

# The Internet as a “Public Sphere”: The New York Times website case study

Jurgita Matačińskaitė

PhD student  
Vilnius University,  
Faculty of Communication  
Maironio st. 7, LT-01124 Vilnius  
E-mail: jurgamata@yahoo.com



**Abstract.** *This paper considers the theory of the Internet becoming part of the “public sphere”. The first part of the paper looks at how the concept of the public sphere was used by different scholars and how they defined the theory of the “public sphere”. The second part of the paper analyses how the theory about the public sphere defined by different scholars works on the practical level.*

**Keywords:** *internet, network society, newspaper, public sphere, New York Times, virtuality, website.*

## Introduction

Research about the audience’s habits to use computers and the Internet shows that new technology and the Internet occupy the cultural space more frequently. Browsing the Internet becomes a daily routine for its audience. Nowadays, the Internet is not only a place to find necessary information; it can also be the place to shape people’s opinions, participate in public discussions about different issues, and find supporting information for one’s arguments. Participation in such a “public sphere” creates a “virtual community” or “Internet community”.

Daya Kishan Thussu, professor at Westminster University in *International Communication: Continuity and Change* states that spectacular innovations in information and communication technologies, especially computing, and their rapid global expansion have led to claims that this is the age of information society. The “public sphere” can therefore be called one of the features of this information society.

### **What Is a “Public Sphere”?**

There are a lot of scientists from different region of the world who discuss and analyse the notion of the “public sphere”. Since some regions of the world have a more complicated definition of the “public sphere” than others, the scientists’s views are affected by their geographical origins. Hannu Nieminen, professor at the University of Helsinki analyses European public sphere. She points out that we can find four main ways in approaching the issue. To understand the European public sphere we can approach it from the pragmatic or affirmative, the processual, the sceptical, or the radicalcritical way. As defined by Hannu Nieminen, the pragmatic or affirmative approach presumes that there are all conditions to realize European public sphere. This approach tries to analyse how to make the public sphere more effective. The processual approach investigates the development of the European public sphere and separates the stages of its development. The sceptical approach raises questions about the validity of the research on the European public sphere definition and points out to the destructive forces of the cultural and political factors. The radicalcritical understanding of the European public sphere tries to deny socio-philosophical assumptions, which are reflective of German sociologist’s Jürgen Habermas theory of the “public sphere” (Nieminen, 2008: 10–17).

Lithuanian scientists are also investigating the “public sphere”. A professor of Vilnius University, Žygintas Pečiulis, analyses the public sphere in the mass communication era as a development of the idea of audiovisual public service. He examines the conception of government-created European public service radio and television as they function in the context of the public sphere (Pečiulis, 2005: 71).

Another scientist from Vilnius University, Inga Vinogradnaitė, investigated the virtual public sphere in Lithuania and examined how the Internet politicises social networks. She tried to identify if there is political impact on the social networks in the virtual sphere where people are able to discuss political issues. She raised two related questions. The first one asked how many and what kind of people participate in political discussions and if people who don't have the possibility to discuss politics in their direct political networks, discuss in the virtual sphere. The second one aimed to investigate what is the common experience of virtual political discussions, how the participants of such a political discussion are evaluated, and what reasons are important for participating in such discussions. Vinogradnaitė came to the conclusion that the impact of the politicised Internet can be expressed not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively. That means that the Internet makes it possible to participate in direct discussions about politics. Such a discussion about politics in another context is impossible, unrepresentative, and usually avoidable (Vinogradnaitė, 2009: 43).

Lithuanian scientists from Vytautas Magnus University, Aušra Vinciūnienė and Aukšė Balčytienė, have also investigated the public sphere in the media. They researched and examined what kind of news about European Union was published in newspapers and broadcasted on television in ten European countries from March 7th to 27th in 2005. The results of the research allowed the scientists to discuss the beginning of the European public sphere, the features of European journalism, and the necessity to carry out qualitative research about the European public sphere (Vinciūnienė, Balčytienė, 2006: 68).

The German sociologist Jürgen Habermas who is regarded as the father of the “public sphere” concept in one of his earliest books *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, defined it as “an arena, independent of government (even if in receipt of state funds) and also enjoying autonomy from partisan economic forces, which is dedicated to rational debate (i.e. to debate and discussion which is not “interest”, “disguised”, or “manipulated”) and which is both accessible to entry and open to

inspection by the citizenry. It is here, in the public sphere, that public opinion is formed” (Habermas, 1989: 36).

