# JOURNALISM, DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

## NORMATIVE ARGUMENTS FROM PUBLIC SPHERE THEORY

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## Abstract

This article addresses theories of deliberative democracy, the public sphere and government communication, and investigates the ways in which government communication might be carried out to strengthen and improve deliberative democracy, within the wider context of journalism. The article begins by undertaking an extended survey of the normative model of the public sphere, as outlined by Jürgen Habermas, and takes account of his later work on the centrality of the deliberative process to the public sphere. In the second half, the article applies Held's conceptions of the role of government communication in the strengthening of deliberative democracy, and attempts to make normative arguments about certain forms of government communication. In doing so, it addresses three areas: the problems with the standing "lobby" system of briefing journalists in the UK; ways in which government communication might be held to greater account in the public sphere; ways in which the improved communication of Parliament might impact upon deliberative democracy.

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## Introduction

The term "deliberative democracy" was first used in 1980 by Joseph Bessette, following the "theoretical critique of liberal democracy and revival of participatory politics gradually developed through the 1970s" (Bohman and Rehg 1997, xii). Despite research on deliberative democracy *per se* being a relatively recent phenomenon, a large body of work has developed in a short space of time. In particular, Dahlgren holds to what we might call the central account of deliberative democracy, arguing that in a debate the "reasons should be made accessible to all concerned; this means not only that they should in some manner be made public, but also be comprehensible" (2009, 87). However, despite so many clear benefits to the model of deliberative democracy, Dahlgren identifies some problems, not wanting to "overload the role we expect deliberation to play in the public sphere" (2009, 88). Bohman and Rehg understand deliberative democracy as being evocative of "rational legislation, participatory politics, and civic self-governance" (1997, ix). Writing individually, Bohman maintains the position that deliberative democracy is a normative conception, to be governed by a set of clear principles: "Deliberation is democratic, to the extent that it is based on a process of reaching reasoned agreement among free and equal citizens. This conception of democratic deliberation also implies a normative ideal of political justification, according to which each citizen's reasons must be given equal concern and consideration for a decision to be legitimate" (1997, 321). Bohman moves to outlining three models of Deliberative democracy, namely: *Pre commitment* (agreeing to "defined public agenda"); *Proceduralist* (which "avoids making overly strong and substantive assumptions about agreement among citizens"); *Dialogical* (in dialogue "many diverse capacities for deliberation are exercised jointly") (1996, 25). Bohman argues that it is the latter model, based on deliberation with "whom we disagree and with others who are not literally present before us" that holds the most weight (1996, 24). Indeed, for Bohman deliberative democracy ought to be "interpersonal" between citizens who are "equally empowered and authorised to participate in decisions that affect their lives together" (1996, 25).

Cohen takes a normative approach in arguing that deliberative democracy involves "a framework of social and institutional conditions that facilitates free discussion among equal citizens – by providing favourable conditions for participation, association and expression" (1997a, 413). He also argues for a four-fold model that states deliberation should be (i) free, (ii) based on reason, (iii) equitable and (iv) have consensus as the overall outcome (1997b, 74). Similarly, Benhabib (1996) is concerned with the normative principles that ought to underpin deliberative democracy. For her, the legitimacy of democratic institutions increases as deliberation improves, stating that this occurs when "decisions are in principle open to appropriate public processes of deliberation by free and equal citizens" (1996, 69). Similarly, Young asserts that the manner in which deliberation occurs is fundamental to the very process of deliberative democracy itself. One of her main problems with much of deliberative democracy theory, is that "Deliberative theorists tend to assume that bracketing political and economic power is sufficient to make speakers equal" (1996, 122). However, she posits that many factors render this bracketing insufficient; economic dependence, political domination, sense of

the right to speak, valuation or devaluation of speech styles, are all factors which might hamper equality.

