

The Mechanisms of Digital Democracy through Political Engagement on Social Media Platforms: A Theoretical Approach

آليات الديمقراطية الرقمية من خلال الممارسة السياسية عبر منصات التواصل الاجتماعي: مقاربة نظرية

LARBI Bouamama

University of Mostaganem (Algeria), Laboratory Studies in Communication, Information and Speech Analysis, bouamama.larbi@univ-mosta.dz

Received: 2024-05-20

Accepted: 2025-05-30

Published: 03-06-2025

Abstract :

Digital communication platforms serve as open arenas allowing immediate integration of users into real-time events and fostering virtual interaction perceived as liberated spaces. This study explores the mechanisms of digital democracy through political practices on social media platforms by investigating how these tools reshape engagement with public affairs. It addresses the central research question: how has political communication transformed under the influence of digital communication landscapes? The findings highlight that while digital platforms diminish the traditional role of intermediaries, they enhance direct participation, transparency, and accountability in political processes. Nevertheless, these platforms are not exempt from biases and new forms of control. The study concludes that genuine digital democracy demands technological accessibility, critical awareness, robust regulatory frameworks, and cultural adaptation to ensure meaningful political participation.

Keywords: Political Communication; Democratic Practice; Decision Making; Interactive Engagement

ملخص: وسائط التواصل الرقمي، منصات مفتوحة تقدم لمستخدميها إمكانية الاندماج في الأحداث على الفور، وتشجع على التفاعل الافتراضي في فضاءات بديلة يعتبرها البعض حرة. هذه الوسائط ساهمت في تقليل المسافات بين الأفراد والمجتمعات، وأظهرت ضعف بعض المؤسسات في دورها كوسيط على الصعيد السياسي، قدمت وسائط التواصل الرقمي آليات للتفاعل المباشر مع الشأن العام، مما جعلها مؤثرة بشكل كبير في العلاقات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والسياسية. وتزيد مكانتها بمشاركتها في تعزيز مستوى الوعي والمعرفة حول القضايا المحلية والعالمية. ويُشير بعض الباحثين إلى أنه يمكن تسمية هذه الظاهرة بنظام ممارسة الديمقراطية الرقمية.

في هذا السياق، لم تعد سياسات التعتيم فعالة في عصر التواصل الرقمي، حيث أضافت هذه الوسائط آليات جديدة لممارسة الديمقراطية، مثل الشفافية في الإجراءات والمشاركة في صنع القرارات، واختيار القادة السياسيين، وزيادة حرية التعبير عن الرأي، بالإضافة إلى إمكانية المحاسبة والرقابة على الأداء الحكومي وممثلي الشعب.

Introduction :

The swift advancements in technology have precipitated profound changes in media and communication paradigms, along with their roles, practices, and the broader issues of freedom, democracy, and public opinion.

The exploration of the contributions of digital communication technologies has unfolded in two predominant perspectives among scholars and practitioners in the political arena. Some regard these technologies as universal platforms that actualize participatory democracy, while others criticize them for amplifying irrational voices and bolstering the influence of dominant groups to further their own agendas.

This paper delves into the reality of the desired communicative openness, critically analyzing the propagated ideals of freedom and uninhibited access to information. Through this exploration, we aim to interrogate the essence of democracy in the context of the opportunities and challenges presented by digital technologies, guided by the overarching question: What is the state of political communication amidst the transformative shifts induced by digital communication landscapes?

1. Political Communication: Concepts and Raised Issues

The evolution of political communication and a thorough examination of its current state reveal numerous issues at the conceptual level. Among the most important reasons for this are:

- There is no consensus among professors of political communication and researchers on the content and boundaries of this type of communication. This does not mean a lack of definitions offered by specialists; rather, there are many definitions, but they are varied, with each one defining it from a different perspective.
- Political communication is a pattern among communication patterns that are invariably linked to social sciences; it is itself a type of social science. The difference between it and other types is close and deeply rooted, which complicates defining its content." (Ben Saud Al-Bashir, 2008, p.15)

Following are some of the definitions provided by researchers for political communication:

Gierstl (1992) views political communication from a technical angle, stating: "Political communication is the collection of techniques and methods available to the political actor aimed at enticing and controlling public opinion." (Rabhi, 2008, p.69)

Dominique Wolton believes that "political communication initially meant the study of government communication directed at voters, then it evolved into the exchange of political speeches between the majority and the opposition.