Habermas’ idealised version of a public space was characterized by greater accessibility to information, a more open debate within the bourgeoisie, a space independent of both business interests and state apparatus.

To Habermas, the public sphere is the basic functional principle in a democratic society and it refers to the ideal of democratic communication. In a Habermasian sense, the ideal of the public sphere is characterised by the following principles:

- access to public debate is free and open to everybody,
- all participants in public debate are considered as equal,
- no subjects and topics are excluded from the debate,
- the result of public deliberation is judged only on the basis of best arguments,
- the aim of the debate is consensus and unanimity (Habermas, 1989: 36–37).

Habermas’ idealised version of the public space was too idealistic. This approach has been criticised from different directions. Some points of critique have been as follows:

American political scientist Jodi Dean in the article *Multiple Reality* claims that the Habermasian idealised version of a public sphere was not so idealistic. She observes that in this particular public sphere not everyone has been included into the debate about the main issues of society. It excluded women, ethnic and racial minorities, and it was built on the backs of the working class. Only the bourgeoisie had access to information.

British sociologist John B. Thompson in the book *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication* criticizes the Habermasian public sphere as well. He argues that “although the bourgeois public sphere was in principle open to all private individuals, it was in practice restricted to a limited section of the population”. He emphasizes that the effective criteria of admission were property and education – the public sphere comprised, in practice, the bourgeois

reading public of the eighteenth century. The two effective criteria of admission tended to circumscribe the same group of individuals, for education was largely determined by one's entitlement to property.

Jodi Dean observes that nowadays computer-mediated interaction provides a much greater number of people with access to information. The scholar argues that "it is no longer a privilege of the elite, because the information is available to anyone with a computer." She claims that nowadays, more people have opportunities to register their thoughts and opinions in political discussions than ever before. Chat rooms, cyber salons, and e-zones are just some of the new electronic spaces in which people can participate as equals in the process of the collective will formation.

Habermas answered to this critique in several instances, and since the 1970s he has transformed his own conception of the public sphere in many ways. However, even with the criticism and with these qualifications, most of the critics continue to use the Habermas' early conceptualisation of the public sphere also as their own critical normative point of reference in their research. This is mostly because there has not been any other comparable historically argued framework for discussing this theory.

Hannu Nieminen claims that today there is a more or less shared consensus among the research community that the "really existing" public sphere does not correspond to these ideal claims, if it ever has. Despite this, the ideal notion still has a strong influence in almost all academic discussions on public sphere or public spheres. As Nieminen argues, the reason for this is probably that the ideal notion seems to match our understanding of the principles and values of our Western liberal democracy – as if the ideals of public sphere were realisable, as if we could make public debate free and equal, as if the public deliberation could be at its best judged only on the basis of the best arguments, and as if the deliberation could eventually establish something like "the Truth" of the matter under discussion. In this sense, the public sphere can act as a regulative idea against which we can measure democracy today.

In this article the “public sphere” is defined as a place (virtual or real) where people share their opinions about a particular subject. It can be about politics, economics, culture or other issues. The “public sphere” helps a person shape his or her opinion or get more familiar with everything that happens around him or her and in the world.

### **Did the Internet Already Become a “Public Sphere”?**

Nowadays, people use the Internet for different purposes. They search for information, buy goods and services, speak in chat rooms, etc. The question therefore becomes, whether or not the Internet has already become a “public sphere” where people can share their opinions about different issues. It should also be admitted, however, that it is easier to raise these questions than to get their answers as scholars are still discussing the issue.

The investigation begins with examining the reasons why more and more communication occurs on the Internet. American scholar Gracie Lawson-Borders in her book *Media Organizations and Convergence* gives us some insight into how new media is accessed and used. She presents the findings of three Americans’ research which show that the audience is changing its habits to use computers and the Internet. The main conclusions are:

- firstly, the Internet is playing a more important role in the audience’s daily routine;
- secondly, the usage of the different forms of media is becoming more of a regular occurrence for the audience;
- lastly, many people are integrating their media choices rather than abandoning one for the other.

Therefore, since society is changing and the print newspapers do not want to lose their audience, there has been a movement of print newspapers toward the electronic domain.