Like Cohen, Benhabib and Young, Fishkin (2009a) is also concerned with the theoretical underpinnings of deliberative democracy, arguing that people are ill informed, and it is hard to motive people to become informed due to the problem of "rational ignorance." However, Fishkin mobilises the concept through what he calls "deliberative polling" (1995, 2009a, 2009b), a process which results in a combination of "political equality with deliberation" (2009b, 26). This process pioneered by Fishkin himself, follows a simple plan. It involves bringing a large cross-section of a particular constituency together, polling the participants of a range of issues, allowing them to debate, discuss and draw on a range of experts. At the end of the process, the participants are polled again, on the same questions. Fishkin and his team, who partner with democratic civil society groups, have consistently found that views shift considerably following deliberative polling. In October 2007, Fishkin put "Europe in one room" (by bringing together a representative sample from across the EU), the results of which are discussed in *When the People Speak* (2009a, 183-189): he found that there was real commonality in the issues faced by people from all of Europe's states, and increased understanding of the role of the EU. However, such exercises are inevitably expensive, with larger polls costing hundreds of thousands and indeed millions of pounds. However, the benefits to deliberative polling are clear, with Fishkin consistently finding large shifts of opinion from the before to the after. For example, he "found in a referendum in Australia and in a general election in Britain that when a scientific sample became more informed and really discussed the issues, it changed its voting intentions significantly" (2009a, 8).

## Theoretical Underpinnings: The Public Sphere

Whilst deliberative democracy as a term originates from 1980, its theoretical underpinnings can be derived from Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere (Habermas 1989; 1996; 1997). The very notion of improving the quality of democratic decision making based upon debate and consensus is foundational to the Habermasian project. Deliberative democracy can be considered an analogous category of what occurs in the public sphere. In a similar vein to the centre of the normative Habermasian model of the public sphere, "Deliberation can overcome the limitations of private views and enhance the quality of public decision-making for a number of reasons" (Held 2006, 237). Turning to Habermas's model of the public sphere to frame this discussion provides the researcher with a rich intellectual well from which to make normative arguments. Under the terms that Habermas sets out, the public sphere is carved out between the state and the private sphere, and is a domain in which the public may hold the state to account through "rational-critical" debate. However, the public sphere in the UK and in most western mass democracies cannot be recognised according to the conditions by which Habermas lays down for it. Rather it is a poor reflection of the bourgeois model proposed by Habermas in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), an argument that he takes back up later in his later writing (1992, 1996, 2006, 2009). To this end, the public sphere is an *ideal*, rather than a *reality*. Like many other theorists, Manuel Castells (2008) argues for this position, insisting that there is normative value in

using the public sphere as a critical category (see also Garnham 1992; Scannell 2007). Referring to Habermas, Castells suggests "the terms of the political equation he proposed remain a useful intellectual construct – a way of representing the contradictory relationships between the conflictive interests of social actors, the social construction of cultural meaning, and the institutions of the state" (2008, 80).

Habermas argues that the main reasons for the break down in the ideal-type public sphere are the commercialisation of media and the dissipation of public discourse, a historical shift that he calls "refeudalisation" (1989). As media have become more commercialised, they have become more subservient to the market, and have become increasingly less committed to the stimulation of a public discourse. Rather commercialisation has led to an exponential rise in entertainment, and infomercial based content, at the expense of political journalism, current affairs journalism, and investigative reporting (Habermas 2006). Increasingly journalists attempt to understand politics through a lens of celebrity and personality, with party leaders in the UK clambering to be seen as "in touch" with the public. However, at the heart of a properly functioning public sphere is a press which stimulates debate, holds politicians and governments to account, and which functions to facilitate a flow of political information to the public. Based on this information, the public sphere functions as a site for the production of public opinion, which feeds back into the media system through polling, and which impact upon the state through voting.