It moved to studying the role of media in shaping public opinion, then the impact of opinion polls on political life, and today it encompasses a broader study of the role of communication in political life including media, opinion polls, political marketing, and advertising, with a particular focus on electoral periods. It can now be considered that political communication covers all communication concerning politics as a subject.

With the advent of digital media and its increasing use globally, governments and political parties now disseminate their speeches and programs through what is known as social networks, electronic press, and other mediums to ensure their reach to the largest possible audience in the shortest time and across various locations, significantly increasing the level of interaction with these contents, unlike the constraints imposed by traditional media, which the internet has encompassed and digitized.

Some researchers find that these means have undergone a renewed genesis, thus political communication has also taken on a digital aspect, thanks to its investment in the speed of information flow, reduction of distances and times, interactivity, and the extension in various networks provided by the internet. It is, therefore, a new form of political communication. (Bouamama, Msahel, 2018)

In general, there are four main conceptions encompassing the various approaches concerning the term political communication:

- **Instrumental conception:** Prominent among the representatives of this conception is Philippe Riutort. This conception presents the process of political communication as an activity directed from the communicators (the ruling authority, professionals of politics and communication) to the audience (the governed), and thus, the communicative process according to this conception is non-interactive and follows a one-way direction.
- **Ecumenical conception:** This conception differs from the previous one. Among its representatives are Jean-Marie Cotteret and Dominique Wolton. According to this conception, political communication is seen as

an interactive process between the basic components involved in the political content, its producer, intermediary, and recipient. (Razin, 2021, p.79)

- **Competitive conception:** This conception embodies the idea of conflict and focuses on surpassing the concept of exchange as unclear, moving towards emphasizing the characteristic of conflict arising from the competition of various societal formations and the forces controlling them.
- **Deliberative conception:** Here, the process of political communication plays an active role in stimulating political debate, mutual dialogue, and collective interaction. In this way, citizenship as a political act can influence the formation of the public sphere and the discussion of public issues, far from social, political, cultural, or racial differences. In such collective concessions, language, with its vocabulary and connotations, plays a role in conveying the unspoken speech or thinking outside the oratorical platforms. (Razin, 2021, p.79)

2. On the Concept of Digital Democracy:

The definitions of democracy offered by researchers and specialists vary across different disciplines and ideological and intellectual orientations. According to Charles Tilly, it is crucial to understand what we are discussing before defining democracy, as the definition is linked to describing and explaining the diversity and change in the extent and nature of democracy. Generally, scholars of democracy distinguish between four definitional approaches: constitutional, substantive, procedural, and process-oriented.

The substantive approach considers the life and political conditions that a governance system aims to enhance. The constitutional approach focuses on the laws adopted by a governance system to describe and define democracy, while procedural definitions focus on a set of authoritative practices to define democracy. Process-oriented definitions emphasize the minimum processes that must continuously operate for a system to be described as democratic. (Tilly, 2010, p. 22).

Ancient philosophers differed in their understanding of the concept of democracy. Hobbes saw it as a collective relinquishment of individual freedom to an absolute ruler, while Rousseau regarded it as an embodiment of collective freedom representing the interests of society's individuals. The views of

contemporary thinkers also vary, though all recognize democracy within the context of religion or the prevailing theocratic system (Ghosheh, p. 8).

This reflects on the possibility of formulating a comprehensive definition of democracy. Generally, democracy can be defined as a form of governance in which citizens participate equally in decisions that affect their lives, encapsulating the principle of governance by the people, of the people, and for the people. Fundamentally, the word democracy is Greek, composed of 'demos' meaning people and 'kratos' meaning power or rule. (Kanso, nd, p. 101).

Digital democracy, as an extension and transformation of the original concept in relation to the communication medium of the age, is defined as the use of all types of internet-based communication media to enhance democracy and citizen participation. It is also the use of digital communication media in public political discussions and decision-making processes, thus forming a type of interaction between the people and the government. It can thus be said that the existence of an electronic government is the basis of digital democracy. (Imran, 2022, p. 343).

