POLITICAL ELECTIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

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ABSTRACT

Technological developments have digitized many concepts that deeply affect humanity's life. This digitization has led to profound changes in areas such as communication, education, commerce, and politics. Particularly, the digitization of politics has transformed traditional political styles and habits, giving rise to the concept of digital political communication. Politicians have begun to effectively use new media tools and aim to elevate their policies in online spaces. The most prominent feature of

online communication spaces is interactive communication. Interactive communication plays a critical role for politicians in establishing effective communication with voters, shaping-directing public opinion, and in election campaigns. Actors adapting to the digital age seek to establish a connection with voters using platforms like social media, where interactive communication is heavily used and effective, and to turn this connection into electoral success. The strategic use of appropriate digital campaigns encourages voter participation in democratic processes while also supporting decision-making processes and idea sharing among voters. However, although elections in the digital age carry positive features for both politicians and voters, they also harbor significant negative features that influence the election processes and decision-making states of voters. These negative features affecting a large majority of voters include the sharing and analysis of individuals' private information, the rapid spread of misinformation without passing through verification mechanisms, and algorithms creating misleading perceptions. In light of this information, the definition and importance of interactive communication have been researched, and the positive features of this communication type in both daily life and democratic processes have been identified, along with alternative suggestions for its negative features. The findings are supported with examples from Turkey and around the world, and the effects of these examples are discussed. In this study, a method that analyzes the strategic use of digital tools in the process of politicians effectively communicating with voters and the impact of interactive communication technologies on election campaigns has been used.

Keywords: *Interactive Communication, Digitization, Digital Politics, Voters.*

DİJİTAL ÇAĞDA SİYASİ SEÇİMLER: SEÇİM KAMPANYALARINDA İNTERAKTİF İLETİŞİM

ÖZ
Teknolojik gelişmeler insanlığın hayatını derinden etkileyen birçok kavramı dijitalleştirmiştir. Bu dijitalleşme, iletişim, eğitim, ticaret ve

siyaset gibi alanlarda köklü değişimlere neden olmuştur. Özellikle siyasetin dijitalleşmesi gelenekselleşen siyaset tarzını ve alışkanlıklarını dönüştürüp dijital siyasal iletişim kavramının ortaya çıkmasına yol açmıştır. Politikacılar yeni medya araçlarını etkin kullanmaya başlamış ve politikalarını çevrimiçi alanlarda yükseltmeyi hedeflemişlerdir. Çevrimiçi iletişim alanlarının en belirgin özelliği ise interaktif (etkileşimli) iletişimdir. İnteraktif iletişim politikacıların seçmenler ile etkili iletişim kurmasında, kamuoyunu şekillendirmede-yönlendirmede ve seçim kampanyalarında kritik bir önem taşımaktadır. Dijital çağa uyum sağlayan aktörler sosyal medya gibi interaktif iletişimin yoğun kullanıldığı ve etkili olduğu platformları kullanarak seçmen ile arasında bir bağ kurup bu bağı seçim başarısına dönüştürmek isterler. Buna uygun dijital kampanyaların stratejik kullanımları, seçmenlerin demokratik süreçlere katılımını arttırmaya teşvik ederken politikacılarında seçmenlerinde kendi aralarında karar alma süreçlerini ve fikir paylaşımlarını desteklemektedir. Ancak dijital çağda seçimler politikacılar ve seçmenler açısından olumlu özellikler taşısa da seçim süreçlerini ve seçmenlerin karar alma hallerini etkileyen önemli olumsuz özellikleri de barındırmaktadır. Kişilerin özel bilgilerinin paylaşılması, analizinin yapılması, yanlış bilginin hızla yayılması ve teyit mekanizmalarından geçmemesi, algoritmaların yanıltıcı algılar oluşturması gibi büyük çoğunlukta seçmeni etkileyen olumsuz özellikleri vardır. Bu bilgiler doğrultusunda interaktif iletişimin tanımı ve önemi araştırılmış ve bu iletişim türünün hem günlük yaşamda hem de demokratik süreçlerde olumlu özellikleri tespit edilmiş olumsuz özellikleri için ise alternatif önerilerde bulunulmuştur. Bulunan veriler Türkiye'den ve dünyadan örneklerle desteklenmiş örneklerin sonuçlarının etkileri tartışılmıştır. Bu çalışmada, politikacıların seçmenlerle etkili iletişim kurma sürecinde dijital araçların stratejik kullanımını ve interaktif iletişim teknolojilerinin seçim kampanyalarına etkisini analiz eden bir yöntem kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *İnteraktif İletişim, Dijitalleşme, Dijital Siyaset, Seçmen.*