Using the Habermasian theory of the public sphere to contextualise this article has a certain strong rationale to it, given Habermas's later explicit focus on the role of deliberative democracy in the public sphere. Haas (1999) states that whilst Habermas is seen as one of the key proponents of deliberative democracy, he is accepted into this role somewhat uncritically; for example, in the case of Lambeth calling Habermas the "patron saint" of public journalism. Nevertheless, Habermas significantly informs the genre (Haas 1999, 346-347). Primarily, through the priority given to "deliberation" on political issues, of public value and importance, democratic differences are subject to reason and debate. Akin to how deliberation ought to operate in the Habermasian public sphere, it is through "through the force of better argument" and not through higher economic or social class, or dominance in terms of physical force, that citizens should gain influence (Edgar 2006, 124). The primacy of the theory of deliberative democracy, as constitutive of the Habermasian public sphere, is thus fundamental to its operation. This position is reenforced by Habermas in his some of his later work (2006, 2009).

Habermas suggests that a model of politics based on deliberation "is supposed to generate legitimacy through a procedure of opinion and will-formation that grants: publicity and transparency for the deliberative process; inclusion and equal opportunity for participation and a justified presumption for reasonable outcomes" (2006, 4). Such a deliberative process, he argues, is already built into the everyday forms of communication that we all undertake. In the course of every day, we listen to rational utterances, and weigh up their veracity; we are all interlocuters in the public sphere. On the question of deliberative democracy influencing the political process, Habermas states that this question is very much an empirical one. Drawing on research which shows that deliberation leads to more informed political choices, and less polarised viewpoints, he outlines the clear deliberative model in relation to the public sphere: "There is empirical evidence for an impact of delib-

eration on decision-making processes in national legislatures and in other political institutions as there is for the learning effects of ruminating political conversations among citizens in every-day life" (2006, 10).

To further develop the connection between deliberative democracy and journalism, I want to now address the role that Habermas sees for journalism in relation to the public sphere. Initially outlined and developed extensively in *Structural Transformation in the Public Sphere,* Habermas provides more rigorous and illustrative detail in his later work (1996, 2006). In one conception, Habermas posits that the public sphere is a fluid space: "Just as little does it represent a system; although it permits one to draw internal boundaries, outwardly it is characterised by open, permeable and shifting horizons" (1996, 360). These shifting horizons are in part directed and moved by journalists, who are mostly responsible for "wild flows of messages – news, reports, commentaries, talks, scenes and images, shows and movies with an informative, polemical, educational or entertaining content" (2006, 11-12). Having been fed (often highly mediated) positions on many subjects and issues from politicians, lobbyists, and civil society actors, journalists operating in the *media system,* "produce an elite discourse" (2006, 14-15). Despite much hyperbole surrounding the role of the Internet, Web 2.0 and citizen journalism, this article will proceed on the assertion that it is still the professional media system that holds the centre ground of the public sphere, an assertion that Habermas holds to.

These multiple actors then, with journalists in the media system making up the substantial core, "join in the construction of what we call 'public opinion,' though this singular phrase only refers to the prevailing one among many public opinions" (2006, 14-15). Indeed, in *Between Facts and Norms,* Habermas submits to the by now prevailing position that public spheres, like public *opinions,* are multiple. He argues, "The streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesised in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of totally specified public opinions" (1996, 360).[1]

These public opinions, of course, are not static; rather, they are constantly changing, under the influence of "every-day talk in the informal settings or episodic publics of civil society at least as much as they are by paying attention to print or electronic media" (2006, 11-12). The latter part of this – the differing level of attention that is given to media – is fundamental for three reasons, and illustrative of my central argument. Firstly, the mediatisation of almost every level of society means that the public is largely saturated by media exposure; secondly, given the nature of the refeudalised public sphere, the opportunities for discussion of matters of a substantial political matter are limited, or at any rate, not utilised; thirdly, what opportunities interlocuters do have, are limited by the lack of quality or substantive political material to discuss, given the over-riding focus on "infotainment" and entertainment in most of the mainstream media.

