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From Habermas Model to New Public Sphere: A Paradigm Shift

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From Habermas Model to New Public Sphere: A Paradigm Shift

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Abstract - Though Habermas model of public sphere was framed for describing the public and sphere at the state-level however, its principles and mechanisms are postulated as relevant to the theory and practices of global public sphere (GPS) and global civil society (GCS). The emerging digital technologies and particularly global connectivity through Internet and social networking have added new dimensions to the existing GPS thereby generating a new public sphere (NPS). The determinants of NPS like globalization, social software etc. do not seem to stand against the Habermas view of public sphere rather stand supportive and enhancing to the principles and requirements of an ideal public sphere both at the national and global levels. This paper unfolds this issue at length by juxtaposing the research findings from the existing research.

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I. INTRODUCTION

By the public sphere we mean a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed with access for all citizens (Habermas, 1974: 49). The term 'public' refers to ideas of citizenship, commonality, and things not private, but accessible and observable by all (Papacharissi, 2002). The public sphere is a vital component of sociopolitical organization. It is the space where people come together as citizens and articulate their independent views to influence the political institutions of society. Civil society is the organized manifestation of these views and the relationship between the state and civil society is the cornerstone of democracy. Without an effective civil society capable enough to structure and channelize citizen debates over diverse ideas and conflicting interests, the state drifts away from its subjects (Castells, 2008).

Citizens act as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion-that is, with the guarantee of freedom to assemble and associate and the freedom to express and publish their opinions about matters of general interest. This kind of communication in a large public body requires specific means for transmitting

information and influencing those who receive it (Habermas, 1974: 49). Between the state and society lies the public sphere, "a network for communicating information and points of view" (Habermas 1996: 360). The interaction between citizens, civil society, and the state, communicated through the public sphere ensures that the balance between stability and social change is maintained in the conduct of public affairs (McChesney 2007).

Carey argues that the privatizing forces of capitalism have shaped a mass commercial culture that has replaced the public sphere. Although he recognized that an ideal public sphere may never have existed, he called for the revival of public life, as a means of protecting independent cultural and social life and resisting the limits of corporate governance and politics (Carey, 1995). The commercialisation of the public sphere, the contribution of cultural manufactures including advertising and public relations, Habermas argues, have manifested in refeudalization of the public sphere where the public are once again reduced to the status of spectator, and expert opinion has replaced 'true' public opinion (Ubayasiri, 2006). Habermas recounts how the potential for critical discourse was drastically curtailed by the triumph of corporate capitalism, the manipulation of public opinion by the advertising industry, and the rise of a passive consumption mentality amongst the masses (Crack, 2007).

Several critics idealize the public sphere and think back on it as something that existed long ago, but eroded with the advent of modern, industrial society. Sensing the demise of the great public, Habermas traced the development of the public sphere in the 17th and 18th century and its decline in the 20th century. He saw the public sphere as a realm of our social life in which public opinion could be formed out of rational public debate (Habermas, 1991[1973]). Such informed and logical discussion, according to Habermas, could facilitate public agreement and decision making, thus representing the best of the democratic tradition (Papacharissi, 2002). If citizens, civil society, or the state fail to meet the demands of this interaction, or if the means of communication between two or more of the key components of the process are blocked, the whole system of representation and decision making comes to a deadlock (McChesney 2007).

However, the internet does offer numerous avenues for political expression and several ways to

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influence politics and become politically active (Jones, 1997; Rash, 1997; Bowen, 1996; Grossman, 1995). Some emphasize that the technological potential for global communication does not guarantee that people from different cultural backgrounds will also be more understanding of each other, and they cite several examples of miscommunication (Hill & Hughes, 1998). Similarly, access to the internet does not guarantee enlightened political discourse. Moving political discussion to online virtual space excludes those with no access to this space. Moreover, connectivity alone does not ensure a more representative and vigorous public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002).

