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**ARTICLE**

# The Dichotomy of Public/Private in the New Media Space

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**ABSTRACT**
Today we exist in a situation in which the new media environment has resulted in paradigm shift in our conception of reality, altering public spaces and communities, as well as functional modes and mechanisms of the private sphere, through the creation of new digitally-intermediated methods of communication. In a mediatised culture, the boundaries between public and private have been fundamentally transformed. Multi-screening has created a new mode of visibility for social cultures and subcultures, which, if it does not exactly abolish the boundary between private and public, at least allows us to rethink this dichotomy. Having thus established a new mode of visibility, the advent of new media has led to the sphere of private life being absorbed by the public sphere, in the process not only of facilitating discussion, but also in becoming a means by which control is exerted by the state, the market and advertising. In turn, in coming under the domination of specific private or group interests, the public sphere itself has been transformed. While, in coinciding with the interests of other groups, these interests may achieve temporary commonality, they cannot be truly public in the original universal sense. The use of multiple Internet portals in living reality creates a distinct or alternative level of virtual publicity. No longer requiring the usual physical spaces to regulate his or her inclusion in both virtual and traditional public spheres, a user of contemporary gadgets creates a remote and individually-tailored model of public interaction. This process of virtual individualisation indicates the ambivalent nature of the networked public sphere. While, on the one

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hand, in engaging in collective interaction and concern for common affairs, politically-active people need the presence of others, on the other, the fact of being rooted in their own experience results in the creation of burgeoning personalised and fragmented hierarchies.

**KEYWORDS**
virtual public sphere, privacy, digital profiling, social media, multi-screen, mediatised culture

## Introduction

Today we exist in a situation in which the new media environment has resulted in a veritable revolution in terms of our conception of reality, fundamentally transforming public spaces and communities, along with functional modes and mechanisms of both public and private spheres, through the creation of new digitally-intermediated methods of communication. So-called new media accessible via digital devices and implying the active participation of users in the distribution and creation of content represents a revolutionary mass media format. This new mode of presence, taking the form of social groups, while not eliminating the boundary between private and public, in any case presents an opportunity for rethinking this dichotomy. New media have become one of the means by which private stories are assembled, represented and made available for general viewing as part of the public sphere. The purpose of this article is to examine how the conceptual public/private dichotomy "works" in the space of new media, what are the key features of contemporary network publicity and its relationship with network privacy, as well as what discursive and social transformations occur within the concept of "private life" in the context of digitally-intermediated civilisation.

## The Transformation of Classical Theories of the Public Sphere

We will begin by considering how the notion of the public sphere has changed in response to the advent of the information society and what are the distinct features of the networked public sphere in the 21st century. Here, it is important to note that the contemporary concept of the "public sphere" (*Öffentlichkeit*) was originally formulated by Jürgen Habermas back in 1962, long before the advent of the new media era. Considering it in terms of forming an intermediary between society and the state, Habermas based his notion of the public sphere on the principle of uniting citizens around a common (public) interest to achieve a rational consensus (Habermas, 1962, pp. 15–26). The concept of the public sphere embodies Habermas' idealised model of communicative action, in the process of which a "morality of equal respect" is established. However, Habermas' fundamentally impersonal notion of the public sphere implies a space in which it is not so much actions that are carried out as the exchange of information and opinions. Publicity, in the form in which Habermas conceptualises it, has found its full embodiment in the idea of

communicative rationality, that is, in the ability of the subject to express himself, perceive another and find a common language with carriers of other points of view taking the form of arguments. However, Habermas's ideal-normative theory of the public sphere relies on a very limited view of the contemporary subject (Warren, 1995, pp. 194–195). Since Habermas' subject is not a concrete *Other*, it is taken in its unembodied dimension and thus placed in the space of abstract rationality. In other words, Habermas's consensual model of the public sphere, while productive in many respects, left out of the analysis those who are in reality "excluded" from the sphere of public discussion of the public good. Characteristically, in this sense, Habermas becomes captive to his own discourse, since his idea of the unity of the public sphere essentially implies a refusal to take into account factual inequality.

