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Birth of digital democracy and its challenges

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ABSTRACT

The main issue of the article is whether online participation is better than traditional political participation. Traditional Political Participation are the activities designed to influence government including voting and face-to-face activities such as protesting or volunteering for a campaign. . Current conceptualizations of online political participation typically do not consider behavior such as displaying campaign slogans on personal Web sites, signing up for a political newsletter, or signing and forwarding an online petition. Based on a zero-order correlation, we tested the relationship between the key criterion variables—online expressive participation and offline political participation. Blog readers who tend to express their views online also tend to participate offline. Education is playing an important role in the realization of our democratic ideals in this digital age. Educators need to be persuaded that the new technologies need to be embraced and utilized. Technology skills should be taught, but basic skills such as reading, writing and critical thinking are also more important than ever. Recent research shows that technology properly deployed in the classroom can make the learning process more interactive and enjoyable if curriculum is customized to learners; needs and personal interests. Digital democracy has a huge impact on the society. We can gain information from internet about anything at any point of time which allows us to have Right to Information. We get to know about the present situation in the country and how well the government is performing for the benefits of the citizens.

Keywords: Digital Democracy, technology, ICT, proposed information, birth rate

INTRODUCTION

E-democracy (a combination of the words electronic and democracy), also known as digital democracy or Internet democracy, is the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in political and governance processes. 'Digital Democracy' refers to the various ways by which electronic platforms can engage and secure the wider and more informed participation of the public in the political environment.

Digital democracy might involve the greater use of the internet to gauge public opinion by mini referenda and e-petitions, the use of the internet to activate political debate via social media and online forums, the incorporation of mobile phone or hand-held devices to involve the public in decision making at various levels, and the replacement of traditional voting methods with e-technology solutions. Proponents argue Digital Democracy could be a solution to a number of contemporary political problems: A more creative approach to voting would help reverse declining turnout at all levels of elections in the UK. Higher levels of direct democracy would counterbalance rising frustration at the message-discipline and inaccessibility of our political representatives, who would in turn be better held to account if initiatives and recall could be part of the e-technology revolution.¹

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We have used a Qualitative method here which aims to address theoretical and practical problem like improving democratic participation and identifying threats. We have produced contextual real world knowledge about the behaviors, social structures and shared beliefs of a specific group of people. We have analyzed the data collected from different articles and put it together in a systematic manner. It was mostly collected from research gate, Jstor and Scribd. The data was transcribed and thematic analysis was conducted. This involved coding all the data before identifying and reviewing the key themes. Each theme was examined to gain an understanding of perceptions and motivations. Such structured collection of data usually produce results that cannot be generalized before sample data, but they provide a more in-depth understanding of perceptions, motivations and emotions

¹ <https://www.tutor2u.net/politics/reference/digital-democracy-introduction>

OBJECTIVES

In this article we sought to describe about the birth of digital democracy and the challenges faced by digital democracy. We will be talking about the birth in India and many more countries accordingly.

1. Birth of Digital Democracy
2. Challenges of Digital Democracy

DESCRIPTION

The idea of enhancing democratic processes with information technology did not appear with the Internet, but gradually developed since the end of the Second World War and the advent of computers. Depending on the state of technology on the one hand, and the political context and the public perception of the problems of democracy on the other hand, three stages can be distinguished. The first age of e-democracy began in the 1950s with the emergence of cybernetics sciences under Norbert Wiener. At this particular time, the beginnings of computing technology and automated systems met efforts to re-evaluate processes of political negotiation and conflict resolution in the aftermath of the Second World War. Not only did cybernetics provide an analytical framework to better understand the social reality, it also brought in a promise of social orthopaedic. In this approach, as illustrated by the book of Karl Deutsch on the Nerves of government, the decision making process is mapped to a cybernetic feedback loop, in which politics acts as a well-defined system that measures and responds to its environment. Computers were thereby conceived of as new potential mediators, capable of processing large amounts of information to arrive at more rational conclusions. This governing machine, it was thought, would dismiss human passions and overcome the bounded rationality of decision-makers pointed out by Herbert Simon. This approach, however, received continued criticism until it ultimately faded in the late 1960s. Its opponents rejected the over-simplification of politics into a practical, scientific system that can respond to the environment in predictable manners and achieve well-defined goals, and termed it as technocracy. ²For instance, Jean Meynaud argued that, otherwise considered a 'black box', the political process represented a complexity irreducible through technology, and conversely that technology could be politicized. Other critics, notably Jurgen Habermas, contested the confusion between political power (as the technical capacity to master things) and political will (as resulting from a free deliberation among

