

The Terms of Engagement:  
Rhetorical Constructions of Citizenship in the Networked Public Sphere

by

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University of Nebraska, 2015

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This dissertation project focuses on how the terms surrounding civic engagement are changing with a transition to the networked public sphere. I analyze how the rhetorical construction of engagement in networked communities is opening up space for deliberative rhetoric. The texts for analysis are two campaigns from the Harry Potter Alliance that are targeted at ending the genocide in Darfur and fighting against illiteracy. In order to better understand the changing rhetorical construction of civic engagement, I trace the traditional view of the concept through time and compare them against the terms being advanced in the case studies. I utilize cluster analysis and social semiotics to categorize and filter the language being used by the networked public of the Harry Potter Alliance. Each of the case studies validated the hypothesis that the terms of engagement are changing, altering the deliberative landscape to allow for more engagement to occur over a geographically separated space. Engagement is framed in ways that make getting involved easier and present civic issues as less monolithic. I conclude that the networked public sphere is offering novel opportunities for civic engagement capable of responding to problems rather than simply constricting public participation.

## Dedication

I want to dedicate this project to the love of my life, Bryn Walters. Her agreeing to marry me was the happiest moment of my life and this project would have never come to fruition without her unyielding support. She has been with me through every edit, every snag in the writing process, and every step along the way. This project is dedicated to you, Bryn, and the degree that comes along with it will provide us the source of stability we have always wanted to start a family. I couldn't be happier with you and I can't thank you enough for all you have done for me along the way.

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## **Chapter 1: How Harry Potter Can Save Civic Engagement: Networked Publics and the Shifting Terms of Civic Engagement**

### **1.1 Overview of the Project**

How are various forms of digital media changing public deliberation? What kinds of new forms of civic engagement are now taking place in contemporary civil society because of the affordances of digital media? How might the very nature of the public sphere—updated through the term “networked public sphere”—be changing? Yochai Benkler (2006) observes that in the networked public sphere, “the structure of public inquiry, debate, and collective action is fundamentally different from the structure of public inquiry and debate in the mass-media-dominated public sphere of the twentieth century” (p. 232). The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), a collective advocacy group born of digitally networked connectivity, offers an illuminating example through which to explore this claim. The Harry Potter Alliance is an open collective of fans of Harry Potter. It is a nonprofit organization with the expressed purpose of activating political participation in young people. The HPA was created by a fan of the book series and now has close to a million members, working on causes ranging from the Genocide in Darfur to a lack of books in African schools. The HPA has its own website, where fans meet and collaborate (through message boards and listserv) or read about the alliance’s current, past, and future “missions” (causes).

The HPA is a networked public, born on the internet, that has allowed fans of the popular book series, *Harry Potter*, to connect with other fans. This connection is less about fandom and more about using the connection one feels about the novels to facilitate other areas of action in a member’s life. The HPA uses the plot of the books and the member’s in-depth understanding of

the characters to connect them to issues of the greater public good. It situates their action alongside the heroic members of Dumbledore's Army and identifies the harms that they intend to advocate against within the villainous realm of Voldemort. During the HPA's campaign to raise awareness in Darfur, they utilized a digital system of message diffusion that invited public participation through the lens of fandom. When another HPA campaign collected and sent books to underprivileged schools in Africa, they relied on rhetorical configurations that structured collective action apart from governmental action. These interventions by the Harry Potter Alliance would seem to confirm Benkler's claim that the networked public sphere carries with it new opportunities for argument invention and slight alterations in argumentative structure that reflect evolving notions of action and collective behavior.

