

**On the Interactions of News Media,  
Interpersonal Communication, Opinion Formation, and Participation:  
Deliberative Democracy and the Public Sphere**

by  
**Joohoan Kim**

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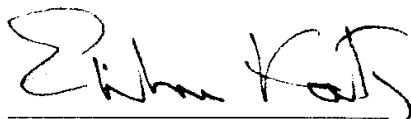
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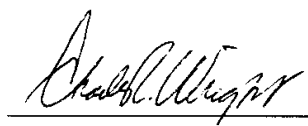
Joohoan Kim

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Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

1997

  
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Supervisor of Dissertation

  
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Graduate Group Chairperson

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world of “socially constructed realities,” which inspired in me the idea of the “semiotic construction of reality.” I also thank him for allowing me to have teaching experience as an assistant in his course. Professor Joseph Turow taught me the contextual trends of communication research, and Professor Charles Wright’s Survey Research Design course was most helpful in designing the survey for this dissertation.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my three-year-old daughter, Sun-Yu.

## ABSTRACT

### On the Interactions of News Media, Interpersonal Communication, Opinion Formation, and Participation: Deliberative Democracy and the Public Sphere

Joohoan Kim

(Supervisor: Professor Elihu Katz)

Deliberative democracy can be defined as a political system based on citizens' voluntary and free discussions on public issues. Most scholars have discussed deliberative democracy within normative boundaries. However, based primarily on Katz's interpretation of Tarde, this study finds the concept of public sphere a useful framework for operationalizing the normative concept of deliberative democracy, since the four components of the public sphere—news media use, interpersonal communication, opinion formation, and political participation—provide us with empirically testable categories. This study tests the validity of theories of deliberative democracy through examining the interrelationships among the four components of the public sphere. Methodologically, it includes a set of 63 items to probe where people talk and what they talk about in their daily life. An experimental treatment (a “stop-and-talk” question) is also included in the survey to simulate the effects of real conversation. Through a set of data gathered from a nationwide survey, sufficient evidence was found to support the basic hypotheses: (1) news media use encourages people to have political conversation, (2) news media use and political conversation tend to enhance the quality of opinions (measured by consistency, opinionation, and consideredness), (3) news media use, political conversation, and enhanced opinions encourage political participation. The significance of this study is that: (1) unlike other media effects studies, its dependent variables are not just of opinion positions or attitude changes, but also opinion quality; (2) it does not consider media alone, but deals with the combined effects of interpersonal communication (conversation) and mass media (news media use); (3) it combines an experimental design with a nationwide survey; and (4) it assumes that the effects of mass media do not stop at people's attitudes, but are extended to their activities.

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## PREFACE

This dissertation is the product of a generous invitation from Professor Elihu Katz and Professor Wyatt to join their collaborative project as a full partner at a moment when their separate projects began to join together. Wyatt has played a pioneering role in the empirical study of freedom of expression, to which Katz has contributed. Katz has had a strong interest in empirical study of the agenda implicit in Gabriel Tarde's conception of the public sphere as consisting of press-conversation-opinion-participation. The history of our three-way collaboration is worth documenting:

1. Following his teacher, Lazarsfeld, Katz finds interest in Tarde as originator of the "two-step flow" of communication model and, more generally of a conception of the public sphere consisting of press-conversation-opinion-action (Katz, 1992).

2. At about the same time, Wyatt completed his empirical study of freedom of expression, a survey commemorating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Amendment (Wyatt, 1991). Katz proposed the extension of Wyatt's study to other societies outside US, and the two collaborated in extending study to Jews and Arabs in Israel (Wyatt, Katz, Levinson, & Al-Haj, 1996). It is possible that Katz sensed the relevance of Wyatt's expression variable for the Tarde/Lazarsfeld model, but it remained unspoken in this aspect of the collaboration between the two men.

3. The Wyatt-Katz project encountered difficulty as the results of the over-generalized conception of feeling free to speak, where the subject and loci of this speech remained unspecified. Tamar Liebes conducted focus groups, attempting to sort out political talk from other kinds.