Digital democracy also appears under other similar names such as electronic democracy, liquid democracy, or third-generation democracy. The Egyptian researcher Jamal Mohamed Gheitas defines it as "the employment of digital communication media in generating, gathering, categorizing, analyzing, and exchanging information, data, and knowledge related to practicing democratic values and its various mechanisms, regardless of the democracy's ideological framework, its prevalence, the integrity of its purpose, and its effectiveness in achieving its goals." (Gheitas, 2006).

3. The Third Generation of Democracy Invades the World:

Professor Abdel Latif Wahbi believes that there is a prevailing belief that democracy represents the best means of managing the relationship between the state and society.

He asserts that this third generation of democracy is conquering the world day by day. Liquid, flowing, or digital democracy emerged at a time when the arena was still experiencing a fierce struggle for the optimal implementation of representative democracy in reality, at a moment when our political elites still disagree on defining their role. (Wahbi, 2014).

Digital democracy represents a communicative process built on effective dialogue capable of creating a space for political discussion while ensuring the representation of all parties (Chouaib, 2014, p. 159).

On this basis, digital democracy is not a new or novel type or style of democracy but a manifestation of new communicative mechanisms and pathways for practicing democracy. It does not refer to a new type of democracy as much as it is based on practicing ordinary democratic action with new tools and mechanisms. It requires the existence of a traditional democracy being transformed into a digital or electronic one.

The digital version of democracy combines both sides of the political process, rulers and the ruled, within the new communication system and its alternative and newly created spaces. However, the real benefits of digital democracy and the "communication revolution," if the term is appropriate, can only be realized with essential conditions in place, including unrestricted access to information and genuine freedom of expression and opinion.

Realistically embodying digital democracy is challenging without a technological infrastructure that allows all members of society to communicate through it, allowing them to freely express their opinions, facilitating information exchange, and overcoming the digital divide to ensure the right to internet access, considering it the solid foundation and infrastructure that supports digital democracy, both digitally and physically.

In developing countries, adopting digital democracy requires the availability of mature digital communication culture among all members of society. On the other hand, it demands freedom of information exchange, its availability, and the associated services being accessible to everyone.

Moreover, the bet on activating digital democracy varies from one society to another, according to their contexts and specificities, as well as the cultural and social conditions, the capacity for change and adoption unique to each society, and the awareness and understanding of individuals about the digital and informational revolution and the availability of the necessary infrastructure.

Although the characteristics of digital communication technologies allow for efficient and rapid information exchange, providing additional opportunities for discussion, the possibility of forming consensus, and planning for collective action, and overcoming geographical, cultural, and social distances, these technologies are also constrained by the standards set by their developers. This has led to questioning the absolute freedom these technologies purportedly offer, especially by critical currents that consider the spaces these technologies

create as areas of false and conditioned freedom, subject to a new type of more precise and intelligent surveillance.

Social media platforms are systems of electronic networks that allow a subscriber to create a personal site or page and then link it through a smart social system with other members who share similar interests, hobbies, or issues. These create interactive social matrices that facilitate synchronous and asynchronous communication regardless of geography.

Social media sites have brought qualitative transformations in patterns of social and political action and have redefined concepts of political and civic participation. However, this redefinition embodies freedom and democracy according to the standards of its developers, not absolute as commonly believed.

4. Dimensions of Digital Democracy:

The Swedish government discusses five dimensions of electronic democracy, which are:

- **Electronic Voting Systems:** Reliance must be shifted to reliable, secure systems that allow the voter to vote only once and are easy to use and accessible by citizens.
- **Online Political Activities:** Encouraging the dissemination of agendas of various parties and forces. Developing the political relationship between the people and the state and developing the concept of electronic popular assemblies through the creation of electronic groups.
- **Transparency and Electronic Trust:** By publishing all government documents online except for security and military documents or those whose publication would cause more harm than their concealment. This step helps the government fight corruption as it exposes information to the public, who will hold officials accountable for what they read and see.
- **Democratic Participation:** Surveying public opinion electronically and publishing government decisions before making them to gather citizens' opinions on them.
- **Digital Divide:** This is the most critical dimension in the electronic democratic process, especially since the proportion of Arab citizens using technology is very modest in most Arab countries. It is essential to be

aware of the risk of falling into the trap of "Webocracy," a metaphorical term for the rule of web or internet owners (Al-Nashar, 2012).