American scientists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in the book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* claim that in the twentieth century we are in an unusual position to appreciate remediation,

because of the rapid development of new digital media and the nearly as rapid response by traditional media. The scholars say that “older electronic and print media are seeking to reaffirm their status within our culture as digital media challenge that status.” According to them, both new and old media are invoking the twin logics of immediacy and hypermediacy in their efforts to remake themselves and each other. The scholars argue that the new medium remains dependent upon the older one, in acknowledged and unacknowledged ways.

The theoretical ideas of Bolter and Grusin that the new medium always depends on the older one was confirmed by Chinese scholar Xigen Li in the book *Internet Newspapers: the Making of a Mainstream Medium*. He notices that in October, 1994, when the first beta version of Netscape was released, few people thought that they would be able to access news through the Web browser. The birth of Netscape was a milestone in the history of newspaper publishing. Netscape opened an unlimited universe that was previously unimaginable and unreachable for newspaper publishers and audiences. As Xigen Li states, Internet-published newspapers started soon after that. In conformity with Bolter and Grusin it can be stated that as new technology emerges with the computer and the Internet print newspapers are remediated. Xigen Li summarized the integration of the newspaper to the computer. He observed that the computer complements the newspaper. It allows print media to deliver news products in real time and tremendously expands the amount of information available to the audience. The new medium that updates the news with full screen photos and video significantly improves the depth and timelines of news.

Xigen Li claims that by using computer technology to produce and deliver a new product, newspapers have welded literacy-print news with Internet-based news (computer-digital delivery).

Obviously, we have to recognize that Internet nowadays takes the place of print newspapers. It brings new features into the process of communication and step by step occupies cultural space. For this reason it is useful to have a look at whether the Internet has become a real “public sphere”.

## **1. The Internet Has Become a “Public Sphere”**

Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells in his book *The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* claims that media, including the Internet, has become a public space. The Spanish scholar argues that in the realm of communication, the network society is characterized by a pattern of networking, flexibility, the recombination of codes, and ephemeral symbolic communication. This is a culture primarily organized around and integrated by a diversified system of electronic media, including the Internet. Castells explains that cultural expressions of all kinds are enclosed and shaped by this interlinked, electronic hypertext, formed by television, radio, print media, film, video, art and Internet communication in the so-called “multimedia system.”

Castells claims that this multimedia system, even in its current state of oligopolistic business concentration, is not characterized by one-way messages to a mass audience. This is the mass culture of the industrial society. According to Castells, media in the network society presents a large variety of communication channels, with increased interactivity. They also do not constitute the global village of a unified Hollywood-centred culture. They are inclusive of a wide range of cultures and social groups, and send targeted messages to selected audiences or to specific sectors of an audience. Castells also claims that the media system is characterized by global business concentration, by diversification of the audience (including cultural diversification), by technological versatility and channel multiplicity, and by the growing autonomy of the audience that is equipped with the Internet and has learned the rules of the game. Namely, these constitute that everything as a collective mental experience is virtual; but that this virtuality is a fundamental dimension of everyone’s reality.

## **2. The Internet Has not Become a “Public Sphere”**

Jodi Dean disagrees that the Internet nowadays is a proper “public sphere”. According to her, if even if the Internet consists of different kinds of websites that are dedicated to specific social groups; that does not necessarily mean that the Internet is a proper “public sphere”.



The proper “public sphere” has to have equality and rationality, decency and civility; but by examining current Internet system’s means of communication, most are not included in the process of shaping the public sphere. Dean’s main idea is that the Internet should be more like a public sphere.

Dutch scientist Jan Van Dijk in his article *The One-dimensional Network Society of Manuel Castells* claims as well that we should not take the network society (including the Internet which is a network of networks) as an absolute institution of the public sphere. He argues that society still consists of individuals, groups/ pairs and organizations. Of course, they form external and internal relations, but these relations do not reflect society. Their organic and material properties and their rules and resources should not be cut out of society in order to bring it back to its supposed bare essence of relationship. Jan Van Dijk emphasizes that “even a totally mediated society where all relations are fully realised by and substantiated in media networks, where social and media networks equal each other, would still be based on bodies, minds, rules and resources of all kinds.”

