Democracy's Challenge with Digitalization: Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles and Radicalization

Demokrasinin Dijitalleşmeyle İmtihanı: Yankı Odaları, Filtre Baloncukları ve Radikalleşme

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ÖZ

Dijitalleşmenin demokratik siyasal hayata olan etkisinin ele alındığı bu çalışmada dijitalleşmenin demokratik işleyişe olumlu ve olumsuz etkileri ortaya koyulmaya çalışılmıştır. Dijitalleşmenin demokrasi için oluşturduğu riskler ve fırsatlar sorunsalı üzerinden kurgulanan çalışmada dijitalleşmenin demokrasi için getirdiği fırsatlar ve riskler tartışılmış ve dijitalleşmenin demokrasi için olumsuz etkilerinin daha fazla olduğu iddiasıyla konu eleştirel açıdan ele alınmıştır. Dijitalleşmenin demokratik hayata ve işleyişe olan etkilerinin ortaya koyulmasının amaçlandığı bu çalışmada öncelikle demokrasi ve dijitalleşme kavramı üzerinde durulmuştur. Dijitalleşme sonunda bireylerin daha çok bilgiye ulaşacağı, daha rahat konuları tartışabileceği ve daha kolay iletişim sağlayabileceği daha bilgili bireylerin oluşacağı ve bunun da demokrasinin işleyişini kolaylaştıracağı beklentisi gerçekleşmemiştir. İnsanlık modern dönemde demokrasi, insan hakları ve anayasal mücadelede devletin yetkilerini kısıtlayarak hak ve özgürlükleri güvence altına almaya çalışmıştır. Dijital dönemde ise aynı mücadele devlete karşı verilmesinin yanı sıra internet sağlayıcıları ve sosyal medya şirketlerine karşı da verilmesi gerekmektedir. Yankı odalarında ve filtre baloncuklarıyla sınırlanan ve çevrelenen bireyler genel bilgiye ulaşmadıkları için toplumda var olan genel durum ve gidişattan daha az haberdar olmuşlardır. Ayrıca internet sağlayıcı ve sosyal medya şirketlerinin bu durumu beslemesi bireylerin olaylara hep tek yanlı bakmasına ve bu tek yanlı bakışında beslenmesine yol açmıştır. Bu durum bireylerin radikalleşmesine ve toplumun bütünlüğü kaybederek sanal ortamlarda siber Balkanlaşmaya, politik radikalleşmeye ve yeni kabileciliğin ortaya çıkmasına yol açmıştır. Bu durumun sonucu olarak da bir topluluğun ortak bilginin ve sorunlarının paylaşıldığı yapının ortadan kalkmasına toplumların birbirini anlamayan birbirine düşman bölümlere ayrılmasına, belki de modernizmin en önemli unsuru olan ulus kavramının yıpranmasına yol açmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Demokrasi, Dijital Demokrasi, Dijitalleşme, Filtre Balonları, Yankı Odası.

ABSTRACT

In this study, which deals with the impact of digitalization on democratic political life, the positive and negative effects of digitalization on democratic functioning are tried to be revealed. In this study, the opportunities and risks that digitalization brings for democracy are discussed and the issue is critically addressed with the claim that digitalization has more negative effects for democracy. The expectation that digitalization would lead to more knowledgeable individuals who could access more information, discuss issues more easily and communicate more easily, and that this would facilitate the functioning of democracy has not materialized. In the modern period, humanity has tried to secure rights and freedoms by limiting the powers of the state in the struggle for democracy, human rights and constitutional struggle. In the digital era, the same struggle must be waged not only against the state but also against internet providers and social media companies. Individuals who are confined and surrounded by echo chambers and filter bubbles are less aware of the general state of affairs in society as they do not have access to general information. In addition, the fact that internet providers and social media companies feed this situation has led individuals to take a one-sided view of events and to be fed this one-sided view. This situation has led to the radicalization of individuals and the loss of the integrity of society, leading to cyber Balkanization, political radicalization and the emergence of new tribalism in virtual environments. As a result of this situation, it has led to the disappearance of the structure in which the common knowledge and problems of a community are shared, the division of societies into hostile sections that do not understand each other, and the erosion of the concept of nation, which is perhaps the most important element of modernism.

