DEMOCRACY, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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ABSTRACT: Democracy is also communication. Those who act and operate in democratic regimes need to communicate. There has been a long historical trajectory, from the speeches delivered in the Greek Agora or the Roman Senate, through to the Modern Era and its printed newspapers, radio, television, and the beginning of the 21st century, with its digital social networks and artificial intelligence (AI), in which there has been a considerable expansion in the creation, flow, and access to information. Currently, one of the central dilemmas in politics is the ability of people to select their sources according to the integrity of the transformation of facts into journalistic or scientific content. The rise of social media has rapidly transformed political communication, altering the logic of conflict and modifying the behavior of actors and institutions. A new information culture is gaining prominence in contemporary democracies, deconstructing and leaving behind the logic of traditional communication flows.

KEYWORDS: Democracy. Social media. Artificial intelligence.

RESUMO: Democracia também é comunicação. Aqueles que agem e atuam em regimes democráticos precisam se comunicar. Houve uma longa trajetória histórica, desde os discursos proferidos na Ágora grega ou no Senado romano, passando pela Era Moderna e seus jornais impressos, rádio, televisão, até o início do século XXI, com suas redes sociais digitais e inteligência artificial (IA), período em que ocorreu uma ampliação considerável na criação, no fluxo e no acesso à informação. Atualmente, um dos dilemas centrais na política é a capacidade das pessoas de selecionar suas fontes de acordo com a integridade na transformação dos fatos em conteúdos jornalísticos ou científicos. A ascensão das redes sociais vem transformando rapidamente a comunicação política, alterando lógicas de conflito e modificando o comportamento dos atores e das instituições. Uma nova cultura informacional vem ganhando preponderância nas democracias contemporâneas, desconstruindo e deixando para trás a lógica do fluxo tradicional de comunicação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Democracia. Redes sociais. Inteligência artificial.

RESUMEN: La democracia también es comunicación. Quienes actúan y trabajan en regímenes democráticos necesitan comunicarse. Ha habido una larga trayectoria histórica, desde los discursos pronunciados en el Ágora griega o en el Senado romano, pasando por la Era Moderna y sus periódicos impresos, la radio, la televisión y el comienzo del siglo XXI, con sus redes sociales digitales y la inteligencia artificial (IA), en la que se ha producido una ampliación considerable en la creación, el flujo y el acceso a la información. Actualmente, uno de los dilemas centrales de la política es la capacidad de las personas para seleccionar sus fuentes de acuerdo con la integridad de la transformación de los hechos en contenidos periodísticos o científicos. El auge de las redes sociales está transformando rápidamente la comunicación política, alterando las lógicas de conflicto y modificando el comportamiento de los actores y las instituciones. Una nueva cultura informacional está ganando preponderancia en las democracias contemporáneas, deconstruyendo y dejando atrás la lógica del flujo tradicional de comunicación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Democracia. Redes sociales. Inteligencia artificial.

Introduction

Democracy is also communication. Those who act and operate within democratic regimes must engage in communication. There has been a long historical trajectory, from speeches delivered in the Greek Agora and the Roman Senate, through the Modern Era with its printed newspapers, radio, and television, to the early twenty-first century, marked by digital social networks and artificial intelligence (AI)—a period characterized by a significant expansion in the creation, flow, and accessibility of information. Today, one of the central dilemmas in politics is the ability of individuals to select their sources based on the integrity with which facts are transformed into journalistic or scientific content.

In 2016, for instance, the term *"post-truth"* was chosen as the Word of the Year by the Oxford Dictionary. The reason is clear: that year, concentrated actions of fake news, disseminated primarily through social media, decisively impacted the referendum on the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union, contributing to the success of Brexit. The lessons of 2016 were subsequently echoed in the same year's US presidential elections, with the victory of Republican candidate Donald Trump, and in Brazil in 2018, with the election of Jair Bolsonaro, then representing the Social Liberal Party.

The rise of social media has been rapidly transforming political communication, altering the dynamics of conflict and reshaping the behavior of both actors and institutions. A new informational culture has been gaining prominence in contemporary democracies, deconstructing and leaving behind the logic of traditional communication flows. While liberal democracies were already facing mounting challenges with the transformation brought about by the circulation of information through digital social networks—marked by fake news and information overload—these challenges have now become even more substantial with the increasing use of AI.

According to Allen and Weyl (2024), Generative AI poses two significant challenges to democracy. First, institutional constellations were theoretically designed to represent citizens, within which they could form a "market" of ideas; however, with generative AI, this market risks becoming distorted, potentially undermining individuals' cognitive ability to comprehend the political world. Second, the concentration of economic power—and consequently political power—among leading AI companies may exacerbate existing imbalances.

Another major challenge posed by AI to democracies lies in its capacity to model and disseminate disinformation. Kreps, McCain, and Brundage (2022) conducted three experiments

with AI-generated texts and concluded that individuals are unable to distinguish between content produced by AI and that created by the human mind. Moreover, partisanship directly affects the perceived credibility of the material, resulting in minimal shifts in opinion; in other words, AI may further reinforce the "echo chamber" effect already amplified by social media.

In this regard, and in line with Thompson (2011), it is difficult to conceive a communication process without at least a minimal degree of coherence in the channels of production, transmission, reception, and feedback concerning the delivered product. When addressing the political phenomenon, the object becomes even more complex, as it involves symbolic elements that are constructed and re-signified over time in societies that are both culturally diverse and complex. The anxieties, aspirations, and hopes present in the collective imagination—determined and demanded by society—constitute the most valuable asset to be effectively engaged by political communication within a democracy.