According to Jan Van Dijk, the virtual reality and the organic reality cannot exist without each other in a modern society which has become dependent upon media networks. Through virtual reality, communities and organizations are able to acquire a relative autonomy of structure. Jan Van Dijk disagrees with Castells’ idea of disembodiment and the popular idealist notion of a freely floating cyberspace. The scholar claims that media networks cannot exist without their resources such as technology, economy, society and human minds including neural networks. He gives an example that observations of virtual communities reveal that their members take with them, as a kind of baggage, all rules, identities and mental states they have learned and shaped in organic groups. A realistic and hopeful perspective of virtuality is that it adds to organic social life, instead of replacing it, and that it is able to launch all kinds of fruitful interplay between them.

We could say that the Internet has some features of a “public sphere”, but not every website provides a possibility for itsvisitors to share their

thoughts and opinions. On some websites we can find some interactivity or places where visitor can express themselves and shape their opinions. However, these places cannot be called the idealistic or proper “public sphere”.

### **The New York Times and the Public Sphere**

In order to analyse how theoretical insights about the “public sphere” function in practice, *The New York Times* newspaper’s website (accessible via [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) and [www.nyt.com](http://www.nyt.com)) was analysed. Lithuanian newspaper websites aim to create some level of interactivity on their own website. The newspapers’ websites have appropriate spaces for people to discuss published articles. Usually, people have free access to newspaper websites articles and can write their opinions without any restrictions. Research of *The New York Times* website as a public sphere could be important and useful for Lithuanian newspapers’ websites as it could show the extent of the world’s leading newspaper site’s use of the ideal public sphere on. The empirical research aims to find the extent of which *The New York Times* website has become a “public sphere”.

The goals of the research:

- to examine whether access to public debate on *The New York Times* website is free and open to everyone;
- to understand whether all the participants in public debate in *The New York Times* website are considered as equal;
- to examine whether on *The New York Times* website there are subjects and topics that are excluded from the debate;

*The New York Times* is a daily newspaper published in New York City by Arthur Ochs Sulzberger Jr. and distributed internationally. It is one of the well-known newspapers in the world, which is why it is very important to examine how the idealistic its website. It is owned by *The New York Times* Company, which publishes 15 other newspapers. It is the largest metropolitan newspaper in the United States, which has a large influence of how and what kind of information is distributed to American society. *The New York Times* Company is a leading global multimedia media news and information company with 2011 revenues

of USD \$2.3 billion and it includes *The New York Times*, *The International Herald Tribune*, *The Boston Globe*, *NYTimes.com*, *BostonGlobe.com*, *Boston.com* and related properties. The Company's core purpose is to enhance society by creating, collecting and distributing high-quality news and information.

*The New York Times* has had a strong presence on the Web since 1995. It has a general policy of keeping articles freely available for one week and charging a fee for access to older articles. Accessing some articles requires registration, though this restriction can be bypassed by using a link generator. According to *The New York Times*, the website had 555 million page views in March of 2005. For the month of March, 2006 *The New York Times* online version had experienced heavy traffic, with 11.6 million unique visitors and continues to rank as the number one newspaper site. In 2012 with over 25 million unique visitors each month, *The New York Times* had one of the most engaged, loyal communities of readers on the Web.

After examining *The New York Times* website, at least two places were found where people can express their opinions about different topics.

The first section seems to be a place where the "public sphere" has potential to flourish. In the section *Readers' Comments* the newspaper attempts to involve the audience into the discussion about different kinds of issues. In this daily section, *The New York Times* proposes a different question for public discussion. One day, it can encourage people to discuss the war in Iraq. Another day, the discussion question can be about disabled people's participation in the Olympics. On a subsequent day, the question was about merit-based pay for teachers. Here the newspaper provides its audience with a forum to read and discuss these issues with one another as well as a place to find links to related articles which contain information and analysis about the daily topics.

We would like to take a deeper look into this kind of "public sphere" which seems to be a new and more flexible place on Internet-based newspaper sites for people to express their opinions. The readers here could post their comments for questions such as "What do you

think of merit-based pay for the teachers?” A person posting his or her comments, however, has the following restrictions.

*The New York Times* website requests the readers to submit their name and their real e-mail address. The newspaper’s website shows a warning to the reader if he or she does not submit his or her real e-mail address and the comment will not be published.

*The New York Times* website also warns the reader that comments are moderated and will be not posted if they are off-topic and or abusive. Submissions may also be edited for length and clarity. *The New York Times* provides User Agreement information on its website. In this agreement, there are 11 clauses which clarify what is allowed on the website and what is not. When you write your comment on the daily topic and send it to the website, *The New York Times* prompts a screen which states “Your comment will appear once it has been approved.”