With advanced market liberalisation in the media sector in the UK, few news outlets stand outside of the market. The most major exception is of course the BBC, whilst the *Guardian* newspaper which is operated by a not-for-profit trust, is an anomaly. Thus, according to normative public sphere theory, the ability of the public sphere to operate in the way it normatively *ought to,* is severely diminished. As media outlets have become more commercialised, and have become more subservient to market logic, they have become increasingly less committed

to the stimulation of a public discourse, and to the reporting of political matters of public importance. One of the major implications of this is that the reporting of government policy remains far from the type of detailed reporting that one might expect in a properly functioning public sphere. As governments become subject to diminishing levels of critical publicity, and serious in-depth political analysis, citizens have diminishing access to political information, upon which to base their political decisions. This chimes with John Thompson, who states that "the commercialisation of mass communication progressively destroyed its character as a medium of the public sphere, for the content of newspapers and other products was depoliticised, personalised and sensationalised" (1990, 113).

Writing some four and a half decades after he forwarded his theory of the public sphere, Habermas (2006) remains true to his primacy of the normative value of the public sphere. To Habermas, the contemporary public sphere is in flux. He argues that given the drive for profit that media corporations are subject to under market logic, serious political content that the public sphere requires is margainalised: "Issues of political discourse become assimilated into and absorbed by the modes and contents of entertainment. Besides personalisation, the dramatisation of events, the simplification of complex matters, and the vivid polarisation of conflicts promotes civic privatism and a mood of anti-politics" (2006, 26-27). To compound this situation further, public broadcasting – which does operate with a different logic - is being eroded; its loss, he argues, "would rob us of the centerpiece of deliberative politics" (2006, 27). That political public sphere that does remain, is "dominated by the kind of mediated communication that lacks the defining features of deliberation," with a shortfall in "face-to-face interaction between present participants in a shared practice of collective decision-making" and the "lack of reciprocity between the roles of speakers and addressees in an egalitarian exchange of claims and opinions" (2006, 8-9).

## Normative Arguments from Deliberative Democracy Theory

In his analysis of deliberative democracy, Held takes account of the same shifts in the political process that Habermas takes account of in his "refeudalisation" thesis (Habermas, 1989). Held defines the key objective of deliberative democracy as "the transformation of private preferences via a process of deliberation into positions that can withstand public scrutiny and test" (Held 2006, 237). His conception of deliberative democracy is instructive here as he frames his conception in public sphere terms. In particular, he addresses the role of personality driven politics in a media saturated environment.

Referring to the growing instrumentalism of the political process, he argues: "The policy process has been invaded by opinion polling, focus groups and other marketing tools designed to adjust policy to extant views and interests rather than to explore the principles underpinning policy and to deliberate over policy direction" (2006, 234). Moreover, the public sphere is "undermined by the reliance of elites and parties on opinion poll data, which they are free to interpret and manipulate in their own interests" (2006, 234-235). Encompassing the refeudalisation thesis, we can chart the shift to a public sphere where the public opinion that it generates is harnessed for improved political positioning at the expense of policy development.

The strengthening of links to the spheres of advertising and marketing has become the most prevalent development here, and for a few decades now the influence of advertising executives in politics has been considerable (see Gould 1998).

Following Habermas's theory of the public sphere, Held provides specific normative arguments, which can be used as empirical criteria to determine the degree of effectual realisation of a system of deliberative democracy. According to Held,

- "Sharing information and pooling knowledge, public deliberation can transform individuals' understanding and enhance their grasp of complex problems" (2006, 237);
- "deliberation can expose one sidedness and partiality of certain viewpoints which may fail to represent the interests of the many" (2006, 237);
- "deliberation may enhance collective judgement because it is concerned not just with pooling information and exchanging views, but also with reasoning about these and testing arguments" (2006, 238).

On the first, Held suggests that the deliberative process leads to better informed individuals, where they "may come to understand elements of their situation which they had not appreciated before: for example, aspects of the interrelation of public issues, or some of the consequences of taking particular courses of action, intended or otherwise" (2006, 237). Through the process of sharing information and pooling knowledge, individuals become better placed to make informed, reasoned and rational decisions. On the second, Held suggests "public deliberation can reveal how certain preference formations may be linked to sectional interests" (2006, 237). Thus, deliberative democracy is grounded in the notion that democracy ought to benefit the many, not the few. In this sense, it can be called *egalitarian*, in a similar way that the normative Habermasian public sphere is in principle open to all (Habermas 1997, 105). On the third, arguing for deliberative democracy leads proponents of the theory to "hope to strengthen the legitimacy of democratic procedures and institutions by embracing deliberative elements, elements designed to expand the quality of democratic life and enhance democratic outcomes" (2006, 238). Thus, research on deliberative democracy ought to try to identify where these improvements might be made.

