Chapter 25

A Glimmer of Hope for Mass Media in a Liberal Democracy:
istanbulrumazinligi.com

Vildan Mahmutoğlu
Galatasaray University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Media is an electronic circle that can create spaces for deliberation, interaction, or participation. However, media in the global age is also constructed with the effects of liberal economy that create large companies' hegemony in media. This economic circumstance creates blocks in media and prevents participation and deliberation of people. The aim of this study is to demonstrate that new media technologies can provide solutions for the problems of mass media in terms of creating rooms for active citizen participation, by providing the outlets for public to participate in. Minority groups have taken advantages of new media technology and have created Web pages to promote their interests and agenda. Turkey is an important example of this phenomenon since several minority groups have created such Web pages. One such group is the Turkish Greeks; by analyzing their Web page, istanbulrumazinligi.com, this study aims to understand their online public sphere, e-democracy, and e-deliberation.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a term often used instead of liberalism, constitutionalism, or social equality. Someone can say democracy is majority rules with minorities still having rights. The meaning of democracy has changed over time according to the time and people and states have appealed to democracy to justify their policies and approaches. "Christopher Hollis describes democracy as one thing at Moscow, one at Rome, a third in Sudan and a fourth at home". In 1975 Shaik Majibor Rahman banned the opposition and strikes in Bangladesh, explaining that it was necessary to "ensure democracy" in the country. Another example occurred in the Philippines, when Dictator Ferdinand Marcos published a book titled "Today's democracy", which contained his description of "democracy". Thus any act or activity can be defined as "democratic" or "non democratic". The same activity could be called both "undemocratic" and "democratic" (Stronberg, 1996).

This study begins with a short definition and history of democratic development in the West. In the 21st.century, democracy needs tools to exist, such as the media. The tradition of democracy needs public opinion which is based on media in this century. Because media can carry discussions, arguments to the public and cause the formation of consensus of the society. However, today, there are many critics about the media because traditional media organizations are generally established by big companies. Therefore, it causes some suspicious about its impartiality. General public intends to see media near citizen rights and public instead of corporations and dominant ideology. New media technologies have led to new possibilities that have helped remove these problems of traditional media. This study investigates a web-site that was launched by a Greek minority group that lives in Istanbul: istanbulrumazinligi.com. Analyzing the web site, the study examines how a minority group is integrated into to national public sphere that has been shaped by the media.

Minority identities are a recent topic of discussion, because a country's boundaries are not necessarily reflective of a homogenous culture. Countries are composed of multiple cultures, minority groups and different people. But also they all live in one specific national identity and share a public sphere which is under effects of the traditional media. There are some questions which will be looked for in this study. How do minority groups find a national voice in the public sphere? How can a minority group utilize the media to enhance their position in the political arena? Can new media find solutions to the problems of national integrated public sphere by opening new spaces? The findings will be analyzed in terms of democratic engagement, public sphere, minority culture, e-democracy, and e-deliberation.

BACKGROUND

Brief History of Western Democracy

In ancient times, Greek city states had places in city centers called *agora*. In this meeting point, men (not women or slaves) came together to discuss politics and hear the decisions of the king or council. The *agora* became one of the first democratic arenas for the public. The Roman Republic also engaged in representative democracy when Roman citizens began to live farther away from the capital city some people were designated to represent groups of citizens. Most representatives were individuals from noble lines or very wealthy families (Dahl, 1993).

The first restriction of the power of the king occurred in England with Magna Carta in 1215 and it became the root of the English parliamentary system. Ideas of land use, the scope of power for government institutions and concepts of liberty were first presented in Magna Carta. Perhaps because of the location of England, these early democratic steps were not as effective as the Declaration of Independence in America in 1776, and the French Revolution in 1789. These two historic events affected many things in the world; giving the idea of democracy to states and directing their attention toward independence. Robert Allen Rutland (1955) says that the American Revolution did not give people something new, and that they simply mimicked the concepts that were born in England. The founders already knew the laws concerning how to protect life, liberty and property. Thus, the process was not new; rather, it was copied to America (Rutland, 1955). On July 4, 1776, 13 colonies seceded from the British Empire and constituted their own state (Scott, 1920). In the course of time, France supported the colonies against the British Empire. This effort later affected France, because supporting the 13 colonies required heavy taxes in France and French intellectuals saw the realization of their vision of freedom. These facts

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