

Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, and Rethinking the Public Sphere in the Age of Social Media*

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The present paper is dedicated to the phenomenon of the public sphere which is currently undergoing significant transformations under the influence of the Internet and social media. The main goal of the article is to find a new approach to the modern development of the public sphere by rethinking it from an Arendtian perspective. The first part examines the main actual changes taking place in the public sphere under the influence of social media, and concludes that the classical concept of the public sphere, dating back to its early notion of Jürgen Habermas, needs to be rethought, this requiring a new approach which would take into account the actual changes and new circumstances in the development of the public sphere. It is proposed to use Arendt's understanding of the public sphere as one of the sources of this new approach which remains relevant today in many ways. The second part examines Arendt's notion of the public sphere as compared with the concept of the public sphere of early Habermasian writing. As a result of this consideration, it is concluded that, in a number of points, Arendt's notion of the public sphere is better suited to an understanding of the modern public sphere than the classical Habermasian concept. In the third part, I rethink the existing trends in the development of the digital public sphere from Arendt's standpoint.

Keywords: Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, the public sphere, public realm, social media, Internet

Introduction

The emergence and rapid development of social media and its transformation into a multifunctional communication platform has been provoking profound changes in the ways of communication between people. Ultimately, a significant transformation of the public sphere and new boundaries are being drawn between the private and the public, along with the appearance of a networked public sphere with its high political potential and ability to cross state, social, and private borders. The communicative possibilities of social media can open new ways for self-organization, activation of resources in networks (knowledge, skills, financial means), citizen participation, and influence. Through the use of social networking services, the public sphere can be purposefully built up, informed,

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networked, and activated, be it for online activities or for engagement in the “real” world. These rapidly developing processes are often difficult to describe in the framework of old theories and concepts. The classic concept of the public sphere, tracing its roots to the early work of Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of The Public Sphere* (1962), needs some rethinking in order to formulate an adequate theoretical construction describing social reality in the digital era. The modern public sphere is far from being a unified public sphere as described by Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, but it is rather “a developing and complex mosaic of differently sized, overlapping and interconnected public spheres” (Keane, 1995: 1). It is something different compared to Habermas’ idealized public sphere of coffee shops or salons, because the networked public sphere is far from being merely a place of rational deliberative discourse. Such an idealistic understanding of the public sphere is not consistent with the real discourse in social media where discussions are often far from an unbiased and disinterested weighing of different arguments and finding the most logical and rational solution. This inconsistency, or this gap between theory and praxis needs a new approach for its bridging which would be based on a more realistic and less idealistic understanding of the public sphere. In this article, I will try to rethink the public sphere of social media from the point of view of Arendt’s political philosophy, which, in my opinion, has not lost its relevance in our time and can be useful for developing new approaches to the analysis of modern social and political processes.

The Public Sphere and Social Media

The emergence of the first social media formally dates back to 1978 when the BBS (Bulletin Board System) was developed for the exchange of public messages or files via a dial-up modem. However, social media became a truly widespread phenomenon in the first half of the 2000’s when the most popular and politically significant social networking sites such as Facebook (2004) and Twitter (2006) were launched. YouTube (2005), a video hosting service which has some elements of other social networking sites and often plays an important role in sharing politically relevant information, should also be mentioned among the most politically-influential social media sites. Since that time, the number of social media users has been rapidly growing, reaching about 2.5 billion users (or 71 percent of the number of internet users) in 2017 (Statista, 2018). This trend is expected to continue, and it is safe to predict that most of the global population will be connected through social media in the future. However, the subject of how social media influences the development of the public sphere is being vigorously debated and remains still largely open to interpretations due to the contradictory trends and insufficient time spent observing this phenomenon.