II. HABERMAS MODEL OF PUBLIC SPHERE

The public sphere mediates between society and state where public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion that accords with the principle of public information which once had to be fought for against the monarchies and which made it possible to exercise democratic control of state activities (Habermas, 1974:50). Thus, public sphere lies between the state and society in the form of a network to exchange information and viewpoints (Habermas 1996, 360). It should however, be noted that much of the earlier theories about public sphere has tacitly assumed a nation-state frame (Fraser, 2005). This public sphere occupies both the physical as well as the virtual space of media. The press is autonomous from the state, has a diverse ownership, and reflects a wide range of views (McChesney 2007).

The structural preconditions for the Habermas model of public sphere were:

First, media institutions are the foundation of the public sphere as these provide information and forums for public dialogue. The national press carried the public views across the state (Habermas, 1974). Second, an addressee of public debate in the shape of sovereign state was essential. Public opinion provided an instrument for making the state accountable and responsive (Crack, 2007). Third, a vibrant civil society was imperative to guide the public debate (Castells, 2008).

The Habermas public sphere was an effort to provide the bases for a new form of civic engagement, for example, the debates was free and open to all as equals, irrespective of their social status. Participants strived to make debate intelligible to others; and when interrogated, provided reasoned justification for their opinions. There is a national communications network and a national media, with a citizenry having common interests (Papacharissi, 2002). Indeed, the association between the state and the public sphere has been so close that it has seemed natural. The state provided institutional foundations for domestic public spheres due to the reason: public discourse was hosted by print

media that had a mainly national circulation; as a sovereign body, the state symbolised an obvious addressee of public deliberation amongst those subject to its authority; and the shared citizenship of deliberators provided a rationale for all to uphold the basic norms of publicity in discourse. (Crack, 2007)

III. THE NEW PUBLIC SPHERE

The contemporary information society and knowledge industries are characterized with the removal of all the temporal and spatial barriers to distanced communication with the help of information communication technologies (ICTs). A structural precondition of transnational public spheres is communicative networks to enable broad participation across state borders. This prerequisite has already been met in terms of material capability. The technologies of the networked society do not just extend previous communication media, but are qualitatively different in terms of structure, speed, and scope (Crack, 2007). The new public sphere is emerging out of the digital gadgets starting from a 'computer' then connecting them into 'Network', which started within a building, then cities, states and finally 'global-networks' came up with the gadget of 'Internet', a global platform giving every citizen an opportunity to become an 'international-citizen' (Chan & Lee, 2007). This platform offers global discussion and dialogue opportunities on non-stop basis (Nawaz, 2010).

The public sphere that was once, anchored around the national institutions of territorially bound societies has shifted to a public sphere constituted around the media system (Volkmer 1999; El-Nawawy & Iskander 2002; Paterson and Sreberny 2004). This media system includes mass self-communication, that is, networks of communication that connect many-to-many in the sending and receiving of messages in a multimodal shape of communication that can bypass mass media and often escape government control (Castells 2007). As the communications landscape gets denser, more complex, and participatory, the networked population is acquiring greater access to information, more opportunities and facilities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action (Shirky, 2011).

One can observe an increasing number of liberal individualist online initiatives that promote the use of the Internet to enable the individuals to access a plethora of political information and express their views directly to elected representatives (Dahlberg, 2001:618). Anonymity online helps one to overcome identity limitations and communicate more freely and openly, thus encouraging a more enlightened exchange of ideas (Papacharissi, 2002). Since the advent of the Internet in the early 1990s, the world's networked population has risen from the low millions to the low billions. Over the

same period, social media have become a fact of life for civil society worldwide that now involves many actors, ranging from regular citizens, activists, nongovernmental organizations, to businesses, market brokers, telecommunications firms, software providers, and of course, governments (Shirky, 2011).

There is extensive civil society-based deliberation in cyber space. Besides online discussion forums, there is an enormous amount of web publishing being undertaken by individuals and civil society organizations that facilitate public deliberation. There are thousands of civic activist groups that use the Internet to draw attention to particular issues to spark deliberation at local, national and global levels. This extension of the public sphere can be observed from how web publications and online dialogue have stirred debate and protests over capitalist globalization. (Dahlberg, 2001:621-22). Similarly worldwide demonstrations against Iraq war in 2003 were primarily organized using ICTs (Hara & Shachaf, 2008). Business, public organizations, and cultural groups are using this virtual environment for conferencing, public meetings, delivering informational services, and performances or exhibits (Messinger et al. 2008)