INTRODUCTION
The advancement of technology studies has standardized the quality of life and living dynamics of societies, transitioning every field that supports social progress to the digital realm. Particularly after the 1990s,

traditional standards have been replaced by digital standards and patterns. The changing dynamics of the world, the digitization of communication, and the active role of social media in all areas of life have significantly influenced political communication and politics. *"The subject of digital politics encompasses the technology-based operations of political production and participation for both political parties and actors, as well as citizens"* (Şen, A. F., & Şen, Y. F. 2023. s.491). In today's world, digital communication tools have replaced traditional propaganda methods and political campaigns with digital election campaigns. Political figures and institutions that have adapted to this era have recognized the importance of interactive communication and have developed propaganda systems accordingly. This system has highlighted the necessity for politicians to interact with voters not only during election periods but also in everyday life, responding to their expectations. It has played an active role in the decision-making processes of voters, their forms of protest, and their potential to vote. It has also enabled voters to become more familiar with political figures and institutions.

Today, thanks to smartphones that have captured the attention of not only young people but also elderly individuals (Dalaylı, 2023, p.23-36), social media is the most effective tool where interactive communication manifests itself. Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, which are heavily used by the masses, are the easiest ways for politicians to reach voters and receive feedback. Thanks to these platforms, the opinions and demands of voters have become more visible, and political institutions have developed new election campaigns and propaganda based on these demands.

"The possibilities of the digital age are being maximally utilized by interest groups and social movements that have goals aligned with political parties. Social media plays a significant role in the development processes of social movements, which emerge in areas where institutional politics remains ineffective or leaves gaps, and act as catalysts for social change." (Özmen, Y. P. 2022. p.770). In this context, social media not only influences voters and political figures but also facilitates the rapid spread of social movements and carries the characteristic of these interactions being referenced in political decision-making processes.

The importance and effective use of interactive communication in political elections during the digital age are examined, and strategies behind the campaigns are analyzed to provide suggestions for future election campaigns. The role of interactive communication in enhancing political participation and its contributions to democratic processes are also assessed, exploring the opportunities and challenges brought by this era. This allows voters to interpret political figures and make decisions without being influenced by internet disinformation.

It is observed that interactive communication not only impacts election campaigns and political communication but also significantly influences political participation and democratic mechanisms. The advancement of technology and the proliferation of digital tools have facilitated access to information, enabling voters to make more informed decisions. However, the disadvantages brought by this process should not be overlooked; issues like digital divides, information pollution, and manipulation can complicate participation in political processes.

The high rates of social media usage among young voters necessitate that political figures and parties use these platforms strategically. Young voters tend to receive news via social media rather than traditional media channels, leading to significant changes in the design and dissemination of political messages. These changes require the reshaping of election strategies and are transforming the ways parties interact with young voters.

Furthermore, interactions on social media platforms have become a crucial factor in shaping voter behavior. During political campaigns, the use of data analysis and targeting techniques provides customized content based on the interests and behavioral patterns of voters. This not only facilitates more effective communication of political messages but also increases voters' participation and engagement in the political processes.

With the opportunities presented by the digital age, the management of political communication and campaigns is undergoing a fundamental transformation. This new era requires political actors to establish a more meaningful and sustained dialogue with voters, and it holds the potential to

maximize the impact of this process on democratic participation and social change. In this context, political parties and candidates must effectively use digital tools to pursue a more transparent, participatory, and interactive approach to democratic processes.

In this study, a method that analyzes the strategic use of digital tools in the process of politicians effectively communicating with voters and the impact of interactive communication technologies on election campaigns has been used.