The momentous social changes taking place in recent years have again initiated discussions about the public sphere; as a rule, "publicity regimes" are considered outside the framework of changes to boundaries between private and public in media culture. In the context of the unfolding controversy, many researchers note that, with the change of publics, the public sphere itself is subject to redefinition. Thus, according to Nancy Fraser the public sphere has undergone changes not only because publics have become diversified, but also because there is neither a relationship of dialogic equality nor a unifying interest, which can in principle be held in common by diverse social groups (Fraser, 1992, p. 128). After all, such social groups that had previously been deprived of participation in public discussion (for example, women, migrants, people with disabilities, national minorities, etc.) have come to the fore, gaining voting rights for the first time in a multicultural, globalised world. Needless to say, each of these groups brings their own values and heroes, their own problems asserted as fit for public discussion, to which factor can be attributed the increasing anonymity and amorphousness of the public space in the era of modernity.

In recent years, researchers have been paying increasing attention to various symptoms of the decline, hollowing-out and de-politicisation of the public sphere. According to the classical Habermasian position, the deformation of the public sphere took place according to the logic of the media market, which, as well as representing the interests of corporations and political elites, is also associated with the growth of state power. As Habermas notes, the colonisation of the lifeworld that takes place through the "silent" media of communication – i.e. power and money – leads to structural distortions in communication and the violation of social integration, along with an externalisation of living interrelationships. It is certainly possible to agree with this: cultural media – art, cinema, literature and the mass media – create an officially-sanctioned, essentially manipulative public sphere in which the political participation of the public is typically reduced to the quiescent consumption of a media product. It is therefore no coincidence that media analysts (Teun van Dijk, Danilo Zolo) identify a contradiction between the dramatically increased access to public media and a deterioration in the quality of public debate. On the other hand, the specificity of the public sphere of contemporary society, with its inherent features of heterogeneity and competitiveness of public interaction, is determined both by new media and traditional media, which can act as counter-publics and mobilise people for collective action.

## The Pluralisation of the Public Sphere in the Digital Age

As we have already noted, under the conditions of a modern mediatised and consumer society, contemporary audiences have become increasingly heterogeneous, compartmentalised and explicitly segmented according to their interests, needs and lifestyles. At the same time, both the need and the ability to share a common "public interest" has declined. Therefore, the modern public can be thought of "at best as a collection of non-intersecting microspaces, comprising LiveJournal[1], blogs, forums, family networks, etc. (Usmanova, 2009, p. 88). Not only in real, but also in virtual public life, we are not dealing with a homogeneous public, but with a multitude of audiences and counterpublics, each having their own interests, aesthetics, needs and lifestyles. In other words, publicity loses its previous outlines and meanings: such a "cultural diversity" of the publics of network communications leads to the emergence of a disordered and non-collective publicity that actively invades the zone of privacy.

Let us now attempt to provide an outline of the diverse sociocultural factors that have determined significant changes in the nature of the public sphere and its relationship with the private. The fundamental novelty of today's situation lies in the fact that a contemporary person finds him- or herself in a "total transition zone" that lies between offline reality and the connection to virtual information worlds. This not only implies day-to-day living in such worlds, but also the value-semantic transition between the external and the internal, the individual and the mass, the private and the public. The quantitative "explosion" of Internet users has led to more than 5 billion users, in the words of Lev Manovich, becoming producers of culture; with this critical mass of social connections, the prospect of "easy contacts" has increased. According to Ekaterina Sal'nikova, the use of gadgets and multiple Internet portals in living reality creates a distinct or alternative level of virtual publicity (Sal'nikova, 2015, p. 120). No longer requiring the usual physical spaces (squares, cafes, parks, streets) to regulate his or her inclusion in both virtual and traditional public spheres, a user of contemporary gadgets can create a remote and individually-tailored model of public interaction on a one-to-one basis and at his or her own discretion. Even ten years ago, it was impossible to imagine that engagement in social, public life could be maintained from the privacy of one's own home. Today, under the conditions of pandemic, the home as a locus of privacy has paradoxically become the place where groups are spontaneously created and new public virtual arenas are born; here, the invasion of the private sphere by the public can clearly be delineated. A person now possesses the means to regulate the quality and content of publicity, as well as the level of his or her own involvement in it. Thus, a personal model of publicity is created that resembles a kind of playing field. However, this process of virtual individualisation indicates the ambivalent nature of the networked public sphere. On the one hand, argues Paulo Virno, in engaging in collective interaction and concern for common affairs, "politically-active people need the presence of others", while, on the other,

[1] LiveJournal is a Russian-owned social networking service where users can keep a blog, journal, or diary. LiveJournal™ is a registered trademark of LiveJournal, Inc.

the fact of being rooted in their own experience results in the creation of "burgeoning personalised and fragmented hierarchies" (Virno, 2001, pp. 37, 39).

