

Collision Digital Democracy: The Impact Of New Technologies On Democratic Processes In Brazil

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Abstract:

The world has become widely connected through the internet, enabling real-time interaction between people from different locations and promoting the use of digital technologies to expand and facilitate citizen participation in democratic processes. In Brazil, the increasing use of social networks has been used to mobilize political discussions and disseminate ideas. Furthermore, tools such as online petitions, public consultations and the transparency of government data have strengthened the active participation of citizens in political debate and in monitoring government actions. However, this access has also been accompanied by the dissemination of fake news, which can compromise the quality of public debate and weaken democracy. Therefore, this work carried out a bibliographical review on digital democracy and analyzed its influence on the democratic process in Brazil, highlighting its contributions and challenges in the current context. The methodology was a literature review, with a qualitative approach, based on academic sources available on the Google Scholar and SciELO platforms. The results indicate that digital democracy plays an important role in citizenship education, promoting knowledge about rights and duties, inclusion, access to justice and spaces for debate. However, challenges such as the spread of fake news, the influence of algorithms and digital surveillance pose threats to democratic integrity. Therefore, it is essential to invest in the formation of critical and conscious digital citizenship.

Key Words: *citizenship; democratic processes; fake news; social media.*

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I. Introduction

The internet was created in the 20th century, during the Cold War, and was used as a strategic tool to facilitate secure and rapid communication between the US military, which was facing the now-defunct Soviet Union in a context of political and military tensions (Adabo, 2014). This network gradually expanded and began to integrate academic and scientific institutions, becoming the basis for what we know today as the internet (Dias; Silveira, 2021). According to Castells (2015), society in the Information Age is organised through the establishment of networks, which consist of a set of interconnected nodes that are renewed and updated by technological transformations.

With the advance of technology, the world is connected through the internet, allowing different people to communicate, establish business relationships and for news and events to reach the most varied locations through the media (Costa, 2021). In this context, the concept of Digital Democracy emerges, derived from the globalisation process, which can be defined as the use of digital technologies, especially the internet and online platforms, to expand and facilitate citizens' participation in the democratic processes of their countries (Teixeira; Pantoja; Cunha, 2024).

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dissemination of political information, public debates, electoral processes and interaction between government and society (Dias; Silveira, 2021)

In Brazil, social networks are widely used by the population, and it is considered to be the 3rd country that consumes the most of these networks, with 131.506 million active accounts and up to 14:44 average hours per user per month when it comes to using the Instagram platform (Comscore, 2022). This has led to increased access to information and the possibility for citizens to participate more actively in political decisions. This participation can take place through online public consultations, electronic voting, virtual petitions and discussion forums on social networks (Dutra; Oliveira Júnior, 2018). In addition, digital democracy promotes the transparency of government actions, since data and information can be made available to the public in real time, which enhances oversight by citizens and civil society (Teixeira; Pantoja; Cunha, 2024).

In this context, the popularisation of the internet brings to the fore a new instrument for democratic participation, offering innovative ways of balancing the participatory and deliberative actions of citizens (Castells, 2015). However, despite these opportunities, important challenges arise, such as personal data leaks, the spread of disinformation and the lack of adequate regulation to guarantee the authenticity and security of online interactions (Gomes, 2011). In view of this, the aim of this paper is to carry out a literature review on digital democracy and analyse how it has influenced the democratic process in Brazil, highlighting its contributions and challenges in the current context.

II. Methodology Aspects

The methodology applied consists of a literature review based on academic sources and scientific articles investigating the use of the internet and digital technologies in politics. The bibliographic survey was carried out on the Google Scholar and SciELO digital platforms, using descriptors such as 'digital democracy', 'online political participation' and 'democratic process in Brazil'. The data collected was analysed qualitatively, focusing on case studies, theoretical articles and reports that address the application of digital democracy in Brazil, as well as the limitations faced in the country's political and social context (Severino, 2016).

Qualitative research makes it possible to interpret social phenomena critically, considering the content, context and meanings attributed by the authors to the topics investigated. Analysing the selected materials seeks to identify patterns, convergences and divergences in theoretical approaches, as well as highlighting the challenges and advances observed in the implementation of digital mechanisms for political participation in Brazil. This approach makes it possible to understand how digital democracy has been discussed and applied in different spheres of Brazilian society (Coutinho, 2014).

In addition, the selection of texts considered criteria such as topicality, scientific relevance and contribution to the debate on democracy and information technologies. By integrating different theoretical and empirical perspectives, the methodology adopted favours a broad and critical understanding of the role of digital technologies in expanding citizen participation, especially in a scenario marked by unequal access, political polarisation and misinformation (Lehfeld, Lehfeld, Sales, Silva & Demo, 2021).