The Role of the Digital Age in Political Elections

Media fulfills responsibilities such as informing, educating, guiding, and entertaining societies through mass communication tools. Media technologies shape how individuals think and feel, as well as the structuring and functioning of society (Erdoğan & Alemdar, 2005. p.142 as cited in Yengin, 2014. p.53). Another area where media is utilized is the field of politics. It is one of the most important tools for conveying political events and policies to the public. Since the existence of traditional media, political figures have been using this method to communicate their political messages to the people. These messages not only inform the electorate but also provide the experience of forming opinions about political institutions or actors. "The media must present significant claims thoroughly, objectively, and understandably, and must express various viewpoints. At this point, independent communication guarantees the development of will and decision-making necessary for the formation of a critical public opinion, structuring it within the public process as a part of democracy." (Schicha, 2003 p.44 as cited in Çetin, N. S. 2019 p.233). Politicians develop various strategies and propaganda methods to leverage the power of the media. Therefore, it is expected that the media approaches political actors and institutions impartially. However, the neutrality of the media has been compromised due to the commercial concerns of media organizations, leading to increasing control of the media by political institutions. This situation has allowed groups that harness the power of the media to more easily spread their ideas and ideologies to societies, using the media as a tool for manipulation. In the digital age, this interaction has emerged through different means. The development of internet technologies has significantly influenced and transformed public practices

of acquiring information, their participation and production in politics, and their political behaviors.

One of the greatest benefits of the internet is the ability to easily reach large audiences from wherever you are. With the development of the internet, the concept of social media has enabled daily practices to be conducted over virtual environments. Users now engage in activities such as gathering information, shopping, socializing, and entertainment more on virtual platforms than in physical settings. Politicians have supported this transformation and have shaped their practices accordingly. The main reason for the rapid spread of this transformation is the internet's ability to easily reach large audiences. *"The internet reached 50 million users within just one year. In contrast, radio took 38 years and television 13 years to reach the same number of users."* (Yengin, D. & Bayrak, T. 2023. p.4). This situation has enabled politicians to begin building their policies using the advantages of the internet instead of traditional media. Political groups also utilize the internet's ability to quickly reach large audiences by conveying their messages through social media platforms. Today, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are frequently used by the masses, who spend a significant amount of time on them. A post shared by a politician on such platforms can reach thousands of people within seconds. This facilitates quick and easy communication between voters and politicians.
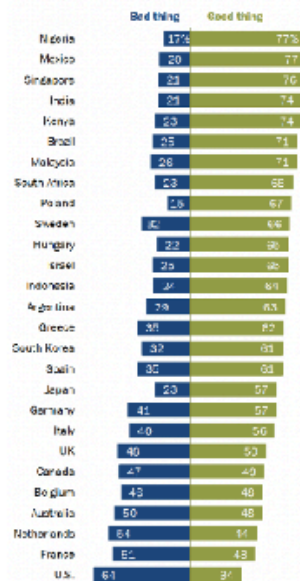
The ease of accessing the internet and factors like low cost have accelerated the integration of politics into the virtual world. Political party posters traditionally seen on billboards have moved online, appearing to users through specific algorithms. These algorithms facilitate targeting voters belonging to particular demographic groups or those with specific interests. During the 2008 U.S. presidential elections, the website created under the leadership of Chris Hughes for Barack H. Obama (mybarackobama. com) enabled young voters to produce content and reach wide audiences. The digital campaign strategy implemented particularly attracted the younger demographic, and this interest was reflected in the election results. (Sadakaoğlu, M. C., & Korkmaz, Ö. E. 2020. p.38-39). Here's the translation of the provided academic text, with attention to grammar:

"The hours during which users are active confirm social media interactions, and campaigns created based on these data are personalized for specific voter demographics. For instance, a political message targeting a particular age group or region can be shown only to the relevant voters through digital ads. This enhances the effectiveness of campaigns and ensures that voters are personally influenced. Another impact of conducting politics over digital platforms is that it allows voters to make their voices heard and actively participate in the process. This participation, in turn, shapes and guides the institutions' campaigns and discourses based on the voters' political engagement."

In addition, the surveys conducted by the US-based independent research firm Pew Research Center between 2022 and 2023 in 27 countries to measure public opinion on the impact of social media on democracy are noteworthy.

