DIGITALIZATION, DIGITAL GOVERNANCE AND DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING: AN INEVITABLE COMBINATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACIES, CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

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ABSTRACT

Digitalization is concerned as an indispensable part of modern-day politics and representative democracies. More and more countries are getting their governance structures digitalized for effective and efficient governance. Data driven decision making is playing a predominant role across the globe as it has significantly ameliorated the daunting task of governance for states and governments. Digitalization in politics and governance has both received acclamation as well as criticism as the advocates and critics both hold their valid arguments concerning their consequences for representative democracies. In the developed world Europe and Americas, the rise in the trend has captivated and attracted the attention of scholars and policy makers arguing on its future potential and challenges for representative democracies. With arguments and criticism on both ends one thing is clear that digitalization in modern democracies is an inevitable fact and necessary inclusion into politics and governance process. With all of its pitfalls concerned, the reforms are to be brought in the digital structure on both technical and ethical lines and it does not suggest indirectly the denouncement of the structure in any way. The article is an effort to analyze and discuss the effects of digitalization on governance and decision making in Europe, America and Australian continent taking case studies of countries.

Key Points: Digitalization, Representative democracies, E-deliberation, Digital governance, Digital Democracy.

INTRODUCTION

The recent decades have shown digital democracy as a burning issue and debate in the political and intellectual circles concerning the political activity and communication through the usage of online and offline digital media and tools. The trend and the modern digital representative version of Democracy has received acclamation and criticism both from different circles. (Jan A.G.M. van Dijk, 2013) Despite that certain claim advocating digital version of democracy are outlined. The digital technologies have stimulated the debate of the potential and capability of internet playing role in reducing space between the general public and elite class by increasing the participation and political discussion platforms accessibility to majority public. Electronic version of participation is been on rise as governments and states are involving more and more of their citizens in the public policy discussions and debates. (Tambouris E., 2013) Three levels of E-democracy can be defined and discussed pertaining to the involvement of citizens in governance and decision-making process. The Information level, The Consultation level and Active Participation. The first level of E-democracy is concentrated on the access to the authentic and reliable information online through the usage of websites, search engines etc.

The second level is concerned with the online discussion and deliberation platforms for better understanding of different public policy issues by citizens and governments for constructive decision making based on these deliberations. Thirdly the Active participation model signifies direct participation and inclusion in the public policy process. (Tuzzi A., 2007)

Digital Democracy as a term have numerous definitions, and still there is no single agreed definition of the term. Yet it can be simply and precisely defined as, "the practice of democracy using digital tools and technologies". We also can have a difference between the definitions of the two versions of Digital democracy, the Minimalist and the Maximalist definition of digital democracy. The Minimalist version is concerned with the access to the governmental information and thus making them enough able to interact with the government through online consultation process. On the other hand, the maximalist version of digital democracy focuses upon the participation of the citizens making collaborations with the citizens and giving them decision making power through the process that how they and their local communities can be governed (Tuzzi A., 2007).

In order to avoid pitfalls in the digital democracy process several steps needed to be taken. The first that has been proved through the case studies, is to engage the citizens as early as possible. It will enable them to dissect the particular problem and setting an effective agenda (Julie Simon, 2017). Another way of judging a good democratic process is to ensure transparency, clear communication and feedback. Clear communication and feedback were instrumental in the success of the E-democracia portal. After the end of every consultation process, a final report is drafted that how the whole process of agreement and disagreement over the bill was made. Such kind of well-structured mechanism makes the overall process transparent. Also, awareness and information regarding the process that, how it works? What are the aims of the project? What will be the rules of engagement? So, by providing the overall framework to the participants, the participatory percentage of the people increases and the risk of people disengagement can be avoided. In order to make the process functional on the routine basis it is essential that the process must be facilitated and moderated. This includes making the participants up

to date with different developments about the law and vice versa (Julie Simon, 2017).

Some of the arguments in favor of using digital tools in democracies and political process are,

1. It improves the exchange of the political information between the governments, representatives, individuals, public administrators and different organizations.
2. It enhances public debate and deliberation thus supports the online political community formation.
3. Through the usage of digital tools citizens have a more pro-active role in the decision-making process (Tsagarousianou, 1999)

The core perception and goal behind the usage of digital tools for public opinion formation, data gathering etc. is to make politics more relatable. The goal is to make politics more from its conventional form of political engagement like voting to a more individual engaging part of an everyday life action process. Different communities and citizens must be supported with skills, network and modern tools in order to engage in political issues relevant to their personal lives (Doing Democracy How Social entrepreneurs bridge divides, fight apathy and strengthen civil liberties).

