Dialogue vs Deliberation: A Case of Discussions on Social Media

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Abstract

In the article relationship between the concepts of dialogue and deliberation, in particular online deliberation, is considered in the context of the concept of deliberative democracy and the theory of communicative action of J. Habermas; online discussions on the topic of D. Trump's second impeachment in the social networks of American media are analyzed by such parameters of the deliberative standard for assessing the quality of discourse as dialogicity and the degree of dialogue.

Keywords

Deliberative democracy, deliberation, online deliberation, dialogue, social media

1. Introduction

The growing importance of political communication on the Internet inevitably causes fundamental changes in traditional public communication [1]. Since the 1990s researchers have begun to study in more detail the role of the Internet, information and communication technologies in discussing political problems and making decisions on certain political issues [1, 2, 3, 4]. Research works in the field of political science, communication studies, sociology started focusing on the impact of Internet access on voting [5], the use of websites as a way to reach voters [6, 7], the role of the Internet as a means of political communication during election campaigns [8, 9], the study of the prospects for digital democracy and the role of new media [10, 11, 12, 13].

The development of the Internet and ICT allows individuals to communicate with each other, freely exchange messages of a political nature, receive necessary information, produce and disseminate it on various platforms while authorities can see this information and react constructively to it. Thanks to the active exchange of opinions, views, positions on various socio-political issues, a public dialogue, public political discourse can be formed.

These days, dialogue is becoming a key to understanding and comprehending processes in various spheres of social life, especially in politics. In view of the high axiological status of the dialogue, it can be put on a par with such fundamental political values as freedom, equality and democracy [14]. Mastering the art of dialogue, especially in the political sphere, is a necessary and basic condition for the successful functioning and development of modern society.

The development of public dialogue between citizens, institutions of civil society and the state in the Internet environment is facilitated by online deliberation which is exceedingly broadly defined and covers all types of communication in the virtual space [15]. It allows all participants representing different geo-graphic locations to interact, expand opportunities for civic participation, citizens' involvement in the political process, access to information and discussion of a wide range of topical issues where individuals can disclose their individuality, freely present their opinions and interests.

The article will further reveal a research of discussions on socio-political themes of current interest on social media. As an example, the discussions in the American segment of Facebook regarding the impeachment of Donald Trump will be analyzed. The main purpose of the article is to understand based on the theory of the German philosopher J. Habermas how the concepts of deliberation and dialogue correlate in theoretical and practical aspects.

The main research questions to be answered:

Q1. How do the concepts of deliberation and dialogue correlate in the context of Habermas theory?

Q2. What parameters should be analyzed to reveal the relationship between dialogue and deliberation in online discussions?

Q3. What is the form of online deliberation on political topics in social networks?

2. Theoretical basis

For our research presented below, it seems necessary to consider several concepts correlating with the phenomena of deliberation and dialogue.

First of all, it is based on the concept of deliberative model of democracy pro-posed by Jurgen Habermas. It focuses on diverse forms of communication, continuous and maximally broad political discourse in society, the results of which are determined by the strength of arguments [16].

Referring to the concept of deliberation which is the center of the concepts of deliberative democracy, researchers note that there is no unified definition [17, 18]. However, most of them believe that citizens involved in the deliberative process must make political decisions themselves based on arguments which, in turn, are reflectors of the needs and moral principles of individuals [19, 20]. Indeed, deliberation is built primarily on an argumentation exchange between citizens and their discussion of various statements in order to ensure the common good. In the process of this discussion, an agreement on procedures, actions or policies that best contribute to the achievement of the common good can be reached [21]. Accordingly, all of the above applies to online deliberation the main difference of which is the online environment.

Touching on the concept of dialogue, we emphasize that in accordance with the principles and postulates of verbal communication, there are two main types of communicative interaction: cooperation and confrontation (conflict) which indicate the coincidence or non-coincidence of the interests and goals of the communicants. We adhere to the point of view of the Russian linguist M. M. Bakhtin who defined dialogue as a way of interaction of consciousnesses, as a result of which understanding arises [22]. According to Bakhtin, dialogical relations are considered as a practically universal phenomenon that permeates all human speech, everything that has meaning and significance. A person cannot experience another consciousness that limits the possibilities of understanding. It is possible to communicate with other people's consciousnesses only dialogically because they do not lend themselves to analysis and contemplation, therefore common coexistence with "Other" is a source for communication and organization of the world.

The concept of D. Bohm which is important for our further reasoning lies in the same aspect. Bohm separates "genuine dialogue" and "rhetorical dialogue" or "discussion" (Table 1) [23].

