Birkner & Donk, 2020; Mpofu, 2019). For example, a comparative study of Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway) by Lien (2022) highlights the existence of anti-Islamic and even hostile rhetoric. Fraser (1990) highlights this debate in his work, arguing that although counter-publics can be exclusionary, anti-egalitarian, and anti-democratic, they can also challenge dominant narratives and broaden public debate. According to her, “the proliferation of subaltern counter-publics means widening of discursive contestation” because these publics emerge “in response to exclusions within dominant publics” (Fraser, 1990: 67). For example, Birkner and Donk (2020) refer to in their study that the conservative right-leaning public in Germany feels overlooked by mainstream media and politicians. In these

studies, slang, offensive language, and radical views are evaluated not as factors causing polarization or fragmentation, but as indicators of discursive diversity in a public sphere. In Russia, for instance, Bodrunova et al. (2021) highlight the positive role of radical language in the discussion process. This point is further supported by Schwarzenegger, who argues that some practices that may be seen as “offensive, weird, or obscene” in other contexts are “normal” and characteristic of the online ecosystem (2021: 100). Building on the idea that online spaces can foster a kind of discursive diversity, even with controversial elements, Birkner and Donk (2020) note that despite all the concerns, a certain level of discussion can be established on social media.

These examples demonstrate that the principle of rational and critical negotiation, traditionally seen as a norm of democratic deliberation in the public sphere, is also being questioned. As Roslyng et al. (2018) point out, the definition, actors, and boundaries of the political itself have changed with the rise of online public spheres. Employing of humor, slang, or offensive language blurs the boundaries of the established discursive space. This suggests that, even accepted norms of the public sphere, can themselves become subjects of public debate. Beyond rational and critical discourse, the inclusion of humor, mockery, slang, offensive language, and similar practices in the discursive struggle in the public sphere, as well as how their boundaries should be determined, have started to emerge in the literature as new areas of discussion. New topics of debate are emerging in the literature, examining whether humor, mockery, slang, offensive language, and similar practices should have a place in public discourse, and how boundaries should be determined.

One of the prominent issues in discussions of fragmentation versus expansion regarding the public sphere is the tendency for people to distance themselves from opposing views and engage with those who share similar opinions. The formation of isolated communities that avoid confrontation with differing perspectives could result in the

adoption of more extreme versions of their initial views which could be a risk of increasingly turning to extremism and marginalization. In contrast, Fraser (1990) and Dahlberg (2007), argue that these enclaves will provide counter-publics an area where they can form their social identities and own voices. These spaces are also considered areas where counter-publics can determine their common goals and strategies, and build solidarity based on shared experiences and issues. In the studies examined, this issue has been evaluated largely in line with Fraser’s perspective. The studies indicate that digital platforms are used to enhance communication and solidarity among common identity groups, thus serving as spaces where a sense of community is established. Social platforms are viewed as alternative spaces for subaltern groups, enabling them to create an online network to share information, experiences and issues and facilitate broad public debate.

Clear examples of this can be seen in the studies of the USA, Israel, and India. In the example of the USA, social messaging applications are examined as platforms for diaspora communities where they can freely communicate within their own communities. These platforms are defined by participants as areas where they can discuss social, political, or everyday issues without encountering or conflicting with dominant publics (Trauthig & Woolley, 2023). This is an area where group members can express themselves more freely within their own cultural communities. In the Israel example, it is indicated that it functions as a space where Israeli Arab citizens negotiate among themselves regarding their group identities, goals, and strategies while also attempting to present themselves to broader audiences (Lowenstein-Barkai, 2023). Fraser, highlighting their dual character, defines counter-publics as both ‘spaces of withdrawal and regrouping’ and ‘bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics,’ (1990: 68). Additionally, these studies provide important examples for Fraser’s proposition that to the extent that these spaces function as public spheres, they are inherently not isolated enclaves. According to Fraser, if

these arenas are considered public, then they can't be exclusive groups by definition, because engaging in discursive interaction as a member of a public means "disseminate one's discourse into ever-widening areas" (1990: 67). Engaging discursively in public spheres inherently involves disseminating discourse into broader arenas, thereby distinguishing them from enclaves by definition. In these examples, social platforms offer counter-publics both a space to connect within themselves and amplify their voices to a wider audience. These places allow them to share their experiences and challenges, fostering solidarity within their communities while raising awareness among the broader public.