Here we must admit that not every comment can be posted on the newspaper’s website. *The New York Times* editors will decide which comments can be published on the website and which ones will be rejected. This means that there is a selection censorship on the *Readers’ Comments* section.

Another thing we have to take into account is that the *Readers’ Comments* section is limited by time. The readers can send their comments about the daily topic from the morning until midnight. After midnight the comments section is closed for that particular issue. If the reader still wants to send his or her comments on the daily topic, the website will state, “Sorry, comments are closed for this item” and comments will not be sent in.

Another place where people can share their opinions is the special section called *Opinion*. In this section there are eight subsections: Editorials, Columnists, Contributors, Letters, N.Y/ Region opinions, Reader’s opinion, and The Public Editor.

The first three sections publish the opinions of *The New York Times* editors, columnists, and contributors about different kinds of issues. These sections are *The New York Times* employees’ opinions. That is why the “public sphere” theory does not apply to these sections. Moreover,

they can be found on the print version of the newspaper and it should not be regarded as a particular feature of the Internet.

The *Letters* section is dedicated to the readers' expressed opinions about articles within *The New York Times*. It denotes a type of interactivity between the readers and writers of the articles. Sometimes, *Letters'* editor gives feedback to the readers in this section. The readers have a possibility to submit a letter to the editor in this section as well. However, we have to admit that the *Letters* section is a traditional practice of journalism. This practice came out on *The New York Times* website from the print version of the newspaper. Due to this, this kind of interactivity between reader and newspaper cannot be called a special feature of the Internet and act as a "public sphere".

We also have to admit here that all letters posted to *The New York Times* website are edited and selected to publish by *The Letters* section's editor. That means that some kind of opinion control in this section exists as well.

In the *N.Y./ Region Opinion* section people can read articles and editor opinions about various issues or events going on within the New York, Connecticut and New Jersey three-state area. Readers in return can submit letters to the editors and send them by e-mail in this weekly section of the newspaper.

The *Reader's Opinion* is the section where readers can share their thoughts about their different interests such as classical music, opera, books, chess, crosswords and games, travels, etc. This section is more about the reader's entertainment.

The last section is the *Public Editor*. In this section the readers can ask everything about *The New York Times* website strategy, politics, revenues, etc. The public editor can in turn answer the readers' questions.

## Conclusions

A general disadvantage of the Internet as a "public sphere" is that not everyone has access to an Internet connection or the skills to use it. For these reasons not everyone can participate in such a community.

*The New York Times* still keeps the traditional form of newspaper even on its website. Some features of new media can be found but the website contains a lot of features from the print newspaper. The best example of this is *The Letters* section. The letters are a specific feature of the print newspaper, which is no longer necessary to keep on the website.

By observing *The New York Times* newspaper's website we have come to the conclusion that, on the website we can find features of a "public sphere". The readers have places where they can express their opinions; however, the newspaper's website cannot be called an ideal or proper "public sphere" due to the following reasons:

Firstly, only *The New York Times* newspaper's website editors can choose the daily topic for discussion. That means that the readers do not have the possibility to freely discuss the issues that they want to talk about.

Secondly, the reader's comments are edited and selectively posted on the website by *The New York Times* editors. This means that there is a censorship on selection based on editorial hierarchy. This also means that not all participants in public debate on *The New York Times* website are considered as equal.

Thirdly, the reader's comments are limited by time. The readers only have the possibility to send their comments from morning until midnight.

*The New York Times* website remains an important but flawed institution. If the website would allow the public more freedom to express themselves, this website would become much closer to the ideal public sphere.

By observing and analyzing *The New York Times* newspaper's website we came to the conclusion that the "public sphere" on *The New York Times* website has one main advantage. This is that the readers can share their opinions and create an "Internet community". However, this kind of "public sphere" has a disadvantage as well, which is that disadvantage is that not everyone has access to an Internet connection or the skills to use it. For these reasons not everyone can participate in such a community.

## References

BUCY, E. Page, NEWHAGEN, John E. *Media Access: Social and Psychological Dimensions of New Technology Use*. Mahwah, New Jersey, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004, 329 p.

BOLTER, Jay David, GRUSIN, Richard. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press, 2000, 295 p.