Table 1

Distinctions of dialogue and discussions according to D. Bohm

Dialogue	Discussion
Based on cooperation of participants.	Built on opposition as two sides oppose each other.
The goal is to create a common foundation.	The goal is the victory of one side.
One participant listens to the other to understand, find meaning and agreement.	Participants try to find weak points and put forward counterarguments.
The original positions are disclosed for their reassessment.	The original positions are defended as true.
Induces an introspection of own position.	Causes criticism of another position.

Opens up the possibility of achieving a better solution than any of the original ones.	Defends the position of one participant as the best solution and excludes other solutions.
Creates a relationship of openness to changes and mistakes.	Creates a closed relationship.
Broadens the horizon and can change the point of view of the participant.	Affirms the point of view of one participant.
Everyone brings up their best idea for discussion, knowing that other people's opinions will help improve it.	Everyone puts forward their best idea and defends it against attempts to show that it is wrong.
Everyone is looking for fundamental agreements.	Everyone is looking for indicative differences.
Everyone is looking for strengths in the positions of others.	Each looks for flaws and weaknesses in the positions of the other.
Implies genuine concern for another person, excludes resentment or alienation.	Implies opposition, challenge to another, without any attention to feelings or relationships and often leads to belittling or condemnation of the other person.
Assumes that many people have a part of the answer, and together they can add these parts into a working solution to the question.	Proceeds from the fact that there is a correct answer and one has it.

We also consider the concept of political dialogue [24] which does not mean a conversation between two or more people on political issues, but a certain configuration of interaction, the negotiation process and partnership based on the principles of discursive equality between the subjects of political communication, striving for mutual understanding and achieving mutually beneficial a result that takes into account a wide range of existing opinions and interests [14]. Such conditions as the presence of political pluralism, the possession of political tolerance by the subjects of dialogue, their communicative competence which consists in the ability to listen, understand and support each other for the sake of maintaining peace, stability and overcoming disagreements, act as necessary conditions for political dialogue which can be regarded as the norm of civilized cooperation, democratic interaction of the parties implying the presence of versatile, alternative points of view, views, positions and even forms of social, political and state structure.

Habermas's theory puts forward a number of issues that are significant for the conceptualization of political dialogue related to the possibilities and boundaries of dialogical discourse in politics, the specifics of the rationality of political communicative actions, the intersubjective nature of political interests, the potential of dialogue in coordinating political interests, the role of a free reasoned consensus in the course of deliberative generalization of interests, the ontological and conceptual status of political dialogue the concept of which is worked out by Habermas in an ambiguous and controversial way. On the one hand, the German philosopher defends the ideal of a state-free dialogue from which we borrow the idea of genuine consent [25]. On the other hand, he writes that Socratic dialogue is impossible for everyone and always. The fuzzy relationship between the concepts of dialogue and deliberation aggravates the controversial aspects of Habermas' understanding of political discourse. Therefore, the purpose of the article is to determine how the concepts of dialogue, in particular political, relate to the concept of deliberation.

Speaking about the connection between the concepts of dialogue and deliberation, it is also important to refer to the opinion of the South Korean political scientist J. Kim who considers informal and casual everyday conversations about politics as a practical form of dialogical deliberation which ultimately form the foundation of deliberative democracy [26]. The point of view of D. Walton who considers deliberation as a form of dialogue in which each side presents its point of view on the solution of any practical problem is important in analyzing the relationship between the phenomena of dialogue and

deliberation, types of dialogical forms [27]. Deliberation is a collective process of dialogical solution by communication participants of common problems for them. The goal of deliberative dialogue is to reach agreement on actions that can be seen as a solution to a practical problem. Also, it is necessary to make a choice between two or more mutually exclusive options.

As D. Walton notes, at first glance it may seem that deliberative dialogue and critical discussion are identical to each other. But, in fact, these are two different types of dialogue since critical discussion pursues the goal of resolving a conflict of opinions and is a type of dialogue-persuasion where each side tries to convince the opposite that it is right, giving certain arguments for this. In a deliberative dialogue, according to Walton, the positions of the participants are much less antagonistic, their goal is to jointly search for an optimal line of behavior for all taking into account specific circumstances and long-term consequences [28].

The object of the research presented below is the concepts of deliberation and dialogue in the context of the concept of deliberative democracy by J. Habermas while the subject is communicative parameters of deliberation and dialogue. Accordingly, our main hypothesis (H1) is that there are several approaches to the relationship between the concepts of deliberation and dialogue. On the one hand, they are equated; on the other hand, the concept of deliberation is broader if we consider dialogue as a form of communication but if we compare the concept of deliberation and political (public) dialogue, then the concept of deliberation will be narrower. To see how the concepts of dialogue and deliberation interact in practice it is necessary to analyze online deliberation in terms of such parameters as dialogicity and the degree of dialogue in the discussion.