Keywords: Digitalization, Democracy, Digital Democracy Echo Chamber, Filter Bubbles

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout human history, there have been significant changes that have affected and transformed the lifestyles, relationship networks and structures of societies. While these changes, from the invention of agriculture to the invention of the steam engine, have caused major transformations in the social structure, the digitalization process, which has an even faster structure with the internet, has led to significant changes in people's lifestyles, relationships, the structure and institutions of society. The changes and transformations that have occurred in the lives of individuals and society with the digitalization process are still continuing today. With digitalization, new forms of relations and communication have emerged in social and political life and this has significantly affected social and political life. Digitalization, which has displaced many traditional attitudes and processes, has led people to move away from face-to-face relationships. People who have the capacity to communicate with people all over the world may face the (dis)advantages of this situation.

In this study, which deals with the impact of digitalization on democratic political life, the positive and negative effects of digitalization on democratic functioning are tried to be revealed.

1. Conceptual Framework

Under this heading, the concepts of digitalization, democracy and digital democracy are discussed.

1.1. Digitalization and Effects of Digitalization

While the Internet can be seen as a tool of peace, it is a product of the Cold War. In 1957, the Soviet Union won the first round of the 'space race' by launching a satellite into Earth orbit. This prompted the Pentagon to create the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), which had many projects, including a plan to promote interactive computing through the creation of the world's first advanced computer network (ARPANET: Advanced Research Projects Agency Network). Although the network was originally conceived as a way to enable communication between computers with different operating systems and interfaces, it gained another rationale. It was argued that the computer network could facilitate the development of a sophisticated military command and control system that could withstand a nuclear attack from the Soviet Union (Edwards, 1996; Norberg and O'Neil, 1996 cited in Curran, 2012: 50). Military concerns also led to the development of network technology that would allow the system to function even if part of it was destroyed. This created a network that was not only difficult to 'eliminate' but also difficult to control. This was also in line with the concerns of the computer scientists who designed the new system and did not want to be subject to a centralized, hierarchical chain of command (Curran, 2012: 50).

The changes and developments in information Technologies have inevitably heralded the digital age. (Üzmez and Büyükbeşe, 2021: 123). Undoubtedly, the widespread use of the internet and the accompanying increases in digital services have caused it to gain an important place in the daily lives of individuals and to become an integral part (Taşel, 2020: 128). The integration of digital technologies into the social structure has led to the concept of digital transformation. (Ballı, 2022: 253). With digitalization, the speed of accessing and disseminating information has increased and become easier (Taşel, 2020: 135).

Digitalization has spread its impact into many facets of social, economic, and political life by rearranging time and place. As individuals engage in digital networks to create new relationships and communities, digitalization has challenged established norms and patterns, leading to the emergence of a network society with new forms of social interaction. Manuel Castells's idea of a "network society" sees networks as the building blocks of modern societies' structures and power structures. Castells asserts that digital technologies like social media have been very important in making a new social

system, a global economy, and a new virtual culture. (Lupton, 2015: 20-22; Yeasmin, 2024: 58) The proliferation of on-line social networks and digital platforms has fundamentally transformed the way individuals and societies communicate and relate to each other. The disappearance of traditional spatial and geographical boundaries makes it possible for individuals to establish instantaneous relationships across distances. Moreover, the digital space has led to the creation and growth of virtual communities united by common shared interests rather than geographical proximity. These virtual communities created through digitalization serve important functions in creating identity and intimacy. Therefore, digitalization in social interaction goes beyond mere communication and affects the way individuals perceive themselves and interact with their environment (Yeasmin, 2024: 58). Online groups can transform common interests into emergent identities and develop a common discourse and language. Over time, seeing ourselves as distinct from popular culture and possibly superior in some ways, we take on particular clothing, pick up a particular vocabulary, and have a feeling of loyalty and community. The identity-based division is driven by deeply rooted psychological processes of group membership. This makes elections less about policy disagreements and more about fights between warring groups that are split by a deep sense of difference (Törnberg and Törnbrg, 60-61: 2024).