Some trends of modern transformation of the public sphere are obvious now. Thus, two diametrically opposed tendencies seem to exist in the development of the public sphere since the emergence of social media. On the one hand, social media forms an online alternative to the traditional offline public sphere which is more open for partici-

pants and is not so much bound by time and place. Yochai Benkler defines the networked public sphere as an online platform where active citizens can cooperate and express their opinions and serve as watchdogs over society on a peer-production model (Benkler, 2006: 177). According to Benkler, changes in the public sphere influenced by the Internet and social media are more qualitative than quantitative, and mean that “the easy possibility of communicating effectively into the public sphere allows individuals to reorient themselves from passive readers and listeners to potential speakers and participants in a conversation” (Benkler, 2006: 213). Thus, social media has been gradually becoming one of the key communicative platforms that is open and free for individual political activism in the sense of a deliberative and participatory democracy. It opens the field for non-professional political actors who can use social media as a communicative platform to convey their political views to a wide audience (Elmer, Langlois, McKelvey, 2012: 6). Therefore, it can be assumed that social media, due to its openness and free access, forms a more diverse and broader public sphere compared to the one that existed during the era of the dominance of print mass media. This new public sphere should be significantly expanded by means of those groups of the population that were often unrepresented in the public sphere of the past. It is not just about different kinds of radicals, marginals, and members of small groups with highly specialized interests, but also about children and teenagers, who, due to their social activities, have become a dominant group in some social media publics.

On the other hand, some researchers note the growing fragmentation and isolationism in the networked public sphere (Bright, 2018; Dahlberg, 2007; Papacharissi, 2002; Sunstein, 2009): social media has been not only destroying some boundaries, it has been also creating new ones. Social network sites maintain the shaping of different communities based on the interests, views and values of those members who prefer to remain within their group, and do not seek to influence the general agenda or to be a part of universal public sphere. As some empirical studies show (Colleoni, Rozza, Arvidsson, 2014; Gaines, Mondak, 2009; Garcia et al., 2015), social media tend to contribute to the fragmentation of public discourse in many ways, which in turn leads to what Cass Sunstein and some other social scientists characterize as the “balkanization” of the public sphere (Sunstein, 2008), and to the development of parallel communities whose members can sometimes cultivate extreme views and do not seek to interact with representatives of other groups (Rasmussen, 2016: 74). These groups tend to be marginalized by the mainstream public sphere, which leads to their further isolation. Nancy Fraser points out that the exclusion of the members of certain social groups from the public sphere may lead to the formation of alternative public spheres where these marginals can “formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interest, and needs” (Fraser, 1990: 67–68). As a result, these groups can become marginalized from the large-scale public sphere themselves, forming echo chambers with very similar views and interests of their users. All this can ultimately lead to the even stronger homogenization of views within such groups, to the filtering out of news and information coming in from the outside which does not fit into the world picture of these groups’ members, to declaring something false to be true, to the creation

to fake news, and to the radicalization of their agenda in order to make themselves heard in the society. However, this does not allow marginalized groups to better understand or reach a consensus with other societal groups, but only leads to their further marginalization. Consequently, users with radical views consolidate into separate groups and tend to isolate themselves from other parts of society. This opinion is shared by some experts who believe that the publics of shared interests can not only trigger some collective activity, but can also form isolated groups that conform to biased images of society (Rasmussen, 2016: 74–75). Another negative tendency developing in the networked public sphere is the inequality and disproportional degrees in attention and influence: the opinions of a huge number of social media users are barely perceptible from the wide audience, while some relatively-small group of popular bloggers get the bulk of attention and influence (Ibid.: 75). That means that although social networking services are mostly open and egalitarian in sense of access and participation, their public discourse is far from democratic, if we understand democracy as the equal distribution of presence and visibility. An opinion of some popular blogger is more visible and therefore carries more weight than an opinion of some ordinary user.