III. Theoretical Foundation

Democracy originated in Greece, in the city of Athens. The Athenian constitution established the popular assembly as the main body, in which all Athenian citizens could participate. During meetings, they had the right to speak, present proposals and suggest laws, and decisions were taken by majority vote (Ferreira Filho, 2001). However, it was from the 20th century onwards that democracy underwent an evolutionary process, being redefined as a continuous search for and construction of consensus, as well as the democratic management of dissent. This process aims to ensure coexistence between different social classes and sectors and the implementation of public policies that allow everyone to live with dignity (Leroy, 2010).

Social transformations driven by digital networks have been the subject of discussion for at least 25 years, with profound implications for political practices in various contexts (Lima et al., 2015). The rapid advance of technology, combined with the widespread dissemination of these tools in society and the growing flow of information, are key factors in understanding the current scenario of global political communication (Almada et al., 2019). Keeping up with these changes means facing challenges in different sectors, including governments, civil society organisations, rights groups and citizens, who need to adapt to this new digital reality to ensure effective participation and respond to contemporary demands (Inct, 2019).

In practice, experiences and initiatives involving democratic activities supported by digital communication technologies have grown and show great diversity in terms of form, purpose, operation and results (Teixeira, Pantoja, & Cunha, 2024). These initiatives range from online public consultations and social mobilisations on digital networks to citizen participation platforms and electronic voting, each with its own particularities and impact on the political process (Almada et al., 2019).

In this context, digital democracy is defined as the use of digital communication technologies with the aim of correcting, increasing or incorporating new procedures into the political process in order to better fulfil one or more principles of democracy (Gomes, 2011). There are two dimensions to this concept:

(a) the tradition of the concept of democracy and all its historical, normative and practical debate as a political system; (b) the interactive innovations of digital technologies and all their expansion into everyday life, applied to solve modern communication and information problems (Silva, Sampaio, & Bragatto, 2016, p. 19).

While the term democracy refers to a form of government based on popular sovereignty, guaranteeing rights such as individual freedom and political equality through institutions and constitutions, digital technologies encompass processes such as connectivity, digitisation and interactivity to make advances in democratic ideals a reality (Almada et al., 2019). Thus, Gomes (2011) emphasises that these technologies reinforce aspects of the political and social practices of the state and citizens in favour of the democratic content of the political community. In this way, the concept of digital democracy is closely linked to the materialisation of democratic principles, using technology as a tool to promote and strengthen citizen participation and transparency (Silva, Sampaio, & Bragatto, 2016).

Relations between the state and civil society, public spheres and models of democracy and social participation have been and continue to be continuously influenced by the rapid advance of information and communication technologies. In an attempt to keep up with technological advances, the theory on the subject has adopted various labels and concepts: teledemocracy, cyberdemocracy, virtual democracy, e-democracy and, finally, digital democracy (Ferreira, Nogueira, & Oliveira, 2017). For Gomes (2011) there are three phases in the development of digital democracy, initially corresponding to the period 1970-1990, when there was the idea that new technologies could help democratic processes, and experiments were developed in which citizens participated in deliberative processes using consoles connected to their televisions.

The second phase began in the 1990s until 2005, with the popularisation of the internet and discussions about the pros and cons of its use for democracy, and the use of computers and, consequently, the internet (Gomes, 2016). And the third phase begins in 2005 until the present day, considered to be the autonomisation of the fields within digital democracy, through the interaction of the internet in democratic environments to focus on its manifestations such as: political participation, online deliberation; online campaigns and political parties; digital parliament; political mobilisation and the internet; digital transparency; open government and open data; smart government; social media and populism (Gomes, 2016; Ferreira, Nogueira, & Oliveira, 2017).

In this context, the concept of digital democracy is constantly evolving, and for some authors it has positive and important aspects in the democratisation process, when it uses these sources to promote initiatives to strengthen elements that promote transparency, participation or political decisions; when it promotes or increases rights and freedoms or through initiatives aimed at increasing or ensuring the diversity of voices and opinions, giving space to minorities (Almada et al., 2019; Silva; Sampaio; Bragatto, 2016). Among the initiatives discussed in academic papers, the authors categorise the main contributions of technologies to democracy into thematic axes, highlighting the following: transparency, participation, the right of access to justice and education for citizenship (Ferreira, Nogueira, Oliveira, & 2017).

Transparency in democracy can be conceptualised as the visibility and accessibility of data and information, including public accounting, statistics and economic data on representatives and public affairs (Barros, 2017).