In most countries surveyed, large shares say social media has been good for their democracy

_% who say social media has been somewhat/a ___ for democracy in their country_

	Bad thing	Good thing
Nigeria	17%	77%
Mexico	20	77
Singapore	24	76
India	29	74
Kenya	23	74
Brazil	25	71
Malaysia	26	71
South Africa	23	68
Poland	26	67
Sweden	30	66
Hungary	22	66
Israel	25	65
Indonesia	27	64
Argentina	29	63
Greece	38	62
South Korea	32	61
Spain	35	61
Japan	23	57
Germany	41	57
Italy	40	56
UK	49	53
Canada	47	49
Belgium	43	48
Australia	50	48
Netherlands	54	44
France	51	43
U.S.	64	34

Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.
Source: Spring 2023 and Spring 2022 Global Attitudes surveys
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 1: Pew Research Center: The impact of social media on democracy 2022-2023
Source: https://l24.im/QFYS5

According to the survey results, people believe that social media contributes to democracy and positively affects their countries. However, in France, the majority (51%) perceives it has a negative impact. This perception may stem from factors such as social media manipulations and the spread of societal events through social media in France. In developing countries like Nigeria and Mexico, approximately eight out of ten individuals (77% in each country) think social media has a beneficial effect on democracy. Influential factors here include the cultural structure of the societies, the prevalence of a young population, and the strength of civil society. In the USA, the most negative views regarding the impact of social media on democracy have been recorded. Only 34% of American adults believe that social media benefits democracy in the USA, whereas nearly double that percentage (64%) believes it has a harmful effect. These data reflect the diversity of opinions on the harms and benefits of social media. The role of social media may differ in each country's unique political, societal, and cultural contexts, leading to varying perceptions.

While social media creates a strong bond between voters and politicians, the rapid spread of communication in a susceptible environment like social media can also lead to disadvantages. This setting facilitates the easy dissemination of false or misleading information, leading to disinformation. *"Since the early 2000s, claims that internet technologies, and consequently social media, would contribute to democracy, increase participation, and create a new public sphere have found some support. However, areas such as personal data security, cyberattacks, manipulation, and censorship create gray areas in terms of maintaining a fair and free democratic environment"* (Aksoy & Türkölmez, 2020. p.56). The dissemination of false information by rival parties or individuals, the threat to personal privacy posed by algorithms, the manipulation of candidates' social media interactions and content production by fake accounts and bots contribute to the erosion of the democratic nature of politics. These manipulation techniques can directly influence and guide voters' decision-making processes. With the advancement of artificial intelligence, content that closely resembles reality or can only be distinguished as real through scrutiny is being generated. This development creates a more vulnerable communication space for disinformation. The role of social media as a tool in the messaging process inherently facilitates manipulation and

disinformation due to its features.

The Importance of Interactive Communication

Interactive communication, where communication occurs through mutual interaction, has existed among humans as the oldest and most natural form of communication. Face-to-face communication, with factors such as gestures, body language, tone of voice, and language, is the oldest and most naturally evolving form of interactive communication where feedback can be received. Subsequently, with the invention of writing, oral transmissions transitioned into lines, pictures, and wall inscriptions. Before the advent of technological processes, interactive written communication occurred through correspondence, while the invention of the teleprinter accelerated this process, making mutual written communication easier. The invention of the telephone facilitated both verbal and written interactive communication. With the invention of the computer and the introduction of the internet, computer-based communication became widespread, contributing to the development of interactive dimensions of communication. Tim Berners-Lee's development of the World Wide Web (www) made the internet more accessible to the masses. Subsequently, rapidly advancing digital developments accelerated and facilitated the interaction between sender and receiver. These advancements have been a turning point in terms of the use of information and the dimensions of communication. Information is not only consumed but users also have the opportunity to produce and disseminate information.

The limited access between source and receiver in traditional media has facilitated the emergence of different communication spaces in new media. The interactive communication between source and receiver in daily life has transitioned to the virtual realm with technological advancements. *"Interactive media is any media that responds to user input. It began to replace the one-way communication model of traditional media with the commercialization of the internet in the 1990s"* (Kavuran, T., & Batar, H. 2019, p.310). Examples of interactive communication established in the virtual environment include users being able to comment on posts, share photos/videos, participate in live broadcasts, share and like posts, and engage in real-time feedback and information exchange regardless of time and place. Interactive communication is important for the effectiveness

and inclusivity of the communication process. It helps reduce question marks in communication maintained by participants and minimizes misunderstandings. In social media where different opinions converge, it creates a platform for debate and facilitates the emergence of new ideas. These interactions significantly impact the participation of masses in democratic processes. Additionally, it enhances both individual and societal communication, as well as commercial communication. Enabling customers to provide feedback easily and pose questions contributes to the development of sales and marketing, offering a shopping system that consumers are more satisfied with.