The generation born and raised in the digital age is known as Generation Z because of the profound impact that digitalization has had on social life. Generation Z does not play in the streets, finds friendship and neighborhood dull, and lacks meaningful life experience. Social media and online platforms provide the news, information, and entertainment needs of Generation Z, which dislikes to follow traditional media (Fidan, 2022: 24). Today, digitalization continues to affect the way societies function and individuals interact and to transform social areas such as communication, trade, education, health, civil society and participation, governance and politics (Yeasmin,2024: 58).

1.2. Democracy and The Concept of Digital Democracy

It is possible to trace the origin of the concept of democracy back to Ancient Greece. While demos, which is at the origin of the concept, means the people; kratos means to rule and govern (Gençoğlu, 2018: 98-99). Thus, the concept literally means "government by the people" (Heywood, 2018: 74). Democracy, portrayed as the best form of government of the modern era, has come to the fore all over the world in parallel with the global spread of modernity and has influenced the world (Göktolga, 2022: 7).

The concept of democracy, in Ancient Greek cities, is in the form of direct democracy. In direct democracy, participation in government without intermediary is taken as a basis and thus there is direct and unintermediary participation in management (Çaha, 2014: 301-303; Ekici and Güven, 2021: 10). While direct democracy is seen in Ancient Greece the mechanism of representation operates in modern democracies. Another difference lies in equality. In Athenian democracy, which stands out as an example of direct democracy, although there is direct participation of the people in the governance process, there is an "inequitable" structure (Yayla, 2014: 46-47). The people who participate in the governing process are limited to the privileged and this leaves the political sphere to the privileged. Today, almost all democracies are representative democracies. In representative democracies, although the people do not participate directly in governance, they participate in governance through the people they elect at certain time intervals (Yayla, 2014: 46-47). In democracies, political participation constitutes an indispensable condition for the realization of the guiding element among the basic logic of democracy; in addition, political participation strengthens the legitimacy of democracy (Russell, 2000: 927). Representative democracies have been the subject of some debates that they have not achieved the desired success (Bayrakcı, 2002: 90).

Since the 1970s, discussions on the crisis of democracy have come to the fore and it has been assumed that representative democracy is at the center of this crisis. While these debates continued, the prediction was that democracy would overcome this situation in a stronger way (Göktolga, 2014: 98). With the development of network technology, the internet and social media, since the 1980s and 1990s, people's ways, possibilities and speeds of communication and the opportunity to produce and share content has increased. Because new technology diversifies information sources and facilitates mutual communication by eliminating time and space limitations. It was anticipated that this would lead to the emergence of a better-informed society, which would support democracy by allowing people to engage in it with greater knowledge, thereby expanding the opportunities for public discourse and propaganda.

Digital technology offers the opportunity to go beyond the process of representation to develop a more participatory politics, taking advantage of the participatory architecture and culture of the social network. The basic idea is that digital technology makes it possible to partially or completely overcome the forms of representation and delegation that have so far dominated democracy in mass societies and usher in a digital democracy where citizens participate directly in all important decisions. The idea behind the idea of online democracy is to make citizens' participation in the political process more direct and realistic. Some political movements have argued that digitalization makes direct democracy possible and that representative democracy is gradually losing its meaning (Gerbaudo, 2019: 60-61).

Digital democracy is a concept that links practices and institutions of collective political self-determination with the digital infrastructures that mediate them. Digital democracy linking two evolving fields-democratic self-governance and digital infrastructures - should be seen neither as a utopian model of the near future nor as a mere disintermediation of existing democratic institutions (Berg and Hofmann, 2021: 2). Digital democracy has been defined as 'a set of attempts to practice democracy without the limits of time, space and other physical conditions', using information communication technologies (ICTs) in addition to, rather than instead of, traditional similar political practices. In this context, digital democracy is the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and computer-mediated communication (CMC) in all forms of media (e.g. internet, interactive broadcasting and digital telephony) to enhance political democracy or citizen participation in democratic communication (Hacker and van Dijk, 2000: 1).

Digital democracy has been used to enhance and support how digital technology can increase political participation by reducing barriers to information and debate; expanding the ways in which citizens can intervene in policymaking; and allowing citizens to follow policymaking more closely. All of these terms are taken as examples of a new model of democracy that could mark the transcendence of representative democracy (Gerbaudo, 2019: 60-61). Much of the discourse on the potential for digital democracy and current practice focuses on the ability of interactive ICT to overcome time and space barriers and facilitate both the flow of information from governments to citizens and direct citizen 'feedback' and participation in government affairs (Hague and Loader, 2005: 13).

