

CYBERSPACE, PUBLICATIONS ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND MORE NEED FOR MORE THEORY

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ABSTRACT

In almost all articles, books and sorts of other academic works published in recent times are intensively used cyberspace sources such as internet, social media, news channels. While great majority of newly produced academic publications are issued on the internet, others already in print are increasingly turning to internet publication. There is also no need to mention that most people have access to books, newspapers, journals on internet or similar electronic resources to obtain information and comments. This is a novel situation for all academic disciplines. It is generating not only many advantages and risks in producing more academic publications than before, but also negative consequences for the development, quality and effectiveness of academic disciplines. Whereas cyberspace has made academic publications easier, quicker and more transparent and visible, it has also created different sorts of problems such as inspection, ethics and most importantly accumulation of knowledge. This paper, looking at these points from the perspective of International Relations discipline and underlining the problems of discontinuity, rupture, mess, and most importantly poorness of accumulative knowledge in those publications made by the help of cyberspace, argues that there is more need to use more theory or theoretical perspectives for analyzing and understanding International Relations. As far as international relations publications are concerned, especially in those articles which I/we read in recent times tens and hundreds of cyberspace resources are used, but even those articles on the same or relevant topics are written without reference to and cut off from each other. They have similar or same arguments and points irrespective of each other, and most importantly, being conjunctural, populist and fashionable. When looked at those journals and publications using cyberspace published in Turkey, their basic problems can be classified into three groups: 1) Wording, method, and code of writing, 2) Reliability, accessibility, and testability of the references used from cyberspace, 3) The content, data and theory deficiencies. Of these, I believe and argue that the most important one is lack of enough use of theory. Consequently here I will try to

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show how the use of theory can help revolve these problems in a few points without dealing with the questions of what theory means and how it is made.

Key words: Cyperspace, academic publications, international relations publications, need for international theory

SİBER ALAN, ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER ÜZERİNE YAPILAN YAYINLAR VE DAHA ÇOK TEORİ İHTİYACI

ÖZET

Son zamanlarda yazılan hemen hemen tüm makalelerde, kitaplarda ve benzeri akademik çalışmalarda yoğun olarak siber alan kaynakları (internet, sosyal medya, haber kanalları) kullanılmaktadır. Diğer yandan, yeni üretilen akademik yayınların büyük çoğunluğu internet üzerinden yapıldığı gibi, mevcut basılı yayınlar da artan bir şekilde internet yayınına dönüşmektedir. İnsanların çoğunun kitapları, gazeteleri, dergileri internet veya benzeri elektronik kaynaklar üzerinden okuduğunu, bilgi ve yorumları bu kanallardan edindiğini söylemeye gerek bile yoktur. Bu gelişme tüm akademik disiplinler için yeni bir durumdur. Bu durum sadece eskisinden daha çok akademik yayınların yapılması için pek çok kolaylıklar ve riskler doğurmamakta, aynı zamanda disiplinlerin gelişmesine, kalitesine ve etkinliğine dönük olumsuz sonuçlar doğurmaktadır. Siber alan akademik disiplinlerde yayın yapmayı bir yandan kolaylaştırmış, hızlandırmış, daha çok şeffaflaştırmış/görünür hale getirmiş iken, diğer yandan denetim, etik ve en önemlisi de bilgi birikimi sorunları doğurmaktadır. Bu tebliğ, bu konulara uluslararası ilişkiler disiplini açısından bakarak, siber alan katkısıyla yapılan yayınlarda görülen dağınıklık, kopukluk ve en önemlisi de bilgi birikimi sorunlarına vurgu yaparak, uluslararası ilişkilerin analizi ve anlaşılması için niçin daha çok teoriye ihtiyaç duyulduğunu iddia etmektedir. Son zamanlarda okuduğum(uz) uluslararası ilişkiler yayınlarının, özellikle dergi makalelerinin en önemli sorunu şudur: Yayınlarda onlarca hatta yüzlerce siber alan kaynağı kullanılmakta, ilgili veya aynı konularda yapılan makaleler birbirinden kopuk ve referans göstermeden yazılmakta, dolayısıyla aynı şeyleri iddia edilmekte, ve en önemlisi de, konjonktürel, popülist ve modaya uygun oluşmaktadır. Örneğin, Türkiye’de yayınlanan birçok dergiye ve makalelerine toplu olarak bakıldığında, temel sorunlar 3 gruba ayrılabilir: 1) Usul, metot ve yazım sorunları 2) Kullanılan referansların güvenilirliği, ulaşılabilirliği, test edilebilirliği sorunları 3) İçerik, veri ve teori eksiklikleri. Ben bu sorunlar arasında en