Jamal Gheitas asserts that practically, the digital face of political activities and field democratic events manifest in two ways: The first is a mix between traditional and electronic, where the digital aspect appears in the background of events. Information and communication technologies are used as a vital infrastructure in the processes of invitation, planning, organization, mobilization, and execution of these activities, which then occur physically in streets and squares amid large crowds.

The second path is entirely electronic, using information and communication technologies and their digital media to perform the processes of invitation, planning, organization, mobilization, and then execution of these activities and events.

He mentions that many examples have appeared on the first path; we have seen global demonstrations against the war on Iraq occurring simultaneously in squares in New York, Beijing, Sydney, London, Cairo, Paris, and Toronto.

Many organizers from peace groups and human rights groups in the United States and Europe resorted to creating websites for planning, coordination, and documenting their activities on the network, while others used email and instant messaging through these sites to organize and manage street demonstrations, coordinate efforts, and exchange information about plans and tactics to be followed during the demonstration.

He notes that before the dominance of the internet, what is known as electronic electoral district associations appeared and were used effectively and efficiently. These electronic electoral district associations combined television, telephone, and computer technologies to provide immediate communication channels between representatives and their electoral districts, and these associations conducted voting. Electronic electoral district associations have not been widely used until the current time.

With the advent of the Internet and the spread of its various media among a significant proportion of active users in public opinion, those engaged with its issues, and participants in its polls, the matter is no longer confined to electronic electoral district associations. Instead, it has extended to practicing direct democracy digitally with greater effectiveness.

The public space has become open for the participation of thousands of citizens at any time within direct democracy. Various experiences in the United States, Britain, and Scotland have demonstrated how Internet media have been

utilized in voting processes, opinion polls, dialogues, and public discussions (Gheitas, 2011).

Consequently, social media platforms are considered one of the central mechanisms for shaping public opinion and overcoming the shortcomings of traditional communication methods.

Forums, which are websites on the Internet that bring together individuals with common interests, serve as depths and worlds of shared ideas and opinions among users. They allow for discussions with relative freedom where members participate, respond, and express their opinions, thus contributing to increasing social and political awareness and fostering commitment to public affairs.

Blogs, in turn, provide an easy mechanism for intellectual publication, allowing everyone to publish what they want "provided it does not conflict with the standards of its developers." They are a source among the information sources provided by the Internet to disseminate information regardless of its importance and field, making it available to users. It has become possible for any individual to be a publisher of information with a degree of freedom to express their opinion and the ideological systems they embrace.

Furthermore, virtual platforms and websites of political parties and civil society organizations, along with virtual assemblies, represent additional outlets for relatively liberated political practices from classical constraints.

5. Traditional Political and Social Models and the Inevitability of the Technological Alternative:

Democratic action typically relies on mechanisms of operation, institutions, structures, and systems where political parties, trade unions, and civil society organizations play a fundamental and pivotal role. These institutions and structures operate as engines for activating the dynamics of the political process and various social dynamics.

The practice of democracy loses its clarity and transparency and becomes devoid of its meanings in the absence of these media and political and social actors, or if they are functionally impaired. They are indispensable guarantees for achieving governance, prudent management, and combating tyranny, bureaucracy, and corruption, which ensure the establishment and legitimation of accountability and scrutiny in its various forms, to preserve the political, social, civil, and cultural rights and gains of individuals.

In cases where these institutions falter in Arab societies, which still suffer from the suppression of public freedoms and the restriction of freedom of expression, they will undoubtedly fail in crowning the developmental project to build a democratic state. Due to their practices and the nature of their relationship with society, these institutions become devoid of spirit and out of sync with the general will, leading to an increase in stagnation and indifference among both the community and public opinion.

This, over time, produces a state of distrust in most political and civil forces, preparing an environment for a contentious public opinion and a democracy lacking much credibility, prompting individuals to surpass this dynamic through expression in alternative communicative spaces, notably digital spaces and beyond.

It is essential for political parties and components of civil society currently present in the political scene to perform the roles assigned to them, keeping pace with the technological change that has produced interactive spaces. According to field observations, these have not been able to assert themselves in the political process, especially in the absence of natural and smooth frameworks, as well as democratic mechanisms to keep up with change.