At the same time, some experts (Fuchs, 2014: 75; Abril, Levin, Del Riego, 2012: 64) believe that the emergence of social media contributes to the tendency of blurring the boundaries between the public and the private. This blurring leads to the merging of the private and public sphere resulting in the appearance of “hybrid” or “semi-public” spaces which combine certain features of the public and private spheres. It requires some rethinking of the concept of the public sphere, and its adequacy to the real circumstances and conditions of the modern world. There is a broad range of communities in social media, from those public spaces near to the classic ideal of the public sphere on the one pole, to the rather private spaces with some public traits on the other pole. This concerns both the subject matter of published information (it can be very personal) and the circle of the targeted audience (it can be limited to a few people). Moreover, there are different combinations in which the private and the public is blended with each other in social media. For example, often public persons, such as politicians, post very personal information and personal statements on social media. The most striking example is probably Donald Trump, who, being the US president and its top official, publishes very personal assessments of events and people from his Twitter account, thereby turning his emotional statements, usually allowed only in a narrow circle of family and friends, into political messages. However, there are also closed social media publics where political issues are discussed but access is possible only for to a limited number of participants. An attempt to analyze the networked public sphere relying on the traditional concept of public sphere would raise a number of issues. For example, do closed or semi-closed forums belong to the private or to the public sphere? Can limited or open access to a social media group be a criterion of its publicity or privacy? Why is it that in small online communities, often with limited access and the full identification of its participants, the quality of the public discourse is higher, and the rules of discussion are established and observed much better than in large open communities? Why are large open online public forums often far

from rational deliberations in terms of the classic Habermasian concept of the public sphere? Here, I suppose, it can be useful to turn to Hannah Arendt's understanding of the public sphere and to her theory of action. This does not mean that I propose to replace Habermas' theory of the public sphere (in its earliest version) with Arendt's theory of the public realm. It is rather about learning something valuable from Arendt, something that other public sphere theorists overlook (for instance, her understanding of the role of the pluralism of opinions in political life), or something that could help social theory meet the challenges to society posed by the rapid development of modern communication technologies.

Hannah Arendt's Notion of the Public Sphere

Hannah Arendt never used the term of the public sphere as a theoretical concept in her works. However, she started to deal with the theme of the common place for public discussions (calling it the "public realm") before Habermas (at least in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [1951], and especially in *The Human Condition* [1958]) and influenced his understanding of the public sphere in many aspects (for instance, Habermas' concept of communicative power). The concept of the public realm is one of the central categories of Arendt's political thought and is based on Arendt's idealistic account of the ancient polis in its classical period. The concept of the public space is understood by Arendt in two basic meanings: it is, on the one hand, the space of appearance, and, on the other hand, it is a common-for-all place, that is, the world people hold in common. As a space of appearance, Arendt's public realm provides "the widest possible publicity" to individuals, and the possibility to "be seen and heard by everybody" (Arendt, 1958: 50), which is necessary to recognize the other and to be recognized by others. This mutual recognition is a condition for further communication and cooperation between individuals. In other words, Arendt understands the public realm as an intersubjective space where people "appear" to each other and, through this appearance, triggers human political activity by their acting and speaking together. Secondly, the public realm is the world that we hold in common. This is the world which "is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place on it" (Arendt, 1998: 52). Thus, Arendt defines the public space as the opposite of private, of the natural, or of something that cannot be common. Unlike the private realm which is natural, the public realm is an artificial realm created by people themselves; it is an "objective space" between nature and men (Dossa, 1989: 86). In Arendt's view, this artificial realm was a kind of special human world which "separates humans from nature and natural necessity" and which "provides them with a potential arena for their political life" (Brunkhorst, 2000: 182). However, for Arendt, the public and the private realm are not only in dual opposition to each other and cannot be merged, but they also supplement and need each other for their own existence. The lack of one of them negatively affects the other and destroys the healthy balance of human life in general.