² <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/35312561.pdf>

citizens). Despite this unsuccessful first exploration of electronic democracy, the use of computers as an aid for effectively managing and rationalising government practices evolved from this stage and finds its sophisticated applications later on, first in the 1960s with the introduction of management techniques such as the Planning Programming and Budgeting System (PPBS), then in the 1990s with the first plans for an electronic government, which would work better and cost less, as the Vice President Al Gore put it. The second age of electronic democracy came with the advent and penetration of cable TV networks and private computers, during the 1970s and 1980s. These new technological devices emerged as new political concerns and visions were framed in the aftermath of the social crises that many industrialised countries experienced in the late 1960s. This led to the rise of so-called new social movements as well as to new conceptions of politics, according to which society would be better transformed from the bottom up and the coordination of local actions rather through the conquest of the state central apparatus. In this active society, as Amitai E-zine termed it, local communities were to be the key political arena and the place where new forms of political participation could be experienced. Resulting from the conjunction of these changes in the technical and political contexts, the term tel-democracy arose and created interest for new initiatives in two major areas. On one side, television began to be used for new points of connection and participation for constituencies by broadcasting public hearings and debates, citizen discussion, and enabling interactivity through telephone call-backs. Teledemocracy trials or projects were started in different cities including Minerva in New Jersey, Qube in Columbus, Televote in Hawa, Interactive cable TV in Milton Keynes. In contrast to this first group of initiatives, which sought to enhance communication between elected officials and citizens, another development was oriented towards promoting social links among citizens. In the vein of the views expressed by Ivan Illich, or of Ernt Schumacher, and later of Benjamin Barber, this second trend was aimed at fostering a decentralised, human-sized, convivial usage of information technologies. It saw the rise of local community networks, such as San Francisco's Community Memory System, which were produced to connect citizens within their localities. These networks were most prominent in the United States and saw an extension during the 1980s with so-called free-nets and the desire to enable peer-based and unmediated information exchanges. However, this second phase of electronic democracy faced technological limitations (e.g. lack of real interactivity of cable TV networks and inter connectivity problems for computers networks) as well as an increasing commercialization of its medium. Hence, it failed to achieve its goals of enlarging the public space of politics. Nonetheless, this period of experimentation was successful in generating active

interest for the democratic potentials offered by ICTs, which set the stage for the third age of electronic democracy. This most recent stage has commonly been the one most associated with the term e-democracy, and it provided the majority of dimensions now prevalent in the debate and understanding of the field. Not only did the emergence of the Internet in the 1990s bring about an entirely new communication medium that became inexpensive, instantaneous and user-friendly (in the context of industrialized countries), but it was also accompanied by a new ideology of information freedom and a declared political ‘independence of cyberspace’ and its ‘citizens’ from the physical, as elaborated by John Perry Barlow in 1996. These visions called for a new age of politics and civic engagement, and combine hedonist and creative individualism, social solidarity, political liberalism and ecological concerns into a world view sometimes termed as a ‘Californian ideology’ that has been intertwined with the cyberspace phenomenon. In these visions, the Internet is much more than an additional tool which provides new solutions to the problems of democracy; it creates a new way of being together and a novel polity, which no longer takes place within the bounded territories of nation states, but in an open, de-territorialised, non-hierarchical space.³