2. Method

In this study, the case study, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. In the case study, which aims to understand the event in depth, in its natural environment, taking into account its complexity and context, an individual, a community, an organization, a nation, etc. as well as a decision, a process, a policy can be examined, (Punch, 2020: 144; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016: 38). Since not all aspects of a single event can be examined, a focal point needs to be identified. Research questions help to define this focus (Punch, 2020: 147). This research addresses the question "What is the impact of digitalization on democracy?". Depending on the research problem, the positive and negative aspects of digitalization on democracy were subjected to descriptive analysis. This case study

is shaped through the concepts of echo chambers, filter bubbles, digital Balkanization and digital tribalization radicalization focus concepts in the literature. Based on these discussions in the literature, a descriptive analysis of the functioning of democracy in a general context was made with the digitalization factor. (Patton, 2018: 503-504) It is aimed to clarify the impact of the digitalization process within the reality of the phenomenon of democracy as a situation. (Yin, 2017: 4) and the issue is critically examined with the claim that digitalization has more negative effects on democracy. Documents like internet sources, articles and books were assessed by using keywords such as digital democracy, echo chambers, filter bubbles.

3. Findings

In this part of the study, the impact of digitalization on democracy is discussed.

3.1. The Positive Impact of Digitalization on Democracy and Politics

Impact of digitalization has been too great to be limited to any one field and the political field has also been affected by this change and transformation. With the developments in information and communication technologies, the concept of politics has also expanded its borders, mobilized and entered our pockets. Social media has moved the public sphere to digital platforms, thus developing a new style of politics through digital activism. The political sphere has undergone certain transformations through social media and the limitations of time and space have disappeared. With the digital transformation of politics, individuals have been able to participate in political debates, organize and develop political campaigns through social networks (Barlas, 2021: 270; Çaha, 2020: 249). Among the contributions of the developments in information technologies and the emergence/widespread use of digital platforms to democracy is the ability of voters of political parties that could not enter the parliament or voters who do not think that any political party represents them to raise their thoughts, opinions, questions and suggestions in the digital environment (Tinni, 2019: 1795). In addition, digital parties, examples of which can be found in Spain and Italy, have significant potential for politics and democracy. Such parties can reach more people and involve more people in decision-making processes through digital methods (Politikyol, 2024). Morever, digital political parties have been an alternative to solve the representation crises of political parties in representative democracies. Digital parties, which can be seen as a reaction to political parties in representative democracies, which are criticized for not allowing for full democracy, are on the rise. Thus, it is aimed and predicted that political participation will increase (Tuncel and Gençay, 2021: 151).

With digitalization, social media has provided an important field of action for politicians and provided an alternative space for opposition groups/parties, especially in countries where government pressures are experienced. In addition, social media, which provides the opportunity to reach large masses with low budgets, is considered important by political organizations (Barlas, 2021: 270). Apart from political parties, information and communication technologies offer great convenience for NGOs in organizing, communication, propaganda and analyzing public expectations. With the transfer of some services to the internet environment with digitalization, time, stationery and labor saving expectations come to the fore (Güngör, 2017: 2261-2262). In addition, with the digitalization of some services, individuals can carry out their transactions "without intermediaries" and can be involved in the management process. This situation both eliminates heavy bureaucratic processes and strengthens the understanding of "governance" in the public sector (Ekici and Güven, 2021: 14). Adding applications such as e-municipalities to this process can both accelerate democratic processes in local governments and encourage public participation in governance (Tinni, 2019: 1796). Thus, policy-making processes and decision-making from the top down (from the state to society) have been transformed into a multidirectional process to a certain extent with digitalization (Gül, 2017: 13).

As a result of the opportunities provided by new communication technologies and the Internet, political parties have been able to be in constant communication with the society and their own base. Moreover, increased communication opportunities make politicians more accessible to individuals. Increased communication opportunities also provide significant advantages in the internal functioning of political parties (Güngör, 2017: 2263). In addition to traditional election activities, digitalization has led to new election activities independent of time and space. Accordingly, political parties can conduct e-election activities such as e-miting, tele-conferences and e-negotiations. Digitalization can also play an effective role in overcoming the crises experienced by representative democracies. In this context, digitalization offers negotiation and participation-oriented opportunities to overcome the crises of political participation and legitimacy (Ekici and Güven, 2021: 21-22). Especially with these opportunities, e-governance practices reveal a more participatory structure in terms of democracy and make it possible to conduct political debates online (Ersöz, 2005: 123).