4. Meanwhile, based on Katz's interpretation of Tarde's model, Kim produced an MA thesis (Kim, 1994a) at the Annenberg School under Katz's supervision in which Tarde's path model of the public sphere (press-conversation-opinion-participation) are approximated and tested with GSS and NES data. Kim proposed further development of the same topic for his doctoral dissertation, under Katz's supervision. In the course of preparing his dissertation, Kim produced papers on social capital and opinion consistency (Kim, 1996), media effects in the public sphere (Kim, 1995), and communicative action and participatory democracy (Kim, 1994b), all based more or less on Tarde's model of the public sphere.

The dissertation project, however, encountered difficulty in gathering data, since most national surveys available do not include all of the four variables in the Tarde model, especially the political conversation variable. Secondary analysis of existing data, therefore, could not serve the purpose.

5. To solve the difficulty in the project on inhibition in expression, Wyatt initiated a new study, with funds from Middle Tennessee State University's John Seigenthaler Chair of First Amendment Studies and the Office of Communication Research, aiming to measure (1) how frequently people talk

about nine different topics generally, (2) how much people feel free to talk about the nine subjects, and (3) how frequently people talk about the nine subjects in each of six loci, in the spirit of his previous studies and the input of Katz and Liebes.

6. Sensing that some of these talk variables might be used for Kim's dissertation, Katz proposed to Wyatt to invite Kim to piggyback the Tarde variables onto the new survey to enable him to solve the difficulty in the dissertation project. Wyatt agreed. Thus, alongside Wyatt's talk items, Kim proposed a set of Tarde variables--including another talk variable (discussion about issues); additional news media variables; "spiral of silence" variables (willingness to argue, local and national opinion climate perceptions); "stop-and-talk" items simulating real political conversations; a set of social welfare items to measure the "quality of opinions"; political interest and political efficacy items; "social capital" variables (trust in government and people); and a series of political participation variables (adopted from GSS data).

A telephone survey was then conducted by Macro International Co.

7. Gradually, as the analysis proceeded, the two strands of the study came increasingly together. At relevant points in this dissertation, suggestions and input from these mentors—including joint drafts of papers—are specifically credited. Broadly speaking, Wyatt became interested in Katz-Kim's study of the Tarde model, and gave thought to the interaction of his original talk variables with the rest of the study. The Tarde design, on the other hand, profited greatly

from use of the Wyatt's talk variables. Papers presented at ICA (Kim, Wyatt & Katz, 1997) and at AEJMC (Wyatt, Katz & Kim, 1997) reflect this interaction.

8. Given this history, it is no surprise how grateful I am to my mentor, Professor Katz, for his sharing with me his conceptualization of the Tarde problem which connected with my own interest in deliberative democracy and the public sphere. I am also grateful to Professor Wyatt for inviting me to join his study, and to share in the interaction between himself and Katz. More than a patron, Professor Wyatt is also my mentor.



## Chapter One

### **Introduction**

Democracy is an ideal. Rousseau was convinced that “no true democracy has ever existed nor ever will,” because it presupposes a number of conditions which are unlikely to be available in the real world.<sup>1</sup> Rousseau’s conclusion was that “Were there such a thing as a nation of Gods, it would be a democracy. So perfect a form of government is not suited to mere men” (in Bobbio, 1987, p. 43). Of course, as a pessimist about democracy, Rousseau was not alone.

A modern version of such pessimism can be found in Downs (1957), who maintains that political inequality is inevitable if citizens act “rationally,” because of “informational and communication costs.” Citizens in a democratic political system, Downs argued, should make two kinds of decisions—(1) how to vote and (2) how to affect the processes of governments' decision making—both of which require time and effort in gathering and analyzing relevant information. Downs’s conclusion is that rational citizens, who weigh information costs and expected utility, would not invest enough time and energy for information that usually pays back little. This means that the fundamental presumption of a participatory democracy—equally well informed citizens—is an unattainable dream.

As Downs and many other political scientists implicitly acknowledge, the modern democratic political system is based on the recognition of the

impossibility of “well informed and participatory” citizens. The rights and responsibilities of participation have been alienated to such institutions as professional information gatherers (e.g., journalists) and publishers, pressure groups, political parties, and governments (Boncheck, 1995).