THE DIFFERENT VISIONS OF ELECTRONIC DEMOCRACY

For the past decade, a whole trend of the scholarship literature about electronic democracy has explored how this concept related to classical models of democracy. Most of this literature has dealt with the forms of political systems that the use of ICTs and of the Internet could trigger, based on the goals and values put forward by the proponents of e-democracy. Arthur Edwards, crossing two dimensions of democracy (individualism versus collectivist, epistemic versus deliberative), differentiated three versions of electronic democracy: a populist version, a liberal version and a republican one. Doug Schuller studied whether the political practices associated to the Internet met the criteria of democracy proposed by Dahl. Jens Hoff, using traditional conceptions of citizenship (liberal, republican, communitarian, radical), suggested that four models of e-democracy could emerge from the use of the Internet (consumerist, plebiscitary, pluralist, participative). Jan van Dijk, after taking into account the purposes of the democracy (elites selection, opinion formation, decision-making) and the means used to achieve these (representative or direct), reached six potential models of e-democracy (legalist, competitive, plebiscitary, pluralist, participative, libertarian). From a somewhat different perspective, Thierry Vedel analyzed how the three current dominant visions of democracy (elitist, pluralist,

³<http://www.theinternationaljournal.org/ojs/index.php?journal=rjitsm&page=article&op=view&path%5B%5D=3404>

republican) shaped the political and governmental uses of the Internet. This kind of approach is fruitful in that it refers to the fundamental issues that every political organization has to address—the nature of the individual, what living together in a community means, the relationship between the citizens and the general will—and the range of arrangements that democracy offers to deal with these questions. Yet, it is likely too early to think in terms of models. The political uses of the Internet are still evolving and it is therefore difficult to anticipate how they will affect the existing political institutions. Many e-democracy projects have so far only concerned specific parts of current political systems, thus failing to have an overall impact. The very discourse on e-democracy is heterogeneous and built on varied, and sometimes contradictory, logics. This variety of usage and conceptions makes it difficult to draw pure forms of e-democracy. This is why, rather than offering another typology of e-democracy models, it is preferable, in my view, to focus on the different core issues which structure the design and implementation of concrete e-democracy projects (as well as the discourse that accompany them). If we do so, we find that three dimensions, corresponding to different sequences of the democratic process (information, discussion, decision) and their related problems (the lack of transparency in political institutions, the narrowness of the public sphere, and the insufficient participation of citizens in public decisions) are apparent in most e-democracy projects. In other words, the idea of electronic, as it is implemented in field or pilot projects, can be mapped along three axes: The first axis is information, starting with the citizen's instantaneous access to politically relevant content, including news, opinions, and factual data—in vast quantities. But in the context of information technology, this proclaimed right of access also ambivalently includes the democratic notion of transparency.⁴ Early optimists saw a future of more transparent governments and greater accountability as documentation on processes and decisions would become more easily accessible. However, many governments of industrialised countries still lack adequate information-access laws. Even in countries where such a legislation is in place (for instance the United States with the Freedom of Information Act of 1964), open information is subject to continued (political) obstacles and practical limitations even though ICTs seem to provide inexpensive ways of disseminating information. Discussion is a second major axis in e-democracy. Significant attention has been given to the potential of this area with three main foci: the Internet is generally seen as a new medium that enables exchange across geographical, social and cultural boundaries and promotes free individual expression (notably because of the anonymity of participants); a large base of users would provide access and exposure to a variety

⁴ <https://internethealthreport.org/2019/the-challenge-of-democracy-in-the-digital-era/>