The positive effects of digitalization on political participation include the fact that digitalization enables participation in current events through discussion groups, facilitates the exchange of ideas between groups with the same or opposing views, provides easy and cheap information exchange, and the possibility of common knowledge and collective intelligence emerging in these discussion environments. The ability to achieve low cost and high participation through electronic voting and the ease of analysis and measurement can be counted among the positive contributions of digitalization to electronic voting. The ability of citizens to participate in the political decision-making process through the websites and social media of political parties, candidates and public institutions, and the possibility of more effective and stronger communication between administrators and the public can be counted among the positive effects of digital governance on politics and democracy (Ersöz, 2005: 126). With digitalization, it is important for politicians to be able to respond to information, demands and suggestions from individuals and civil society organizations at the same speed. Therefore, the political sphere needs to be harmonized with the digital age and technologies (Gül, 2017: 13-14).

It is possible to diversify the effects of digital platforms in the political arena. The use of social media, an effective method for political actors to reach their voters, is also decisive on potential target audiences. Social media platforms are increasingly attracting the attention of politics. In 2008, Obama's active and effective use of social media in the US elections reveals the importance of social media in political communication (Yeşil and Ulaş, 2021: 152-153). With developments in information technologies (Hacker and van Dijk, 2000: 4):

- The scale and speed of information provision has increased. This may lead to more informed citizens.
- Political participation may also increase.
- There are new ways of organizing.
- New political communities can emerge without state intervention.
- A hierarchical political system can become more horizontal.
- Citizens may see an increase in political participation, as well as an increased chance to take an active role in setting the agenda for governments.
- ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) or CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) can help eliminate intermediaries such as journalists and parties.
- Politics can respond more directly to citizens' concerns.
- It can be effective in solving the problems of representative democracy.

The creation and exchange of information have been made easier yand faster by digitalization, and this has also made it easier and faster for people to obtain information. This situation has led to the theoretical prediction that a society consisting of more informed and conscious individuals will emerge

with digitalization. Therefore, some thinkers have predicted that the functioning of democracy will be easier in a society consisting of informed and conscious individuals.

3.2. The Negative Impact of Digitalization on Democracy and Politics

Digitalization also has negative effects on politics and democracy. In general, these negative effects include lack of security, insufficient infrastructure, lack of full utilization skills, information overload and privacy violations (Güler and Şahnagil, 2017: 17). People have been exposed to an overabundance of information as a result of digitalization and the sources of political information have also increased significantly but this creates a new problem area, raising concerns about whether the information accessed is reliable and valid (Van Dijk and Hacker, 2018: 8-9). Morever, the fact that information can be produced and disseminated rapidly has facilitated the production and dissemination of misinformation in the same way. This situation has led to individuals being bombarded with too much information on the one hand, and on the other hand, false and inaccurate information. As a result, the individual, bewildered by the vast amount of information and false and inaccurate information, has chosen to limit himself/herself to a certain area and led individuals to close themselves to general information. This has led to the emergence of echo chambers where one-sided information is always produced and shared

It is envisaged that the development and widespread use of the Internet will increase political participation, which is among the basic elements of representative democracies. However, the Internet does not have the same effect in every country, region, society and individual and that the same infrastructure services are not available. The Internet can ensure participatory democracy because it does not reach every segment of society with equal opportunities. That is, the digital divide caused by the fact that not everyone can use the Internet and have access to it can be stated as a negative effect of digitalization on political participation (Ersöz, 2005: 125- 126). The negative effects of the Internet on political participation processes can also be a source for the development of anti-democratic views and the spread of anti-democratic ideas through discussion groups. In terms of electronic voting, the security problem and the disappearance of the symbols of classical election rituals can be seen as negative effects.