Interactive Communication Tools and Their Effects in Digital Campaigns

With the advancement of internet technologies, channels of political communication have undergone a significant transformation. Traditional election campaigns, such as printed publications, television advertisements, and rallies, which still exert their influence, have been reflected on social media platforms alongside this development. Webinars, specially designed mobile applications, live streams, online surveys, personalized communication tools, and similar digital campaign activities conducted in digital environments have contributed to the establishment of a connection between political actors and voters. The rise of internet technologies has led to an increase in digital election campaigns and has underscored the significant role of interactive communication tools in elections.

With the development of internet technologies, the fundamental changes in political communication channels can be assessed within the framework of the Media System Dependency Theory (MSDT), developed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur in 1976 (DeFleur, 1991). This helps us better understand how the dependencies of voters and politicians on media have evolved and the effects of these dependencies on democratic processes. Today, voters increasingly depend on digital platforms and tools to acquire information, construct meaning, and engage in social interaction, highlighting the three fundamental links of MSDT: access to information, meaning construction, and social interaction dependency.

Firstly, in terms of access to information dependency, the internet and social media platforms enable voters to quickly and extensively acquire information about current political events and campaigns. Unlike traditional media channels, these platforms offer a broader and more diverse range of information, allowing voters to make more informed decisions.

Secondly, in the context of meaning construction dependency, digital platforms provide voters the opportunity to develop their own understandings and interpretations of political issues and candidates. Tools such as live broadcasts, interactive polls, and discussion forums encourage voters to actively participate in political processes and shape their own views.

Lastly, social interaction dependency is facilitated by social media platforms, which ease the communication between voters and politicians, and among voters themselves. These interactions enhance voter participation in political processes and allow for a more active role in political debates. They also enable politicians to strengthen their ties with voters and shape their campaign strategies based on voter feedback.

In light of these connections, the Media System Dependency Theory offers an opportunity to thoroughly analyze how political communication and campaigns are shaped in the digital age and their impacts on voter behavior and democratic participation. Thus, political actors and campaign managers can develop more effective communication strategies to contribute to the democratic processes.

As an example of these systemic communication strategies, during the 2023 presidential elections in Turkey, DEVA Party leader Ali Babacan strategically utilized the opportunities presented by the digital age and conducted the world's first metaverse rally. Babacan's observation that this virtual world (metaverse), created through the combination of digital technologies, attracted the interest of young audiences and his subsequent campaign targeting this audience garnered significant attention from the media. The reflection of the campaign in the media and its interaction on social media platforms not only increased the visibility of the campaign but also facilitated direct communication between voters and political

actors. This innovative approach transcended the traditional boundaries of politics, enabling more effective communication and interaction on digital platforms.

Figure 2: DEVA Partisi Lideri Ali Babacan'ın Metaverse Miting Af
Source: https://l24.im/32oF

During the 2015 and 2019 Canadian federal elections, the leader of the Liberal Party, Justin Trudeau, predominantly targeted young people in his campaigns and effectively utilized interactive communication strategies by leveraging the "Liberal Party" mobile application. This application facilitated direct communication with the leader, rapid dissemination of campaign news and advertisements, and enabled Trudeau to update his campaign based on feedback received from supporters.

Figure 3: Justin Trudeau "Liberal Party" Mobile App
Source: https://l24.im/32oF

In the digitizing landscape of electoral campaigns, the adaptation of politicians to these innovations not only affects those who continue with traditional methods but also influences those who embrace the new changes. With each innovation, politicians are compelled to present more creative campaigns, thereby impacting the participation of voters in democratic processes. Merely possessing interactive communication tools is insufficient for the effective execution of digital election campaigns. It is imperative to produce tailored content for target audiences, diminish hierarchical structures between the public and candidates, conduct voter-centric campaigns, and provide trustworthy, non-manipulative content for the effective execution of digital campaigns.

The adaptation of political actors to the process of digitization reshapes their interactions with voters and modernizes campaign strategies. This adaptation process enables reaching a broader voter base and particularly facilitates connecting with technology-inclined younger generations. Presently, social media analytics and data mining play critical roles in shaping campaign strategies, aiding politicians in better understanding voter preferences and acting accordingly.

For instance, data analytics technologies utilized in the 2020 United States Presidential elections played a pivotal role in determining Joe Biden's

campaign strategies. The campaign team analyzed voter behaviors using data obtained from social media and utilized this information to prepare tailored content, thereby establishing more effective communication with voters. This approach was significant in attracting the interest of young voters and encouraging their engagement via social media platforms.