For this reason, according to Lance Bennett, have great potential for studying the modern public sphere (Bennett, 2012). The technological renewal of the media has led to a re-coding and reorganisation of the public space, along with the creation of new public actors and arenas, new forms of communicative interaction, as well as non-traditional forms of solidarisation. Let us consider the potential of new media to act as intermediaries and public platforms capable of broadcasting and consolidating the meanings of social action. In recent years, the online medium of the Internet has acquired the features of a social system, leading to the emergence of many "virtual worlds" whose subjects consist of real and virtual individuals, groups and communities. To designate this new situation, Manuel Castells introduced the concept of "networked space" (Castells, 2001, p. 328), which is characterised by an exchange of different types of resources or flows of information, technology, capital, organisational interaction, images, etc. Thus, according to Inna Kushnaryova, the "information Internet" was replaced by its social equivalent (Kushnaryova, 2012, p. 4); this transition is associated with the global development trend from "publication", "document", "message" to "co-authorship", opening access to everyone who wants to participate in the creation, evaluation and analysis of texts that can change over time and whose content is not definitively specified. These new interactive "documents" have become the means by which a culture of participatory culture is formed, in which subject-users act in the new capacity of creators/prosumers or co-participants in civil actions. In essence, now we are dealing with the specific developmental consequences of the communication structures underpinning the Internet, in which the usual scheme of "content producer/consumer" is supplemented by the additional link of "content modifier", with these three links potentially representing independent participants in the creative process (not only the author and reader, but also those who adapt content or contextualise it with their commentary). Therefore, a characteristic feature of new social media comprises the principle of active user participation in replenishing and creating content, which generally distinguishes these forms from those of the 20th century mass media.

As we have already noted, the key feature of new media is their socialisation, which has also led to the formation of new public communities that are directly focused on mutual relationships. As a consequence of their intrinsic nature, the simplest online interactions take on a networked structure, creating what the French economist Yann Moulier-Boutang calls a "pollinating" online world. In this sense, the audience of traditional media forms did not comprise a networked space, since there were no established connections within it. While, at first glance, the content of social networks and media may look the same, it is in the "the nature of its construction" that it has a fundamentally different, network character (see: Lavrenchuk, 2010, p. 69). Moreover, this type of social interaction does not rely on a single centre or unified growth point; there is no dedicated control level. Therefore, unlike the traditional media, social networks create distinct groups or communities that coalesce around common interests, values, or some event. Of course, it is not uncommon for such

communities to determine the agenda, in the first instance, their own. As a product of an infinite number of private initiatives, they are not fully integrated into the general social idea. The network clearly demonstrates its isolation from many social problems and political topics: so many people, so many opinions… this is the conclusion that the network helps to draw on the basis of live communication. This is inevitable due to the observable fact that even the smallest groups manifest their own specific contradictions.

Another important characteristic of networked public communications is that the model offers a "simpler" communication platform than any traditional news media portal. In the networked media environment, the main motivation for social interaction consists in the human desire to be seen or heard by formulating and sharing some interesting news with someone. According to David Marshall, it is these two dimensions – a form of cultural production and a form of public engagement and exchange – that make social networks simultaneously a media and communication form (see: Marshall, 2010, p. 44). By means of software for exchanging messages between users, this communication is carried out in real time, in the "here and now", providing an instant response to some important events of general significance. Therefore, synchronicity is one of the most important aspects of the social media space: here nothing is ever deferred, but everything takes place in the reality of current time, where everyone is already connected to each other. In other words, social media is focused not on contemplation, but on (re)action, which occurs not according to tradition, but momentarily. The world of new media is instantaneous rather than sequential: the yearbook has taken the place of the chronicle, while linear relationships have been replaced by group communication configurations. During its formation, network communication was characterised by the horizontal nature of social ties, along with autonomy, accessibility and equal participation of users, which created opportunities for discussion of public issues free from power and the market, those which for various reasons had been excluded from the news agenda or remained on the periphery of discussion within the framework of traditional media.