Digital platforms, which open a fast, low-cost and relatively free space for political actors, have brought new debates. The blocking of former US President Trump's social media accounts led to a debate on the freedoms of digital platforms (Tuncel and Gençay, 2021: 148). The digital technologies, which multinational corporations develop, maximize the profits and interests of these handful of tech companies. But when power is concentrated in the hands of a few, there is little accountability to the public. When users do not fully understand terms of service, monitoring or privacy notices, consent cannot be given fully or freely. When terms of service are not applied consistently, there is inconsistent enforcement of the law (Khalil, 2024). Digital tools can be used by parties and governments on the basis of self-interest. These interest-based uses include sabotaging opposition, manufacturing consent, threatening activists and collecting information without consent (Trerê, 2016). Since the surveillance activities of digitalization and the internet can harm freedoms and privacy, democracies are negatively affected in this process. In addition, the possibilities provided by digitalization and the internet can be used as an instrumental role (control mechanism) that can transform even public executions that are described as democratic into authoritarian power (Kandırmaz, 2021: 177-178).

Individuals have numerous options in obtaining information and accessing news content. The diversity/intensity of information leads individuals to make choices about which information to access. This process raises certain concerns and makes it necessary to focus on three interrelated concepts. These concepts are selective exposure, echo chambers and filter bubbles (Guess at al., 2018: 4). In a period when almost every relationship is transferred to digital platforms, encounters with different

thoughts and issues have not increased contrary to expectations. With the use of social platforms and especially the internet, individuals have gained great opportunities to find "their own similar ones". This has raised a new question: what would be the effect of the internet on democracy if only like-minded people were to communicate? (Varol, 2022: 459). In addition, the fact that internet information providers and social media companies present content and advertisements to individuals according to their interests and searches, as well as according to the people they communicate with, has enabled the formation of filter bubbles and echo chambers. According to Van Dijk and Hacker (2018: 5), in addition to the positive effects of digitalization, negative effects such as fake news, political disinformation, the capture of social media by terrorist organizations and extremists, echo chambers, filter bubbles, elections influenced by hackers defined as enemies, and manipulation are also evident.

Digital media are therefore likely to worsen the current state of democracy. Therefore, access to data from these platforms is crucial for academics and public authorities, given the substantial costs to society of growing division, misinformation, and other disputes (Bavel et al., 2021: 914).

3.2.1. Echo Chambers

Echo chambers, the most important factor in increasing polarization, construct a reality in which the same content is constantly reaffirmed by changing the observation references of individuals (Palmieri, 2023). The echo chamber occurs where a particular group of participants excludes outsiders and chooses to connect with those within the group. The stronger and tighter this network is, the more isolated the group becomes from outside opinion. In this isolated situation, the views of the group members can spread widely within the group (Bruns, 2017: 3). In today's use of the echo chamber concept, in a communication environment consisting of participants with similar opinions, a communication situation in which individuals hear only their own voices/thoughts as a result of similar opinions comes to the fore (Varol, 2022: 460). A detail that stands out in the concept of echo chambers occurs when people on the other side are not trusted, and a situation in which other voices are discredited occurs in the echo chamber (Nguyen, 2018: 1-2). Thus, certain information and ideas are reinforced through repeated messages through preferred digital media tools (Söğüt and Öngel, 2022: 218).

Individuals can create a new echo chamber for themselves by filtering out thoughts or information that they do not prefer, are not interested in or do not care about. This situation can often result in the closure to different ideas, not hearing and recognizing opposing views. In particular, this situation conflicts with the essence of democracy in terms of being closed to different opinions (Kasap, 2022: 201). With the effect of the echo chamber, individuals can strengthen their own views and opinions and fall into the illusion that these views and opinions are the truth that should be accepted. Thus, individuals can also create their own virtual tribes in the virtual space (Narin, 2018: 240-241).

Among the most prominent features of echo chambers is the decrease in information diversity. Although there is the possibility of diversity in information sources, a reaffirming spiral situation emerges towards the existing views of group members. In the case of echo chambers, overconfidence in the group may arise and there may be certain difficulties in leaving the group. If individuals oppose the dominant view, social isolation may also oc2613cur (Varol, 2022: 463-466). The emergence of echo chambers also carries certain risks. In particular, echo chambers can increase ideological polarization and have a negative impact on democracy (Akyol, 2021: 162).