Hannah Arendt's concept of the public realm has much in common with Habermas' notion of the public sphere. Both Habermas and Arendt have their ideal model of public dialogue in the past; Habermas' model is in the bourgeoisie public sphere of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and Arendt's model is the ancient polis. Both underline that the private space of the past was the sphere of the family and the economy at once (Fuchs, 2014: 60). Both criticize the modern public sphere and try to find a way to repair it. Both believe that the prerequisite for the existence of the public sphere is its openness and equality of its participants. However, despite many similarities, there are also some important differences between the Arendtian and classic Habermasian views of the public sphere. First, Arendt's concept is more spatial, although the public realm's similarity to the public sphere means not a physical place, but rather an improvised place that emerges in the deeds and speeches of individuals who gather together to undertake some common activities, existing only while these activities last (d'Entrèves, 1994: 77). Arendt emphasizes the physical presence and visibility of actors, whereas the public of Habermas can be dispersed in different places but communicating to each other via the media. Second, Arendt understands the public realm not only as a communicative space where people are discussing some common affairs, but also as competitive, as an "agonistic" space (obviously referring to the agonistic character of public life in the ancient polis). Finally, whereas the public realm is a place where equal participants not only exchange opinions, but also make decisions and "act in concert" as in Hannah Arendt's political philosophy, Habermas' public sphere is primarily a communicative platform of information exchange and public opinion-formation. Arendt insists on face-to-face communication between people; it cannot happen everywhere, but only in some particular place. Seyla Benhabib explains this terminological shift from the German, the mother tongue of both Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas: when Hannah Arendt takes "der öffentliche Raum" for the public realm in the German versions of her writings, Habermas uses the term "die Öffentlichkeit," variously translated into English as the "public sphere," "publicity," and "public opinion." According to Benhabib, the public sphere of Habermas becomes increasingly de-substantialised or de-corporealised in this process compared with the public realm of Hannah Arendt (Benhabib, 1997: 7). Following Nancy Fraser's concept of weak and strong publics (Fraser, 1990), the classic Habermasian public sphere consists mostly of "weak publics" with rational discussions, but without any direct influence on political decision-making. Influence is possible only indirectly, through public opinion. On the contrary, Arendt's public realm consists of "strong publics" because they are not only the places of rational discussions, but also the places of political actions, the places where will is manifested, where power and authority emerges, where political judgements and actions are possible, and where political decisions are made.

Unlike Habermas, Arendt considers the public sphere not only as a place for the rational discussions of common affairs. For Arendt, the public sphere is a space in which people can present themselves to others and demonstrate their individuality. Moreover, the sphere of politics — and for Arendt the public sphere is always political — this is a place in which there can be not only one truth, for this is a place of many opinions. These

opinions are neither better nor worse than the others just because one of them is closer to the truth and the other is further away from it. Arendt criticizes “public opinion” as a conformist opinion based not on plurality, but on uniformity. It is the public sphere of mass society. Therefore, in real politics, according to Arendt, there cannot be a single opinion; there are plural opinions. Thus, from an Arendtian point of view, the public sphere should be an area of competition between representatives of different opinions who seek to convince other people to share their point of view or their vision of reality. At the same time, although Arendt gives weight to the rational element of a political debate in the public sphere, she also realizes very well that, in political life, the political public discourse has not only a rational perspective. For instance, there is an aesthetic — an appearance, a self-presentation (Arendt, 1998: 198–199) — or an emotional perspective — as a source of “joy of action,” which Arendt describes in *Truth and Politics* (1967): “The joy and gratification, that arise out of being in company with our peers, of acting together and appearing in public, of inserting ourselves into the world by word and deed” (Arendt, 2006: 259). The fact that Arendt understood this point perfectly well indicates her attempt to combine common sense and spontaneity, rationality, and aesthetics in her theory of judgment. This means that Habermas’ reduction of public discourse to the weighing of rational arguments would not only be too great of an idealization of the phenomenon of the public sphere, but would have been interpreted by Arendt as a contradiction of the very essence of politics unsuitable for an analysis of political activity in the networked public sphere, even from a theoretical point of view.