In order to explore the potential of these examples to illustrate changes initiated through the networked public sphere, I must first review how models of civic engagement have evolved over time. The networked public sphere inherits a set of norms and practices from the early modern public sphere, described most comprehensively by Jurgen Habermas (1989). Since the networked public sphere is inflected by this heritage, I will look for areas of variance that mark the transition to the networked public sphere. Where will such variance between the early modern public sphere and the networked public sphere be located? In this dissertation, I argue that the differences between the early modern public sphere and the networked public sphere can be appreciated through the language used in each context to describe civic engagement. How do citizens and critics describe civic engagement in different eras? What words cluster around engagement? One premise that this dissertation works from is that expansions or evolutions in the communicative network enable new ways of enacting citizenship and agency. This is especially true in the context of the networked public sphere, which places a new emphasis on



communication. New digitized and networked discourses represent novel ways of knowledge-production, information gathering, interacting with the world, and positioning oneself in a greater contextualized whole. For example, Wikipedia allows interested viewers to become contributors able to cite material that can tell a more complete version of a given story.

Accordingly, there is a rhetoric of participation and co-construction that accompanies Wikipedia that departs from the rhetoric of expertise and finality that accompanied early modern versions of the encyclopedia.

This dissertation represents a critical discursive analysis of multimodal, layered, transmedia messages that help shed light on some of the evolving issues connected with civic engagement in the networked public sphere. In order to better understand the evolving landscape of networked discourses, I present in the rest of Chapter 1, document traditional models of civic engagement by drawing on the work of Jürgen Habermas and Robert Putnam, explore the technological affordances that form the infrastructure of contemporary communication networks, identify arguments over the impact of the internet on social capital, and sketch the genesis of the networked public sphere to underline the significance of this research.

## **1.2 Traditional Understandings of Engagement: Tracing Conceptualizations of Engagement within the Early and Late Modern Public Sphere**

I aim to trace the evolution of rhetoric about civic engagement to illuminate alterations in the public sphere that are occurring as a result of new deliberative forums, modes of connectivity, and communication channels. One premise of this project is that how we communicate has powerful implications as to how we conceptualize civic action and agency within our normative models of behavior. A historically grounded perspective on civic

engagement will identify key facets of civic engagement that will allow for a comparative analysis of the rhetoric of civic engagement in the early networked public sphere.

Although there are many accounts of civic engagement, the one articulated by Jürgen Habermas is commonly cited in Communication and other disciplines as the basis for what Benjamin Barber calls “strong democracy” (1983). The Habermasian view of the public and democracy centers on various concepts that trace back to Greek democratic theory, but updated to reflect bourgeois culture and economics. Democratization, for Habermas, was focused on political participation as the centerpiece of a democratic society. Habermas’s work is a historical account of the development of the bourgeois public sphere, illustrating how that development shapes the concept of engagement within the early modern era. For Habermas, the public sphere was a discursive space that mediated the complex matrix of people’s personal, social, economic, and familial concerns. To be civically engaged in this context was to participate in argument with similar interlocutors, negotiating personal opinions and public concerns. Conversations that occurred in pubs and coffee houses, the intellectual salons of the day, were later expressed and amplified in the press—newspapers and journals—which shaped the larger discourses in public debate. The agenda-setting role of the mass media meant that the editors were able to select topics that would become points of discussion. Critical analysis of this coverage became the focus of discourses against government action. This process (theoretically) endowed political engagement with an emancipatory power, because in these public spaces one could speak critically of state power and other powerful interests of control. According to Habermas, it was in these material and mediated forums that individuals and groups could actually shape public opinion through argument and discourse.

At its most basic level, Habermas' explanation of the bourgeois public sphere emphasized the open discussion of any issue of general concern in which argumentation was utilized to appeal to and shape the concept of the public good. The bourgeois public sphere relied on a bracketing of personal status, in which the so-called "forceless force" (Habermas & McCarthy, 1977) of the superior argument was to be championed instead of the argument's source. It presupposed notions of the freedom of speech and assembly, participatory rights, free press, and the ability to engage freely in the political process.