önemlisinin, teorinin yeterince kullanılmamış olmasından kaynaklanan olduğunu düşünüyor ve iddia ediyorum. Bunun da ancak uluslararası ilişkiler teorilerinin kullanımının ön şart olması ile aşılabileceğini iddia ediyorum. Burada teori nedir ve nasıl yapılır sorularına girmeden, teori kullanımının bu sorunları nasıl açacağını birkaç noktada göstermeye çalışacağım.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siberaalan, akademik yayımlar, uluslararası ilişkiler yayımları, uluslararası teori ihtiyacı

EXPRESSION OF THE PROBLEM

This paper is motived by my individual observations both as a member of the TÜBİTAK ULAKBİM Social Sciences Data Base (SBVT) Committee and as a student of International Relations(IR) discipline. From the former position I have observed that there is a growing number and volume of e-journals as well as in-print journals using growing number of cyberspace resources. Indeed these publications made by universities and private institutions in all fields of social sciences including International Relations are a great advantage for both publishing sector and academic world. But I personally doubt and question whether they are making any (positive) impact on development and accumulation of knowledge. If it is yes or no; why it is so and how and under what conditions it could be yes or no. To answer this question I turn to my own discipline of International Relations as a test where I can see it more clearly. From the position of International Relations I observe that great majority of academic publications are using cyberspace resources to produce empirical works in various cases, issues or developments. Thanks to the cyberspace facilities as well as more number of IR academicians we see a growing number of works being published in e-journals and books or in-print journals and books in cyber world.

On the basis of my profession and observations I have two questions: Firstly, is cyberspace really an advantage or disadvantage for academia and academic disciplines? Assuming that it can be both, I then ask how can we eliminate its disadvantages and improve knowledge and social disciplines? To answer these questions in this paper I heavily rely on my personal observations, experiences and body of knowledge. Instead of using a number of cyberspace resources just like I criticize of, this paper will be based on my ideas and thoughts inclusive of



inductive and deductive epistemology. Being aware of the positivist methodology and all kinds of probable criticism to be made against my approach, I aim to use a post-positivist method of subjectivity, reflectivist interpretation and personal ideas.

Thus this paper rings the alarm bells to the attention of social scientists about declining quality and impact of publications in and via cyberspace despite the rise of quantity tremendously. I will try to do this not because I am an expert of cyberspace or a social scientist but because of my humble expertise on International Relations discipline and on the standards of publishing in or beyond cyberspace. Therefore the arguments I put forward in this paper are based on my own observations and experiments/experience as a student of IR and as a member of TÜBİTAK SBVT as well as refereeing in various journals and serving at all levels of academic panels and juries.

Publishing in Cyber Age/Space

In almost all articles, books and sorts of other academic works published in recent times are intensively used cyberspace sources such as internet, social media, news channels, etc. While great majority of newly produced academic publications are issued on the internet, others already in print are increasingly turning to internet publication. There is also no need to mention that most of the people are having access to books, newspapers, journals on internet or similar electronic resources to obtain information and comments from these channels. This development is a novel situation for all academic disciplines, serving a number of advantages for academia like the ones for others in every area of life.

Based on my experience both as an academician using cyber resources and as a member of ULAKBİM SBVT committee,¹⁶ I observe that there is a growing mess and decline of quality in academic publishing due to cyberspace facilities. First of all, writing an article has become so quick, easy, and unabated that, I observe, some articles seems to have been written overnight thanks to obtaining tens, hundreds and even thousands of information from cyberspace, downloading them in a second and using them as a reference. These so-called 'overnight articles' have both positive and negative aspects of writing, publishing and development of academic disciplines. For example, I have known that an editor has managed

¹⁶ TÜBİTAK Social Sciences Data Base (SBVT) committee is a body of academics for screening and examining Turkey-based journals to select for citing in the database on the basis of a set of criteria defined by TÜBİTAK. For details see <http://uvf.ulakbim.gov.tr/sbvt/kurul.uhtml>



over ten e-journals in different fields dispersed from engineering to social sciences to agriculture to medicine. The editor is editing and publishing hundreds of articles in a month or a year on the internet. Regardless of whether being for profit or academic objective, this shows that academic borders and sensitivities are blurring and eroding.

Cyberspace is generating not only so many problems and risks in producing more academic publications than before, but also having negative consequences for the development, quality and effectiveness of the academic disciplines. While cyberspace has made academic publishing easier, faster, more transparent and visible, it has also created different sorts of problems in terms of inspection, ethics and most importantly accumulation/development of knowledge. No doubt that having access to data and information in cyberspace worldwide (through www.... sources) has been so easy and fast that most research are now conducted at a pc computer, in an office and or at home. Most researcher don't need to go to a library or a data center, like my generation used to do research through printed catalogues, read through numerous pages of books to get ideas and comprehensive knowledge. All this process can now be managed in 'google.com', databases, or elsewhere with a strike of key in seconds by accessing not to one but generally to hundreds or thousands of sources. And then you don't need to take notes on paper for hours, but just copy-and-paste the information into your word program just in a few seconds. This cyberspace process is thankfully very useful not only to get resources easier and faster, but also help write up an article by building and making up a theme or hypothesis in a relatively shorter time. Don't think that this a method used only by undergraduate students for their homework but also even by new and old generation of academic members for their books and articles. We can see evidences and outcomes of this method very clearly in academic journals and books. Thus in the cyber age one can publish more papers than before and appear in transparent cyber environment/milieu, meaning that there is a more chance of getting known and being popular and effective in academia.