The technological media and their smart applications, which have affected ways and mechanisms of communication and changed various patterns of individual activities and interactions in the social and political environment, have opened wide horizons for human interaction and the formation of opinions and trends, which has reflected on the political and social life, leading to the emergence of many phenomena and new frameworks for creating democratic change.

The introduction of the technological medium into the arena of political action has led to the creation of new mechanisms and mechanisms for practicing democracy and political action, which can hence be referred to as electronic or digital democracy, as a product of the integration and interaction between the values of democracy as a political, civil, and social concept, and the digital communication system as a means to enhance it.

Media, with its multiple channels, plays a central role in activating democracy, deepening its practices, and contributing to social movements and influencing public opinion (Hisham, p 138).

Over decades, amid the obstacles and failures witnessed by traditional democratic institutions, the communication system has offered an indispensable

alternative to reinvigorate democratic values and stimulate the work of its stakeholders.

It has also influenced the nature and procedures of the process and its practices through the roles it plays in facilitating access to, obtaining, exchanging, and sharing information. This has increased the importance and role of digital communication media in democratic action.

The matter does not stop at the effectiveness of its tools; they also excel as a practical and cost-effective means of communication that allows widespread dissemination. Moreover, these media facilitate the diversity of content including audio, images, written text, hypertext, and video, which has formed an important infrastructure and added credibility to democratic practices in contemporary societies.

Communication media activated in democratic activity often feature unprecedented capabilities for mobilization, pressure, rapid information transfer, and breaking through geographical and temporal boundaries. Thus, if unrestricted and provided in a free environment for opinion, they are ideal tools for practicing democracy in all its dimensions.

This effectiveness is also linked to the effectiveness of the "vital citizen," who is considered a requirement for achieving the concept of citizenship, leading to the creation of an environment conducive to democracy and transitioning from occasional to continuous democracy and an enlightened public opinion.

Undoubtedly, democracy in modern digital societies is closely linked to social interactions and public opinion, which closely mirrors its practical embodiment. Public opinion, especially through communication media, should reflect what people desire in democracy. It also bears the responsibility of guiding the decisions of the regime, which in turn is linked to the government's trust in both actual and digital public opinion. (Grespi, 1997, p. 110)

6. The Social Communication System and the Stakes of Reviving the 'Agora':

The concept of the Agora, the public square of Athens, is linked to democracy and considered a living embodiment of it. This square held a central place in the city as a meeting and dialogue space for public affairs, where every citizen of Athens had equal communicative rights to express their opinions in this square and be heard. Decisions related to the public interest were only made after open, argumentative, accessible, and publicly available deliberations.

Over time, the "Agora" has transcended the contexts of time and place to rise to an abstract and ideal conceptual level, directly related to freedom, equality, diversity, and the acceptance of plurality and difference within society.

This concept has become the antithesis of the authoritarian state that digests individual and collective rights and lacks legitimacy and consensus, embodying the concept of a prudent democratic state based on human and rationalized practice of power, acknowledging the centrality of human value and respect for his freedoms.

Since its emergence, the Internet has produced multiple spaces that have prepared a virtual society with universal interactions, where various real societies have acquired a virtual existence.

This has led to a new type of Agora, a virtual global Agora, whose spaces and areas have witnessed public and free deliberations similar to those prevalent in the direct democracy of ancient Greece. The political, social, intellectual, and cultural stakes of its spaces have diversified in forms of intellectual and cultural consumption and reception.

On this basis, the Agora has been embodied, or at least is in the process of emerging, on a virtual level, and its embodiment is linked to guarantees of practicing democracy in its simplest and agreed-upon meanings, which ensure the other opinion, plurality, and the formation of a free space where opinions meet, intermingle, and compete to align within the limits of the group's or majority's interest.

The challenge posed for practicing virtual democracy lies in the extent to which it actually embodies freedom in light of the standards and values that govern it, especially the usage standards that embody the ideology of its owners and developers.

A significant manifestation of these standards restricting free expression and, through it, the practice of virtual democracy is the bias some major digital platforms show in favor of one side in the global opinion environment, such as "bias by Facebook or Twitter through restricting Palestinian interactions."

