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## Abstract

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### **Has the Internet changed the public sphere in Europe? The role of online news media in political communication.**

The public sphere is the site where political communication between individuals takes place. In modern societies most of this communication is conveyed by the mass media. This paper addresses the question of whether the Internet has changed the public sphere in Europe since the perspectives for political communication offered by this new information and communication technology (ICT) seem promising. The role of online news media is given special consideration.

The changing quality of the public sphere in the European context has been the focus of abundant literature in recent years. However, empirical data on public discourse and political communication is largely missing.

To begin with, this paper looks into concepts of the public sphere, starting from Habermas' normative model. After identifying the main points of criticism that are usually brought forward against it, the paper discusses a modified concept in the context of Europe. It then critically assess the characteristics of the Internet as a *new* medium and especially its role and potential as a *news* medium.

Finally there will be an analysis of the changes the Internet and its news media have brought to political communication and the public sphere in Europe. This will be done against the background of the potential offered by the introduction of the new technology.

It is found that the Internet has not been sufficiently made use of considering its potential to extend political communication across existing boundaries and to widen and change public spheres in Europe. This result is based on two findings. Firstly, it is shown that the means to achieve better political communication which the Internet has brought with it have hardly been exploited to date. Secondly, the little empirical data available suggest that the effect of the Internet on the Europeanisation of the public sphere has been modest.