But this kind of pessimism can be maintained only when actions are the result of “rational choices” and the cost of information for participation is relatively high. What if citizens can get and share the relevant information with less and less cost due to the on-going revolution in means of communication? What if “gathering information” is performed for its own sake? What if people read newspapers and talk about politics as if they were leisure activities? What if the “rational citizens” also have passion and sympathy, and a desire for justice? What if the feeling of “injustice” is one of the most important components of collective action (Gamson, 1992)?<sup>2</sup>

True, a perfect participatory democracy may not be achievable in the real world; but it is also true that we can improve and approximate what we have by reference to what we do not have—the ideal democracy. Such an improvement and approximation, however, would require clear understanding and shared consensus on “what is ideal” and “how to achieve it.” This is why Habermas (1996) so laboriously theorizes the “ideal” speech situation in the “ideal” communication community of the public sphere, admitting that his theories are a “counterfactual ideal” (1996, p. 322). The counterfactual presupposition of the “ideal communication community” will, Habermas

argues, “indeed open up a perspective allowing them [citizens] to go beyond local practices of justification and to transcend the provinciality of their spatiotemporal contexts that are inescapable in action and experience. This perspective thus enables them to do justice to the meaning of *context-transcending* validity claims.” (1996, p. 323).

In the course of attempting to find an ideal model of democracy to be approximated within the real political world, many political theorists have recently set their hope on deliberative democracy (Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Habermas, 1996; Chambers, 1996; Page, 1996; Dryzek, 1994; Keane, 1991; Bobbio, 1987, Fishkin, 1991). For example, Rehg (1996) points out:

In this context, one of the more fertile and optimistic theoretical developments has been associated with ideas of “deliberative democracy.” These ideas reflect a concern that citizens’ participation in the democratic process have a rational character—that voting, for example, should not simply aggregate given preferences but rather follow on a process of “thoughtful interaction and opinion formation” in which citizens become informed of the better arguments and more general interests. (p. ix)

We may define deliberative democracy as a democratic political system based on citizens’ voluntary and free discussions on public issues. It is a discursive socio-political system where citizens share relevant information, talk about (converse, discuss, argue, and deliberate) political affairs, form public opinions, and participate in political processes. The whole system is “discursive,” in as much as each category of deliberation—sharing information,

talking about it, forming opinions, and participating—has characteristics of “discourse” and “communicative action” (Habermas, 1984). In this sense, deliberative democracy *is* a “discursive democracy” (Dryzek, 1994). The concept of deliberative democracy covers not only institutional procedures like the rule of majority but also the political culture of free discussion and voluntary participation.

At the core of deliberative democracy, therefore, is political conversation. By political conversation, I mean any kind of political talk, discussion or argument, as long as it is voluntarily carried out by free citizens without any specific purpose. Discussions devoted for formal purposes (e.g., talks in board meetings or persuasion in business strategy meetings) are not conversation in this sense. Political conversation does not belong to any specific institution but to citizens’ everyday life. Political conversation happens in private realms among private persons, but it concerns public issues as well as private matters. It is conversation in which citizens can bridge the meaning of their personal experience with the meaning of political worlds “out there.” Political conversation happens in the private sphere, but (1) its inputs (information, topics, issues, agendas) come from outside the private sphere, such as the political system and public worlds, and (2) its outputs (public opinion, issue positions, voting preference, participatory activities) are fed into the political system.

It is in the significance of political conversation that the concept of deliberative democracy and that of public sphere find common theoretical ground. The public sphere can be defined as “a communication structure rooted in the lifeworld through the associational network of civil society” (Habermas, 1996, p. 359). In other words, the public sphere is a spatiotemporal entity where citizens actually get together freely and have open political conversations. As such, the public sphere is not an organization or an institution. Rather, it can best be described as “a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e., opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes).” In short, the public sphere is the place for communication and opinion formation. In the public sphere, “the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topical specified *public opinions*” (Habermas, 1996, p. 360).