Europe a success model in the usage of digital advocacy tools for E-deliberation:

Europe case showed trust deficit in the surveys conducted by 2014 Ipsos Mori poll and Eurobarometer survey conducted from citizens on the politics of Europe. The 2014 Ipsos Mori poll suggested that, in Britain only 16% of the citizens trust the politicians on telling the truth. In Germany and France 68% and 86% of the people distrust the politicians. While the Eurobarometer survey showed that only 32% of the British adults trusted parliament, and only 28% French, 40% Germans and 24% Italians have a trust on their governments. Many causes could be attributed to these statistics and the lack of trust in European citizens, but one significant factor is the role played by the digital technologies. Overwhelming majority of the public in the online activity has been ignored by the political process. Voting once a few years and not involved in the digital process, consultation and feedback on every single issue related to the politics are the causes attributed to such trends (Jamie Bartlett, 2015). But some political scientists believe like normally citizens are not serious about engaging in politics and

according to the Hansard Research Foundation that only 29% of the British voters believed that more participation in the political process can bring improvement in the political system (Stoker, 2014). The real issue is not with the speed, ease or the opportunities given in maximum numbers to the participants online but is the process of engagement which requires transparency in the process. New digital technologies used and employed in an effective way makes the overall political and governance process more transparent, democratic, accessible, inclusive and acceptable (Jamie Bartlett, 2015).

The EU democratic deficit can be removed by usage of digital tools that will create stronger connections between EU citizens and EU decision making process. After an analysis and review of 22 local, national EU level experiences most promising and reliable digital tools were found. Certain important factors that the report identified for the efficient e-participation process were, close and clear link between the participation process and the decision-making process, clarity of the overall process to the participants involved and feedback to the participants about their contributions. Along with that there must be an institutional culture of participation rather than relying on a single event. Effective mobilization and engagement mechanism to be implemented targeting different groups (Jamie Bartlett, 2015).

Despite a lot of improvements has been made on the internet on the access to information in the political decision-making process, there is still a lot to do specifically concerned with the online deliberation process with respect to diverse ideas. It has been proven from research that access to the e-participation cannot solve the overall political vacuum, rather the process must be transformed to an actual decision-making process. This must be done by giving a clear picture to the participants about the process as well as proper feedback on the input. In the same way it is essential that with time the overall participatory framework for the citizens must be updated and modernized. Otherwise, the citizens must than only be conferred upon limited roles it ultimately it will not be a change barrier constructively. In order to analyze the role of the e-democratic institutions on the EU level the EU institutions within their institutional limits must take into action the scholarly recommendations (Rasmus O.Nielsen, 2019).

When an analysis of 25 top social entrepreneurs across the Europe was done, seven different kinds of strategies were revealed that can impact the representative democracies on developed path. These strategies apply to all kind of thinkers, citizens and professionals. These strategies can be outlined as,

1. Making politics engaging and relatable.
2. Foster offline engagement through online tools
3. Bring unlikely allies together
4. Leverage the power of networks
5. Shift Power relations
6. Tap into citizens skills and expertise
7. Use research as basis for the reflection and action (Doing Democracy How Social entrepreneurs bridge divides, fight apathy and strengthen civil liberties).

E-participation at EU level cannot be improved without making it relevant to a proper decision-making process. The mechanism and the structure of participation must be clear to the participants and they must be given relevant feedback upon their participation. Without improving and updating the structure of decision-making process, its certain that those participating in the process will be confined to limited roles in the overall decision-making process. Here the problem lies not on technical lines rather on institutional ones. Successful e-democratic process and e-participation needs resolving institutional barriers and drawbacks (Rasmus O.Nielsen, 2019).

Digitalization in American Continent:
United States of America:
The case of digital democracy in United States of America has been subjected to complex opinions by different scholars. On the sociological level the dominant narrative considers digitalization as fatal to the democracy. Considerable number of scholars and political scientists argue that digital technologies have greatly affected the people engagement and participation in the politics and the overall political community is dying (Putnam, 2000) (J.J Macmillan, 2007) (Nielson, 2015).