of opinions and the self-organising nature of the medium could produce a self-regulated public space ‘by the people, for the people’; taking part in public forums or discussion newsgroups would generate a greater sense of community and condense collective identities. Yet, these assumptions have to be evaluated on the basis of the actual practices which can be observed. Research findings in this domain are rather deceptive and contradict cyber-optimists’ hopes: only a minority of participants are really active; self-expression is often preferred to the engagement in genuine discussion (which supposes an effort to understand the others points of views), so that many newsgroups can be likened to interactive monologues. Finally, online decision-making and participation is a third major direction in electronic democracy. This space includes efforts to more actively involve constituents, especially in the setting of local communities. Examples have included online consultations and focus groups, opinion polling and surveys, and experiments with public referenda (see Wright in this volume). Electronic voting as a larger issue in e-democracy also falls into this category, and has generated significant interest in the potential of enabling direct democracy at large scales. The argument goes as follows: direct democracy, as exemplified by the Athenian agora, is the optimal form of democracy; yet, because it was not materially possible to gather all citizens in the same place, representative democracy was implemented; fortunately, by allowing to electronically consult millions of citizens, the Internet will allow to revive the direct democracy. Such an argument is seducing but suffers from a serious misconception: representative democracy has not been implemented in modern democracies to solve a problem of numbers, but because it embodied the elitist conception of the ruling bourgeoisie, according to which most citizens are only able to select governing official elected, but not to deliberate on public affairs.

The most important challenge of Digital democracy is whether the Internet is helping or hurting democratic processes around the globe?

In its golden era, the internet was celebrated for giving voters new found access to information about candidates and unprecedented levels of transparency for public data. It laid the groundwork for a new generation of campaigns and social movements, enabling citizens to challenge existing power structures and information gatekeepers.⁵

Today, this optimism has been tempered by the steady drip of news about election interference over the internet in the United States and countless other countries. It has awoken democratic

⁵Jakubowicz,A.(2017).Alt_RightWhiteLite:trolling,hatespeechandcyberracismsonsocialmedia. *CosmopolitanCivilSocieties:AnInterdisciplinaryJournal*,9(3),41.

institutions to new levels of concern. What happened in the 2016 presidential election in the United States may have surprised many Americans, but it was hardly unique on the world stage. Take Brazil. Just ten days before right-wing Jair Bolsonaro was elected president, leading newspaper Folha de São Paulo uncovered a \$3 million USD scheme, paid for Bolsonaro affiliates, that promoted viral, divisive messages and false reports in Bolsonaro's favor, despite efforts by fact-checking groups and Facebook to stem the tide of disinformation. Soon after, the reporter who wrote about the scheme began receiving threats and had her personal WhatsApp account hacked and inundated with pro-Bolsonaro messages. Efforts to promote candidates with underhanded methods and stifle independent reporting are also widespread in India. Civil society groups have long observed trolling and disinformation campaigns on Facebook and WhatsApp that appear designed to undermine dissenting voices and promote Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In the lead up to an April 2019 election, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter announced they took down hundreds of pages (with millions of followers combined) for "coordinated inauthentic behavior" and "promoting spam". Some favored the BJP, and others the opposing Indian National Congress party. Facebook's role in particular, in these and other elections, has generated significant public scrutiny. In 2018, a globally reported hearing of Mark Zuckerberg by the United States Congress in light of a public scandal involving the consulting group, Cambridge Analytical, played a big role in putting data harvesting for political purposes into view. Zuckerberg apologized then for not doing more to prevent the platform from being used for harm, including, "fake news, foreign interference in elections and hate speech." Facebook has since pledged to improve transparency in political advertising. Twitter has added "elections integrity" to its public values. But such solutions may be mere band-aids. Platforms are designed in ways that incentivize and reward extreme and sensationalist content that generates clicks and shares through outrageous claims and attacks. News feed algorithms are easily gamed by bots and professional trolls. Google search results can be manipulated. In 2017 and 2018 Cambridge Analytica was also found to have collected data from users in India, Brazil, Indonesia and Mexico for campaign work. The consulting firm also put down roots in Kenya. In a case study from current President Uhuru Kenyatta's 2013 election campaign, Cambridge Analytica described having built a strategy for the candidate "based on the electorate's needs (jobs) and fears (tribal violence)." This struck a chord for Kenyans, who have grown accustomed to social media sparking violence between different ethnic groups. In 2017, Kenyan parties engaged in targeted advertising and even personal SMS messaging to citizens,