The public sphere is assumed to be located between the political system (e.g., governments) and the private sphere. People enter the public sphere as private persons and participate in public deliberations without any obligation, predetermined choices, or specific agenda. In this sense, the basic format of public deliberation in public sphere is “non-purposive” and “non-goal-directed” conversation. Since the public sphere does not refer to any physical spaces, but to the “social space” produced by communication actions,<sup>3</sup> any space—living rooms, shopping malls, restaurants, churches, streets, work places as well as civic organizations—can be the public sphere if people freely get together and

talk about public issues. Even a mediated sphere via electronic mass media and computer networks can be a form of the public sphere.<sup>4</sup> We may say that the public sphere is more “dispersed spaces” than a “central space,” following Katz’s (1996) conceptualization, since dispersed spaces seem to be more appropriate for informal political conversation: “If one were designing a participatory democracy, one would make provisions for a central space in which all citizens could gather together and for dispersed spaces in which they could meet in smaller, more homogeneous groups. Ideally, the agenda would be agreed upon in the central space (forum, agora, town meeting), mulled over in the dispersed spaces (café, salon, club, trade union hall, party headquarters), and returned for debate and decision to the central space” (Katz, 1996, p. 23).

We need to distinguish the public sphere from the political system. The political system (e.g., national and local governments) demands formal, “ponderously solemn, serious, earnest” (Schudson, 1995, p. 10) discussion for institutionalized decision making, but the public sphere allows citizens to have informal and spontaneous conversations on public issues and to form rational opinions. Of course, deliberative democracy requires both the political system and the public sphere, but deliberative democracy theorists emphasize the significance of informal conversations in the public sphere, since they are the basis for rational public opinion.<sup>5</sup>

The theory of the public sphere is useful for pinning down the normative concept of deliberative democracy, for it provides us with an

empirically testable category: conversation. And yet, most scholars discuss deliberative democracy within normative boundaries. Gutmann and Thompson (1996), for example, maintain that “Deliberation is the most appropriate way for citizens collectively to resolve their moral disagreements,” (p. 4) and suggest three principles—reciprocity, publicity, and accountability—to guide the process of deliberation. Dryzek (1994) suggests a “discursive design” for constructing the institutions of deliberative democracy. Chambers (1996), too, makes the normative arguments that “talking (persuasion) is better than fighting (coercion).” Following Habermas, she considers that talking is the best way to reach reasonable and legitimate solutions and to produce mutual understanding.

The fundamental assumption of deliberative democracy is, as we shall see later, that citizens’ deliberation on public issues will produce more reasonable conclusions, resulting from more informed, rational, and impartial opinions. Most advocates of deliberative democracy seem to take it for granted that deliberation and discussion would increase the “quality” of opinions (Habermas, 1996; Chambers, 1996; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). There are, however, only a few scholars who have attempted to test the validity of the deliberative democracy model.

Fishkin, for example, tried to show the effects of deliberation through “deliberative opinion polls.” Fishkin (1991) contends that the true democratic ideal is the face-to-face society, in which citizens have the time and the opportunity to discuss matters with their neighbors and develop their ideas; in

other words, it is a society where deliberation is possible before decision. Based on this assumption, he has conducted polling as a “mechanism for finding out what the electorate as a whole *would* decide, if it were given the chance to deliberate” (Denver, Hands, & Jones, 1995, pp. 147-8). In January 1996, Fishkin performed “deliberative polling” with a “representative sampling of 600 American voters” (New York Times, Jan. 14, 1996), but the study failed. Even if it had succeeded, the result would have the problem of external validity, since the experimental settings were far from natural, and furthermore, the sample was not randomly selected but “self-selected” by themselves, since participants had to accept the free four day trip to Austin, Texas.

Page (1996) also believes that “Public deliberation is essential to democracy,” but recognizes nevertheless that “thorough, face-to-face deliberation among the whole collectivity of millions of citizens” would be impossible (p. 3). He suggests that “public deliberation” can be carried out only with the help of “professional communicators,” that is, the mass media. Though Page acknowledges that today’s mass media have many limitations and “hazards,” he maintains that the mass media are the only practical possibility for public deliberation, and he argues that they can be improved by an attentive audience “shopping around”. From this, Page focuses on how far mass media can go in taking over the functions of citizens’ public deliberation, rather than on whether mass media can stimulate public to have their own deliberations.