The title of Habermas' keystone work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), derived from the establishment of his theory that the structural change in the public sphere was because of the cultural industries' rise, spread of free market capitalism, and the encroachment of governmental organizations into the public sphere. Habermas contrasted the basis of liberal democracy in the bourgeois public sphere with the privatized forms of spectator politics emerging in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the new mass media of radio, television, and film. This transformation of the public sphere left citizens acting primarily as consumers who were exchanging goods, services, and the political spectacle took place around them. The overarching purpose of his exploration into the transformation of the public sphere was to illustrate how alterations in the forums of public discourse and argument can dramatically shift citizens from debating culture to uncritically consuming it. Although Habermas since softened his critique of mass-mediated deliberation (1992), it is worth expanding on his critique since it shaped much 20<sup>th</sup> century discourse on the possibilities of civic engagement.

Habermas's vision of "welfare state capitalism and mass democracy" is drawn from the skeptical perspective toward mass media and culture made famous by the Frankfurt School. Horkheimer and Adorno (1948) critiqued the culture industry for allowing the corporatization of

the public sphere. They were critical of the mass media industry that produced cultural “needs” that only capitalism and the consumption of products could fulfill. Their worry was that translating desirability into the purchasing of things instead of existential needs like freedom and democracy would create a deadened culture more susceptible to fascism. They argued that the media’s interest in the public good was compromised by a manipulative cultural production industry that fused political and economic interest. Furthermore, Horkheimer and Adorno characterized the administrative society of the welfare state as an erosion of democracy due to a decline in individuality and personal freedom.

Horkheimer and Adorno’s argument is that corporations, with their incredible financial power and political influence, are able to manipulate public debate in ways that create a compliant passivity. Whereas the early modern public sphere facilitated consensus through argument and discourse from citizens, the twentieth century public sphere created a pseudo-collective representativeness from so-called experts’ manufactured political jargon. Citizenship thus became framed in the terms of spectatorship. Citizens view the news, but they don’t take part in it. Civic engagement becomes reactionary rather than proactive. This framing of civic engagement distances citizens from their connection to the process and represents their agency primarily as judgment about past occurrences rather than focusing on how citizens can actually shape the agenda for public conversation. For example, the nightly network news reports on crises, but rarely do they do so in a way that tells citizens what they can do to help ameliorate the situation. This positions citizens as making retroactive judgments about what has happened rather than actively shaping the broader agenda of public debate.

When spectator politics is assumed to be the norm, then the role of the media is to create stories for consumption. Public discourse loses its critical lens when “staged displays” are able to

position symbols that “cannot be argued, but simply identified with” (Habermas, 1989, p. 206) and it is this cooptation of citizen agency that Habermas argues eroded the power of the public sphere. The role of engagement in such a public sphere is not to take action, but to identify with certain actions that are mass-produced to serve the interests of the powerful media players that manufacture opinion. The function and role of media in this worldview is to shape discourse within the public sphere within the limits of themes approved by corporate media gatekeepers. In this view, regular citizens are mere consumers and only occasionally producers of rational, political discourse.

Sociologist Robert Putnam (2001) agrees with Habermas that the decline of civic engagement is related to the proliferation of mass media. If the mass media historically placed citizens in a passive position, then they are likely to be less critical and evaluative of the political process and less involved in localized discourse that translates into civic engagement. Putnam’s hypothesis is straightforward: civic engagement is the driving force behind a vibrant and strong democracy and social capital is a key ingredient in facilitating civic engagement. Putnam defines social capital as “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (p. 67).

There are two different types of social capital: bonding and bridging capital. Bonding capital is the strengthening of connections between communities that is generated through like-minded discourse and organizational affiliation. Bonding positions social capital as an end that is generated through communal discourse on topics that influence the people involved in the discussions. Putnam argued that the discursive engagement that occurred at sites like clubs, community activities, and organized recreational sports generated the social capital that acted as

a catalyst for civic engagement. By challenging ideas during vigorous debate, citizens refine and develop arguments that can later be levied on behalf of social or political change.