Unfortunately, unlike Habermas, who had the possibility to review his early work in light of criticism and social changes, Arendt died long before the time the Internet and social media became an essential factor of the “digital transformation of the public sphere.” Therefore, I would like to add a caveat to my attempt at looking at the modern development of the public sphere from Arendt’s point of view. My paper is largely a kind of speculation; even if I try to reconstruct Arendt’s position on the modern public sphere relying on her views reflected in her published works and on the hypothesis, they would remain basically unchanged. However, the main goal of this article is not to reproduce Arendt’s authentic view on the development of the public sphere in the context of its expansion in cyberspace, but to try to discover a new approach to the notion of the public sphere, and try to revise this notion in view of the circumstances that arose with the emergence and development of social media. How can Arendt’s understanding of the public sphere be useful today? This is a difficult question, considering all the changes in the ways of human communication over the past decades, and the fact that Arendt herself relied on an even more ancient version of the public sphere, in comparison to Habermas’ concept of the public sphere.

Rethinking of the Networked Public Sphere from an Arendtian Perspective

One of the most significant and distinctive features of Arendt’s way of thinking was her concentration on actual events and processes combined with her endeavor to understand

social and political processes of the present through the prism of some of the important changes of the past (Salikov, Zhavoronkov, 2017: 522). However, this approach carried a certain risk since past transformations occurred in a sometimes completely different political, social, and cultural context. Therefore, conclusions based on an analysis of the past can have only limited applicability to analyses of present or future changes (Salikov, Zhavoronkov, 2018: 26). Nevertheless, at least some of Arendt's ideas seem to be useful in analyzing the networked public sphere. These ideas are quite capable of enriching the traditional approach to the analysis of the public sphere, with certain adjustments made due to the unique features of communication in social media and its contradictory tendencies towards openness and cooperation on the one hand, and the tendencies towards isolation and fragmentation on the other.

Arendt considered one of the problems of modern democracy to be its increasingly representative character, that is, the process of turning politics into a small circle of professionals performing representative functions, while the overwhelming majority of ordinary citizens in modern society refuse to participate in political life in favor of private and social ones. There are many possible explanations for this phenomenon, one of which is a too- great distance between individuals and the decision-making level in modern giant states, which triggers the sense of alienation from politics and public activity. Arendt understood very well that direct discussion and joint decision-making are possible only under the conditions of a limited community, when a number of its participants would gather in a physical public space and debate face-to-face. That is why the idea of councils or small local communities — soviets (in terms of the Russian Revolution) or townhall meetings (in terms of the American Revolution) — was important to her. At the same time, the emergence of social media provides new opportunities for this form of political life, both in an offline form and in various types of hybrid combinations, when political discussions and actions both offline and online are combined.¹ It should be noted that, from an Arendtian perspective, the public sphere is not a huge homogeneous entity, but something that consists of local public spaces. In this sense, the universal public sphere could be ideally presented as a kind of multi-level construction consisting of separate mini-public spheres where the political life of ordinary citizens actually takes place. It is then that these mini-public spheres, or elementary public spaces, can ideally be understood as some sort of councils, the historical examples for which Arendt finds in the revolutions in France, the United States of America, Russia, and Hungary.

Since Arendt understands the universal public sphere as consisting of a multitude of local public spaces, the increased fragmentation of the modern public sphere in light of her council theory does not look like such an unambiguous phenomenon as it seems to be in the light of classical Habermasian public sphere theory. The fragmentation of the modern public sphere could be considered by Arendt not only as a problem, but also as a

1. The most vivid example of this kind of hybrid forms of political activity can be illustrated by the revolutionary processes during the Arab Spring; discussions and self-organization first took place on social media, but then the main actions poured out into physical space, although social networks did not lose their function as a political public space even afterward.