This transparency allows citizens to better understand the actions and decisions of those in power, strengthening accountability and trust in democratic institutions, and is fundamental to promoting citizen participation: informed citizens have a greater capacity to make decisions regarding political life (Barbosa, 2023). Initiatives promoted along these lines in Brazil are exemplified by the Transparency Portal, which publicises government spending, the Citizen Information Service (e-SIC), which facilitates access to public information, and tools for tenders and auctions (Avelino; Pompeu; Fonseca, 2021). They also include mechanisms for monitoring public works and policies, which aim to guarantee transparency and accountability in government actions (Ferreira, Nogueira, & Oliveira, 2017).

In the sphere of participation, citizens can use technologies and social networks to submit defence forms and request public policies through online petitions, participatory forums and ombudsmen (Lourenço, 2022). In addition, digital platforms offer spaces for debates and discussions on relevant issues, allowing citizens to express their opinions, share experiences and contribute to the formulation of policies (Barros, 2017). These tools not only facilitate communication between the population and public managers, but also promote an environment of civic engagement and responsibility.

The development of information technologies has played a fundamental role in the right of access to justice. Currently, the majority of legal proceedings have already been digitised, which makes it easier to monitor and process cases (Porto, 2017). In addition, there are virtual platforms that implement traditional alternative dispute resolution methods, such as Online Dispute Resolution (ODR). These platforms introduce tools such as computers and software to manage conflicts, promoting a reconfiguration of the traditional judicial system. This

approach brings a number of benefits, including greater agility, efficiency and economy in the conflict resolution process (Gaio, 2022).

These innovations not only reduce bureaucracy, but also make justice more accessible to a wider public, allowing individuals who previously faced significant barriers to pursue their rights more easily and quickly (Dantas, 2024). In addition, information technologies contribute to transparency and accountability, as citizens can follow the progress of their cases online (Gaio, 2022). As a result, technologies not only transform the structure of the justice system, but also promote a culture of greater participation and inclusion in access to justice, strengthening democratic principles and citizens' fundamental rights (Rezende; Tárrega, 2022).

In addition to the above, digital democracy also plays a fundamental role in citizenship education, providing the necessary conditions for the formation of civic values and knowledge about rights and duties (Avelino; Pompeu; & Fonseca, 2021). This education includes information about laws, clarification of government initiatives and the functioning of public institutions (Barros, 2017). In a democratic context, digital education is a fast and agile means of providing citizens with data that expands their repertoire of information on a variety of topics of public interest (Barbosa, 2023).

Among the initiatives that can be highlighted in this area are online courses that train citizens in various areas of knowledge, interactive environments aimed at children and teenagers that teach about rights and duties, simulators and calculators that help to understand practical aspects of legislation, as well as specialised booklets and dictionaries that make it easier to understand legal terms (Barbosa, 2023; Araujo; Penteado; Santos, 2015).

In addition, the availability of indicators and research results, as well as databases containing legislation and public documents, is fundamental so that citizens can access relevant information in an accessible way (Avelino; Pompeu; Fonseca, 2021). These tools not only promote civic education, but also encourage greater political and social participation, empowering individuals to become actively involved in building a fairer and more democratic society (Barros, 2017). In this way, citizenship education, mediated by digital technologies, strengthens democracy by creating more informed and engaged citizens.

Another major advance brought about by technology in Brazil has been in the electoral field. In the last fifteen years, the country has become a world reference in the computerisation of the voting system, mainly with the introduction and constant improvement of electronic ballot boxes (Albala; Borges; Rennó, 2023). Barrientos (2007) defines electronic voting as a series of new technologies applied in whole or in part to the electoral process, specifically to the act of voting, as well as to the partial and total recording and counting of votes in an election, whether local, regional or national.

Since 1996, with the initial implementation of electronic voting, Brazil has undergone several stages of modernisation, with frequent updates to the electronic ballot boxes and the logistical system for distribution and counting (Tse, 2023). This system has allowed for greater agility, security and transparency in the electoral process, both in the collection and counting of votes (Ferreira; Nogueira; Oliveira, 2017). Among the innovations implemented were the use of encryption algorithms to protect data integrity and the implementation of additional layers of security, such as biometrics, to guarantee the identity of voters (Albala, Borges, & Rennó, 2023).

As well as reducing the time it takes to count the results, which is now carried out in a matter of hours, the electronic system has also minimised the risk of electoral fraud and human error when counting votes (Tse, 2023). This computerisation of voting has strengthened democracy in the country, offering greater transparency and encouraging popular participation, as well as serving as a model for other countries seeking to implement similar electronic voting systems (Ferreira; Nogueira; Oliveira, 2017).