However, the modern virtual model of publicity is far from ideal; it dispels the liberal myth of network communication as a decentralised platform where an open and free exchange of opinions between users takes place, where other people's opinions are respected and where an exchange of information is the subject of discussion. Indeed, at an early stage in the development of social networks, new media were seen as a revolutionary weapon of the Internet, the formation of a "new social system and civic engagement" (Shirky, 2003), resulting in the creation of a new network-based public sphere. Here it is emphasised that the traditional public sphere was to be replaced by a new multipolar environment, egalitarian in nature, without a single centre, clearly delineated boundaries or a hierarchical "top". In other words, the online environment carried a positive political charge, ensuring not unilateral, but two-way information interaction of many actors – that is to say, their collective, public communication. Based on these characteristics, social networks were viewed as a new independent arena for discussion, whose developmental logic implied the active and free collaboration of participants.

However, a fundamentally different point of view has emerged, according to which social networks, in acting as a kind of filter and information selector, neither create new content nor new evaluations, but rather only redistribute and process information. Thus, according to Lev Gudkov, social networks are the renewal element of a technologically novel form of old mechanisms of social communication (see: Fanailova, 2013), including their own opinion leaders and the reproduction of those mass sentiments that are characteristic of society as a whole. Analysing the content of the pages of ordinary Russian users, sociologists note that about half of them use social networks for communication, shopping and entertainment, as well as for disseminating existing rather than creating new information.

Thus, in their online communication, participants, much as in everyday offline life, devote more time to private, domestic interests and hobbies, rather than socially significant issues. At the centre of the online discussion is the world of apparency, comprised of ostensibly meaningless events. For example, in a network context, a landscape viewed or a dinner eaten can become a topic for discussion. Thus, it can be seen that the "agenda", in which the personal and private begins to prevail over the public, is subject to fragmentation, pushing important and pressing social problems to the periphery of the sphere of network cooperation. In other words, as Zygmunt Bauman saliently notes, the modern lifeworld, both online and offline, has been transformed into an individualised and privatised version of events, consisting of "endless train of activities, in the center of which we find ourselves and our thoughts about ourselves" (Bauman, 2007, p. 323). As a result, according to Bauman, the former balance between the public and the private, by which means the stability of the social order was maintained, has been lost; contemporary society, in principle, does not recognise the need for a dialogue between the public and the private, since the public has been colonised by the private. Since, in the networked world, "public interest" degrades to curiosity about the private life of "public figures", "public problems" that cannot be subjected to such a reduction cease to be comprehensible.

Sceptically assessing the impact of the Internet on society, Jaron Lanier in his manifesto *You Are Not A Gadget* argues that social networks have led society down the wrong path, since here, instead of creativity and individuality, it is superficial judgments and the rapid creation and consumption of content that are privileged (Lanier, 2010). Indeed, social networks are increasingly becoming a platform for constructing the standards and values of mass media culture, progressively manifesting hierarchical features, including the presence of "stars", who receive the lion's share of comments, likes and hit counts. Thus, the reorientation of communication towards the area of private interests turned social networks into an endless number of parallel universes, each enclosing the user in the loop of personality. The trend towards the personalisation of information, its increasing polycentricity and variability, exacerbates not only the atomisation of individual communities, which become a kind of sub-institution, but ultimately risks the formation of information "tunnels" or "ghettos", i.e. subjective and multiplied "world pictures".