These three points could be conceived of as conditions of deliberative democracy that journalism can help to enable, contingent on a certain type of government communication. On each point, I will recommend how government communication – primarily to journalists – might help bring about these conditions. I will turn to each of Held's points, and will recommend how on the part of government, as they communicate to journalists, the strengthening deliberative democracy might be improved. In one sense, government cannot be responsible in real terms for what is reported. This is a point that Habermas suggests, arguing "even governments do not generally have any control over how the media convey and interpret their messages, or even how political elites or the broader public receive and react to them" (2009, 170). However, government can be responsible at least for the communication that emanates from the various organs of the state, and can ensure that communication is carried out in a way that is conducive to deliberative democracy. In this respect, I will refer to government communication from its central departments, and in the third point, refer to the communication of Parliament, on the

basis that in the UK system it is government that can have massive influence over the affairs of the legislature.

## Public Deliberation and Individuals' Understanding of Complex Problems

With regard to government communication, public deliberation on the affairs of government is a central part of deliberative democracy, and an important underpinning factor of the public sphere. For deliberation to function successfully, the type of communication that comes from government will be formative upon the process. The main way that government shares information and pools knowledge with the public, is through communication that it has with journalists. In the UK, this primarily happens through "the Lobby," the privileged group of journalists that meets with the Prime Minister's Spokesperson twice daily (during the Parliamentary sessions). In 2008 there were 176 members, mostly working for the national broadcast media and newspapers (HL Paper 7 2009, 21). Many smaller news outlets and regional journalists are excluded. The meeting of the lobby is now constitutes an attributable briefing (changed from the previous unattributable policy), but the only access the public and non-lobby journalists have to the proceedings comes in the form of a brief summary posted on the Number Ten website. The Phillis Review in 2004 had reported that "Both government and the media have seen their credibility damaged by the impression that they are involved in a closed, secretive and opaque insider process" (2004, 25). It is perhaps the presence and role of the lobby that probably best underpins this impression. The Lords Communication Report (2009) on Government communication suggested that the standing lobby system of privileging information to certain journalists in a segregated manner, should be abandoned, and that instead media briefings should be available to all online (HL Paper 7 2009, 22).

However, despite this clear recommendation, the lobby system has remained in place. In its response to the report, the government argued:

> The role of the Prime Minister's Spokesperson is fundamentally different to that of the President's spokesperson in the United States where a named and filmed spokesperson is filmed and can handle political questions. The Prime Minister's Spokesperson is a career civil servant who cannot handle political questions. His role is to inform and update the lobby on Government business. (HM Government, 2009)

Whilst there are fundamental differences between the two political systems, concessions ought to be made by the UK government if the system of secrecy is to be abolished. Indeed, the rationale provided for not allowing a civil servant to handle political questions involves evoking a false dichotomy between political and non-political subject matter. To suggest that the Prime Minister's Spokesperson is ever answering questions on the business of government, in a manner devoid of political content, seems a contradiction in terms. Rather, enacting the recommendation to abolish the lobby system may lead to the development and improvement of deliberative democracy. Rather than government information being primarily communicated to an exclusive group of journalists, it could be placed firmly in the public domain. Rather than journalists have a premium on what they report

regarding government, and rather than them having predominance over the way the affairs of government are interpreted, the public would have much wider and better access to government communication.