Bridging capital is the type of social capital that can be attained through discursively confronting alternative viewpoints among differing communities to see the implicit and explicit common ground shared between the two. Bridging positions social capital as a means to find argumentative common ground to advance commonly held goals. Putnam argued that bridging capital is a means of surmounting gaps between dissimilar groups. He saw both bonding and bridging capital as essential parts of the political process because they are catalysts to drive civic engagement and action. The two concepts are mutually reinforcing insofar as they allow political discussion to be focused on issues-based rhetoric rather than on *ad hominem* attacks against the opposition. It is important for Putnam to see the opposition as fellow members of a community with an inherent humanity, although they share different beliefs or values.

Putnam's explanation of the declines of both forms of social capital feeds his larger argument about the crumbling of citizen involvement in the political process. Opinions in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century were not being developed in a way that highlighted the personhood of the opposition; that lack of respect for the humanity of the opposition in the argument (the social part of social capital), produced deeper division and a decline in collaborative agency. Putnam envisioned the forums and locations for these discussions—the bowling leagues, civic clubs, and similar organizations—to be essential to the production of social capital.

The question, for the purpose of this study, is this: Are these traditional forums the only way to build social capital, or might social capital be generated in alternative forums toward the same ends? If both types of social capital *are* being developed to fulfill similar civic ends, might Putnam's pessimism about contemporary civic engagement really be attributed to the fact that it

is simply functioning under a different rhetorical code? My suspicion is yes—social capital is still being developed, but it is rhetorically constructed differently. Rather than falling under the terms bonding and bridging, or being located in vertical organizations, opportunities to develop social capital are found in digitally supported social networks. In order to begin to answer these broader questions about the shifting terrain of civic engagement, the next section makes the case that Putnam's position on social capital and the internet is far more complicated than he assumes. I then explore the genesis of the networked public sphere and argue that the technological affordances that undergird it support venues to generate social capital and deliberative discourse.

### **1.3 Arguments about Social Capital in a Digital Era**

If the mass media distracted citizens from communally oriented work, what impact does the internet have on civic engagement? On the one hand, the internet might seem to only accelerate the critique lodged by Habermas and Putnam that new forms of media distract citizens from civic affairs. For Putnam, the interpersonal connections needed to build lasting social capital simply cannot thrive in high technology environments. He argued that technology, such as television and its expansion, "has made our communities (or, rather, what we experience as our communities) wider and shallower" (Putnam, 2001, p. 75). For Putnam, internet users congregate around their own interests and not around traditional civic virtues represented by the greater good. Indeed, large numbers of internet consumers use the web merely for entertainment, information gathering, and to pass time.

Many scholars share Putnam's assumption that the internet decreases social capital because of the large number of users that direct their internet time toward entertainment. Shah, Kwak and Holbert (2001) pointed out two ways in which internet use might erode social capital:

first, because of time displacement and, second, because of the type of content being consumed. Quite simply, the time spent on consuming digital media trades off with time that could be spent on social capital creating civic activity. In addition, the research makes the case that the content itself, as Putnam hypothesized, was antithetical to civic engagement because it was for entertainment purposes only. If people are spending time online looking at cute cat videos or inconsequential status updates, then they are not developing the kind of social capital necessary to address glaring local, national, and global problems.

Of course, around the year 2000, scholars were very skeptical about the legitimacy of internet forums as sources of communicative exchange and community building. For example, Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukophadhyay, and Scherlis (1998) and Nie and Erbring (2000) argued internet forums actually decrease the face-to-face interaction that is necessary to facilitate social capital. There are also large amounts of scholarship dedicated to the concept that digital democracy is little more than an echo chamber or an information cocoon in which people surround themselves with like-minded people in order to avoid robust deliberative discourse (Burri, 2014; Carpentier, 2011; Garrett, 2009; Sunstein, 2001; Sunstein, 2009). Gilbert and Bergstrom (2009) found that specific genres of blogs develop viewership that use predetermined knowledge to reify their opinions. This body of literature portrays the internet as just another medium of mass consumption that allows viewers to read their selected content without deep engagement or detail.

