INTRODUCTION

Based on numerous evidence-based researches, the structure and operation of the public sphere can be comprehended if we understand information communication technologies (ICTs) that serve as its foundation. New information and communication technologies transcend the boundary between private and public spheres. In addition, communication technologies create the possibility of a public sphere, which transcends national boundaries. Notably, communication technologies that enable the possibility of a global public sphere create machineries for restricting, censoring and blocking access. Restrictive mechanisms range from conventional forms of censorship to digital filtering, using media concentration. Governments and private entities, such as nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), take advantage of digital facilities including online media, mobile media, search engines, social networking sites and platforms such as Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter and YouTube, which help create a public sphere. In this paper, the author critically examines assertion that to understand the structure and operation of the public sphere, information communication technologies should be illuminated. It was achieved by exploring and analysing various books, journal articles and online media regarding the role and relationship between ICTs and the public sphere.

DISCUSSION

The special theme of current essay integrates a unique collection of literature that explores a wide spectrum of public sphere and information
communication technologies, using various methodological techniques, analytic approaches and theoretical tradition. By combining and citing various resources in this issue, the goal of the author is to highlight the importance of ICTs, particularly social networking sites (SNSs), around the creation of a global public sphere. Since their inception, SNSs such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and Google Plus have attracted millions of users, majority of whom have incorporated these social sites in their daily activities. Ellison defines social networking sites (SNSs) as Internet-based services that enable people to engender public or semi-public profiles within bounded systems. In addition, SNSs allow people to articulate other users with whom they are connected. Further, SNSs as Web 2.0 software approach allow people to traverse and view their connections made by other users within the bounding system. The nomenclature and the nature of interactions or connections among users vary from site to site. While we use the term ‘social networking platforms’ to describe the phenomenon of communication technologies, the term ‘social networking sites’ is common in public discourse, hence the terms are used interchangeably. In spite of the fact that networking entails initiation of relationships, typically between strangers, it is not the primary practice on social networking or other computer-mediated communication platforms.

In modern society, the public sphere is conceptualised as a platform, in which political participation is endorsed through a medium of talk. Additionally, it can be viewed as a social platform, in which public opinion can be created and discussed for the betterment of society. Private sphere covered social labour or civil society and the interactions of commodity exchange. On the other hand, public sphere dealt with the government. However, as it stands, communication technologies have dissolved these boundaries. For example, public opinion on social networking platforms makes the government aware of the societal needs. Snowden’s case brought a discussion about privacy, which is a constitutional right subject to amendments. The participation in such discussion is an illustration of democracy, which transforms public opinion to political action. Social networking sites are integral part of robust public spheres in the sense that they end the public sphere theory, which requires
states policies or laws to be steered by the public sphere. That is to say, democracy extends the legitimacy of a government. Coleman & Blumer note that democracy is supported by the opportunity and capacity of people to engage their governments or other public entities in the enlightened debates.

Social networking platforms or sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are unique to this discussion not only because they allow people to meet and interact with strangers on a private or public sphere, but also enable users to articulate and visualise their social networks. Consequentially, such communication technologies create connection between people that would not have been created in traditional public sphere. However, that is not usually the objective and these connections often emerge between people who share some offline relationships. On large social platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook and Google Plus, users are not necessarily connecting or searching new people; instead, they are extending communication with participants who are already part of their networks. According to Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, Facebook maintains existing offline connections or solidify offline relationships, as opposed to creating new connections. In the same line, Pew research highlighted that over 90% of American teenagers use social networking platforms to connect with existing friends. From this end, we note that communication technologies transform the pre-existing social networks from the physical world to the cyber space. To articulate social networking platforms as fundamental creation features of public sphere, we label them as global digitised public sphere. Skog theorised that the authenticity of online users varies across social networks. In the same context, both technological and social forces shape user practices.

As of this writing, there are numerous social networking platforms with different technological affordance holding up a wide array of practices and interests. Most SNSs support the traditional social networks; however, other sites help strangers or new users connect, based on their political views, shared interests or activities. Social sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, cater for diverse audiences. Other sites attract users based on shared language, racial, religious, sexual and nationality-based aspects. While the core
technological features are moderately constant, the cultures or practices that emerge around social networking sites are varied.

The connection between the public sphere and the promotion of democratic space on a global scale can be understood by highlighting the role of the Internet and its related technologies. Information communication technologies strengthen democracy of a global public sphere. According to McKee, events or occasions are termed as public when they are open to all people. The concept of the public is evidenced by information communication technologies in social networking platforms when issues such as public education, public ownership and public health are discussed. Intrinsically, the concept of public is connected to the concept of private. The Images of Osama Bin Laden caused an opinionated debate that became global. However, it had no global institutional locus. It is an illustration of the global public sphere, where global public opinion shapes the politics and economics of the world. The accessibility and advancement of Internet technologies realise democracy across states. Consequently, democracy inspires debates on the global public sphere. To an extent, globalisation contributes to democratic participation. Information communication facilitates globalisation in terms of improved communication and formation of International Organisation. As a result, democracies are strengthened and expressed in periodic election, constructing frameworks of radical deliberative and participatory democracy. This is in line with Habermas conceptualisation of public sphere as platform of deliberation or communication where people identify and discuss social issues, resulting in public opinion that informs the decision making process among political actors. Under this conception, the success of communicative actions is the primary measure of democracy. In this discourse, social networking platforms are pillars and effective conduits of channelling public opinion to feasible political actions. Therefore, understanding the effectiveness of communication technologies in the democratic space translates to the comprehension and engendering of public sphere. Private entities come together on social networking platforms as public and challenge governments to engage then in rational arguments. Parallel to the economic
interest of the civil society, social networking over the Internet is also subject to rational principles. Since the inception of SNSs, free and open communication is becoming popular. It cements the principle of representation and the modern efforts to streamline democracy over the Internet.