natural process or a kind of reaction of an ordinary person to the processes of unification and globalization, massification, and the reduction of human uniqueness in the modern world. Perhaps the only way for an ordinary person not to dissolve in this melting pot is to build their own small world together with like-minded persons, that is, to create a kind of autonomous formation in which they can fully manifest the uniqueness of their personality, participate in discussions, make decisions, and act together: this means to create the world around them. In this sense, the fragmentation of the public sphere into separate fragments is a natural and, to some extent, inevitable process. In an interview with Carlo Schmid on Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR, Northern German Broadcasting), Arendt, in fact, directly says that the fragmentation of the public sphere into many small local public spaces can be almost the only opportunity under the conditions of modern giant states to give an ordinary person a chance to be present in publicity (Arendt, Schmid, 1965: 69). In local public places, a person can directly express their point of view and discuss it with other participants. Arendt maintains all forms of ground-level self-organization as having the potential to set up a public space in which political action can flourish (see Habermas, 1977: 3–9). She argues fiercely for localism against centralization, and for power from below in the form of local political councils (Arendt, 1990). Arendt is convinced that the civic ideal of the polis can still be realized at the scale of the local and the particular (Howell, 1993: 315). Social media with its plurality and variety of local public spaces is a very promising phenomenon where localism and particularity can flourish from this Arendtian perspective.

However, if we change our perspective from the narrower focus of local councils to a broader context of political activism, we discover that the processes taking place in the digital public sphere allow us to describe them in terms of Arendt's political philosophy, taking into account Arendt's thought of opinion and her understanding of how important the pluralism of opinions is for political life. From Arendt's point of view, the political role of social networks would reside in creating and disseminating a wide range of individual opinions. On the one side, the private opinions of initially non-public persons expressed in the certain publics in social media may attract the attention of a wide audience, and thereby become a starting point for political discussions and actions influencing the overall political agenda in such a way. On the other side, "each individual statement of a politician, while also being interpreted by traditional media, which not always represent the whole spectrum of opinions, becomes the subject of a broad public discussion, in certain aspects analogous to the Greek *ἀγών* between equal opinions, each of whom does not negate the others" (Salikov, Zhavoronkov, 2017: 522). According to this "agonistic" view, the public realm represents a place where people not only discuss and rationally weigh arguments, but also compete with each other for recognition, authority, and influence. As an "agonistic" space, the public realm is the space where men speaking and acting attempt to compete with other people for a vision of reality they all are living in. Although Arendt does not reject the deliberative and rational character of the public sphere, she also takes non-rational motivation of acting it out in the public realm into account: people speak and act in the public realm to be visible to other people, and to appear in the

common world. This understanding of politics more precisely reflects what happens in the real public sphere (and as well as in its digital segment), where the motivations of the participants in public discourse can be very different, just as their argumentation would not always follow the rules of rational discourse ethics. Moreover, if we logically develop Arendt's agonistic view of the public sphere, it will be quite possible to solve the difficulty in her theory which is connected with its rigid distinction between the public and the private, and the political and the social, a distinction her critics constantly pay attention to. To do this, it is sufficient to depart from the dogmatic understanding of what relates to the private sphere and what is public, which problems are political, and which are related to the sphere of economy. We will then come to the conclusion that the boundaries between these spheres could be also the subject of discussion and public consensus. The history of the emancipation of various groups (workers, women, or sexual minorities) shows that the private, or the problems of a certain group of people, can become a subject of a common public discussion, and thus, can acquire the status of a political problem. The struggle for equality or the struggle to be heard, for a place in the public sphere are always political matters, not private ones. In this sense, Arendt's public sphere might not be as static compared with the public sphere described in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, and would provide the possibility of development and corrections, rather than simply insisting on an ideal construction with rigid borders and strict rules which is highly unlikely to happen in reality. Nevertheless, her understanding of the public sphere may seem contradictory and inconsequential. So, if we pay attention to Arendt's account of people's equality in the sense of participatory activity in politics, we will encounter a peculiar combination of egalitarianism and elitism, or of aristocratism and republicanism. Arendt insists on the right of everyone to be present in the public sphere, on the right to action, and the right to have and express an opinion as a part of a more broad and fundamental human right, the "right to have rights": "We become aware of the existence of a right to have rights (and that means to live in a framework where one is judged by one's actions and opinions) and a right to belong to some kind of organized community, only when millions of people emerge who had lost and could not regain these rights because of the new global political situation . . . the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself. It is by no means certain whether this is possible" (Arendt, 1973: 296–297). However, only a small active part of the population has a need to take part in political life. The rest is merely concerned about private and social issues (Arendt, 1990: 70). In other words, in Arendt's terms, fragmentation, isolation, and marginalization are not necessarily the possibility of about the individual's active presence being taken away in the public sphere, but more often about the natural process of stratification of society into politically active and passive parts (Salikov, Zhavoronkov, 2017: 516), which have different needs of appearing in the public sphere and different abilities to persuade other people of the significance of their issues to be a part of the general agenda. This elitist idea is found, for example, in *On Revolution*, where Arendt clearly means that the public realm is to be used by those who really want and need to be present in it:

Politically, they are the best, and it is the task of good government and the sign of a well-ordered republic to assure them of their rightful place in the public realm. To be sure, such an 'aristocratic' form of government would spell the end of general suffrage as we understand it today; for only those who as voluntary members of an 'elementary' republic have demonstrated that they care for more than their private happiness and are concerned about the state of the world would have the right to be heard in the conduct of the business of the republic. (Arendt, 1990: 279)

The crucial issue of the modern public sphere from an Arendtian perspective could be not its growing fragmentation and isolation of certain groups in it, but the "rise of the social" that threatens the existence of the private and the public as vital spheres of human existence. By the "rise of the social," Arendt means the displacement of the political by the social, and the substitution of the public discussion of common affairs by the public protection of private economic interests. From Arendt's point of view, this "rise of the social" "has not only blurred the old borderline between the private and the political, it has also changed almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two term and their significance for the life of the "individual and the citizen" (Arendt, 1998: 38). Arendt is convinced that the penetration of the social with its characteristic patterns of behaviour into the public sphere has a destructive effect on the latter: instead of competition between different opinions, the desire to express individuality and to present one's own uniqueness to others is replaced by conformism and the intention to be "normal," whilst free and spontaneous action is substituted by a "kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to 'normalise' its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement" (Ibid.: 40). As a result of this substitution of the political by the social, the public sphere turns into "a pseudo-space of interaction in which individuals no longer "act" but "merely behave" as economic producers, consumers and urban city dwellers" (Benhabib, 1997: 4). Therefore, Arendt considers the "rise of the social" as a great danger to the existence of the public sphere. For Arendt, "the social" makes action itself impossible, for it "excludes the possibility of action" (Arendt, 1998: 40), and substitutes the uniqueness of each actor with the monotony, predictability, and conformity of "the social": the "phenomenon of conformism is characteristic of the last stage of this modern development" (Arendt, 1998: 40). Moreover, empirical research indicates that conformity often pressures the expression of opinions and political participation (Mallinson, Hatemi, 2018). In terms of social media, this means that people try to behave as conformists and avoid acute political themes in those social media communities that consist of participants sharing different political views, and with whom they have close relations at the same time (Mutz, 2006). They prefer to discuss political topics in closed or semi-closed communities of like-minded people, that is, people with similar political views. From Arendt's point of view, what happens today to the networked public sphere could be understood as the continuation of the "rise of the social," the process of blurring the boundaries between the public sphere and the private sphere, leading to their destruction and the following fusion into a single social sphere. The process of merging the borders between the public and the private is two-sided and reciprocal in its

nature: on the one hand, it results in the privatization of publicity when publicity is limited, and when audience restriction mechanisms are used.² On the other hand, it results in the publicization (also politicization and economizing) of the private, when the private is exposed in the public realm or used for political and economic goals.³ From Arendt's point of view, such a hybridization of the private and the public can ultimately lead to both the degradation of the public sphere and the destruction of the private sphere.⁴