The effects of algorithms and echo chambers are relatively less addressed in the studies. Guo and Harlow (2014) investigated how algorithms influence the spread of dominant narratives by examining videos on YouTube. Focusing on videos related to Latinos, Asians, and African Americans, their study revealed that although alternative discourses do exist on the platform, the most popular and thus widely circulated/ consumed content, driven by algorithms, remains the ones with dominant narratives. Because algorithms prioritize content that garners the most engagement, popular discourses and stereotypical representations become more prevalent to users. Investigating the echo chamber effect of social media during the protests in Russia, Svetlana and Anna (2016) concluded that the Facebook platform functioned more as an echo chamber than its local competitor. Although it had "evident mobilization potential" on the one hand, it showed a "low capacity for opinion crossroads" on the other (2016: 122). While Facebook, the social sharing environment of those with a more oppositional attitude, has an echo chamber effect, its local competitor, Vkontakte, does not show the echo chamber effect because it has a more moderate attitude. An important observation also reveals a parallel between a country's social and political polarization and the echo chambers on digital platforms. The study therefore draws attention also to the importance of the national socio-political context.

Although limitations and negative aspects of digital media have been acknowledged in various studies, the recurring themes within our examined examples mostly highlight its potential. However, it is possible to say that digital platforms are seen as an opportunity because they allow easier and wider access, particularly in cases where those outside the mainstream media use them effectively to express themselves and ensure their visibility, rather than from a deterministic perspective that technology inherently leads to democratization. The field findings of these studies demonstrate that marginalized groups can find more space for self-expression in digital media compared to traditional mass media, and they found this to be very valuable and meaningful, especially politically. Considering this, we can say that marginalized groups are less concerned with the problems of algorithms, echo chambers, and filter bubbles. Instead, they focus on the opportunities digital media offers to create their own spaces for self-expression and amplify their voices, particularly in protest or oppositional social practices. Digital media, as it opens up spheres for anti-hegemonic discourses and practices, fosters broader participation and representation from previously excluded voices, ultimately leads to a more diverse public sphere, and is regarded as an opportunity for counter-public spheres.

Conclusion

The studies examined indicate a positive relation between digital media and the counter-public sphere aligning with the expansion discourse. Most studies broadly accept that digital media expands the boundaries of the public sphere and provides new avenues for counter-public spheres. It is seen as an opportunity for disadvantaged groups to express themselves and challenge dominant narratives, particularly for those lacking access to mainstream media. In countries with strong political control, digital media creates spaces for civil discourse to circulate despite pressure on mainstream media. In less restrictive countries, it empowers marginalized groups to interact and gain wider public visibility.

In the studies, the expansion of public sphere is examined from different perspectives. Firstly, it points to the broadening of access to public debate for citizens and groups who are excluded from the mainstream public sphere. Digital platforms provide a space that allows both individuals and various groups to express themselves and gain visibility. However, in some cases, a quantitative increase in participation does not always result in corresponding discursive expansion. This leads us to the second perspective of expansion emphasized in the research: as participation widens the circulation of alternative discourses in the public sphere also increases. Unlike mainstream media, which is dominated by hegemonic discourses, digital media is seen as a platform for counter-discourses. Third, digital media opens space for creative expression and innovative forms of activism. Examples include styles of expression where humor and creativity are combined with audio-visual techniques. In this way, it both questions and expands the boundaries of discourse and visibility in the mainstream public sphere. It is argued that digital media expands the boundaries of politics by challenging established norms, creating space for actors outside institutional politics, and facilitating non-traditional forms of activism. In addition, digital platforms are seen as an important opportunity to bring agendas that cannot find coverage in the mainstream media to the public sphere thus allowing it to find a place on the agenda of the mainstream media. It is also noted that it functions as an important tool in social mobilizations, facilitating communication and organization, amplifying voices, and garnering support from the wider population, both nationally and internationally.

Self-contained networks are seen as areas of empowerment where common issues are shared and solidarity is developed, rather than the fragmentation of the public sphere. Research indicates that the limitations of algorithmic curation, 'echo chambers' or 'filter bubbles' and their potential for isolation or fragmentation in the public sphere have received relatively less attention in studies. (This gap in research could be due to the

chosen keywords during the sampling process). Digital platforms are predominantly viewed as spaces for interaction, sharing, and empowerment rather than isolation. Research emphasizes their role in enabling diverse groups to collectively form identities and discourses outside the mainstream public sphere, while also participating in broader public discourse. However, the studies do not provide definitive conclusions about the extent to which alternative narratives shared online can influence dominant narratives and policies.