These arguments come from a position that face-to-face communication is essential to the creation of social capital. We should treat this assumption with some skepticism. For example, Howard, Rainie and Lones (2001) found that “online tools are more likely to extend social contact than detract from it” (p. 397). In addition, Wellman, Haase, Witte, and Hampton (2001)



recognized the connection between online organizational and political activity defining the action as “increasing participatory capital” (p. 450). Pasek, Kenski, Romer, and Jamieson (2006) conclude “people’s use of mass media may help to stimulate development of both social and political action” (p. 20). What Pasek et al., and the other studies I have cited, illustrate is that as technology evolves, and the methods and forms of communication and deliberation change in tandem, then older models of civic engagement are transformed.

However, much of the extant literature on the internet and social capital assumes Putnam’s measures of social capital. In the networked public sphere, there are new forms of power that are not registered in Putnam’s original theorizing of the nascent web. For example, Manuel Castells identifies “programmers” and “switchers” as actors with new power in networked societies. Programmers work to “constitute network(s), and to program/reprogram the network(s), in terms of the goals assigned” (p. 45). Programmers are the organizing forces that code the networks that comprise the networked public sphere. In this way programmers are the ones facilitating bonding capital between networks, exactly as Putnam hypothesized. Switchers describe those who have the power “to connect and ensure the cooperation of different networks by sharing common goals and combining resources, while fending off competition from other networks by setting up strategic cooperation” (p. 45). Switchers are not just individual actors, but actors with the ability to reconfigure the complex and dynamic mini-networks that link the interface of common goals together. The ability to shape how networks interact to form larger publics is one important site of communicative power in a networked public sphere that mirrors bridging capital.

These two modes of power could be roughly seen as analogous to Putnam’s bonding and bridging forms of social capital. Programmers can create interfaces, forums, or sites that connect

people and breed identification, whereas switchers function to bridges different discourse communities. There may be some subtle differences between Putnam and Castells, for sure, but the similarity in function suggests that the internet does not dilute social capital so much as redeploy the sites at which it functions.

Power or social capital, in a networked public sphere, is not derivative solely of the coercive power of direct influence, but relies on the relational capacity, values, and interests of those involved. Castells (2010) illuminates this process as he explained that the construction of meaning through discourses guides social actors to action. Public argument is about legitimizing certain discourses as opposed to others. Legitimacy relies on “consent elicited by the construction of shared meaning” (Castells, 2009, p. 9). Digital media increases the ability of citizens to produce argument that is circulated publicly, leading to a concomitant increase in the sites where legitimacy is argued. This process constructs meaning and thus power in networks.

What this means for the purpose of this study is that political action and social capital *can* be generated in digital forums. The early fears about the death of social capital were about the deaths of previous forums for its generation, not the actual concept. Thinking of all the varied types of digital communication as blending parts of the traditional model of civic engagement with the affordances of new technologies illustrates that social capital didn’t die with bowling leagues; it simply took on new forms in new forums. While Putnam saw social capital as the building block for a high functioning democracy, he did not anticipate that, rather than constantly eroding throughout the twentieth century, it was, instead, taking on different formations.

I would argue that Putnam has a totalizing view of social capital inasmuch as he presumes it can only be generated in the ways he predicts and identifies. While face-to-face interaction is a strong component of a certain type of social capital, it can be generated in other

ways. I will argue that the sense of community and belonging that can be generated in the networked public sphere is a type of social capital. Comparing social capital generation across media ought to examine the intensity of the bonds being built rather than presuming that one mode of connection, like face-to-face interaction, automatically trumps all others. This does not mean that *all* digital forums produce social capital—certainly not, but then, neither can it be said that *all* civil society organizations created social capital either. What is needed is more situated analysis—case studies—of instances in which social capital is generated in internetworked contexts. The internet, which supports many different networked communication hubs and nodes, provides new forums where similar behaviors and a public spirit that Putnam identified as essential to social capital can be developed.

