

ABSTRACT

Transforming Knowledge at the Crossroads: Claiming the Internet as Transnational Public Space

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This study evaluates the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as a means of generating viable transnational public space—a common forum beyond national boundaries—for the effective production, exchange, and dissemination of oppositional knowledge designed to affect social change. Each of three case studies investigates how multiple truth claims and the discursive practices of diverse social knowledge networks encounter each other on the internet at dynamic intellectual and activist crossroads. The case studies include a website that gave international, public voice to sequestered Afghan women; an internet dialogue between Cuban and U.S. students separated by decades of the U.S. blockade; and an online cultural journal produced by Cuban intellectuals with both world-wide and local transformative potential.

Drawing on multiple disciplines to establish theoretical foundations, the case studies examine how various public spheres are discursively constructed by specific marginalized or segregated populations determined to change their material conditions. They investigate how local cultural practices become visible and new authoritative roles become possible online. The case studies also explore the complex and sometimes messy negotiations among diverse populations that result. This examination of how

oppositional knowledge becomes a force in the public spaces of the internet also notes the challenges posed by the strategic use of ICTs for local and global social change. One such challenge is how effectively local-global tensions are navigated under the emerging neoliberal political economy of the internet and the controlling effects of institutional, corporate or state forces, including issues of technology access. The studies illuminate ways in which the structures and nature of formal institutional knowledge and everyday local knowledge differ and are interwoven in their processes of production, exchange and dissemination on the internet. The research highlights the essential role of negotiating diverse sources, discourses and intellectual practices to construct the nuanced knowledge that is necessary to address local and global transformational challenges.