Digital democracy within virtual spaces does not find a meaning that matches the reality of the Arab individual, where the freedom, plurality, and guarantees for rights of expression, opinion, equality, and tolerance prevalent in the virtual arena do not find support in the social reality of the Arab world and generally in the developing countries.

This is because these virtual values are merely formal and relatively isolated from this reality, and the concepts of freedom and plurality experienced on

virtual platforms do not find anything to rely on in the lived world, leading to the embodiment of the "Agora" as a virtual condition, and its split from reality where freedom, plurality, and the right to express opinion have not yet materialized.

Therefore, the abstract must be translated into the embodied, as concepts and values such as freedom, democracy, and plurality need to be realistically and socially constructed, stemming from a genuine and conscious will to build an aware society capable of effectively performing its roles.

7. The New Media System as a Mechanism for Establishing Democracy:

James Bohman (2004) believes that the new media system contributes to solving the dilemmas of representative democracy and rejuvenating its spirit. Similarly, Godberg (2007) views new media as playing an increasingly significant role in enabling networked participation as a mechanism for reviving democracy in both its social and political aspects.

The Internet has provided a system of media, technologies, and mechanisms that enable wide segments of society to speak, express, and emerge, inevitably reducing the elitist character of political participation. It acts to broaden its scope and democratize the contribution to public affairs decision-making.

The horizontal, collaborative, and flexible nature of virtual exchanges allows for decentralized interactions, producing multiple communicative contexts characterized by their individual nature, diversity of actors, and variety of content and opinions.

If the potential of its media is unrestricted, the Internet space becomes a locus for "direct democracy," at least theoretically close to the Athenian model due to its openness and provision of platforms for dialogue, communication, and discussion.

Thus, the new communication environment has contributed to creating a new type of democracy based on discussion, debate, and community participation in collective decision-making, somewhat akin to the Athenian space.

In this regard, El Yahyawi (2008) finds that the Internet, by virtue of its openness and navigational flexibility, has become a "medium" where individuals

interact in various spaces provided by social networks, discussion forums, websites, and blogs, which have embodied the "Athenian space" that marked the early stirrings of democratic action and free expression centuries ago.

Furthermore, because democracy is built on the availability and free flow of information, new media, which play the role of a lever and infrastructure for information exchange and distribution without constraints, enhance democratic values. These media spaces have increased the dynamics of dialogue and opened wider channels for understanding, representation, and presence, significantly contributing to spreading a democratic climate and providing an escape from authoritarian climates.

Thus, digital democracy does not mean inventing a new type of democracy but practicing known democracy with its mechanisms and tools, requiring the solidification of traditional democracy before it can transform into digital democracy.

Digital democracy requires individuals to bear a significant burden of "the burden of governance," meaning that individuals in the state are required to make decisions and issue judgments within the public sphere. This ranges from voting for election candidates to voting on major laws and constitutional amendments and extends to social and political participation in all its forms.

Transparency, cooperation, and interactivity are major manifestations of the digital democracy style and the transformations it seeks to bring about, aiming to pull representative democracy out of its crisis, particularly characterized by information monopolization and restricting the virtual public space.

The Internet has enabled citizens to participate in political decision-making regarding core issues, compelling leaders and politicians to adopt these technologies and change their view of democracy and the citizen as an active and co-producing participant in policies.

Thanks to the interactive capabilities provided by digital and smart media, the Internet has nourished the public space and contributed to the transition from a society of unidirectionality and non-communication through vertically-oriented media to an interactive, horizontal, and participatory society, transcending the duality of news and communication, as well as the duality of media and networks, to the extent that the information receiver and consumer have become content producers.

Social media platforms have become not only highly flexible communication tools but also means of direct pressure and influence, used by

their owners as conduits of direct political action and new levers for renewing democratic content.

Pierre Lévy (1997) sees that the Internet space has provided channels that encourage the greatest number of individuals to express and state their legitimate opinions and demands regarding the challenges facing their societies, providing them with mechanisms for accountability and transparency regarding public policy formation.

It is built on self-regulation, and all this is achieved thanks to the technological conduit represented by the Internet, and the interactive and participatory capabilities it is characterized by, providing the cybernetic space with editorial, exchange, and flexible openness features.