Dmitry Golynko-Volfson interprets this chiefly in terms of the way that Russian social networks immerse the user in the entertainment environment of image

strategies and role-playing games, imposing a cult of comfortable consumption of information goods and services in an atmosphere of careless repressive hedonism (see: Golynko-Volfson, 2009, p. 103). Indeed, with the widespread adoption of social media and online services, advertising and marketing strategies are being introduced into the public space, in which consumer values and practices take on a social dimension. Thanks to new photo and video hosting services, users can instantly visualise their consumer preferences, as well as sharing with friends what they have bought or watched and where they have travelled. At the same time, for each photo or video sent from the application or project editor, the user can gain points and thus increase their rating. Therefore, the term "user engagement" is increasingly used as the main parameter in measuring online audiences, which is achieved through well-thought-out scenarios and engagement tools (buttons for sharing on social media, giving ratings, registering and subscribing etc.). The representation of these practices in social media symbolises the expansion of the influence of new forms of marketing (guerrilla-, viral-, trust-) on the user's life. It would seem that there is an image of a transparent society built on horizontal connections, as well as that of a participant who does not seek to hide the details of his or her private life.

In the case of Russian network communication, the "syndrome of public silence" characterises not only offline reality, but also the virtual sphere, in which a public dispute quickly develops into a "scandal" or a "performance", transforming communication into part of the culture industry. It is the open space of the Russian network media that creates a favourable environment for the ostentatious exhibition of tendentious private or group interests. What emerges in the place of communicatively mature public discussions is either a scattered polyphonic noise or an authoritarian monologue. The metaphor of "public silence" used in this sense encompasses both the inability to express oneself in the language of public communication and a willingness to express oneself in registers that do not correspond to the ideal of public discussion (indiscriminate speech, authoritarian monologue, etc.). As a result of the underdevelopment of "the public register" in modern Russian interaction (both offline and online), public online communication becomes not only aggressive, but also vacuous. The diversity of the public of network communication leads to the immersion of participants in their own personal "filter bubble" (Pariser, 2011), precluding their interest in another point of view and making it impossible to form a single public consensus.

## From Public to Private: a History of Privacy

In tandem with transformations affecting the public sphere, privacy is also undergoing significant changes. Today, it can be stated with some confidence that the era of erased boundaries between public and private has begun in the sphere of network communication. Since the question of what has become of privacy (as the "primary reality") today is complex and requires extensive sociocultural analysis, we will content ourselves with analysing only those social effects that have been introduced by new media. However, making a digression into history, we must remember that

the idea of solitude and privacy is more a product of culture: for a long time, privacy was not a universally-held value. It should also be noted that privacy in the sense we understand it now did not exist until the 18th century.

In premodern cultures, people living in small communities typically experienced little in the way of privacy. Sex, breastfeeding and bathing took place in the full view of family and friends. In ancient Rome, landowners built their homes with wide open gardens, transforming their homes into public museums in an ostentatious show of wealth. A change in the understanding of privacy took place during the early Middle Ages, with the monastic practice of practice of seclusion for the purposes of prayer. However, according to Aron Gurevitch, the confession procedure was public for the majority of parishioners: the communicant confessed to God (in the person of a confessor), repented of his sins and received absolution in the presence of fellow believers (Gurevich, 2005). In other words, the world of the Middle Ages is a "common world", a shared place of residence, work, prayer and reading. Medieval publicity was realised in various forms of state, religious, scientific, artistic and everyday life.

The need for a private sphere started to be articulated during the Modern Era, when class-based affiliations and models of social life started to be replaced by such behavioural attitudes of a person as individuality, self-development and responsibility for one's life. Rapid changes including industrialisation, urbanization and an accelerating pace of life led to feelings of constant tension, resulting in the desire for a private space where one cannot be observed. Thus, the private home gradually became the locus of individual existence, in which, in contrast to the public sphere, natural-spontaneous human behaviour becomes possible. An idealisation of informal communication in the family circle arose, contrasting with the conflicts and stresses inherent in public bourgeois society. Thus, in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, along with improved standards of living and the guarantee of basic needs, privacy came to be recognised as a basic human right. Along with the bourgeois institution of privacy, which became a much more closed institution than before, arose a perceived need to protect the private sphere of the family from the encroachments of the outside world. For example, the uncontrolled use of the image of US First Lady Frances Cleveland in product advertisements led to the emergence of one of the first national privacy laws. In 1903, the New York City legislature imposed a fine of up to $1,000 for the unauthorised use of someone's image for commercial purposes. In other words, with the emergence of state institutions of modernity and the emergence of the capitalist economy, the term "private" began to refer to a wide range of phenomena: firstly, to the household; secondly, to the economic order of market production, exchange, distribution and consumption; and thirdly, to the sphere of civil, cultural, scientific and artistic etc. associations functioning within the framework of civil society.