Research indicates that the advantages of digital media are more widely recognized than its limitations for counter-public spheres. However, the social and political effects of these possibilities are not yet clear. Despite the large population's access to the public sphere and the circulation of different discourses, it is quite controversial whether it leads to more inclusive social and political policies. In today's societies, due to economic, political, and social reasons, radical or populist political tendencies are on the rise. However, the role of social platforms, where much of our social interaction and public discourse happen, in this radicalization should also be examined. For this reason, further investigation is needed to explore the role of digital platforms in fostering polarization and fragmentation.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Çalışma dijital medyanın daha fazla katılım ve temsile alan açarak karşı-kamusal alanların genişlemesini mi sağladığı yoksa parçalanma ve kutuplaşmaya mı yol açtığı sorusunu araştırmaktadır. Kamusal alan demokratik toplumların işleyişinde temel önem taşıyan katılım, temsil ve müzakere süreçlerini içermektedir. Vatandaşların bilgiye erişimi ve politik tartışmalara

katılımı açısından iletişim araçları önemli bir rol oynamakta, bu nedenle kamusal alan çoğunlukla iletişim araçları ile ilişkili şekilde tartışılmaktadır. Daha önce kitle iletişim araçlarında olduğu gibi, dijital iletişim araçları da bilgiye erişim, katılım, etkileşim gibi alanlarda getirdiği olanaklarla ilişkili şekilde kamusal alan tartışmalarının merkezi haline gelmiştir. Özellikle farklı ülkelerdeki toplumsal hareketlerde sosyal medyanın etkin kullanımıyla birlikte, dijital platformların karşı kamusal alanlar açısından olanakları da daha fazla tartışılır olmuştur. Dijital medyanın dezavantajlı grupların kendi sözlerini söyleyebildikleri önemli bir alan açtığı ve bu sayede daha geniş ve kapsayıcı bir kamusal söylemi teşvik ettiği ileri sürülmüştür. Ancak diğer taraftan dijital medyanın gerçek anlamda demokratik ve eşitlikçi bir iletişim ortamını ne ölçüde sağladığı kontrol, algoritmalar, ticari yönelim, yankı odası ve filtre baloncukları gibi konular etrafında tartışılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda temel soru, dijital medya katılım ve temsilde genişlemeyi mi sağladığı yoksa parçalanmaya ve kutuplaşmaya mı neden olmuştur.

Çalışma literatürdeki güncel ampirik araştırmaların tematik analizi ile süregelen bu tartışmalara katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu kapsamda, Web of Science veri tabanından, son on yılda yayınlanmış, karşı kamusal alan ve dijital medya ilişkisini çeşitli çevrimiçi hareketler üzerinden inceleyen 15 araştırma, amaçlı örneklem yöntemiyle seçilmiştir. Farklı örnekleri kapsayan bu ampirik araştırmaların incelenmesi dijital medyanın karşı kamusal alanlara sunduğu olanakların veya neden olduğu sınırlılıkların pratikteki karşılıklarını görmemize imkan vermektedir. Ayrıca farklı ülkelerdeki durumların karşılaştırmalı bir şekilde incelenmesi, dijital medyanın farklı kültürel, politik ve sosyal bağlamlarda karşı kamusal alanları nasıl şekillendirdiğine dair ortak kalıpların ve farklılıkların belirlenmesine de olanak sağlamaktadır.

Araştırma sonunda, karşı kamusal alan ve dijital medya ilişkisinin ağırlıklı olarak genişleme söylemine paralel bir çerçevede tartışıldığını söylemek mümkündür. Çalışmalarda, dijital

medyanın, ana akım medyaya erişimi olmayan dezavantajlı gruplara olanaklar sunduğu, kendilerini ifade etmede ve karşı hegemonik anlatıları dolaşıma sokmaları için önemli bir araç olduğuna işaret edilmektedir. Farklı politik ve toplumsal bağlam ile ilişkili olarak ülkelere göre kimi farklılıklar olmakla birlikte, benzer bir eğilim göstermekte ve ana akım medyaya erişimi olmayan grupların görünürlük kazanmaları ve kendi söylemlerini dolaşıma sokabilmelerinde önemli bir alan sunmaktadır.