On the other hand, the research conducted at the Midwestern university by conducting a longitudinal survey of the undergraduate students it was found that digital civic engagement is the answer to the gaps in the conventional political participation. The role of the educators, scholars and students is detrimental in attaining an increase in the online civic

engagement. The results of the study indicated that the participation of the students in the civic learning courses led to the proper amount of increase in the online engagement. While students engaged significantly less over time. Those students that were present in the civic learning courses were engaged offline while those that were not present in such courses reduced their offline civic engagement. The study revealed that as less appearance in the traditional civic engagement indicates like voting, campaigns for elections is cited as decline in the American democratic structure, the same is valid for the engagement in the internet age that effect the democratic structure with its less and larger civic engagement online. Alternatively, it's just the matter of time. The case and significance of the civic engagement and its impacts upon democracy in the United States remains the same (Jacob L. Nelson, 2016).

The most important challenges to the E-democratic setup in the United States in concerned with political decision making and policy making. The significant and notable challenges are the institutional constraints on the virtual public sphere, proactive role of the governmental institutions in the implementation of E-democracy, the technology related constraints on the virtual public spheres, multi-dimensionality of the digital divide, constraints on the access to the internet, the issue of the social inclusiveness, structural barriers to inclusion, structural barriers due to the E-government, Challenge of connecting the unconnected, technologies dealing that creates barriers to access etc. (Cropf, 2018). Through proper policy and decision making the challenges needs to be dealt with to actualize a successful e-democratic model in United States.

Canada:

Canada was one of the few countries that successfully implemented the e-government practices in the country. (Mohamed Charih, 2004). The e-government practice in Canada started in the mid-nineties with the "Connecting Canadians" initiative in 1994 and in 1999 this was accompanied by the government online web portal. After that a new project in 2005 with the name of "Service Canada" was launched. The post 9/11 context made the information and transparency questionable and thus it was a setback to the engaging citizens in the policy making. In 2005 a telephonic survey was conducted in Canada that revealed that Canadians were in the favor of a more direct say in the policy making and opportunities they need that can impact governmental decision making. Yet still Canada lags behind in e-democratic practices to a major extent as the state-citizen relations and connection are controlled through managerial approach. The opinion of the citizens in the policy making is lesser. The government-initiated programs and the e-consultations has only made the government active online but e-democracy as a system in true sense is still nominal (Wouters, 2008).

Canada has negligible findings and evidence that with the advent of the ICT, s the engagement and citizen participation has been improved to a satisfactory level. Despite a lot of efforts made in the digitalizing of certain administrative and managerial functions, Canada lags behind in the four pre-requisites that are essential for the e-consultations to improve the democratic governance. These are the citizens awareness, literacy, feedback capacity and will power. Till then, significant improvements are not done in these four areas, no technology can bring a decisive improvement in the overall e-democratic process. Technology definitely enhances the services of the governments and improves the access to the information and the communication process. Yet it is not adequate to say that the internet and technologies can serve the cause of Direct Democracy and empower the ordinary citizens directly in Canada. So Canadian e-democratic and e-governmental structures significantly needs reforms and amendments in order to set the appropriate course of action for their political representation (Lacharite, 2011).

Brazil:

On the digital democracy practices in Brazil research was undertaken between August 2017 and January 2018 in order to do an analysis into the digital democracy initiatives undertaken by the Brazilian federal executive. All Brazilian executive websites were searched and surveyed for digital democracy initiatives. Democratic values and themes were taken on the basis of which all the data was analyzed namely transparency, participation, rights and access to justice, deliberation and information and education for citizenship. Transparency is related to the improvement of accountability mechanism, control of citizens, monitoring the state actions and initiatives etc. Overall, the initiatives relevant to the