Investigating the existence of echo chambers on social media, Terren and Borge (2021: 99) analyzed 55 studies from around the world. Of these studies, 24 found conclusive and significant evidence in support of the social media echo chamber hypothesis. A further 26 studies found evidence of social media echo chambers between ideologically different groups, around controversial issues or political

topics. Only 5 studies did not find evidence of social media echo chambers. The existence of a strongly established echo chamber can make it easier for a filter bubble situation to emerge (Bruns, 2017: 3). Individuals in echo chambers may have a narrow and radical perspective by not orienting towards ideas and information other than their own (Hülür and Bayır, 2021: 250).

3.2.2. Filter Balloons

Although the concept of filter bubble was first used in 2011, the concept came to the fore after Trump won the elections in the US in 2016. Filter bubbles are defined as a concept that shows individuals only the content of their own interest through personalized filters and places individuals in a virtual world that is isolated from different thoughts by keeping them out of opposing views (Sarsılmaz, 2023). The concept of filter bubble refers to the results of algorithms that determine what individuals will encounter on the internet. As a result, many sites offer personalized content using individuals' browsing history, age, gender, location and other data (F.S. Blog, n.d.). When a group of participants prefer to communicate within the group to the exclusion of outsiders, a filter bubble emerges. This process gradually increases the likelihood of opinions and information circulating within the group (Bruns, 2017: 3). Filter bubbles can lead to a narrow worldview and limit the diversity of social discourse (Narin, 2018: 242).

Filter bubbles also distract individuals from different perspectives and ideas if the information directed to them is politically oriented. Thus, users are placed in a filter bubble and miss the diversity of information (Çaycı, 2021: 906). Since individuals who are supporters of different parties on a political issue cannot reach the right information and opposing ideas due to filter bubbles, they may lack the right information and social polarization may increase (Mizrahi, 2022). Facebook's algorithmic personalization can affect users' news consumption habits, the content they are exposed to, and how information is chosen, arranged, and presented (Vaidhyanathan, 2018; Cinelli, 2020: 11).

The limitation of information consumed and the tendency to interact with like-minded individuals on social media raise concerns that individuals are encouraging the adoption of more extreme ideological positions. Numerous studies clearly explain how the algorithms of internet providers and social media might interact to influence user behavior (Kitchens, Johnson and Gray, 2020: 1619). Moreover, filter bubbles create the idea that everyone thinks like us and serve an invisible self-propaganda. As a result of filter bubbles, individuals may tend to think that what they see is "everything" without realizing that what they see is filtered. Filter bubbles cause a process that is the opposite of the necessity for citizens to see things through each other's eyes, which democracies emphasize. In both the US elections and the Brexit vote, filter bubbles isolated people from different opinions (F.S. Blog, n.d.).

3.2.3. Digital Tribalization and Digital Balkanization

When different groups see and hear very different perspectives or focus on very different issues, mutual understanding can become difficult and it can become increasingly difficult for people to solve the problems which society face together. Many people believe that these problems which society confront are extremely serious, while others in society may believe that these same problems are imaginary constructs created by bigoted and self-interested politicians. As a result of different groups designing their own preferred communication packages, there will be further divergence and differentiation as group members push each other to the extremes of their initial inclinations. Moreover, different discussion groups of like-minded people will become increasingly distant from each other as they conduct most of their discussions with each other (Sunstein, 2017: 61-65). Political outgroup-related posts, which frequently reflect outgroup hostility, were more likely to be shared than political ingroup-related posts, according to an examination of about 3 million social media posts. In addition, discourses regarding out-group members were generally negative (Bavel et al., 2021: 914).

According to Sunstein, filtering in groups leads to divisions between people when online groups of people come together to share similar ideas, and in doing so often convince themselves and each other that their point of view is simply correct, and direct each other towards increasingly extreme versions of the same views they already hold. Sunstein refers to this as the "Balkanization" of the internet and discusses it as a powerful recruitment and enrollment tool for terrorist groups (Pierman, 2024: 60). According to Van Bavel et al. (2021: 914), social media can exacerbate polarization. This situation will lead to the emergence of different groups in society that think differently from each other, do not understand the common problems of society, and approach each other with hostility and prejudice. In addition, this situation will cause these different segments of society to move away from the truth, to take a one-sided view of events, and to lose the sense of nationhood. Consequently, on the one hand, it leads to the disappearance of the unity of the nation on the other hand, and to a new understanding of tribalism in which people are differentiated not according to ethnic origin but according to different characteristics in the online environment. At the same time, this differentiation leads to the loss of common feelings in the long run and the emergence of groups that are hostile to each other. This situation is called cyber-balkanization by some thinkers.