However, it should be noted that traditional media, which began to play an important role in the recognition of the concept of privacy, also involved itself in the representation of private life as that which ensured the unity of living, that is, the happiness of recognising one's own experience in a new material form (see: Bolz, 1989). In particular, television created the illusion of direct, trusting contact with the

viewer. By entering the home and becoming “household names”, the heroes of the small screen seem to address an individual personally. In thus invading the private home space with information presented as belonging to “everyone”, the public becomes personal by virtue of the manner in which the person sitting in front of the screen is addressed. Thus the “man on the telly”, whether an announcer, presenter, actor or even a portrayed character, comes to seem like an acquaintance or even a “relative”; with his scheduled arrival, he is imbued with the private meanings of the viewer. This phenomenon of “close contact” also affects the formats of television programmes. At the same time, a counter movement can be observed. Already in the era of traditional media, the boundary between private and public was starting to blur with the emergence of intermediate forms of communication that engender a new kind of openness on the part of the viewer. Although hidden from view, his or her life and intimate experiences more easily become the subject of general discussion as shown by the format of various talk shows on Russian federal channels. The penetration of the airwaves by the social fears arising from the various private problems and interests of “the man in the street” lead, in time, to a disintegration of the public agenda. The concomitant inversion of the private and the public in media culture can then be asserted as a self-evident everyday reality.

## The Public: The Privatisation of the Private in New Media

Modern network media problematise the situation to a greater extent; in creating new modes of visibility and transparency of private life in full view of everyone, they have opened the personal world for public discussion. The public legitimisation of private life comes with the emergence of an open, complex, interactive social media structure, with many competing and collaborating communities of users who thus acquire the right to share their experiences publicly in a wide variety of forms. Users of social networking services generally strive to socialise their every step; for them, it becomes important to record what they have read, listened to, watched, as well as where and with whom they have met. The principle of plurality and universal visibility across social networks, in which everyone began to see everyone else at the same time, led to the presence of the *Other* becoming an integral part of contemporary media. Multiple profiles on social networks made it possible to see the world of others; hence, the growing interest in other people’s everyday experience, in their diverse practices and lifestyles, even the most intimate and secret aspects thereof. The stars of TV have been replaced by bloggers, authors of scandalous posts on Facebook[2] and popular YouTube[3] channels and insta-girls, whose accounts invite their followers to transfer their personal values drawn from private life to different spheres of society, applying them in such a way that they act as a force for social transformation. Of course, “public interest” in the private and intimate is not a new cultural phenomenon; however, each era has its own limits of the admissibility of the private in the public sphere. In new media, not only does the distance between the

[2] Facebook® is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries.

[3] YouTube™ is a trademark of Google Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries.

user and his or her world becomes transparent for the first time, but also the boundary between intimacy and publicity itself. Thus, the constant fixation of private moments of life alienates the subject from his or her private space, which is increasingly displaced by the public space of narcissistic self-presentation. According to Anthony Giddens, the life forms created by modernity have torn us away from all traditional types of social order in a way that has no historical precedent. In a qualitative sense, they have thus managed to change the most intimate and deeply personal characteristics of our everyday existence (Giddens, 1999, p. 115).

Thus, the urge to document life, to record the momentary and trivial in presenting a kind of visual diary of private life for public viewing, leads to a change in the algorithms of personification and self-identification. With the development of new media, a significant anthropological shift occurs: the reality-structuring "I" has vanished and in its place has appeared a kind of "multi-personality" performing various roles and having many hypostases and identities.

In video blogs, in particular, as noted by Alla Chernykh, there is a legitimisation of public discourse about private things, when the unsayable becomes expressed and discussed, the shameful becomes acceptable or even decent and repulsive secrets turn into an object of pride (see: Chernykh, 2013, p. 134). For example, the highest-rated positions of vloggers on *YouTube* are occupied not by politicians, but by "opinion leaders" in beauty tips, whose subscribers – sometimes numbering in the millions – are interested in watching unpretentious, simple stories of a young girl's day who "discovers" the secrets of makeup, meets with friends, goes shopping etc. Roland Barthes refers to this "publicity of the private" as a "new social value", emphasising that "the explosion of the private in public", i.e. public consumption of the private, is a deeply ambivalent process (Barthes, 1980).