transparency contained authorities monitoring, public works and policies monitoring, fiscal transparency, opening data, citizen information service and bidding of auction tools. The second point taken for analysis was participation that is to influence the decision-making process through the use of the communication and information technologies. Participation initiatives consisted of different steps and projects like public discussion oriented digital platforms, institutional forums online, electronic petitions, digital voting systems, best practice bank and ombudsman. After that comes the category of rights and access to justice which is concerned with the protection of citizens' rights and giving them access to justice. These are concerned with political minorities. It includes allowing the citizens to have a greater access to the justice online that includes access to information, judicial issues and complaints filing etc. These initiatives basically consisted of denouncement and conflict intermediation. Deliberation is another perspective taken in the research related to the public discussion and debates. The concept is currently discussed with the perspective of Deliberative democracy. Relevant to the digital democratic setup it is concerned with forums, arguments based public consultations, drafting bill texts and online systems of public deliberations. After that another point taken is the value of information and education for citizenship, concerned with all important details needed for citizenship and democratic awareness. It can consist of laws and different issues concerned with public interest. Mainly following initiatives are focused in this category online courses, children and adolescent's environment, calculators and simulators, booklets and dictionaries, research results and indicators and legislation of public documents database. The evaluation ultimately found that total of 119 digital democracy steps taken by the Brazilian federal government in which 47.1% accounted for transparency, participation and information and education for citizenship accounted for 23.5% while only 5.9 % initiatives consisted of rights and access to justice (Almada, 2019).

E Democracy in the Australian Continent:
The introduction of the communication and the computing technologies has greatly affected the overall social, economic and political life of the Australians. These technologies have accelerated the trend of making Australia becoming part of the global community. They have made Australian politics open to access and participation to a great deal. The digital tools have enabled the citizens for their self-expression and political expression. The political parties in Australia have been transformed with the introduction of these digital technologies. The primary advantage they have taken out of these digital technologies is that of informing and educating their citizens. The use of ICT, s by the political representatives in Australia, have become a source for them on the local and state level as a publishing vehicle as well as mean of interaction with the individual constituencies. The role of ICT, s for the electoral process has mixed results having both positive and negative connotations. Yet it has helped in the opinion formation of the citizens to a greater level. Australian civil society has been affected with the advent of ICT, s. This upgradation has affected the four core democratic values of equality, popular control, civil liberties and vibrant public debate. Access to discussion and debate, sharing of information on larger scale, share and input into the policy processes are some of the constructive implications of the ICT, s on the Australian civil society. The scope of these digital technologies has the possibility to give equal voice to citizens. It can project huge content from variety of the sources and also can develop digital education through the use of education and entertainment. On the other hand, the implications of ICT, s for the public sector and government has enabled to publish a wide range of information online related to public policy. New democratic services have been provided such as the freedom of expression and access to information online part of the public consultations and participations online (Peter Chen, 2006).

In New Zealand 2008 general elections has been considered a haul mark year in the use of the digital technologies and internet by the political parties and the common public. Different scholarly work has been published regarding the E-government with respect to health, library services and digital records management (Jason Eberhart-Phillips, 2000) (Yates, 2007) (Parker) (Shaw, 2006) (Dorner, 2009). Significant progress has been made in New Zealand on the relationship between politics and ICT, s, yet more work needs to be done in this regard. Currently focus has been given on the E-government in New Zealand in order to facilitate the access of the citizens into the government services and secure and understand the citizens input into the overall process

of use of these E-government services. On the E-participation level the political parties have taken the initiatives on their websites in order to engage with their voters on the issues of policy and party guidelines. On the general people level, the engagement with politics online is small. Without some political elites and some online blogs, the political engagement of citizens has not yet achieved a satisfactory optimistic level (Shaw R.).

Critical Analysis and Conclusion:
Digitalization in politics and decision-making process is playing a detrimental role all across the globe especially in the developed world. With its advocates and critics both with valid arguments and strong analytical perspective on both ends, still it has become indispensable inclusion into representative democracies. With all the positive impacts of the digitalization on all these countries discussed that of political participation, access to information, data driven decision making, helping decision makers in shaping and framing public policies for citizens etc. digitalization technologies have technical and moral constraints. The digital divide between citizens on the know how about the politics, equal access to the online services provided for deliberation, the design-reality gap problem and achieving greater citizens engagement online in order to have majoritarian perspective in the issues of public interest are some of its technical constraints. In the same way the digital technologies need to develop ethical paradigms in order not to violate the individual liberties, human rights, freedom of expression and opinion, personal privacy which are the fundamental norms and values related to Democracy. Digital technologies are inevitable usage in representative democracies provided establishing an ethical and technical code of conduct or paradigm conducive to the norms of representative democracies solving concerns and grievances attached with it.

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