DEAN, Jodi. *Multiple Reality* [Online: accessed on 13th of November, 2011.], <<http://www.mediamatic.net/article-5863-en.html>>.

DIJK, Jan Van. *The One-dimensional Network Society of Manuel Castells*. [Online: accessed on 2nd of January, 2012], <[http://www.gw.utwente.nl/vandijk/research/network\\_society/network\\_society\\_plaatje/d\\_castells\\_review\\_castells\\_net.pdf](http://www.gw.utwente.nl/vandijk/research/network_society/network_society_plaatje/d_castells_review_castells_net.pdf)>.

CASTELLS, Manuel. *The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Cheltenham, Northampton: Edward Edgar, 2004, p. 464.

HABERMAS, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT, (first published in German 1962), 1989, p. 326.

LAWSON-BORDERS, Gracie. *Media Organizations and Convergence*. Mahwah, New Jersey, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006, 289 p.

LI, Xigen. *Internet Newspapers the Making of a Mainstream Medium*. Mahwah, New Jersey, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006, 307 p.

NIEMINEN, Hannu. Europe of Networks or the European Public Sphere? Four plus One Approaches. In *Sociologija: Mintis ir veiksmas*. 2008, No. 3 (23), p. 10–27. [Online: accessed on 23rd of January, 2013], <[https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10224/4687/Europe\\_of\\_Networks\\_or\\_the\\_European\\_Public\\_Sphere\\_2008.pdf?sequence=1](https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10224/4687/Europe_of_Networks_or_the_European_Public_Sphere_2008.pdf?sequence=1)>.

PEČIULIS, Žygyntas. Viešoji erdvė masinės komunikacijos eroje: audiovizualinės visuomeninės tarnybos idėjos raida. In *Politologija*. 2005, Volume 39, p. 71–90. [Online: accessed on 25th of January, 2013], <[http://www.leidykla.vu.lt/fileadmin/Politologija/2005-3\\_39/N%2071-90.pdf](http://www.leidykla.vu.lt/fileadmin/Politologija/2005-3_39/N%2071-90.pdf)>.

THOMPSON, John B. *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in The Era of Mass Communication*. Padstow, Cornwall: T.J. Press Ltd, 1990, 234 p.

THUSSU, Daya Kishan. *International Communication: Continuity and Change*. New York, Oxford: University Press, 2000, 342 p.



*The New York Times* [Online: accessed on 20th of January, 2013], <<http://www.nytimes.com> and [www.nyt.com](http://www.nyt.com)>.

VINOGRADNAITĖ, Inga. Virtualios viešosios erdvės Lietuvoje: kaip internetas politizuoja socialinius tinklus. In *Politologija*. 2009, No. 1, p.43–72. [Online: accessed on 18th of January, 2013], <<http://archive.minfolit.lt/arch/17501/17797.pdf>>.

VINCIŪNIENĖ, Aušra, BALČYTIENĖ, Auksė. Europinės naujienos Europos žiniasklaidoje. In *Informacijos mokslai*. 2006, No. 36, p. 68–82. [Online: accessed 16th of January, 2013], <<http://www.cceol.com/asp/getdocument.aspx?logid=5&id=d0b8b862257f4208b71c1eae17f140bb>>.

## **Internetas kaip viešoji erdvė: dienraščio**

### ***The New York Times* interneto svetainės atvejo tyrimas**

Jurgita Matačinskaitė

#### **Santrauka**

Šio straipsnio pirmoje dalyje gvildenamos interneto kaip viešosios erdvės teorinės prieigos. Antra dalis skirta empiriniam *The New York Times* interneto svetainės tyrimui, pasitelkiant vokiečių sociologo Jurgeno Habermaso apibrėžtą idealios viešosios erdvės teoriją, t. y. *The New York Times* interneto svetainė pasirinkta viešosios erdvės teorijai patikrinti praktiškai.