Considering the vast amount of literature on normative aspects of deliberative democracy, it is surprising how little effort has been made so far to test empirically the basic assumptions of the deliberative democracy model. Even Fishkin and Page do not try to capture the picture of deliberative democracy as a whole. Habermas himself, the champion of the normative and ideal models, recognizes that ideal theories should and can be tested empirically, for “The concept of the political public sphere and civil society introduced above are not mere normative postulates but have empirical relevance” (1996, p. 373).

The purpose of this study is to test the fundamental assumptions of the theories of deliberative democracy with data from a nationwide survey. In this study, I will try to answer following questions: Does a greater amount of shared information about public issues really encourage people to have conversation about the issues? Does more frequent political conversation enhance the “quality” of opinions? Is more conversation and more rational opinion reflected in greater participation?

For empirical operationalization of the normative concepts of deliberative democracy, I mainly relied on the theories of the public sphere by Habermas (1989 [1962]) and Tarde (1899). Though the public sphere itself has normative imperatives such as freedom of expression and equal opportunity, it primarily refers to the necessary socio-political conditions for political conversation. In his article entitled “*L’opinion et la conversation*” (1899),<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Tarde, the French sociologist, theorized the process in which “the public,” with

rationalized “Opinion,” emerged as a result of rapid social diffusion, with the press (newspapers) provoking conversations in salons and coffee houses. Katz (1992) summarizes Tarde’s argument as follows: “(1) the newspaper fuels conversation, (2) conversation shapes opinion, and (3) opinion triggers action” (p, 80).<sup>7</sup> In other words, the input of the public sphere is information made publicly available through the mass media, its process is conversation and opinion formation, and its output is collective action.

Though Tarde does not seem to have been explicitly interested in theories of democracy, he was an observer of dynamics of public sphere. He pointed out the tight relations between the press, conversation, and opinion formation. He wrote that : “[C]onversation at all times, and the press, which at present is the principal source of conversation, are the major factors in opinion” (Tarde,1899, p. 2). Habermas also sees newspapers and conversations as essential to public opinion. In his definition of the public sphere, he writes:

By “public sphere” we mean first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as **public opinion** can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every **conversation** in which private persons come together to form a public. When the public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence; today, **newspapers** and periodicals, radio and television are the media of the public sphere. We speak of a political public sphere when the public **discussions** concern objects connected with the **practice** of the state (Habermas, 1991:398; emphases added).

We see here, Habermas's concept of the public sphere like Tarde's, consists of (1) the media disseminating the same information to a large number of private persons; (2) the private person's everyday conversation; and (3) the formation of public opinions. Recently, Habermas has added a "collective action" component to his theory of the public sphere:

In the structures of the public sphere, which are both decentered and porous, the scattered critical potential can be gathered, activated and focused. This certainly requires the support of civil society. With it, social movements can direct attention at specific themes and highlight particular contributions. In this way, the relationship of dependence between masses and populist leaders is turned into its opposite: the actors in the arena owe their influence to the acclaim of an audience versed in critique (in Carleheden & Gabriëls, 1996, p. 8).

In Katz's (1992) reading, Tarde's argument was that opinions lead to actions: "opinions [are] really formed through the day-to-day exchange of comments and observations which goes on among people...[B]y the very process of talking to one another, the vague dispositions which people have are crystallized, step by step, into specific attitudes, acts, or votes" (p. 80). In Keane's (1984) definition of the public sphere, we can also find a similar effect from deliberation to collective action:

A public sphere is brought into existence whenever two or more individuals... assemble to interrogate both their own interactions and the wider relations of social and political power within which they are always and already embedded. Through this autonomous association, members of the public sphere consider what they are

doing, settle how they will live together, and determine... how they might collectively act (Keane, 1984, pp. 2-3).

Thus, the concept of the public sphere suggests that there are four components which make up the mechanism of deliberative democracy, namely: news media, conversations, public opinion formation, and participation (see also Calhoun, 1992; Robbins, 1993; van Ginneken, 1992). Bryce's (1973 [1888], pp. 4-6) "four stages" of public opinion formation also refers to these four components:

(1) Reading newspapers: "A business man reads in his newspaper at breakfast the events of the preceding day."