The production of a robust public sphere helps to contribute to socioeconomic and political development by featuring opinion and information from diverse and antagonistic sources, which are facilitated by information communication technologies. Certainly, social media platforms sensitize people to different opinions. People who use Google Plus, Twitter and Facebook are likely to share their opinions on topical issues, especially when they are offline. These platforms serve as a source of information used to back their opinions. In addition, social networking sites provide a platform that increases the visibility of contemporary celebrities emerging from entertainment or sports industries. Given that their private and professional life attracts public interest, their prominence can be used to initiate public discussions linked to social problems. In turn, the discussion can influence political, social and economic action. The Ice Bucket Challenge is a campaign initiated by the ALS Association to create awareness of Lou Gehrig’s or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis disease. This campaign offers insights on the influence of social networking platforms, precisely Twitter. According to Souza (2014), the success of the Ice Bucket Challenge can be duplicated to initiate public opinions necessary for the development of the society. Facebook and Twitter users are likely to discuss the Edward Snowden case on various platforms. Edward Snowden leaked classified intelligence, which exposed the widespread government surveillance of Americans’ e-mail and phone records. Snowden’s case presents an apt example of national issue that dominated social networks and news coverage, as well as divided Americans. Views regarding the privacy and government surveillance were aggregated through opinions and polls on social networks. It implies that the Internet accessibility and social networks engender both private and public sphere. The users of Web 2.0 technologies and Internet-enabled handheld devices are more likely to share opinions in various in-person scenarios, including public meeting, at restaurants with
friends or workplaces compared to those who do not use such devices. Interestingly, only entities that feel that their Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter networks are in agreement with their opinion are more likely to join social site discussion on the debatable issues. Technologists play a critical role in creating the public sphere. Technological design, frameworks and choices, defining widely deployed multimedia devices and software approaches like smartphones and Web 2.0 respectively, enable and restrict access to public sphere. These observations are in line with the argument that understanding of ICTs is integral to the creation of a robust public sphere.

In closing this argument, it is worth noting that information communication technologies produce not only new opportunities for the networked public sphere, but also create new limitations on the methods of public protest and mobilisation. Sites like Twitter and Facebook might also encourage self-censorship. Unless an individual, precisely a celebrity know their audience, followers or admirers agree with their opinion; they are likely to withdraw away from discussing controversial topics. For example, regarding current writing, unless people are certain that their audience agrees on the topical issue of Russia’s presence in Ukraine, or Israel’s activities in Gaza, they are likely not to comment on the issue. This ground is also complimented by the observation that most people are comfortable with the viral Ice Bucket Challenge rather than with tropical political banter. Additionally, since celebrities and other public figures use the social media, they are informed about the depth of disagreement over public issue within their circle of contacts. The fear of offending or losing friends, audiences or supporters might make people or public entities hesitant to contribute online or offline. People tend to avoid using social networking platforms such as Twitter and Facebook on important political discussions. Consequentially, this might remove critical political conversation from the public sphere. A society or nation, where people are not able to share their opinions freely and benefit from appreciating alternative viewpoints, is polarised. While many people, entities or governments might point out that keeping political debate off social networking sites is a matter of tact, precisely from Facebook and Twitter, apprehension that fear of offending
others on social media stifles critical debates.

**CONCLUSION**

Current critical research essay discussed the argument that the structure and operation of the public sphere could be comprehended with ease if we understand information communication technologies (ICTs) that help engender it. The author asserts that it is essential to have an understanding of information communication technologies because they play a significant role in constructing a public sphere that transcends the borders between private and public spheres. In addition, ICTS extends the public sphere to the global village. Social network sites (SNSs) have continued to attract the attention of researchers intrigued by their accessibility and affordances. Scholars from disparate field have examined SNSs to understand the culture, implications, meaning and practices of the sites, as well as the public engagement in them.

In the appreciation of the fact that people and entities, both private and public, have moved to the cyberspace, social, economic and polecat discussions are not exceptional. With the growing recognition of social networking sites and platforms, such as Google Plus, Facebook and Twitter, conventional private and public spheres have also transformed to synchronise with these communication technologies. For example, social, political and economic debates that touch societies are discussed on these platforms. This is the subject to the fact that virtually every public figure and influential minds are accessible online. Matters concerning healthcare and social amenities would be, more easily publicised through the Internet or social networking sites than through print media.