IV. DETERMINANTS OF NEW PUBLIC SPHERE

Cyberspace is delineated as a 'new public space' made by people and 'conjoining traditional mythic narratives of progress with strong modern impulses toward self-fulfillment and personal development' (Jones, 1997:22). Cyberspace is public as well as private space. This character of cyber space attracts those who want to reinvent their private and public lives. Cyberspace offers a new terrain for the playing out of the centuries old friction between personal and collective identity; the individual and community (Papacharissi, 2002). The reason for this optimism is that good Internet skills, independent of level of education, may actually serve as a predictor of online political actions (Min, 2010).

Media became a vital component of the public sphere in the industrial society (Thompson, 2000). If communication networks are supposed to form the public sphere, then our society, the network society, is more competent than any other historical form of organization, to organize its public sphere on the basis of global media communication networks (Cardoso 2006; Lull 2007; Chester 2007). In the digital era, global media includes the diversity of both the mass media and Internet and wireless communication networks (McChesney 2007). It should however be noted that mass media alone do not change people's minds. Media transmits opinions, and then they get resonated by friends, family members, and colleagues. It is the later social step in which political opinions are shaped

(Katz & Lazarsfeld, 2005). The Internet in general and social media in particular, can make a difference in this second step of opinion formation (Shirky, 2011).

The network society is characterized by a trend towards individualization, social fragmentation and new forms of mediated community. The logic of networked organization is horizontally differentiated and polycentric. The old cohesive hierarchies are substituted by a huge number of strategically significant 'nodes' in the network, which can cooperate and conflict with one another. Network structures traverse all spheres of society, including politics, government, the economy, technology, and the community (Van Dijk, 2006). These processes disrupt the conventional understandings of space, borders, and territory, and influence the institutional foundations of public sphere deliberation (Crack, 2007). A recent multi-country study shows that social networking is generally more common in higher income nations because wealthier countries have higher rates of internet access. However, people in lower income nations use social networking at rates that are as high as found in rich states (Pew, 2011).

Long ago it became clear that acquiring and dispersing political communication online is fast, easy, cheap, and convenient (Abramson et al., 1988). The structural conditions of nation-state based public spheres are being supplemented by transnational networks that offer the structural potential for extended forms of publicity. 'These are threefold: communicative networks, governmental networks, and activist networks' (Crack, 2007). As in the case of Habermasian model, media should be free from state and market influence; governance organizations should be accountable and receptive to public opinion; and civil society institutions should observe basic norms of deliberation (Habermas, 1974). If there is a convergence of these conditions around a given issue area, then transnational networks could facilitate meaningful critical dialogue (Shirky, 2011; Min, 2010; Crack, 2007).

a) ICTS

ICT refers to computers, software, networks, satellite links and related systems that enable people to access, analyze, create, exchange and use data, information, and knowledge in ways that, were almost unimaginable hitherto. ICT is used almost interchangeably with the Internet (Beebe, 2004). It is better to comprehend ICT in perspective of creating a new set of relationships and places, agora rather than as a high-tech tool. It is one more global field in which struggles over the distribution of power, resources and information will be fought out (Van Dijk, 2006). The Internet is a unique matrix of networks which is based on a 'many-to-many' model of information distribution, as opposed to the 'one-to-many' structure of mass media (Crack, 2007).

New technologies provide information and tools

that have the potential to extend the role of the public in the social and political arena. The mushroom growth of online political groups and activism certainly depict political uses of the internet (Bowen, 1996; Browning, 1996). The internet and related technologies due to their nature can augment avenues for personal expression and foster citizen activity (e.g. Kling, 1996; Negroponte, 1998). The Internet and wireless communication, by enacting a global, horizontal network of communication, offer both an organizing tool and a means for debate, dialogue, and collective decision making (Castells, 2008).