Furthermore, campaigns conducted on digital platforms necessitate politicians to approach voters in a more transparent and accountable manner, thereby enhancing voter trust. Ensuring the successful execution of digital campaigns entails politicians adhering to ethical standards and delivering non-manipulative content. Within this framework, interactive digital platforms facilitate direct communication between politicians and voters, supporting participation in democratic processes and increasing the interest and engagement of young voters in political affairs. The rise of interactive communication tools in this context is reshaping the nature of election campaigns and rendering politicians' relationships with voters more dynamic and interactive. This new era not only presents politicians and voters with opportunities beyond traditional methods but also fosters increased democratic participation and societal interaction.

Political Elections in the Digital Age: Security and Privacy Issues

Throughout human history, there has been a need for information, and information has been perceived as power. The ease of access to information has further increased this need and facilitated the active use of technology by the masses. *"Technological transformation has popularized a data-driven understanding. The information society has taken on a surveilled form through technology, which has become an integral part of daily life practices"* (Lyon, 2006 as cited in Öztürk & Zeybek, 2021. p.7). The most prevalent location of surveillance is social media platforms. While social media serves as the easiest and fastest access point to information, it also functions as a realm where users' interactions are monitored, their data is recorded, and shared. Surveillance based on a competitive logic seeks to gather, store, process, disseminate, evaluate, and utilize data about individuals through their behaviors in order to uphold and enact specific behaviors of groups or individuals. Thus, potential or actual physical, ideological, or structural violence can be directed towards individuals in order to influence their behaviors. (Lyon, 2006 as cited in Öztürk &

Zeybek, 2021. p.8).

Therefore, data collection and analysis processes in political elections occurring in the digital age are highly susceptible to security and privacy risks. Political parties monitor both their own voter bases and the social media interactions of the targeted voter demographics to tailor campaigns accordingly. Particularly, the scandal of Cambridge Analytica in 2018, involving the 'sale of personal data,' sparked significant repercussions in terms of security breaches. Cambridge Analytica illicitly harvested personal data from millions of Facebook users. Subsequently, when it emerged that these data were used for voter analysis, the credibility of social media was once again called into question. Illegally obtained data were utilized to sway voters, directing individuals politically and exposing users to manipulation. This undermined trust in social media and compromised the transparency of the electoral process.

The active use of social media by politicians can sometimes lead to the manipulation of disinformation in their favor. For instance, in the 2023 general elections in Türkiye, the candidate of the "Cumhur Alliance," Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from the AKP, showcased edited videos of the candidate of the "Millet Alliance," Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu from the CHP, during campaign rallies. Initially, this video was accepted without verification by a portion of the public, leading to backlash against the opposing candidate. However, it later emerged that the video had been edited, resulting in a loss of trust among some segments of the AKP's voter base. While these uncertainties may not have immediately translated into a shift in votes from the AKP to the CHP, they were sufficient to raise doubts among the AKP's own voter base and to distance the targeted audience, ultimately affecting the AKP's electoral strategy.

Similarly, during the French presidential elections in 2017, Marine Le Pen's claim that her opponent Emmanuel Macron had a bank account in the Bahamas without being able to substantiate it damaged her political image. Such manipulative and misleading information can influence voter perceptions and undermine democratic processes. These examples highlight the potential for politicians to manipulate and spread disinformation through social media.

Security breaches and privacy concerns of this nature once again underscore the importance of ethical and legal regulations in electoral processes. In order to protect digital data and ensure election security, many countries have found themselves compelled to adopt stricter laws and regulations governing electoral processes. However, such regulations may prove inadequate in the face of rapid technological evolution and ever-changing dynamics of social media. For instance, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of the European Union, designed to safeguard individuals' data and prevent unauthorized usage, holds significant relevance in electoral processes. Nevertheless, the implementation of regulations like GDPR can be arduous and intricate, as digital platforms and applications undergo continuous updates and evolution.

In this context, it is imperative for political parties and campaign managers to be more cognizant and proactive in their data management and protection strategies. Increasing transparency in data collection and processing processes, safeguarding users' data, and empowering them with greater control over these processes are crucial for ensuring a trustworthy electoral process in the digital age.

Moreover, the data processing capabilities provided by social media platforms and other digital tools offer extraordinary opportunities for election campaigns; however, ensuring that these opportunities remain within ethical boundaries entails significant responsibility. The use of artificial intelligence and algorithm-based analyses enhances the understanding and potential influence of voter behavior, yet it may also introduce practices that endanger individual privacy rights. Therefore, the ethical use and regulation of technology are imperative to ensure the fairness and reliability of election processes.