leveraging the Kenyan government's ample collection of personal data, for which there are currently no legal protections for data privacy. President Uhuru Kenyatta won this election in a re-vote, after his initial win was nullified by the Supreme Court on the grounds of irregularities. These cases represent just a handful of those that have dominated headlines and news feeds around the world in recent years. What they tell us, in sum, is that on the open internet anyone can reach and change the minds of millions of people — especially if they have money to spend and are willing to weaponize information and data. Powerful and wealthy people and institutions, local and foreign governments, are wielding the internet in this way for political gain. Ideas to mitigate the risks have begun to emerge. Support for independent fact checking initiatives is rising worldwide, and voters are becoming wiser to the digital machinations of political leaders and interest groups. Ahead of European elections in 2019, four leading tech companies (Facebook, Google, Twitter and Mozilla) signed the European Commission's Code of Practice on Disinformation pledging to take specific steps to prevent disinformation from manipulating citizens of the European Union. Worldwide, social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Google, YouTube and Twitter are urged to be more transparent about how internet users are tracked and targeted, and give people more control over their own data. Everywhere, there is consternation about what is to come. In Africa, elections are scheduled in 19 countries in 2019. In Asia, in upwards of 10 countries. In Latin America, there will be as many as nine elections, six presidential. Responsible reporting and factual information is crucial for people to make informed choices about who should govern. That is why fighting misinformation with care for free speech and open access to information is key. When power is up for grabs, no expense is spared to sway public opinion or to silence critics.⁶

The last few years have seen a surge in digital democracy projects around the world. Parliaments are experimenting with new tools to enable citizens to propose and draft legislation, local governments are giving residents the power to decide how local budgets are spent, and a wave of new political parties such as Podemos, Pirate Parties and M5S have at their core the idea of participatory or direct democracy. Many of these experiments in digital democracy were triggered by a crisis. The financial crisis of 2008 prompted the Kitchenware Revolution in Iceland and the anti-austerity 15M movement in Spain, which eventually led to the development of the Your Priorities and Decide Madrid platforms respectively. In Estonia, a scandal relating to party

⁶Jakubowicz,A.(2017).Alt_RightWhiteLite:trolling,hatespeechandcyberracismsonsocialmedia. *CosmopolitanCivilSocieties:AnInterdisciplinaryJournal*,9(3),41.

political finances engulfed the country in a political crisis that prompted the President, together with civil society organizations, to set up the Estonian Citizens' Assembly to make recommendations for democratic reforms. This initiative led to, amongst other things, the creation of the Citizens' Initiative Platform, Rahvaalgatus. Meanwhile, the vTaiwan process was set up in the aftermath of the Sunflower Student Movement, which saw the Taiwanese parliament surrounded and occupied by student protesters in response to a proposed trade deal with China. Many other experiments have taken place against a backdrop of declining trust in politicians and democratic institutions which has created a space for new political actors and projects to emerge. Across much of the western world, governments are facing a crisis of legitimacy. All the projects we've looked at aim in one way or another to address this by providing new channels for citizens to participate in the decisions and deliberations of government. In some instances, parliaments and governments are initiating new methods for openness and digital participation themselves, such as LabHacker/ e-Democracia in Brazil. More commonly, when the capacity to build these mechanisms in-house is insufficient, these institutions are partnering with open-source 'civic tech' communities to provide the necessary tools and expertise. The impetus can also come from grassroots democracy movements and civic tech organisations themselves, who develop the tools and processes and seek buy-in from decision-makers to embed them in institutional processes. Digitally minded political parties are also driving this change, attempting to practice large scale grassroots involvement in internal decision-making, and, where they take power, establishing new mechanisms for participatory and direct democracy (such as the Ahora Madrid Coalition).

CONCLUSION

The overall aim of this research is to get to know about the birth of digital democracy, the challenges, how digital tools can be used by the parliament, government and political parties to engage citizens to improve the quality and legitimacy of their decision making. The six key opportunities identified were: the democratization of information publishing, the broadening of the public sphere, the increasing equality of access to and participation within political processes, increasing transparency and accountability from government and the promotion of democratic values.

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