Modern communication technologies easily merge into each other to enhance connectivity and raise accessibility (Kleinberg, 2008; Fidler, 1997). For example, cell phones are owned by overwhelmingly large majorities of people in most major countries around the world, and they are used for multiple purposes beyond just phone calls. A recent multi-country study shows that text messaging is a global phenomenon – across the 21 countries surveyed, a median of 75% of cell phone owners say they text (Pew, 2011). Blogs and networking sites represent the most popular online category across the world when ranked by average time spent, followed by online games and instant messaging (Molinari & Porquier, 2011).

b) *Networking*

A digital network consists of two or more computers that are linked in order to share resources (such as scanners, printers and CDs), exchange files, or allow electronic communications. The computers on a network are linked through cables, telephone lines, radio waves, satellites, or infrared light beams (Winkelman, 1998). The Internet is the world's largest, most powerful computer network (Manochehr, 2007). Networked computers have the potential to expand the scale of the worlds beyond our imagination (Bell, 2008).

Digital social networks refer to social networks primarily realised by means of computer-mediated communication (Licklider et al., 1968). The first instance of a social networking platform was SixDegrees.com, launched in 1997 (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Most appropriate to the global setting, networks are capable of structuring social relationships without constraint of place or the need for co-presence (Axford, 2004). Most social software research focuses on the relations between social entities in digital social networks and their interaction, while community information systems contain and group social entities (Klamma et al., 2007). Social networking sites used to publicize political agendas can influence voters' behavior (Molinari & Porquier, 2011). This role of social media has been witnessed in several election campaigns in the last few years (Anduiza, 2009; Stirland, 2008; Hachigian & Wu, 2003).

c) *Social Software*

'Social-software' is that specie of software which helps conduct social activities and socializing process at any temporal level including the international communications. This results in the establishment of a 'new environment' of global interaction, which has both positive and negative aftereffects for the international community (Oblak, 2002). The social software has shaped and stimulated 'new public sphere' as a backdrop of global communications for the novel 'global society' which never existed in a form that every member of this society can instantly interact with another member beyond the traditional limits of time and space (Bell, 2008).

The term 'social software' encompasses a wide range of different technologies, along with the social aspect of these technologies that often emerges from an integrated use of different technologies. Commonly used social software includes weblogs, wikis, RSS feeds and social bookmarking (Dalsgaard, 2006). Similarly, the social network sites (SNSs) are the web-based services that allow individuals to: create a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system; articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection; and view and pass through their connections and those made by others within the system however, the nature and labels of these links vary from site to site (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

What makes SNSs distinctive is not that they help individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they allow users to articulate and make visible their social networks. This can lead to interactions between individuals that would not otherwise be possible, but that is often not the goal, and these meetings are frequently between those who share some offline connection (Haythornthwaite, 2005). Social media can reduce the costs of coordination and can compensate for the disadvantages of undisciplined groups. As a result, it is now possible for larger, looser groups to take on some kinds of coordinated action, such as protest movements and public media campaigns that were previously reserved for formal organizations (Shirky, 2011).

Beyond common features like profiles, Friends, comments, and private messaging, SNSs vary greatly in their services and user base. Some have photo or video-sharing capabilities; others have integrated blogging and instant messaging technology. Mobile-specific SNSs have also been launched (e.g., Dodgeball), and some web-based SNSs also support limited mobile interactions (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, & Cyworld) (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). It is better to think about social media as a long-term tool that can strengthen civil society and the public sphere. This may be called the "environmental" view in contrast to the instrumental view of Internet freedom. According to this idea, positive

political changes in the life of a country, including pro-democratic regime change, follow, rather than precede, the development of a strong public sphere (Shirky, 2011).

d) *Blogs*

The blogs are a class of social software often used in organizations for social networking (Kumar et al., 2004). For example, Weblogs support independent and individual presentation (Dalsgaard, 2006). The term 'Blog' is a short form of 'Weblog' and can be most appropriately described as an online journal (Drexler et al., 2007). The act of 'Blogging' is the creation of such logs. For some businesses, the 'real' news is not just a ticker-tape-like news feed from Reuters or the BBC. In business, the most important news is what you and those you care about, did yesterday, are doing today, and plan to do tomorrow (Klamma et al., 2007). Likewise, the comment feature of blogs provides the opportunity for feedback from anyone in the world creating limitless collaborative options. The political use of the blogging phenomenon is one of the outstanding indicators of the impact that the e-communication is having on the political arena (Kahn & Kellner, 2004; Kevin, 2007). In sum, they are potentially powerful collaborative tools (Drexler et al., 2007).