Lastly, the security and transparency of political elections in the digital age should not be confined solely to technology and laws. Increasing the digital literacy levels of voters should make them more aware of digital platforms and data collection methods, thereby assisting individuals in feeling safer and more knowledgeable in the digital world. This approach is essential for creating a more resilient and informed electorate in the face of the challenges brought about by the digital age, thus safeguarding the

integrity of political election processes.

CONCLUSION

The digital age has fundamentally transformed election processes and the strategies of political parties. Traditional election methods have been replaced by digital campaigns conducted through online platforms and social media. These platforms offer significant advantages to political parties by allowing direct interaction with voters and the ability to receive feedback. However, this process also brings new challenges such as information pollution, the spread of misleading information, and algorithmic manipulations. Parties are striving to overcome these challenges by using digital tools ethically and increasing transparency, focusing on raising voter awareness and encouraging democratic participation. Thus, digital politics presents both opportunities and potential threats to democratic processes.

The era initiated by digital technologies underscores the significance of political figures adapting to evolving communication paradigms. At the core of this transformation lies the concept of interactive communication, facilitating dynamic and reciprocal engagement between political stakeholders and voters. Social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and YouTube have evolved into spaces where political entities can organize rallies, orchestrate targeted campaigns, and present themselves. Factors such as ease of access to politically endorsed figures by the masses, the preference for innovative election campaigns with the advancement of mobile technologies, facilitation of active communication with politicians, temporally and spatially independent video-visual sharing, and the advantage of live chatting influence voters to play an active role and enhance participation in democratic processes.

Data analytics plays a pivotal role in shaping modern election campaigns, enabling candidates to monitor voter sensitivities, identify critical issues, and tailor messaging strategies accordingly. Political actors can leverage big data and predictive analytics to obtain valuable insights into voter behaviors and preferences, allowing them to craft target-oriented and personalized communication strategies that resonate with their target audiences. Despite the myriad benefits offered by digital technologies,

significant challenges and risks accompany their utilization in political elections.

The proliferation of misinformation and fake news on social media platforms has emerged as a significant concern jeopardizing the integrity of the electoral process and eroding trust in democratic institutions. Issues such as privacy breaches, unregulated advancements like artificial intelligence, and unequal access to internet technologies pose substantial obstacles to fair political participation and representation.

In light of these challenges, political actors and institutions must prioritize transparency, accountability, and precautionary measures against manipulations facilitated by digital technologies in their election campaigns. Measures should be taken to prevent the use of fake and bot accounts, and users employing fake accounts during electoral processes should be monitored. The harmful effects of bot accounts should be recognized not only during electoral processes but also in everyday life, with appropriate measures implemented. Safeguards should be implemented to protect user data privacy, and efforts to promote digital literacy and media literacy among users are imperative.

In the digital age, the future of political elections will be shaped by ongoing technological developments, evolving regulatory frameworks, and changing societal norms. Political actors can leverage the transformative potential of digital technologies to create more inclusive, participatory, and resilient election systems, while upholding democratic principles and values through embracing innovation. Therefore, both political institutions and individuals must closely monitor and understand both the technology and user behaviors to effectively and responsibly exist in the new communication environment created by digital tools. Interactive communication serves as a tool not only to establish direct and meaningful dialogues with voters but also to enhance the capacity to reach wide and diverse audiences. However, the quality of this interaction depends on the correct and ethical use of technology. While technology can facilitate the spread of misleading information, it can also be a tool to democratize access to information and expand participation in political processes.

Hence, political actors and election management boards should preserve the advantages offered by digital technologies and minimize potential risks by increasing the transparency of campaigns conducted on digital platforms, implementing regulations to protect users from misinformation. Additionally, standards regarding the ethics of data analytics and personalized content used during digital campaigns should be established and strictly adhered to.

In conclusion, political actors must understand the innovations and challenges brought by the digital age while guiding election campaigns and act ethically and responsibly within this framework. This ensures that the potential of technology to strengthen democratic processes is maximized. This not only requires effective use of technological tools but also necessitates raising awareness among voters and ensuring fairness and safety in the digital space for all users. Political communication in the digital age is not merely a technological issue but also a deeply ethical and political concern.

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