3.   Research approach and data

To achieve the goals of our investigation we used discourse analysis which is simultaneously a key moment and a method of online deliberations' research. Our analysis is based on a modification of the methodology developed by the UN expert Yu. Misnikov (in line with the ideas of J. Habermas), already tested by us earlier and presented in previous publications [3, 17]. The scientist has generated «deliberative standard to assess discourse quality» where thematically different discursive parameters of the deliberative standard, corresponding to specific research issues and using for guiding the process of encoding messages of Inter-net discussions, are described [27].

The empirical material for the discourse analysis was online discussions on the second impeachment of US ex-President Donald Trump on Facebook pages of the leading American printed and TV media distributed into three categories in dependence of affiliation to political parties (conservative and liberal). We have selected two media sources for analysis: the conservative Washington Times and Fox News, the liberal New York Times and MSNBC, as well as additionally we took a neutral Wall Street Journal. In the Facebook accounts of these media, discussions were chosen on the topic of the second impeachment of the American ex-president in connection with the attempted capture of the Capitol on January 6, 2021. A total of 2,931 comments were analyzed.

In this paper we analyzed the positions of the participants "for" and "against" impeachment as well as two parameters of the deliberative standard that can show us how the concepts of dialogue and deliberation relate. The first of these is dialogicity. In a narrow sense the definition of dialogicity is used as a category of text that characterizes its focus on the addressee. The interweaving of various voices into the text makes it dialogic. To define it, it is needed to divide the number of participants' mentions of each other by the total number of posts. We can say that this is a mechanical and quantitative indicator.

Based on the theory of Habermas and Bohm's dialogical approach we modified the methodology of Yu. Misnikov supplementing it with such a new parameter as the degree of dialogue, i.e. striving for dialogue (consensus), and try to determine its degree in a particular discussion. The discussion can take place in various forms including not only dialogue but also debates, discussions, polemics, etc. Since we are talking about the relationship between the concepts of dialogue and deliberation we focus on the study of the degree of dialogue and not discussion, polemics, etc. In this case these parameters are less relevant for us but if their percentage totality exceeds the degree of dialogue, then it becomes necessary to study them in detail. Although in this case the discussion will not be a deliberation as it is based on a dialogical form of communication.

4. Research results

To understand whether dialogical communication between the participants is possible, what degree of dialogue is present in the discussion, it is necessary to analyze the opinions of the participants, how much they differ from each other.

According to the aggregate analysis of all media, 53.5% of users are against Trump and for his impeachment while 46.5% are for Trump and against his impeachment, excluding bots' posts (Table 2). If we take into account the posts of bots, then the data is 55.8% and 44.2%, respectively, which to a small extent but gives an advantage to demos and supporters of the opinion about Trump's removal from the presidency. Bots could be identified manually as a) they were pointed out by some users to whom these bots responded to the comment with their message; moreover, users went to the Facebook pages from which bots responded to the comment and indicated on the lack of information about users; b) the messages of bots were constantly duplicated and without changing the text which immediately prompts the idea of them. Based on the analysis of all positions, we can see that the American society is split into two camps in almost equal proportions.

Table 2
Attitude to D. Trump and his second impeachment (in percentage)

	Liberal		Conservative		Neutral
	MSNBC	The New York Times	The Washington Times	Fox News	The Wall Street Journal
For	2	24	71	66	51 (including bots' posts)
Against	98	76	29	34	49
General data					
For	13		68.5		58 (without bots' posts)
Against	87		31.5		42

It is relevant to notice that the data we obtained practically coincide with the data of opinion polls (for example: YouGov (support 50%, oppose 42%), Ipsos (sup. 51%, opp. 35%), Axios/Ipsos (sup. 51%, opp. 49%), Politico/Morning Consult (sup. 44%, opp. 43%), Avalanche Insights (sup. 58%, opp. 34%)) and with the results of voting in the Senate [4]. On February 13, 2021, the Senate voted against impeachment with 57 votes in favor and 43 votes against. A minimum of 67 votes in favor was required for a successful impeachment [4].

From the analysis of dialogicity (see Table 3) we can see that it was not particularly high (did not even reach 50%) but the degree of dialogue dominated in the discussions. The remaining few statements could be in the form of discussion, polemics, etc. We assume that there is no dialogue in 100% form, it is, as a rule, mixed which was shown by the data obtained. For example, according to D. Walton, this format of dialogue simultaneously includes polemics, disputes, attempts to convince each other, that is persuasive, negotiation and deliberative normative types of dialogue with the dominance of a deliberative dialogue [30]. It is important to study the degree of dialogue in order to understand what kind of discussion is presented before us. If, for example, the degree of other forms of communication would exceed the degree of dialogue, then such a discussion could not be called deliberation as it is based on the dialogical form.