There is a caveat here. Publishing too easy, speedy, and transparent in the cyberspace has many risks and problems. First of all, there is an ocean of information and data (but not necessarily knowledge) in cyberspace to cope with. In conducting research not only 'too little' but also 'too many/much' information is problematic. Too little information leaves the researcher devoid of resources, but too many information creates troubles to select and deselect them. In another words, cyberspace provides so much information and data that one



should be very careful in managing it due partly to selecting the useful and partly to deselecting misinformation or bogus.

Secondly, there is a problem of ethics and reliability of resources. Is all information or data in cyberspace true? Of course, not. Then how to differentiate the true one from the mis/disinformation. Related to this is the question of testing and checking/inspecting the information received from the cyberspace. One of the problems pertaining to this is the removal of information or data from the website after a while. Some if not all websites or internet links cannot be reached all the time because of this problem, which makes the publication unreliable.

Thirdly, the most important of all in my opinion is the issue of accumulative or substantive knowledge¹⁷, i.e. building up a compact and coherence set of ideas about the phenomena in the discipline concerned. The most important problem in most of International Relations publications, especially in articles in international journals which I/we read in recent times is this: Those articles written on the same or relevant topic/problem use tens and even hundreds of cyberspace resource, but without reference to and cut off from each other. As a result, they suggest similar or same arguments and points irrespective of each other, and most importantly conjunctural, populist and fashionable. In this context, their basic problems can be classified into three groups: 1) Lack of quality of wording, methodology and writing, 2) Reliability, accessibility, and testability of the references used from cyberspace, 3) The content, data and theoretical deficiencies. Of these, I believe and argue that the most important one is lack of enough use of theory.

AN ESSENTIAL DILEMMA: QUANTITY OR QUALITY?

We can surely and safely observe that there are more publications being made in all fields of social sciences. An interesting and important aspect of this development is that all or most of these publications are related with international relations issues in various ways. From sociology to psychology all social sciences are increasingly and understandably focusing on international problems in this or other ways while International Relations scholars are increasing and inevitably dealing with other aspects of social issues. So far so good. We see

¹⁷ Note that knowledge is not equal to information, data, fact but more than all of them. I simply prefer the definition as: “theoretical or practical understanding of a subject”, “the sum of what is known”, “true, justified belief; certain understanding, as opposed to opinion”.
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/knowledge>.



that social sciences are more active and fertile in empirical and case studies. Statistics, surveys, archives, interviews, questionnaires and other scientific methods are being used to produce more articles. More and more articles and books are piling up in electronic or in-print forms; cyberspace and library shelves are filling up. But the big question is how much do they add up the accumulative/substantive knowledge. Here are two points: Are they properly produced, refereed, published, indexed? And secondly, how much do they rely and refer to the literature of the subject? Regarding the second point, the most important problem is lack of quality of publications in terms of prevailing theories of the field concerned.

This paper, looking at these points from the perspective of International Relations discipline underlies the problems of discontinuity, rupture, mess, and most importantly poorness of accumulative knowledge in those publications made by the help of cyberspace. Most articles are irrelevant and even ignorant of either general paradigms in social sciences in general or prevailing theories in IR discipline. Such research and publication that is cut off from the prevailing paradigms and theories are something like an isolated human-being from society, detached from realities of life, and devoid of sound arguments. This creates a dispersed, patchy, undervalued and underrated bulk of articles and journals with no or little impact on the development of knowledge, thus failing to contribute to the substance. If the objective of scientific research and publications is to contribute to improvement of knowledge by way of confirming or challenging or criticizing the literature, this can be achieved only by reference to the accumulated paradigms and theories. Indeed this improves the quality of articles and journals, but with a disadvantage of failing to write fast, easy, and unabated articles and reducing the level of quantity. This also has pressure and constraints on writers and academics as well as on editors and owners of journals.

Indeed the quantity kills the quality; and the quality limits the quantity. Most academics who are under pressure of so-called 'publish or perish' (and now to earn more income from government's incentive payments!) have the habit to publish as many articles or works as possible annually. Thus emerging a large quantity of articles with the help of and on cyberspace. On the other hand e-journals now need more manuscripts to survive and maintain itself on the market or citation sectors such as TUBİTAK ULAKBİM or Thomson ISI or elsewhere. They may be providing more services and facilities for epistemic societies and readers in general, thus contributing to the development of the knowledge, but the same problem can be mentioned here as to what extent the large quantity help increase the quality.