Lietuvos žiniasklaidai šis tyrimas galėtų būti aktualus, nes dauguma žiniasklaidos priemonių stengiasi labiau skatinti interaktyvumą savo interneto svetainėse. Beveik visose Lietuvos dienraščių interneto svetainėse skaitytojams sudaromos galimybės ir sąlygos diskutuoti įvairiomis dienraščių svetainėse publikuojamomis temomis. Mūsų šalies dienraščių interneto svetainėse paprastai galima perskaityti publikacijų ir pareikšti savo nuomonę komentaruose be jokių papildomų apribojimų. Todėl empirinis *The New York Times* interneto svetainės kaip viešosios erdvės tyrimas gali būti svarbus ir naudingas plečiant Lietuvos dienraščių interneto svetaines, nes tyrimas atskleidžia tendencijas, kaip lyderiaujančio pasaulyje dienraščio interneto svetainėje užtikrinama ir kuriama teoriniuose darbuose aprašyta viešoji erdvė, kurioje skaitytojai išreiškia savo nuomonę.



Nors skirtingi pasaulio mokslininkai nevienodai apibrėžia ir traktuoja viešosios erdvės sąvoką, kaip pagrindinė ašis straipsnyje pasirinkta vokiečių socialogo Jürgeno Habermaso viešosios erdvės teorija. Šiam mokslininkui viešoji erdvė yra pagrindinis praktiškas principas demokratinėje visuomenėje, kuris remiasi idealia demokratine komunikacija. Habermaso supratimu, ideali viešoji erdvė yra apibrėžiama remiantis šiais principais: 1) prisijungimas prie viešų diskusijų yra laisvas ir atviras kiekvienam; 2) visi viešos diskusijos dalyviai yra laikomi lygūs; 3) nėra temų, kurios galėtų būti išbrauktos iš diskusijų kaip netinkamos; 4) viešų svarstymų rezultatai yra vertinami, atsižvelgiant tik į išsakytus geriausius argumentus; 5) diskusijų tikslas yra konsensusas ir bendrumas.

Šie esminiai J. Habermaso viešosios erdvės teorijos aspektai buvo pasirinkti, siekiant atlikti empirinį tyrimą. Bandoma išsiaiškinti, kaip viešosios erdvės teorija veikia praktiškai viename iš geriausiai žinomų ir respektabiliausių pasaulyje *The New York Times* dienraščio interneto svetainėje (prieiga internete [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) ir [www.nyt.com](http://www.nyt.com)). Tyrimu siekta atsakyti į klausimą, ar *The New York Times* dienraščio interneto svetainė yra tapusi „viešąja erdve“.

Atliekant tyrimą siekta šių tikslų: 1) išnagrinėti, ar prisijungimas prie viešų diskusijų *The New York Times* dienraščio interneto svetainėje yra laisvas ir atviras kiekvienam; 2) ištirti, ar visi viešos diskusijos dalyviai *The New York Times* dienraščio interneto svetainėje yra laikomi lygūs; 3) išanalizuoti, ar nėra temų, kurios iš *The New York Times* dienraščio interneto svetainėje galimų vykti diskusijų galėtų būti išbrauktos kaip netinkamos.

Atlikus tyrimą, nustatyta, kad *The New York Times* dienraščio interneto svetainės redaktoriai kasdien gali parinkti temą diskusijai. O tai reiškia, kad skaitytojai neturi galimybės laisvai diskutuoti jiems patinkančia tema / temomis. Antra, skaitytojų komentarai yra redaguojami ir pasirinktinai publikuojami *The New York Times* dienraščio interneto svetainės redaktorių. Todėl daroma išvada, kad dienraščio interneto svetainėje egzistuoja kažkas panašaus į atranka pagrįstą cenzūrą. Tai reiškia, kad ne visi skaitytojai / dalyviai interneto svetainėje vykstančiose viešose diskusijose yra laikomi lygūs. Trečia, skaitytojų komentarų siuntimas *The New York Times* dienraščio interneto svetainėje yra ribojamas laiko. Skaitytojai gali siųsti savo komentarus tik nuo ryto iki vidurnakčio. Po vidurnakčio komentarų siųsti negalima, nes interneto svetainė jų nepriima ir apie tai praneša skaitytojui. Todėl daroma išvada, kad prisijun-

gimas prie viešų diskusijų *The New York Times* dienraščio interneto svetainėje nėra laisvas ir atviras kiekvienam.

**Esminiai žodžiai:** dienraštis, internetas, New York Times, tinklalapis, tinklaveikos visuomenė, viešoji erdvė, virtualybė.

### About the author

---

Jurgita Matačinskaitė is a PhD student at the Vilnius University, Faculty of Communication. She specializes in research on audio resolution and audiovisual convergence. She also works in the field of public relations.