Democracy is a multifaceted process with intertwined political, social, economic, and cultural dimensions. Its essence is to expand the circle of popular participation in decision-making and effective monitoring of its implementation at all levels and in various fields.

However, it will not be institutionally and legally embodied until it finds support in the broadest sectors of the populace, who demand it, work to achieve it, and preserve it. Thus, it is illusory to believe that freedoms and democracy come as a gift from the ruler or are imposed externally from outside the community.

Pascal Josèphe (2009) observes that proponents of deliberative network democracy, who believe in its approach, view the internet, at least in the short to medium term, as a democratizing tool for current political, social, and cultural systems, and even, within foreseeable limits, as the "final station" for resolving the entire democratic dilemma.

In the realm of political action, communication and information technology has played a pivotal role in accelerating the processes of forming public opinion, political representation, and even decision-making, relying on the direct nature of communication methods. The degree of change varies depending on the nature of each political system and its progress in democracy.

Digital democracy reveals the integration between democracy as a political concept and technology as a mechanism and means to enhance it through contributing to the provision of theoretical foundations based on democracy, such as freedom of opinion and expression.

It offers tools for generating, collecting, categorizing, analyzing, and disseminating all information, data, and knowledge related to practicing

democratic values, thus becoming new means for practicing democracy and potentially reflecting on its concept as well.

Overall, Egyptian researcher Adel Abdel-Sadek Mohamed (2009) notes that some of the most prominent effects of the internet on political and public action include:

- Enabling individuals to create, receive, and send political content, utilizing mobile phone capabilities and various internet communication technologies and services.
- Enabling political participation from anywhere and at any time, using the mobility of wireless communication technologies to monitor events directly and with great flexibility. This feature is crucial for enabling marginalized and remote groups to participate politically.
- Personal participation, where the internet provides a relative ability to perform individual and voluntary actions not subject to directives.
- The internet can deliver many essential government services faster and more relevantly to citizens, which are fundamental to the democratic process. It also reduces the costs of gathering information and facilitates access to it.
- The internet helps facilitate the gathering of information necessary for monitoring government activities, publishing content that criticizes its plans and general policies.
- The internet can serve as a mechanism for democracy through new ways and means of practicing political processes, such as electronic voting or conducting consultations between voters and their representatives, or electronic opinion polls or forming political groups and alliances online.

Researcher Edwards (2003) believes that the internet has provided and detailed new frameworks for activating democracy, having successfully overcome barriers and obstacles to the application of direct democracy, such as the vast number of citizens and the complex socio-economic structure of modern societies.

It has introduced new models and mechanisms that enhance participation, such as email, opinion polls, forums, and electronic voting, allowing citizens to participate effectively in the democratic process. (Razin, 2021, p 160)

Case Study: The Role of Social Media in the Algerian Hirak Movement

A pertinent illustration of digital democracy mechanisms in action is the Algerian Hirak movement (2019–2021), where social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter played a critical role in mobilizing citizens, disseminating information, and organizing peaceful protests. Without traditional party structures or centralized leadership, activists utilized digital tools to coordinate efforts, share political messages, and challenge mainstream narratives. The movement showcased the power of interactive engagement and demonstrated the potential of digital democracy in enabling direct citizen participation. However, it also exposed vulnerabilities such as misinformation dissemination and selective censorship, emphasizing the necessity for critical digital literacy and institutional safeguards.

Conclusion:

Upon examining the concept of digital democracy, its unique facets, and its differentiation from related concepts, and through emphasizing the implementations of digital democracy along with its integral role within contemporary governmental communication systems, a profound understanding emerges.

Digital democracy extends to incorporate political communication practices and the creation of virtual spaces for political interaction. It becomes clear that the successful establishment of digital democracy is contingent upon several critical factors: the system's capacity for adaptation, the prevailing communication culture, the particularities of its localization context, and the communication environment's readiness for adoption and transformation.

This environment is notably variable across different nations and governance structures. Therefore, developing countries are especially urged to embrace and enhance the framework of digital democracy. This involves not only opening up to the dynamic interactions facilitated by its platforms but also simultaneously crafting a legislative environment that can manage the vast array of data and the diversity of its stakeholders effectively.