## Deliberation against One-sidedness and Partiality

In respect of government communication, for one sidedness and partiality of certain viewpoints to be exposed, interlocutors need to be able to rely on factually correct information from government on which to base their deliberations. Whilst information coming from government will only form a part of deliberation within the wider public sphere, a certain type of government information will go a long way to improving deliberation within a public sphere. The obvious implication here is that government ought to thus only communicate in a way that is truthful and accurate. As an *aspiration* this is normatively desirable under the terms of the public sphere; as a *reality* this is practically very difficult to implement, nigh impossible. However, as this article has adopted a methodological framework of normative theory, the underpinning rationale of deliberative democracy, it is beneficial to theorise as to how government might be institutionally required to communicate in an honest and factual manner. Government ought to be absolutely clear and honest about its policies, including who they benefit and who they disadvantage. Discarding spin for positive presentation, welds the government to a manner of communicating which may help restore credibility in government communications, and may help restore the breakdown in trust between politicians, the media and the public. "Honesty" – in relation to government communication – could be seen as improbable concept. However, here I am referring not to subjective notions of honesty, but those which may come from institutional rigour and regulation.

Moving government along a continuum, towards some sense of honesty, may be possible under certain conditions. Turning to the House of Lords report again, it set out a normative standard of how governments ought to communicate, stating: "One of the most important tasks of government is to provide clear, truthful and factual information to citizens. The accurate and impartial communication of information about government polices, activities and services is critical to the democratic process" (HL Paper 7 2009, 7). The regulation of government to ensure that "spinning" information is avoided may be achieved by various forms of regulation, where the establishment of the UK Statistics Authority is perhaps a key example of how this may be achieved. The UK SA, established in April 2008, "is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament […] The Authority's statutory objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and ensure good practice in relation to official statistics" (UK Statistics Authority, 2009). In order to achieve further structural impartiality, and to emphasise it's "arms-length" status, the "budget has been set outside the normal Spending Review process" (UK Statistics Authority 2009).

A body such as the UK SA, occurring in any liberal democracy, can subject government to a rigorous assessment of the information that it communicates. Deliberative democracy, where information that deliberators can better trust and

accept as factual, will accordingly be strengthened. Yet, bodies such as UK SA should not have to burden the regulation of government communication alone. A healthy public sphere, where interlocutors expose actors such as government to "rational criticism," will also be involved in this job. To enable this, government must place as much information in the public domain as possible. Indeed the New Labour government, in March 2010, began to move in this direction by promising to place much more government data in the public domain than was previously the case. The recent setup of data.gov.uk, showed the government's drive in this direction. The website states, "We're very aware that there are more people like you outside of government who have the skills and abilities to make wonderful things out of public data. These are our first steps in building a collaborative relationship with you" (HM Government 2010). Moreover, the employment of Sir Tim Berners-Lee and Professor Nigel Shadbolt, showed the government was clearly trying to improve the relationship between the state and the citizen. Perhaps, unknowingly, it is improving the conditions for deliberative democracy. Moreover, initiatives such as the *Datablog* on the *Guardian* website show clearly the results that this kind of activity can have (Guardian 2010). Users are encouraged to take raw data, investigate and interrogate it, and to submit their findings back to the *Guardian,* often in the form of visualising data.

## Deliberation and Collective Judgement

When making normative arguments on deliberative democracy and the public sphere, it is perhaps the UK Parliament that can be looked upon as an ideal-type model (or microcosm) of how a public sphere can be modeled. Davis (2009) outlined this argument, stating that "as a system, the UK parliament is very much oriented around public sphere ideals in both its institutional formation and the cultural norms and values adopted by the politicians within" (2009, 289). Discussing Parliament as an ideal-type public sphere model is not unproblematic. Clearly, there are many ways in which Parliament does not function well as a public sphere; not least with regards to its problematic nature of not being very representative of the British public. However, it stands as a normatively important model of the public sphere, as one that embodies the formal principles of deliberative democracy. This article will proceed on the contention that deliberative democracy might be strengthened if the affairs of Parliament are better communicated and disseminated. The notion follows that if the public are more commonly exposed to ideal-type deliberation, then deliberation in the wider public sphere may be improved. By this I mean that by exposing the public to the kind of debate that takes place in Parliament, they may encounter a type of debate that is not commonly seen elsewhere in mainstream media.