e) *Globalization*

ICTs are the creator and booster of globalization which is the process that constitutes a social system with the capacity to work as a unit on a planetary scale in real or chosen time. Capacity here refers to technological, institutional (deregulation, liberalization, & privatization), and organizational capacity (networking as a form of structuring of activity) (Held et al. 1999; Giddens & Hutton 2000; Held & McGrew 2007). These processes have shifted the debate from the national domain to the global debate and prompted the emergence of a global civil society and of ad hoc forms of global governance. Consequently, the public sphere as the space of debate on public issues has also shifted from the national to the global level (Castells, 2008).

What is being witnessed in this global age is not the end of politics but rather its relocation elsewhere (Toffler, 1991). The national/international dualism no more defines the structure of opportunities for political action instead it is now located in the "global" arena. Global politics have transformed into global domestic politics, which rob national politics of their boundaries and foundations (Beck, 2006: 249). The increasing inability of nation-states to face and control the processes of globalization of the issues that are the object of their governance leads to ad hoc forms of global governance and, eventually, to a new form of state (Waters, 2001; Holton, 1998; Hirst & Thompson, 1996). However nation states, despite their multidimensional crisis, do not disappear, instead they

transform themselves to adjust to the new context. Their transformation is what really transforms the contemporary landscape of politics and policy making (Castells, 2008).

Moreover, a number of contemporary issues are global in their nature and in their treatment (Jacquet et al., 2002). Among these problems, the most prominent is global warming which is characterized by the damage caused due to unsustainable development. Such issues require global policies to be observed across the globe (Grundmann, 2001). This again reiterates the nation state inabilities. It is however obvious that not everything or everyone is globalized, but the global networks that structure the planet affects everything and everyone. The obvious reason for this phenomenon is that all the core economic, communicative, and cultural activities are globalized (Castells, 2008).

V. DISCUSSIONS

Research shows that exchange within many deliberative forums fails to approximate the other requirements of Habermas model in various ways. First, reflexivity is often just a nominal part of online deliberations. Second, many online forums fail to attain a reasonable level of respectful listening or commitment to working with difference. Third, it is difficult to validate identity claims and information put forward. Fourth, certain individuals and groups tend to dominate the discourse both quantitatively and qualitatively. Fifth, existing social inequalities lead to extensive exclusions from online forums. Finally, the growth of economic interests into areas of online life is resulting in the displacement of rational deliberation by instrumental rationality in many online forums (Dahlberg, 2001:623). However, it is argued that conventional public sphere theory is inappropriate to evaluate the import of cross-border communicative flows, since it takes for granted an alliance between political territory and the circulation of dialogue. Moreover in the mass society, this relationship seemed so close that some have made the flawed extrapolation that public spheres require a physical locale (Crack, 2007).

Furthermore, Habermas noted that while granting free access has never compelled every member of the community to participate. Similarly the online public spheres cannot expect all users of the web to engage in meaningful dialogue (Ubayasiri, 2006). In any case the world is being progressively restructured by a complex web of social relations and the suffusion of media infrastructure in daily life. Mass society is being transitioned to a network society. Social and media networks are shaping its prime mode of organization and most important structures at all (van Dijk, 2006).

Despite the enthusiasm regarding the innovative uses of the internet as a public medium, it is still a medium invented in a capitalist era. It is an essential part of a social and political world (Jones,

1997). The Internet has to some extent been developed, monitored and regulated by government. Nor are online interactions free of corporate power. The Internet is now mainly developed and controlled by commercial interests and online commerce dominates the Web. As such it is vulnerable to the same forces that originally transformed the public sphere. The same forces defined the character of radio and television, media once admired for providing innovative ways of communication (Papacharissi, 2002). However, a huge amount of cyber-discourse takes place relatively autonomous from state and economic affairs (Dahlberg, 2001:617). The anonymity of the authors over the internet and the arguable tendency towards mass tyranny, seemingly dent the very foundation of the public sphere, and its ability to produce positive public opinion. The need for 'control' would then arguably challenge the very freedoms accorded by the internet and the public sphere (Ubayasiri, 2006).