The expansion of the boundaries of the private in social media is also characterised by the fact that discourses related to traumatic experiences are among those most often brought up for public discussion. Today, in social networks, the traditional notion of privacy, which was closely associated with feelings of shyness and shame, has been transformed, with many prohibitions and regulations being reversed or simply annulled. Thus, for example, such social hashtags as #Imafraidtosay, #prosthesesarefree, #metoo, #faceofdepression have brought into the public space topics long considered socially taboo: suicide, disability, sexual violence and harassment. In other words, along with their alternative public discourses, the counter-publics are gaining a voice. In this regard, the emergence of such "volatile forms of sociality" as flash mobs on social networks suggests that novels forms and methods of human cooperation are emerging that were not characteristic of pre-Internet communication. Although virally-organised flash mobs do not always address important social issues, this does not prevent them from becoming a new platform for social discussion. All these new tools and practices create a dynamic picture of continuous and varied "evidence" and documentation of reality, which, according to Castells, leads to increasingly diverse social voices being heard and an increasing number of their stories becoming available and observed through such simple acts like photography or video, reposting stories or comments to blogs (see: Castells, 2001, p. 269).

## The End of the Private Era

Thus, having become digital citizens, we find ourselves in a new situation of post-privacy, in which the private world is visualised and acquires mobility along with its owner-user (see: Sal'nikova, 2015, p. 132). As Umberto Eco rightly observes, the Internet makes us voluntarily withdraw our privacy, disavowing what used to be a zone of the unseen and the opaque (Eco, 2007). We willingly share our life on the Web with a wide circle of near and far. After all, if you are invisible on social networks, then you not only do not exist, but you are also probably hiding something. Paradoxically, it is the sphere of the private that today correlates with activity and visibility; therefore, the border between private and public can be determined not only by referencing the duality of collective versus individual, but also through such concepts as the dichotomy of visible and by invisible.

In social media, we have not only gained visibility under the gaze of the *Other*, but our social data has become the new gold, which we voluntarily give away in the form of private messages, photos, likes, comments and reposts that leave a deep digital footprint. Thus, our daily private lives become not only observable, but also included in the system of supervision over us. However, as Eli Pariser notes, with the development of digital technologies, our needs and preferences are personalised through the use of a system of numerous filters by Internet companies that study our interests and desires to determine the purchasing goals and abilities of participants, who have inadvertently become a media audience. All this leads to the fact that the corresponding programs construct not only consumer practices, but also streams of information messages, determine "which videos we watch, which restaurants we should go to, which potential partners we will meet via an online dating service" (Pariser, 2011, p. 19). As a result, in the era of personalisation of search and data tracking, the Internet has ceased to be transparent and the world of everyday life has ceased to be an autonomous space. According to Pariser, the contemporary Internet is fraught with a threat, since the more private places a user creates on Facebook, Instagram[4] or Twitter[5] etc., the more amenable this private life becomes to state and corporate control. The translation of complex social relations by personalised online systems into the space of only "friends" precludes the opportunity "to see the world from another point of view" and thereby presents an incomplete version of the picture of the world, stripped of alternative perspectives. In this case, the daily life of media users, although ostensibly constructed in accordance with their personal desires and interests, becomes more and more controlled by the social media platforms themselves.

Software algorithms analyse the nature, interests, desires and views of users to create a digital user profile. For example, researchers from University of Cambridge and Northern Illinois University back in 2013 developed a technique for measuring the so-called "Big Five" personality traits using Facebook posts (*Big Five* is a personality model that identifies five variables according to which we are perceived

[4] Instagram® is a trademark of Instagram LLC., registered in the U.S. and other countries.

[5] Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries.

and evaluated by others: openness, neuroticism, extroversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness. The researchers were able to accurately identify political tendencies, religious preferences and many other factors by analysing "likes" left by users. Michal Kosinski, a researcher at Stanford University, noted in an interview that ten likes (interests) are enough for the system to recognise your personality better than a work colleague, by 230–240 likes the computer will know about you more than your spouse does (see: Dobrynin, 2016).