Since the advent of radio and the displacement of its central role by television in the second half of the twentieth century, no other transformation has so decisively impacted the process of political communication as digital social networks—and now, AI. Unlike traditional channels, through which political narratives were conveyed with coherence—stories crafted to end in triumph or failure, often with dramatic or even humorous undertones—engagement in new media thrives on the opposite: immediacy, incoherence, confusion, and aggression. This form of communication operates through excess, distorting information and fostering divisive polarization.

Driven by increasingly powerful algorithmic chains, users are often led to access content unrelated to their initial interests. According to Deibert (2020), this results from the business models of major corporations that provide search and entertainment tools on social media platforms but, in reality, seek ever more private and individualized data. AI, in its nascent stage, has only begun to explore and promises to reshape the entire logic of information production and circulation.

The data-driven surveillance capitalism orchestrated by major social media companies has transformed informational culture and directly impacted democracy. Significant battles have been fought as states attempt to regulate and bring greater transparency to the so-called "black box" of algorithms; however, as long as this power struggle remains unresolved, we are likely to continue witnessing the rise of extremist leaderships fueled by xenophobic and anti-systemic rhetoric. This is not a favorable moment for democracy, which faces waves of autocratization even within consolidated democratic systems.

The articles in this dossier address this issue through diverse theoretical, empirical, and methodological perspectives. By investigating phenomena still in development, the authors provide an invaluable contribution to this research agenda, shedding light on contemporary challenges, proposing explanatory pathways, and thus helping to shape the field.

The article by Débora de Oliveira Santos and Bianca Ferreira de Andrade examines the impact of fake news on Brazilian democracy, highlighting how disinformation influences political attitudes and trust in institutions. Drawing on data from the World Values Survey (WVS), the survey "A Cara da Democracia", and focus groups, the authors identify that distrust in traditional media and the use of social networks such as Facebook and WhatsApp are associated with the dissemination of false news. The correlations revealed by their research point to key directions for understanding the phenomenon of fake news in an increasingly digitalized environment through which information circulates, directly affecting democracy.

André Sampaio Furlani analyzes the documentary *Dossiê Urnas Eletrônicas*, produced by Brasil Paralelo, as a conspiracy theory aimed at fostering distrust in the Brazilian electoral system. Employing a framing analysis methodology, the study identifies two main frames: "(un)reliability of technology" and "(anti)democracy," highlighting how the production company selects, omits, and emphasizes information to construct a narrative aligned with Bolsonarist discourse. The documentary distorts critical technical arguments concerning electronic voting machines by omitting key facts and contexts, suggesting fraud and creating a conspiratorial atmosphere through audiovisual techniques and post-truth strategies, such as hidden causal links and the polarization between "friends" and "enemies."

José Manuel Mussunda da Silva analyzes the role of political memes, particularly the slogan "*Vão Gostar*," during the 2022 Angolan elections, highlighting their influence on digital mobilization and the construction of electoral narratives. Using a qualitative approach, the study examines how these memes adapted political discourse to the digital environment, making it more accessible—especially to younger audiences—while also challenging established political structures. The meme "*Vão Gostar*" emerged as both a tool for social critique and engagement and as a vehicle associated with hate speech and disinformation. By contributing to the debate on political communication in the digital era, the research also exposes the challenges these transformations pose in authoritarian contexts.

Amâncio de Oliveira, Romeu Mesquita, and Rodrigo Lyra investigate the impact of AI on diplomacy and its integration into global innovation ecosystems, emphasizing the tension between international cooperation and competition. The authors analyze how AI is

transforming diplomatic practice by optimizing traditional functions and creating new dynamics, all while nations such as the United States, the European Union, and China compete for technological and regulatory supremacy. The article also discusses Scientific Diplomacy and Innovation as instruments to foster international cooperation, evidence-based public policies, and balanced governance. By framing AI as a crucial technological frontier, it addresses ethical, security, and regulatory challenges while proposing strategies to equip diplomats and policymakers with the necessary tools to navigate this evolving landscape.

Eder Van Pelt's article investigates the relationship between democracy and the digital environment, examining how information technologies affect political participation and the formation of the "digital subject." Through a qualitative literature review drawing on theorists such as Castells, Bauman, and Haraway, the study discusses the need for legal regulation to safeguard civil rights in the digital age, including privacy and self-determination. It also addresses the influence of algorithms on behavioral modulation and the risks of discrimination and control by large corporations. The analysis proposes the democratization of technological codes and the creation of legal frameworks to strengthen contemporary democracy, balancing innovation and governance to confront emerging digital realities.

Ícaro Araujo Juriti explores the relationship with the Other in the digital sphere, arguing that the dynamics of social networks, shaped by market logic, foster alienation and the commodification of the Other. The author draws a parallel between this dynamic and nineteenth-century ethnographic museums and human zoos, emphasizing the processes of dehumanization and the erosion of alterity. While the Internet enables encounters, it often reduces the Other to superficial representations, encourages echo chambers, and promotes the blocking of dissent. Juriti critiques the superficiality of digital relationships, mediated by algorithms and commercial interests, which deepen estrangement and alienation, arguing that as long as capitalist logic dominates the digital realm, relationships will remain fragile, resembling a contemporary "human zoo."

We extend our gratitude to the researchers who contributed to this dossier and to *Cadernos de Campo* for providing this valuable platform, which has consistently disseminated significant scholarly investigations.

We wish you an enriching read!

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