Moreover, there is an essential need for caution against unrestrained openness that could potentially leave the digital communication space devoid of ethical and standard regulations. Such oversight could precipitate total anarchy, diverting digital democracy away from serving the public interest and addressing crucial societal issues effectively.

Furthermore, certain perspectives argue that internet spaces, as currently configured, may inherently reflect a Western-centric view of democracy, imbued with the ideologies of their proprietors. This view may not necessarily resonate with or suit the socio-political contexts of developing nations.

Consequently, there is a pressing need for these countries to tailor digital democracy initiatives to align with their unique cultural and societal contexts. This tailored approach ensures that digital democracy not only respects but also enhances the local governance structures, cultural nuances, and public policy objectives of these regions. Such an adaptation is crucial for the fruitful integration and functional efficacy of digital democracy within diverse global landscapes.

References and sources:

- Abdel Karim, H. (2015). New media and mechanisms for achieving the quality of democracy in transitional societies: An approach to participatory democracy. *Thought Magazine*, Mohamed Khider University, Biskra.
- Bertrand, J. C. (1999). *Media: Introduction to the press, radio, and television* (2nd ed.). Paris: Ellipses.
- Bouamama, A., & Msahel, M. (2018). Political communication in the context of new media: Renewal of concepts and functions, cognitive approach. *Heritage Journal*, 1(8).
- Chouaib, B. (2014). Democracy and sovereignty according to Jurgen Habermas. *Heritage Magazine*, 4(6). Retrieved from <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/76356>
- Edwards, S. (2003). *The new political arena*. Plymouth: Lexington Books.
- El Nashar, N. (2012). Electronic democracy, participation, and engagement.
- El Yahyawi, Y. (2008). Digital democracy. Retrieved from <http://www.e-joussour.net/ar/node/2629>
- Fakhro, A. M. (2013, June 26). Arab regimes and electronic democracy. *Al Khaleej*. Retrieved from <http://www.arabrenewal.info/2010-06-11-14-11-19/44998-%25D8%25A3%25D9%2586%25D8%25B8%25D9%>
- Fathallah, A. N. (2015). Problems of political communication. *Contemporary*. Retrieved from http://nasserfattahallah.blogspot.com/2011/07/blog-post_08.html

- Gheitas, J. (2006). *Digital Democracy* (1st ed.). Egypt: Dar Nahdat Misr for Printing & Publishing.
- Gheitas, J. M. (2011). *Digital Democracy* (1st ed.). Egypt: Egyptian General Book Organization.
- Gochet, M. (2007). *Religion in Democracy: The Path of Secularization* (S. Mohsen, Trans.) (1st ed.). Lebanon: Center for Arab Unity Studies.
- Grespi, E. (1997). *The public opinion process: How the people speak*. London, UK: LEA Publishers.
- Imran, N. (2022). Digital democracy: Towards enhancing participation through information technology. *Journal of Legal and Political Sciences*, 13(2).
- Kanso, W. (n.d.). *Democracy: History and Origin*. Lebanon: Aramoun, Konrad Adenauer Foundation.
- Manovich, L. (2006). *The language of the new media*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Marzouki, B. E. (2014). The nature of political communication: A critical reading in some modern western concepts. *Scientific Observer Journal*, 1(1), 7-31.
- Nimmo, D., & Sanders, K. (1981). *Handbook of political communication*.
- Quére, L. (n.d.). The public space: From political theory to sociological theory. *Quederni*, 18, 75-92.
- Rabhi, S. (2008). *Political Parties and the Political Communication Process in Algeria: A Descriptive Comparative Study of the Role of the National Liberation Front and 'Workers' Party'* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Algiers 3. Retrieved from <http://kenanaonline.com/users/DrNadiaElnashar/posts/463986>
- Razin, M. (2021). *Political Communication on Social Networks in Algeria: The Electoral Campaigns of Political Parties as a Model* (Ph.D. dissertation). University of Tebessa.
- Tilly, C. (2010). *Democracy* (M. F. Tabakh, Trans.). Beirut, Lebanon: Center for Arab Unity Studies.
- Wahbi, A. L. (2014). Third generation of democracy invading the world. *Justice Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.justadala.com>

Walton, D. (n.d.). *Thinking communication*. Paris: Flammarion.