It is not coincidental that the Harvard labour historian Shoshana Zuboff defines the current situation in terms of the transformation of traditional capitalism into surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019). Under surveillance capitalism is supposed the unilateral appropriation of human experience by private companies for transformation into their own proprietary data streams. Although some of this data is genuinely used to improve products and services, the rest, considered in terms of "behavioural surplus", is valued for its wealth of predictive signals. This predictive data is then processed by computer programs into highly profitable predictive products that anticipate our current and future consumer decisions.

Therefore, digital privacy has become a manipulative and market-based personal targeting tool for conducting effective marketing research, as well as for use in advertising and political campaigns. Another notorious example concerns the use of *Big Data* methods in a political campaign. In 2015, Cambridge Analytica[6] unleashed an app called *This Is Your Digital Life*, admitting that it was created to study the digital traces of users, on which basis their psychological profiles were to be constructed. Cambridge Analytica subsequently used its database to individually tailor messages targeting voters as part of Donald Trump's election campaign. Based on the analysis of data from 50 million users, Cambridge Analytica was able to provide recommendations for the conduct of the election campaign: what to tell a person and how to tell it in such a way that he believes the message and responds to it as desired.

Under the influence of the present coronavirus pandemic, the tendency for governments to accumulate private data has received a new impetus. In the context of global public emergency, it becomes necessary to consider issues concerning the forced transparency of personal life and the trend towards total digital control, which poses an existential threat to privacy and raises new concerns regarding the problem of personal data protection. The use of digital surveillance technologies such as QR codes, SMS passes, questionnaires filled in by those arriving from abroad, requirements to report movements and confirm one's actual place of residence, mandatory photographing and daily health diaries and the tracking of mobile phone data confirms the distinctively global character of the current situation. For example, the Chinese government obliged its citizens to install special software on their smartphones. This official application assigns individuals a colour code of red, yellow or green to indicate their health status and impose a regime: travel freely, self-isolate at

[6] Cambridge Analytica Ltd was a private British political consulting firm that was involved in influencing hundreds of elections globally. It was a subsidiary of SCL Group (formerly Strategic Communication Laboratories), a British behavioural research and strategic communication company.

home for seven days or undergo two weeks of quarantine, respectively. The software provides access to personal data, which sends the data subject's location, city name and identification code to the police. In Italy, Germany and Austria, mobile operators have shared location data with health authorities to ensure that citizens comply with emergency social distancing measures. However, such measures can also be seen as testifying to the fact that, in modern civilization, the value of human life is so high that society, as a collective entity, is ready to sacrifice the private life of citizens for their own safety. Consequently, the contemporary world, in which all the data about us is routinely collected, has become a reality that problematises a new set of relationships between people, the state and their employers. This may explain why, in the modern information society, privacy has turned into another form of inequality, with non-transparency becoming a luxury jealously guarded by the new digital aristocracy.

## Conclusion

Thus, as a result of our analysis, we have seen that in the new media space, the border between the private and the public has become unstable. As a consequence, it is in the process of being redefined with the emergence of multiple networked publics and counter-publics, which have become the subject of observation and evaluation, collective discussions and even the intrusions of third parties. For this reason, the boundary between private and public can be defined not only in terms of the social collective versus the individual, but also according to such concepts as the visible/invisible dichotomy.

We have seen that, in the era of new media, a personalisation of network publicity takes place, along with the sphere of private life itself turning out to be absorbed by the public sphere, open not only for discussion, but also for control by the state, the market and advertising. This is because every network activity comprises both an action and a digital footprint. In turn, in coming under the domination of specific private or group interests, the public sphere has also been transformed, since, while these interests may achieve temporary commonality, they cannot be considered to be truly public in the original universal sense of the word.

From our point of view, the ambivalent nature of new media, being based on personalisation and filtering, sets out and defines the ambiguous and contradictory nature of the public/private relationship. Thus, not only is the public responded to, but also represented in the private sphere, while, in the public sphere, privacy is reproduced up to and including its peculiarly intimate atmosphere and intonation. This rapidly changing network reality requires further development of conceptual tools for analysing the new content and forms of collective and private life, of which one of the most important remains the relationship between public and private.

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