For example, speaking about online discussion on MSNBC we noticed that the degree of dialogue is high (13% out of 14%) since the positions of the participants are almost completely the same (98%).

It can be assumed that like-minded people basically conducted a dialogue with each other, did not enter into a discussion, polemics with other participants whose opinions differ. In the case of the neutral The Wall Street Journal we see that the camps of opinions are divided approximately in the same ratio as well as the degree of dialogue and discussion (23% and 18% respectively), despite the fact that, in comparison with other discussions, this degree of dialogicity is one of the highest (41%). In such a discussion it is much more difficult to achieve general agreement and this is shown by the analysis of the positions of the participants and the forms of their communication.

Table 3
Dialogicity and degree of dialogue in online discussions (in percentage)

	Liberal		Conservative		Neutral
	MSNBC	The New York Times	The Washington Times	Fox News	The Wall Street Journal
Dialogicity	14	34	41	16	41
Degree of dialogue	13	21	37	12.3	23
Discussion, polemics and etc.	1	13	4	3,7	18

5. Discussion

After conducting the research, we propose for further scientific discussion the following statements concerning the relationship between the concepts of deliberation and dialogue:

1. A sign of equality can be put between the concepts of dialogue and deliberation if they are considered as forms of interaction, means of achieving consensus which are similar to each other because both phenomena affect the subject-subject relationship allowing joint activities; active participation of communicators in a discussion based on the power of arguments in order to achieve understanding, consensus; communication between par-ties is based on their equality which may imply an equal right to express position, reasoning and voice. Participants are open to mutual influence; therefore, they can change their minds in the process of communication. Respectively, a different result of discussion may appear that can influence both the development and decision-making which means that participants can be heard. The essence of dialogue and deliberation is not in the exchange of meanings but in the construction of a new common meaning that can transform participants in the process and their lives, i.e. participants can unleash their potential, enrich themselves with new knowledge about the world and self-actualization.

2. If we interpret dialogue as a form of communication between participants, then the concept of deliberation in this case will be broader as dialogue is one of the conditions for deliberation.

3. If we consider political (public) dialogue – a dialogue between citizens, between civil society and state as a form of discursive interaction where the purpose is to achieve public consensus, then here the concept of deliberation will be narrower since it serves as a form of such interaction where people can come to understanding, agreement on various issues. Accordingly, all that has been said applies to online deliberation. The main difference and advantage of online from offline deliberation is the online environment which allows participants to interact more effectively with each other.

However, we believe that in this case it would be more correct to say about deliberative dialogue and not about dialogical deliberation as the basis of deliberation is dialogue and without it deliberation is impossible. Perhaps, the concept of dialogical deliberation is used in the literature to characterize the high level of dialogic deliberation, i.e. the addressing of the participants to each other by name, but this is to be learned in further research.

6. Conclusion and future research

To sum up, we can confirm our main hypothesis and provide an answer to the first research question (Q1). Deliberation is understood as the process of communication between citizens that takes place in a public space through dialogue, discussions, negotiations with the help of which the search for solutions to common problems related to the political sphere is carried out. Mutual understanding, consensus, an equal reasoned discussion based on respect for the positions of the participants and taking into account their interests are seen as important mechanisms of this process. The study showed that, firstly, an equal sign can be put between the concepts of deliberation and dialogue as both phenomena as forms of interaction between individuals are similar to each other, pursue the goal of mutual understanding, cooperation; secondly, the concept of deliberation is perceived more broadly since dialogue is one of the components of deliberation which is studied as a form of communication.

Analysis of the participants' positions, dialogicity and the degree of dialogue in online deliberations made it possible to identify how the concepts of deliberation and dialogue relate in practice (Q2). It was noted that online deliberation takes place in a mixed format which includes disputes, discussions, polemics but with the dominance of the dialogical form which is one of the significant conditions for deliberation (Q3).

On the basis of these conclusions, in the future we can talk about such a concept as a deliberative dialogue, try to identify its features and conditions for its occurrence. In the process of searching for literature we noticed that there is also the concept of dialogical deliberation which we consider not entirely correct since deliberation is a dialogue, it is based on a dialogical form of communication without which deliberation is not deliberation.

It will be useful to analyze online discussions in countries with different political regimes (democratic and authoritarian) and compare such parameters of discussions as dialogicity, degree of dialogue. Also, we are going to analyze Russian online deliberations on theme of Aleksey Navalny arrest on popular Russian social media of hybrid media and compare the results to American ones in order to identify what deliberations contain more dialogue. Also, we are going to analyze a degree of dialogue in online discussions in dependance of platforms (for example, forums and social media can be compared).

7. Acknowledgements

8. References

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