In the information society, the contributions mentioned above represent significant advances promoted by the insertion of technology and the internet into our democracy. These new directions can help public management both to improve the internal environment of organisations and to externalise processes, data, communication and reduce bureaucracy (Macedo, 2014). The strategic use of technology in public administration, especially in the management of IT resources, can improve customer service and the services provided to citizens:

IT governance and administration, with its planning, organising, directing and controlling processes, aims to guarantee the successful implementation of efforts to use information, from its definition with strategic alignment influenced by the context to the measurement of its impact on organisational performance. IT governance and administration should not only be carried out by the area's strategic managers, but is a responsibility in which business managers play a decisive role in its success (Albertin; Moura, 2005, p.94).

Three steps are fundamental to making the most of information in the context of public management planning: knowing, selecting and using information appropriately (Macedo, 2014). Firstly, it is essential to know the nature and source of the available data, ensuring that it is reliable and up-to-date. Next, the careful selection of this data makes it possible to filter out only what is relevant and appropriate for strategic decision-making (Ferreira; Nogueira; Oliveira, 2017). Finally, the effective use of information transforms data into practical actions, optimising processes and results.

The process of democracy must also encompass the subjective freedom and participation of citizens as individuals, since they are situated in different positions and circumstances or have different ideas (Lourenço,

2022). Thus, it must be clarified that democracy is not just a political regime of government, but encompasses aspects of rights, such as politics, economics, protection, social and cultural (Lima et al., 2015).

In this sense, the internet has created a space, a rapprochement between citizens and their representatives, but it is not possible to establish that this form of communication is the only means of exercising democracy, as the data available on the internet can also be manipulated (Mendes, 2023). Thus, in order for participatory democracy to be effective, two prerequisites are needed: a change in citizens' consciousness in order to strengthen a sense of community in society and a reduction in current social and economic inequality (Lima et al., 2015).

Thus, one of the individual ways in which a citizen can exercise this right is through freedom of expression, being a fundamental right expressed in the Federal Constitution (1988), its effectiveness guarantees the democratic structure of our state, as well as giving citizens a voice through the manifestation of thoughts and their various political and ideological currents (Costa, 2021). Thus, in the contemporary legal order, freedom of expression consists of a set of rights that determine communication freedoms, be they freedom of expression in the strict sense through the expression of thought or opinion, freedom of creation and of the press and the right to information (Mendes, 2023).

In this context, social networks have become a major part of people's daily lives, as they have become a tool for interaction and communication. In real time, users can express their opinions, share personal or public events with a high speed of propagation (Lourenço, 2022). Despite the countless benefits that these social media allow, what we have seen is an increase in fake news, hate speech, speeches against democracy, illegal acts and false information. Through fake profiles and often anonymous identities, unidentified users are able to create profiles on social networks and spread "fake news", promoting excesses in their right to freedom of expression (Mendes, 2023).

Freedom of expression cannot be used to practice illegal activities or for speeches that incite hatred, against democracy or against institutions or people in general. According to the STF, public authorities cannot initiate any measure of prosecution (criminal or disciplinary) based on anonymous writings, which is why it is necessary for the public authorities to establish means to guarantee accountability for users who exceed the limits of freedom of expression. In this sense, Mendes (2023) emphasized the importance of more transparency and penalties for digital platforms. According to Mendes, social media algorithms are being manipulated and this system needs to be limited.

If these excesses are to be combated, a set of actions is needed between the judicial system, users and social network providers, because the speed with which information is created and disseminated via the virtual network is greater than the time it takes for the judicial system to respond and act (Rezende; Tárrega, 2022). In fact, the possibilities that public authorities have to prevent these types of violations are still not enough. Freedom is the crucial point for a society to guarantee the rights of individuals, which is why public authorities need to develop and implement policies that encourage citizens to exercise freedom of expression by expressing their thoughts, ideas and questions while respecting the principles of civility (Costa, 2021).

IV. Final Considerations

Contemporary society is deeply marked by the intensive use of technologies, especially the internet and digital tools, which play a crucial role in strengthening democracy. These resources facilitate broad and immediate access to information, creating conditions for citizens to stay informed and exercise their rights with greater autonomy. They also expand spaces for public debate. Digital platforms enable people to participate in public consultations, claim rights and monitor the performance of managers, thus promoting more accessible and collaborative governance. In this way, technology not only strengthens the exercise of citizenship, but also improves the quality of democracy, increasing the representativeness and effectiveness of democratic processes.

However, the use of these technologies also presents challenges: the excessive dissemination of fake news, the influence of algorithms on social perceptions and digital surveillance represent threats to democratic integrity. If democracy is not to be compromised, it is essential to invest in digital citizenship training, promoting education that enables citizens to act consciously and critically in the digital environment. In addition, the creation of public policies that guarantee transparency and the independence of algorithms is essential to ensure that technology serves democracy and does not replace it.

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