(2) Talking politics: "He goes down to this office in the train, talks there to two or three acquaintances, and perceives that they agree or do not agree with his own still faint impressions.... And the opinion of ordinary minds, which in most of such minds has been hitherto fluid and undetermined, has begun to crystallize into a solid mass."

(3) Opinion formation: "Then debate and controversy begin... The effect of controversy is to drive the partisans on either side from some of their arguments, which are shown to be weak; to confirm them in others, which they think strong; and to make them take up a definite position on one side.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, opinion, which may have been manifold till the polling, is thereafter generally twofold only. There is a view which has triumphed and a view which has been vanquished."<sup>9</sup>

(4) Participatory activities: "The fourth is reached when action becomes necessary. When a citizen has to give a vote, he votes as a member of a party."

The four components allow us to construct a basic model of deliberative democracy which will be tested in this study: (1) news media use encourages people to talk about public issues, (2) news media use and political conversations produce more consistent and considered opinions, and (3) news

media, political conversation, and considered opinion encourage political participation.

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- 1 ) Rousseau's four conditions for true democracy are: (1) a state sufficiently small to make it possible to call the whole people together without difficulty and to allow each citizen to know all of his neighbors; (2) manners simple enough that business will be kept to a minimum and thorny questions avoided; (3) a considerable equality in fortune and in rank; (4) little or no luxury in the society (in Bobbio, 1987, p. 43).
  - 2 ) The "injustice component" refers to the moral indignation expressed through this form of political consciousness. This is not merely a cognitive or intellectual judgment about what is equitable but also what cognitive psychologists call a *hot cognition* –one that is laden with emotion (Gamson, 1992, p. 7).
  - 3 ) The public sphere is a unique form of the lifeworld. There are, according to Habermas, two kinds of functions of the lifeworld: (1) functions associated with reproductive aspects of the lifeworld – e.g., religion, education, and the family and (2) functions associated with aspects of validity– science, morality, and art. The public sphere "distinguishes itself through a *communication structure* that is related to a third feature of communicative action: it refers neither to the *functions* nor to the *contents* of everyday communication but to the *social space* generated in communicative action" (1996, p. 360). In this sense, the public sphere is a sort of social structure in Giddens's (1984) sense. According to Giddens's concept of the "duality of structure," a social structure is an outcome (the results) of human interactions as well as an input (the rules and resources) of the interactions. We could say that the public sphere, similarly, is produced by communicative actions, and at the same time, it enables and limits communicative actions. Habermas goes on to say that the lifeworld itself is also reproduced by communicative action: "Like the lifeworld as a whole,

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so, too, the public sphere is reproduced through communicative action” (1996, p. 360).

- 4 ) Habermas (1996) argues that “The more they [the public spheres] detach themselves from the public’s physical presence and extend to the virtual presence of scattered readers, listeners, or viewers linked by public media, the clearer becomes the abstraction that enters when the spatial structure of simple interactions is expanded into a public sphere ” (p. 361).
- 5 ) For example, Chambers (1996, p. 195) stresses the significance informal discussion by pointing out that deliberative democracy depends, “on the one hand, on institutionalizing the necessary procedures and conditions of communication and, on the other, on the interplay between institutionalized decision making and informally, yet rationally shaped public opinion.... Discourse does depend on institutionalizing the necessary procedures and conditions of communication, but it also depends on citizens’ participating in institutionalized as well as informal discourse as discursive actors.”
- 6 ) According to van Ginneken (1992) and Reynié (1989), Tarde’s article “L’opinion et la conversation” was first published in *Revue de Paris* in late August 1899. But Clark (1969) reports that it was 1898.
- 7) Gabriel Tarde has been called “one of the three most outstanding sociologists of nineteenth-century France” along with Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim (in Tarde, 1969, Translator’s introduction). Lazarsfeld might be the first who recognized the importance of Tarde with regard to communication studies and media effect research. Katz (1992) locates Tarde as the founding father of the communication and opinion research traditions, since Tarde was the first to argue for the significance of interpersonal communication in the context of media effects.
- 8 ) This is quite similar to the basic idea behind Noelle-Neumann’s spiral of silence model, with one major difference: while Bryce thought that the result

of scanning others' opinion would be to change one's own opinion to the majority's side, Noelle-Neumann believed that such a shift in attitude would not occur. Those who learned that they have a minority opinion would just remain silent.

