Can women benefit from cyberspace as a public space?

Mehri Shahzeidi
Elahe Shabani
Luke Younghooon Chang
Myeong-Cheol Park

Ishfahan University & KAIST
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Introduction

- From a socio-cultural perspective, public spaces are places of interaction and communication.

- Public space is part of the public sphere and shares a significant role in:
  - establishment of civil society
  - developing citizenship
  - increasing social inclusion

- Women are a disadvantaged group in terms of public space.

- Similar to public space, cyberspace provides a place of interaction and communication.

- Cyberspace offers new forms of communication that potentially enable women to break through their often isolated social situation.
Purpose of the research

- In this study we have assessed cyberspace’s potential in compensating women’s disadvantages in public spaces.

- We try to figure out:
  - Women’s motivation in using cyberspace
  - Cyberspace and public space’s aspects that women are more prosperous at them
  - The role of cyberspace in increasing social inclusion
Research Methodology

- Qualitative based research

- **Data collecting technique:** semi-structured interview (carried out between January 2012 and March 2013)

- **Sampling method:** theoretical sampling method

- **Sample size:** 38 women, aged between 15 – 33, physical access to internet at home, at least use one of items including: social network sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter), e-mail, Yahoo Messenger, Google Talk, Skype, and OOVOO.

- **Method of analyzing data:** thematic coding
Table: Extracted categories from interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limitation in access to public spaces</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place-time limitation</td>
<td>Going to remote place. Leaving home at noon or at late night. Having friends in remote place.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Normative limitation</td>
<td>Limitation in communicating with men. Social norm about women behaviors.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Insecurity and distrust feeling</td>
<td>Concerns about to be judged, visibility, accessibility, strangers, and harassment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family limitation</td>
<td>Forcing Hijjab. Wifehood and motherhood duties. Controlling girls in terms of their relationships and their presence in public spaces.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government limitation</td>
<td>Moral police. Segregate place based on gender.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-interactive public space</td>
<td>Lack of place for getting acquainted with new people, creating groups, and access to people with common concerns.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of virtual communication</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Getting acquainted with new people, diverse people, and people with common concerns.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Group membership. Creating new groups. Group activities. Searching favorite groups.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to good listener</td>
<td>Access to different people with different ideas and attitudes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely feeling</td>
<td>Access to ones for confabulating and consulting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>Feelings of closeness, sympathy, membership, similarity.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Findings

Women cannot benefit fully from cyberspace because of:

- Ruining the trust between men and women
- Purpose of connecting with opposite sex
- Experiencing public space and cyberspace indirectly

- Lacking social trust and insecurity feeling
- Non beneficial interactions that mostly oriented to sexual matters
- Exacerbating insecurity feeling

- Mending the lost social trust between men and women
- Diminishing normative and government limitation around women and men relationship
- Motivating to experience real world and virtual world directly
Findings

- Connecting public space with cyberspace is the most fruitful way to proliferate the advantages of each because these two spaces can:
  - compensating the disadvantages of the other and mutually develop
  - transforming into more creative places by increasing social capital
  - decreasing lack of interest and insecurity feeling.

- Those who have high access to cyberspace intend to connect their social and virtual lives more than others.

- It appears that for motivating women to connect their social and virtual lives decision makers should concentrate on:
  - ICT regulation
  - bridging digital divide
  - respecting people’s privacy
  - stopping sites blocking
Findings

- **Women do not add new ones and new potential to their social networks as a consequence of:**
  - lack of trust
  - insecurity feelings
  - lack of interest toward virtual communication

- students or employees are more active in starting a new relationship specially in educational and occupational context.

- women with no involvement in educational and occupational work and limited access to public space search for personal, emotional, and sexual relationship in cyberspace.

- Involving women in social and cultural activity (e.g. NGOs, charity foundations), make them more prosperous in cyberspace.
Findings

- Women who do not feel safe or do not participate in group activity in public space behave almost in the same manner in cyberspace.

- Those who are disadvantage in public space usually are not advantage in cyberspace.

- There is no place for practicing democracy. People in cyberspace hence cannot behave in a democratic manner.

- It seems that empowering women to be more active and creative citizen lead to their prosperity in cyberspace.
Thank you
Q&A

Mehri Shahzeidi
mehrishahzeidi@gmail.com

Elahe Shabani
elaheshabani@ut.ac.ir

Luke Younghoon Chang
younghoonchang@kaist.ac.kr