However, the internet will open the door to a cultural and political renaissance, despite the fact that large corporations will take up a fraction of it to launch their cyberventures. It has the capacity to trigger a cascade of changes (McChesney, 1995). Many studies have shown how citizens utilize computers and the Internet for enhanced political and democratic initiatives. But for the so-called cyber pessimists, the Internet is nothing but a digital replica of the real world where one observes politics as usual (Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Wilhelm, 2000). Virtuality has been a vital feature of the public sphere in most of its historical manifestations: which means that discourse has been conducted at a distance (Warner, 2002). Therefore there is no a priori reason why computer mediated communication should be incompatible with critical publicity (Crack, 2007).

national press. However, modern communication technologies along with the processes of globalization are shaping new public sphere.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

It seems inappropriate to compare the public sphere of 21st century with the public sphere of 18th century. The ICTs are rapidly transforming all the societal, political and economic aspects of life. There has been a paradigm shift mainly realized through technologies. However, the Internet itself can not turn on some fundamentally new age of political participation and grassroots democracy (Hill and Hughes, 1998). ICTs can certainly help connect, motivate, and organize dissent. Whether the expression of dissent is strong enough to bring social change is a question of human agency. New technologies provide additional tools, but they cannot all alone alter a political and economic system that has existed for centuries (Papacharissi, 2002).

Furthermore, the so-called 'digital divide' is also evident within states as well as between them. Country-specific studies have proved that the pattern of marginalisation correlates with groups that experience broader disadvantages, such as women, ethnic minorities, ruralists, and the poorly educated (Norris, 2001:77–86). The 'Information Age' sounds like an unsuitable misnomer when it comes to mind that a person in a developed country is 22 times more likely to be an Internet user than someone in a developing country (UNCTAD, 2006, p. xi). However, if socio-economic factors creating 'digital divide' mark new public sphere as undemocratic then it is ironic to note that Habermas public sphere, the pinnacle of democracy was also rather undemocratic in its structure throughout the centuries, by not including women or people from lower social classes (Papacharissi, 2002).

The network society causes the temporal-spatial boundaries of public spheres to be increasingly fluid (Castells, 2001a). A favorable confluence of communication networks, governance networks, and activist networks, may facilitate the emergence transnational public spheres around certain issue-areas. The balance of problems versus prospects for the expansion of critical publicity will vary vastly depending on the subject and social movement concerned. However, it is evident that there are certain constraints to the further consolidation of transnational public spheres and these must be addressed to materialize the revival and transformation of public sphere (Crack, 2007). Recent research is more focused on the "second-level" digital divide which is a divide that concerns "multiple layers of access and use" of ICTs (Castells, 2008). Such research proposes that individuals have a variety of ways to access and use ICTs. These multiple layers of access and use are

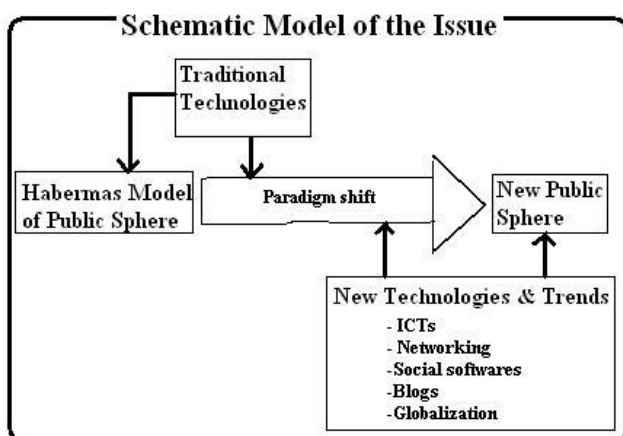


Figure 1: Theoretical Model of the Issue.

Figure 1 is the schematic presentation of the issue discussed across the paper containing all the critical factors and their interrelationships to portray the whole story with a holistic view. Habermas public sphere was anchored around traditional media primarily

determined by a variety of factors that including, not only socioeconomic and demographic factors, but also physical, psychological, cultural, and ecological factors (Min, 2010).

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