Çalışmalarda kamusal alanın genişlemesi öne çıkan farklı temalar ekseninde farklı boyutları ile ele alınmıştır. Bunlardan birincisi dijital medyanın kitle iletişim araçlarına göre daha geniş kesimlerin erişimine açık olması nedeniyle temsil alanının genişlemesi daha önce temsil edilmeyen ya da sınırlı şekilde temsil edilen, marjinalleştirilen grupların da kamusal tartışmalara erişebilmesidir. ayrıca geleneksel politik kurumların dışında olan bireylerin de politik tartışmalara katılmaları anlamında da bir açıklık sağladığına işaret edilmektedir. Bu anlamda kamusal alanda daha geniş yurttaş kesiminin ve farklı çıkar ve kimlik gruplarının temsili anlamında bir genişlemeden söz edilmektedir. İkinci olarak farklı kimlik ve çıkar gruplarının katılımı ile alternatif söylemlerin de dolaşıma girebildiğine, hegemonik söylemlere meydan okunabildiğine bu anlamda da söylemsel alanın da genişlediğine işaret edilmektedir. Üçüncü olarak, geleneksel eylem ve ifade biçimlerindeki yeniliklere de işaret edilmektedir. Dijital alan mizahı, yaratıcılığı ve görsel-işitsel teknikleri harmanlayarak yenilikçi aktivizm biçimlerine de alan açmaktadır. Bunlara ek olarak bir diğer boyutta da toplumsal bir hareketlilik sırsasında iletişim kurma, dayanışma geliştirme ve daha geniş kamulara seslerini duyurma konusunda da bir olanak sağladığına çalışmalarda işaret edilmektedir. Daha kapalı siyasal ortamlarda dahi ve hatta belki de en çok bu toplumlarda dijital platformların muhalif seslerin duyulmasında önemli bir mecra olduğu dile getirilmektedir.

Parçalanma ekseninde literatürdeki tartışmalarda

ele alınan, dijital medyanın yankı odaları ve filtre balonları ile kendi içine kapalı ve izole topluluklara neden olacağı konusuna incelenen çalışmalarda görece daha sınırlı bir şekilde ele alındığı görülmektedir. Bu alanlar daha çok toplulukların kendi içindeki iletişim, paylaşım ve dayanışma ve hegemonik söylemlere karşı kendi ortak kimlik ve dillerini kurdukları bir yer olarak görülmektedir.

Her ne kadar dijital medyanın sınırlılıkları ve olumsuz yönleri çeşitli çalışmalarda kabul edilmiş olsa da incelediğimiz örneklerde tekrarlanan temalar çoğunlukla dijital medyanın potansiyelini vurgulamaktadır. Fakat bunun teknolojinin demokratikleşmeye yol açtığı şeklindeki determinist bir yaklaşımdan çok ana akım medyanın dışında kalanların kendilerini ifade etmek ve görünürlüklerini sağlamak için etkin şekilde kullandıkları durumlarda, dijital platformların daha kolay ve geniş bir erişime imkan vermesi anlamında bir olanak olarak görüldüğünü söylemek mümkündür.

Bu çalışmaların saha bulguları, ana akım medyadan dışlanan grupların geleneksel kitle iletişim araçlarına kıyasla dijital medyada kendilerini ifade etmeye daha fazla alan bulabildiklerini ve bunu özellikle politik açıdan çok değerli ve anlamlı bulduklarını göstermektedir. Bunu dikkate aldığımızda marjinal grupların algoritmalar, yankı odaları ve filtre baloncukları konularında daha az endişe ifade ettiklerini söyleyebiliriz. Bunun yerine, kendilerini ifade etmek için kendi alanlarını yaratmak ve özellikle protesto veya muhalif toplumsal uygulamalarda seslerini yükseltmek için dijital medyanın sunduğu fırsatlara odaklanmaktadır. Dijital medya, anti-hegemonik söylem ve uygulamalara alan açtığı, önceden dışlanmış seslerin daha geniş katılımını ve temsilini teşvik ettiği ve sonuçta daha çeşitli bir kamusal alana yol açtığı için, karşı-kamusal alanlar için bir fırsat olarak görülmektedir.

Araştırmalar, dijital medyanın avantajlarının, karşı kamusal alanlar açısından sınırlamalarından daha geniş çapta kabul edildiğini göstermektedir. Ancak bu olasılıkların sosyal ve politik etkileri henüz netlik

kazanmamıştır. Çünkü geniş nüfusun kamusal alana erişimi ve farklı söylemlerin dolaşımına rağmen bunun daha kapsayıcı toplumsal ve siyasal politikalara yol açıp açmadığı oldukça tartışmalıdır. Günümüz toplumlarında ekonomik, politik ve sosyal birçok nedene bağlı olarak radikal ya da popülist siyasal eğilimler artmaktadır. Ancak sosyal etkileşimimizin ve kamusal söylemimizin büyük bir kısmının gerçekleştiği sosyal platformların da bu radikalleşmedeki rolünün incelenmesi gerekmektedir. Bu nedenle dijital platformların kutuplaşmayı ve parçalanmayı teşvik etmedeki rolünü araştırmak için daha fazla araştırmaya ihtiyaç vardır.

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