In many Western democracies, for reasons pertaining to the market liberalisation of the public sphere, the reporting of Parliament has greatly declined. Detailed accounts of debates have all but disappeared from the national press, with some of the only parliamentary reporting focusing on the comic, as seen in the work of the sketch writers. Moreover, ministers commonly speak to the press before a Parliamentary announcement, flouting the clear conventions set out on the matter. There is a need for Parliament to take the initiative on the matter, and to improve its own communication: both to the press and to the public. Given the system of

governance that operates in the UK, with one party usually having a massive working majority, it therefore *de facto* is the responsibility of the government to propose and guide such changes. The *Putnam Commission report* on the UK Parliament, argued that the UK parliaments failure to communicate has lead to widespread misunderstanding of Parliament`s function and its importance (Hansard Society 2005). As Kalitowski argues, "research suggests that most people are not willing to pro-actively seek information about Parliament and are almost totally reliant on what they see on television or read in the newspapers for information" (Kalitowski 2008, 11). Here government can be influential. For example, enacting recommendations that follow those set out by the Putnam commission would be exemplary of this. The commission's recommendations suggested that "all of Parliament`s communication with the public" be driven by the following five principles: "Accessibility and Transparency"; "Participation and Responsiveness"; "Accountability with the Public"; "Inclusiveness"; "A model of good practice in management and communication" (Hansard Society 2005). These five principles may also be extended to communication with journalists, with one way that these may be enacted being through broadcasting policies and legislation. In the UK, the government can be hugely influential on the content Public Service Broadcasting, through the enacting of legislation. Mandating that Parliament is extensively covered by broadcast media, can be massively influential over the extent to which the operations of a parliament are exposed to the public.

In the UK, the establishment of the BBC Parliament channel is representative of this. Moreover, the recently launched *Democracy Live* website is a perfect example of how PSBs can deliver content in the public sphere that would simply be untenable under the market model. Launching in November 2009, *Democracy Live* offers coverage of the House of Commons, House of Lords, Welsh Assembly, Northern Ireland Assembly, Scottish Parliament and the European Parliament. Also, footage from select committees from in the Houses of Parliament is carried. Moreover, as all content is searchable, *Democracy Live* thematises footage across its archive. For example, a user may follow attention that the issue of "housing" gets in the elected institutions, and view debates that have taken place on this theme. Indeed, what the website offers the user is essentially unrivaled in terms of what the market could deliver, or indeed what parliament itself could deliver. This takes us to a position where the role of Public Service Broadcasting is integral to the communication of parliament, and in doing so, the strengthening of the public sphere. PSBs, through their vast resources – technical and financial – can offer a strategic and comprehensive way to communicate parliament.

Given the (supposedly) egalitarian nature of public service broadcasting, it is open – as in the Habermasian principle – to all people. Through the communication of the affairs of parliament, in a largely unmediated manner, the debates that occur in the legislature can be exposed to deliberation in the public sphere. There may of course be room for greater development and improvement. For example, carrying BBC parliament on DAB radio (as once was the case) would open it up to an even wider audience, and make it accessible in the places where one can listen to the radio when television viewing is not possible. Furthermore, could BBC Parliament become like *Democracy Live*, where multi-screen technology would facilitate its multiple streams? However, as there is still much digital exclusion online, the

BBC must be careful to not develop online ahead of what it develops offline, on television and radio. Consequently, government should mandate to Public Service Consequently, government should mandate to Public Service Broadcasters (the BBC) that parliament be extensively communicated through television, radio and the Internet. As the reasoning and testing of arguments takes place in parliament, with this process widely communicated in the public sphere, then the conditions of deliberative democracy may be enhanced, with the public better equipped to reach collective judgement.