However, there is a key terminological shift that underlines the significance of this dissertation: you won't find civic engagement being discussed under the rubric of social capital; instead, it is more likely to appear under the guise of "social networking." All of the meta-talk about social networking in the wake of blogging, Facebook, and Twitter would seem to suggest the capacity of digitally networked forums to generate and support Putnam's network-centric definition of social capital: "networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination for mutual benefit" (1995, p. 67). As the next chapter makes clearer, rhetorical analysis will help illustrate how the concept of civic engagement in the public sphere might be seen as at least occasionally invigorating, rather than always detracting from, social capital and political agency. Tracking the shifting "terms of engagement" thus expands our understanding of citizenship in contemporary networked societies.

#### **1.4 The Genesis of the Networked Public Sphere**

With what some scholars have called the birth of the networked public sphere, the landscape of civic engagement is changing (Asserhoffer & Maireder, 2013; Benkler 2006; Benkler et al., 2013; Druns, 2008; Pfister 2014; Shirky, 2011). Networked media have increased the contact points between citizen voices and the public sphere. Blogs, forums, chat rooms, and social media sites like Twitter, Shoutbox, or Facebook are forums that are acting as contemporary intellectual salons. The highly interactive features of these networked sites of engagement differ from the more consumption-oriented mass media, implicitly carrying with them a sense of conversation because of the mechanism to “reply” or give feedback in some manner. The networked public sphere is a theoretical conceptualization that demonstrates how the earlier functioning of the public sphere pairs with networked media technology to allow people to connect and communicate differently. In the same way that mass ownership of radios and televisions sets allowed for mass media communication, the advancement of the internet as a communication grid allows for networked communication.

The concept of affordance is typically traced back to Gibson (1977) who explained affordances as “action possibilities” in a visual context. The word has been appropriated in technical writing to help describe the interactive possibilities facilitated by technology. Technology, due to its capacity and interactive capabilities, possesses an inherent set of biases and attributes (Bruce, 1993; Hickerman, 1990). The original conceptions of blogs, which didn’t have dynamic HTML abilities, privileged the *dissemination* of the written word whereas, by comparison, early versions of chat rooms privileged *interconnectivity* through the written word. Koehler et al (2007) explained that some technology is better suited to certain tasks than others based on the capabilities provided to a user by its interface. These concepts come together comfortably in a definition used by Dr. Ralph Putnam (2008): “the ways in which technology

offers or supports certain actions.” I will approach the idea of technological affordances as facilitating certain behaviors and actions on the basis of their potential “action possibilities.”

The technological affordances of digital media allow citizens to transfer the lived experience of what Habermas defined as the lifeworld to a digitally networked grid. The technological affordances of the networked public sphere integrate multiple avenues for sharing information while creating a platform for transmitting layered messages. Wikis allow for users to collaborate in real time. They share information and create collectives that are self-regulating. Video blogs connected to mobile phones allow for videos capturing real-time events that can be uploaded instantly to the network. This sharing of the lived experience of video bloggers allows engaged citizens the opportunities to act as *de facto* freelance journalists. Editing software allows for users to splice together text, videos, pictures, and music in ways formerly accessible only to people who could afford the complicated machinery required for those tasks. These technological affordances are creating new forums in the networked public sphere with unique communicative features aiding civic engagement. Jansson (2013) observes 5 categories for technological affordances that will act as a guide for our continued exploration into networked participatory culture: mediated or mediatized mobility, technological convergence, interactivity, new interfaces, and the automation of surveillance.

*Mediated or mediatized mobility.* The miniaturization of processors and their computing power is an affordance that allows citizens to access the internet anywhere, recording or taking pictures of events, and even using programs to create multimedia messages on the fly. The line between producers and consumers as well as text and context are constantly being blurred with the evolution of this affordance. Contractor, Monge, and Leonardi (2011) explained that technology constitutes a digital skeleton, which resonates with descriptions of the networked

public sphere as a series of nodes and hubs. Nodes and hubs can be understood as the decentralization of communication interfaces. The wide spread use of smart phones allows people to utilize the advancement in technology to connect with people, describe the world, and create analogies through the immediate connection to the internet.