Conclusion

Summing up, we should note that there is a growing inconsistency between the classical idealistic understanding of public sphere going back to Jürgen Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of Public Sphere*, and the phenomenon of the digital public sphere. In order to overcome this inconsistency, we need to rethink our understanding of the phenomenon of the public sphere and to find a new approach that would take into account recent changes in the public sphere occurring under the influence of the Internet and social media. It can be useful to consider the following ideas; first, Arendt's idea of self-organization through local communities, including her preference for localism in the public sphere over centralization, correlates well with the fact that the digital public sphere consists of many segments that, although connected, are, nevertheless, separated communities, whose participants are linked by common interests. Second, her thoughts on the role of the pluralism of opinions can also be helpful for understanding modern transformations of the public sphere. In this sense, the political significance of social networking services for the development of the public sphere would consist in their contribution to the creation and dissemination of a wide variety of opinions. Third, Arendt's idea of competition in the public sphere could be important because the public sphere is not only a place where rational arguments are weighed, but also the place of a struggle for recognition from other people, for their attention, and for the world's representations in their minds. Finally, it is the idea of the "rise of the social," which represents the most serious problem of the modern public sphere from Arendt's standpoint, with its merging of the borders between the private and the public, and with the hybridization of the public sphere which also may be useful to consider. These processes, in terms of Arendtian thought, can lead to the gradual disappearance of the public and private spheres, at least as we knew them before.

2. There are many closed and semi-closed communities in social networks which are open only for a limited number of users. Such communities are not fully public or private spheres; they are rather hybrid semi-public or semiprivate. Some experts, like Ulrike Klinger, for instance, define these communities as "semi-public spheres" (see Klinger, 2018).

3. Christian Fuchs points out that most social media services use private, semi-public, and public user data as a commodity, and sell it to advertising clients that present targeted advertisements to users (Fuchs, 2014: 79).

4. This phenomenon is especially vividly manifested on the pages of public politicians on social media, where personal information about family and friends often coexists with political statements and discussions.

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Ханна Арендт, Юрген Хабермас и переосмысление публичной сферы в эпоху социальных медиа

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Настоящая статья посвящена феномену публичной сферы, претерпевающей сегодня существенные трансформации под влиянием Интернета и социальных медиа. Основная цель статьи заключается в том, чтобы переосмыслить происходящие в современной публичной сфере изменения с позиций политической теории Ханны Арендт. В первой части статьи анализируются основные актуальные изменения, происходящие в публичной

сфере под влиянием социальных медиа. Делается вывод о том, что классическое понимание публичной сферы, восходящее к работе Юргена Хабермаса «Структурная трансформация публичной сферы», нуждается в переосмыслении, в новом подходе, который принимал бы во внимание последние изменения и новые обстоятельства в развитии публичной сферы. В статье делается предположение, что понимание публичной сферы в теории Арендт во многом остается актуальным сегодня и может послужить одним из источников нового подхода к пониманию публичной сферы. Во второй части текста рассматривается концепция публичной сферы в теории Арендт, проводится сравнительный анализ этой концепции с концепцией публичной сферы из раннего периода творчества Юргена Хабермаса. В результате исследования автор приходит к выводу, что в ряде моментов арендтовская концепция публичной сферы лучше подходит для понимания феномена современной публичной сферы, чем классическая хабермасианская теория. В третьей части предпринимается попытка переосмысления существующих трендов в развитии цифровой публичной сферы с позиции теории Арендт.

Ключевые слова: Ханна Арендт, Юрген Хабермас, публичная сфера, публичное пространство, социальные медиа, Интернет