My observation is negative unfortunately. Just like large quantity of mundane goods in market reduce their quality due to cost effectiveness in particular. Even though there can still be found high quality goods in shops, they are both too expensive and rare, and also questionable whether rare goods do have any impact on the quality of our life in general.

LET'S TIDY UP CYBERSPACE WITH THEORETICAL PUBLICATIONS

There are very important phrases like “small is beautiful” and “little is more”, which I believe can be a guidance to resolve the mess and the problems of quality in cyberspace. The critical question is whether or not too many/large quantities of publications make anything good for scientific development. My straight answer would be “no”, except for granting some non-academic advantages for those academics in need of titles, positions, profits etc. Apart from waste of resources and time, too many/large quantities of publications with almost no contribution to the accumulation of knowledge and the quality is only eroding/destroying academic life, universal values, and even social expectations. We have hundreds or thousands of universities around the world employing academics with such publications using, and publishing in cyberspace resources.

In my opinion, in the world in general and particularly in Turkey, university performances may be categorized into two groups in this respect: Those publishing articles and books immensely contributing to the making and development of theory, and those with no theory but a bulk of copy-pastes from cyberspace resources as aforementioned. While the former, even though using and being worldwide through cyberspace facilities, don't rely on them only but explore more philosophy and ideas emanating from history and grand philosophers of the past. Even those so-called positivist/scientific scholars and academicians prefer not to use mundane and easily-accessible internet resources, but to drill in philosophical works still in-print or e-forms.

This fact triggers and encourages me to argue that in order to improve the quality of the publications in and via cyberspace in social sciences and International Relations in particular, we don't need increasingly many more publications with no or little contribution to the substantive knowledge, but need to tidy up the mess with as few publications as possible with accumulated ideas in order to contribute to prevailing paradigm(s) or theory(ies). This is a



must/obligation not only for the academics but more for editors and owners of journals, who really wish to contribute to development of academic disciplines, and our life and world.

Consequently here I will try to show in a few points how the use of theory can help revolve these problems without dealing with the question of what theory means and how it is made. The first precondition of the theoretical approach is to be abstract and parsimonious rather than loose, patchy bulk of data and information. So academic works should have a theoretical perspective, if necessary with data to test or develop it. Then one does not need to use or look for a number of cyberspace resources, but to focus on elaboration, accumulation and abstraction of ideas on the literature.

Secondly, it must be conceptually oriented either for making or improving or challenging political concepts. Being slightly different from a theoretical perspective, conceptual perspective is to focus on discovering, overviewing, or developing social phenomena, either by using new methods, models or ideas or revisiting the existing ones. This also requires to be more abstractive and parsimonious of the data and information, rather than enlisting a bulk of resources from cyberspace.

Thirdly, every argument must evolve around philosophical ideas rooted from historical or philosophical works. And even if empirical research is made by using cyberspace resources, it must be theory-sensitive, theoretically oriented and abstract. Here the important point is to engage with the literature from the ancient times to-day. In this case one doesn't need to find and use a lot of cyberspace resources as an evidence or reference but to limit itself to the fundamental texts of international relations or other social sciences. For example, to develop an article on cooperation or conflict in international relations one needs first and foremost to dwell on ideas rooted in the philosophical works such as I.Kant or N.Machiavelli in the Western philosophy or Ibn Haldun or Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Ibn Sina (Avicenna), in the Islamic philosophy, individually or combined preferably. Indeed we are the academics who have, or are working to have, a Ph.D. - 'Philosophy of Doctorate' -, meaning that our articles or publications must be philosophically-oriented. And the term 'academia' originated from Plato's philosophical institution named 'Academy'.

Fourthly, including all of the above points, academic works must be keen on selective use of resources: Instead of easily found information on the cyberspace sources, looking for the best



and certified resources, which can be reached only in those works approved through the publishers and the grand names of the subject. What I am saying is that a lot of resources in the cyberspace may not be reliable but poor in peer reviewing by the experts of the subject. Instead, we can find such works in ‘in-print space’ in developed universities and academic institutions but not in periphery bookstores or corner shops.

CONCLUSION

This paper is an attempt to alarm the academia and the academicians that cyberspace may be eroding and distorting the academic knowledge due to floods of articles or other publications either using unchecked or unauthorized use of cyberspace resources and being published in e-journals or other sources in the cyberspace. So cyberspace doesn’t mean an automatically positive thing for the development of academia, but may be a source of degradation and degeneration. To prevent this to happen, this paper urged that we must be theoretical by using theoretical approach so as to produce less rather than more and develop little by little but deeper and deeper.

