What's the Use of the Public Sphere in the Age of the Internet?

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This essay is part of a more ambitious study aimed at examining the relations between information and democracy. It sets out to criticize the dominant approach to this subject, one that argues the market cannot be relied upon to produce information required to support a healthy democracy. This social democratic approach advocates state support to ensure robust and impartial information is available from television, libraries and cognate organisations. The justification for such arrangements has relied heavily on the notion of public service, an inflection of Habermas' concept of public sphere. It is argued here that this social democratic approach is outdated and, with it, so are the conjoined notions of public sphere and public service institutions.