- 9 ) Tarde, too, believed that public opinions tended to polarize, and one side would prevail over the other: "We say Opinion, but for every problem there are always two opinions. One of the two, however, manages to eclipse the other fairly quickly by its more rapid and striking brilliance or else because, even though less widespread, it is the more clamorous of the two" (1899, p. 3).



## Chapter Two

### **Theories of the Public Sphere and Deliberative Democracy**

My main argument of this study is that the public sphere is a necessary condition for deliberative democracy. In the previous chapter, I suggested that the public sphere consists of four components: news media, conversation, public opinion, and participation. Since Habermas's seminal work (1989 [1962]), the theory of the public sphere has been widely defended (and criticized, too) by communication scholars as well as socio-political theorists. But the significance of the public sphere to deliberative democracy has seldom been discussed. In this chapter, I will compare theories of the public sphere with Habermas's theory of communicative action (1984, 1987) and Gabriel Tarde's essay on *Conversation and Opinion* (1898), then discuss the functions of the four components of the public sphere will be discussed from the perspective of deliberative democracy.

#### ***2-1. The Public Sphere: A necessary condition for Deliberative Democracy***

We can understand Habermas's concept of the public sphere as a political representation of the lifeworld in which communicative actions are carried out (Habermas, 1987). I understand lifeworld and communicative action to be two key concepts in theorizing the public sphere. The lifeworld is a spatio-

temporal background against which communicative actions are made,<sup>1</sup> and the public sphere is a realm in which equal individuals gather to participate in open and free deliberation and conversation, a form of communicative action. In a word, the public sphere is a “spatio-temporal”<sup>2</sup> background<sup>3</sup> for communicative actions.

One might say that where there is a communicative action, there is a public sphere: as Habermas argues, the lifeworld is “a concept complementary to that of communicative action” (Habermas, 1987:119), just as conversation is a concept complementary to the public sphere. So we can add: what conversation is to the public sphere, communicative action is to the lifeworld, and strategic action to the system<sup>4</sup> (the “external” world).<sup>5</sup> As Schutz wrote, our experiences in the lifeworld are “temporally arranged”; they are “intersected by world time, biological time, and social time...All experiences have a social dimension, just as the temporal and spatial arrangement of my experiences is also ‘socialized’” (Schutz, in Habermas, 1987:128).

Lifeworld is the world we live through with our body—a spatio-temporal entity. While an individual cannot control one’s own lifeworld freely, this does not mean that actors are simply at the mercy of their lifeworld, “[F]or the lifeworld can in turn reproduce itself only through communicative action, and that means through processes of reaching understanding that depend on the actors’ responding with yes or no to criticizable validity claims” (Habermas,

1996, p. 324).<sup>6</sup> Communicative action is the contrasting concept to “strategic” or “purposive-rational” action. The latter involves the manipulation of nature to achieve an established purpose, whereas communicative action consists of human beings’ interactions with one another to achieve mutual understanding and to build social institutions.

In the original theory of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989 [1962]), there was insufficient considerations given to spatio-temporal constraints and the cultural contexts of interactions in the public sphere. As a result, the public sphere seemed to fit only for ghosts, unconstrained by time and space, since they would have no bodies. But without the necessary time and space, we can participate neither in discussion nor deliberation. In a recent work (1996), Habermas recognizes that “Lifeworld contexts certainly constrain actors’ latitude for action and interpretation, but only in the sense that they open up a horizon for *possible* interactions and interpretations. As soon as we conceive intentional social relations as communicatively mediated in the sense proposed, we are no longer dealing with disembodied, omniscient beings who exist beyond the empirical realm and are capable of context-free action, so to speak. Rather, we are concerned with finite, embodied actors who are socialized in concrete forms of life, situated in historical time and social space, and caught up in networks of communicative action” (p. 324).