## Conclusions: Furthering the Research to Take Account of the Case of Online Deliberation

When we consider journalism, government communication, deliberative democracy and the public sphere, the role of the Internet becomes an unavoidable question. Indeed, we can see a broad narrative in recent literature which takes these themes into account, and by weaving them together attempts to deal with the issue of the internet, online public spheres and online deliberative democracy. Habermas has himself dealt with this issue, arguing largely against the existence of public spheres online, at least judged against the standards that he sets out in his normative model (discussed extensively above). Stating that the Internet reintroduces "deliberative elements in electronic communication," and "has certainly reactivated the grass-roots of an egalitarian public of writers and readers," he argues that it can only really further the democratic cause through its ability to undermine censorship in countries where this is readily applied to the media (Habermas 2006, 9). Rather, as the Internet usually is colonised by single or special interest groups, insularly focused, and not commonly focused on the advancement of public good, the Internet's role in strengthening the public sphere is limited. Moreover, "The Web provides the hardware for the delocalisation of an intensified and accelerated mode of communication, but it can itself do nothing to stem the centrifugal tendencies" (2009, 158).

For Fishkin, the internet offers a means of carrying out deliberative polling, but at a reduced cost: "Eventually, Deliberative Polling on the Internet promises great advantages in terms of cost and in terms of flexibility in the time required of participants […] Internet-based Deliberative Polls offer the promise of greater convenience and continuing dialogue" (Fishkin 2009a, 29). However given the *digital divide*, whereby many remain without online access, deliberative polling online is currently problematic. However, he concedes that if this issue was overcome, online polling "may eventually surpass the face-to-face process. One can only answer this question through further empirical work" (Fishkin 2009a, 31). Moreover, Dahlberg (2001), Blumler and Coleman (2001) and Street and Wright (2007), attempt to come to terms with issues of government involvement and provision, and issues of design in the deliberative process online. Dahlberg argues that whilst some government initiatives globally try to institute deliberative models online, they very often are reduced to simply following *liberal-individualist* ideals. Moreover, even if governments were to offer deliberatively based online forums, there remains a "need for public deliberations independent of administrative power," an argument which follows the classical Habermasian position that the public sphere should normatively exist outside of the control and reach of the state (Dahlberg 2001, 621).

Blumler and Coleman take a similar position when they recommend "the creation of a new organisation, publicly funded but independent from government, to encourage and report upon a wide range of exercises in electronic democracy. Its remit would be "to foster new forms of public involvement in civic affairs through interactive and other appropriate means" (Blumler and Coleman 2001, 4). Viewing this in rational terms, they state "At best, the new media can be said to have a vulnerable potential to improve public communications. If they are to be a force for democracy, a policy intervention is required that is both visionary and practical" (Blumler and Coleman 2001, 4). Finally, Street and Wright see the issue in terms of design in relation to online deliberative spaces, suggesting that it is "how discussion is organised within the medium of communication helps to determine whether or not the result will be deliberation or cacophony" (Street and Wright 2007, 850).

This article has contended that the normative theory of the public sphere offers a sound position from which to make arguments on deliberative democracy, government communication and journalism. It has shown that a certain type of government communication – independently regulated – to journalists and to the public, might strengthen deliberative democracy within the public sphere. By addressing government communication under the categories of the pooling of knowledge, exposing one sidedness, and the enhancement of collective judgement, normative arguments can be made for a certain type of government communication. The twin theories of deliberative democracy and the Habermasian model of the public sphere allow for the making of arguments that could have tangible impacts upon government communication in the future. With regards to the UK, I have shown that some recent initiatives and developments in government communication have begun to move towards a position whereby – within the framework of this argument – deliberative democracy might begin to be improved. Whilst these arguments primarily relate to the UK, they are also generalisable into other western liberal democratic settings. They may not be relevant elsewhere, as many other countries already have made significant improvements in this area. However, the normative principles on government communication that we can draw from public sphere theory, with respect to deliberative democracy, have importance that means they ought to apply in multiple settings.

## Notes:

1. Habermas (1992) accepted that the public sphere was best conceptualised in the plural. Moreover, in Between Facts and Norms he argued that the public sphere "branches out into a multitude of overlapping international, national, regional, local and subcultural arenas" (Habermas 1996, 373). Positing the existence of literary, religious and feminist spheres for example, Habermas states that these make up a panoply of "abstract public sphere[s] of isolated readers, listeners and viewers scattered across large geographic areas, or even around the globe, and brought together only through the mass media" (1996, 374).

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