*Technological Convergence.* Technological convergence, first identified by Jenkins (2006) in his book *Convergence Culture*, refers to the capability of new forms of mobile technology to work across platforms and to transmit information in a diverse arrangement digitally. The technological advancements that allow people to integrate public and private information into multimodal productive spaces for argument change the ways in which engagement occurs. People are able to express their point of view by artfully merging arguments through collaborative production. Appropriated images with varied captions become the political cartoon of the day and sharing these creative arguments across social media platforms like MySpace and Facebook have a built-in distribution mechanism. Citizens within the networked public sphere generate flows of cultural information, which in turn creates mechanisms of identification for digital publics. Since all media converge through the digital medium, citizens are able to easily interweave, manipulate, cut and paste, and edit cultural artifacts from blogs to podcasts to videos to form a persuasive message.

*The ability of the network to transcend physical space.* Whereas the heart of the bourgeois public sphere was the coffeehouse or tavern, the networked public sphere is creating new deliberative spaces where digitally accessed communication hubs act as deliberative laboratories for citizens. Common places for discussion, activism, and connection are proliferating through the greater interconnectivity of the networked public sphere. Social media acts as a hub and distribution system that keeps people connected. Instead of contacting each

individual person via a one-to-one interface, networked citizens are able to utilize the many-to-many capability of the networked public sphere to reduce the resource intensity of communication while still increasing the number of audience members. The increased connectivity provided by a networked public sphere opens up possibilities for non-geographically bound civic engagement.

*New interfaces.* The ability to record and quickly upload digital movies via YouTube is an example of how new interfaces allow opinion formation and sharing across the network. People can follow different YouTube channels, critically evaluate ideas and products, or just offer small glimpses into their personal lives. Twitter allows users to transmit their messages to either a select group of followers or thousands of followers at once. The reaction time and depth of connection one feels to celebrities is an example of how new interfaces are changing the scope of communicative practices.

Like-minded individuals are now able to discuss their favorite topics, gather, associate, and bond in forums that do not require them to leave the comfort of their own home. Benkler (2006) describes the qualitative transition as “represented in the experience of being a potential speaker, as opposed to simply a listener and voter. It relates to the self-perception of individuals in society and the culture of participation they can adopt” (p. 213). People who needed a forum in which to express their opinions are often able to find it through new interfaces that afford novel forms of expressivity. Even a mechanism as simple as the ability to post feedback to a news article, television program, or service affords people the opportunity to be more active consumers, producers, and distributors of information. New interface capabilities provided in the networked public sphere increase opportunities for engagement.

*Automation of surveillance.* The automation of surveillance describes how digital media are eroding the boundaries between watchers and the watched. What this means is that in addition to real time updates, people are able to answer questions of what “really happened” with the technological capacity to digitally record and disseminate information. This has important implications to the evolving nature of engagement because it diffuses power from the top down to a more decentralized model. Nahon (2011) argues that the deliberative capabilities of a networked public are defined by their inclusivity and exclusivity. She argues that inclusion and exclusion are evaluated by the balance of power between the network’s gatekeepers and those being gated. This idea of power is important within the framework of participatory culture because it emphasizes the power of participants to select which communities that they want to engage. I will argue that decisions are being driven by the ways in which engagement messages are being rhetorically constructed and replicated. The way that messages are conveyed can change the decision-making process.

In addition to these five affordances identified by Jansson, I would add *speed* and *many-to-many communication*:

*Speed.* The speed of communication in the networked public sphere allows for people to react, across the network, in real time. Benkler (2006) explained that the networked information economy utilizes the speed of microprocessors to make other technological affordances more available to citizens. The speed of communication in a networked public sphere allows citizens to be instantly collaborative, rather than featuring lagging and reactive engagement. The real time nature of their discussion and action enhances feelings of agency, since citizens can more quickly respond to exigencies that invite action.