3.2.4. Radicalism

Instead of utilizing the potential of the internet to share their thoughts and open up to different perspectives in virtual environments, individuals prefer to selectively disclose issues that are important to them individually rather than issues that are important to society at large. That is to say, in the current structure of digital media (e.g. the way social media algorithms are implemented), individuals use the tools and opportunities provided by social media to validate their own prejudices. In doing so, they create online 'camps' that increase distrust and widen polarization. As users produce content, they become more prone to fabricating or using fake content to persuade others and make their own views more convincing. Such a vicious cycle leads to and feeds polarization, radicalization and extremism. (Losifidis and Nicoli, 2021: 3).

Social networks can work as polarizing machines, helping to confirm and thus reinforce people's previous views (Sunstein, 2009: 24). It would be easy to argue that by facilitating the spread of polarizing ideas, the internet has put countries on a slippery slope leading to an anti-democratic future (Bowers, 2016: XI). Individualized filtering has the potential to create a breeding ground for extremism. This is because like-minded people discuss with each other more easily and frequently, and often without hearing opposing views. Repeated exposure to an extreme view and the belief that many others hold that view will, predictably, lead those who are exposed to and possibly predisposed to that view to believe it (Sunstein, 2017: 71). This will lead to the emergence of extremism and radicalization. Undoubtedly, online radicalization and extremism is an important factor contributing to the resurgence of right-wing extremism that is sweeping the West. The 2018 Cambridge Analytica investigation confirms that this radicalization is spread through a deliberate strategy of misinformation and manipulation (Nyabola, 2018: 198). Meleagrou-Hitchens et al. (2017: 1249)'s research demonstrates how online and offline dynamics encourage radical viewpoints and function in collaboration. In other words, radicalization processes develop and evolve by integrating elements related to physical and virtual interactions (Valentini et al., 2020: 12).

Extremist societies who possess a shared ideology but are geographically separated may find it easier to connect with one another and to reinforce their communication because the internet makes it simpler to connect with like-minded people. Many extremist organizations and members of hate groups use the internet to find each other, recruit new members, exchange information and fuel each other's passions. Without the internet, their fiery dialogues might never reach their potential audience, as geographical separation reduces them to a few parts per million. With the internet, a large number of websites are created and managed by such extremist organizations, individuals and groups. Thus,

these individuals and groups are able to link to each other, gain members among like-minded people, and at the same time openly encourage debate (Sunstein, 2017: 59-60).

CONCLUSION

The relationship between digitalization and democracy exhibits a multidimensional structure, and the direction of this relationship varies depending on how the technology is designed and utilized. In this study, the effects of digitalization on democracy have been addressed based on the existing literature, considering both its positive and negative dimensions. Digital technologies offer advantages such as enhancing public participation, facilitating access to information, and enabling direct interaction with political processes. Social media has moved the public sphere to digital platforms, thus developing a new style of politics through digital activism. With the development of network technology, the internet and social media, people's ways, possibilities and speeds of communication and the opportunity to produce and share content has increased. This would lead to the emergence of a better-informed society, support democracy by allowing people to engage in it with greater and would facilitate the functioning of democracy. This expectation was not realized. These technologies may confine individuals to echo chambers, expose them to one-sided information through filter bubbles, and contribute to political polarization in society. The individual, bewildered by the vast amount of information and false and inaccurate information, has chosen to limit himself/herself to a certain area. In the process, together, filter bubbles and echo chambers gradually increase the likelihood of opinions and information circulating within the group and also, distract individuals from different perspectives and ideas. Users become more prone to fabricating or using fake content to persuade others, to validate their own prejudices and make their own views more convincing. In such a vicious cycle, Individuals are exposed to their own world of ideas and become fanatical. And this stuation leads to and feeds social polarization, radicalization and extremism. As a result of this situation, it has led to the disappearance of the structure in which the common knowledge and problems of a community are shared, the division of societies into hostile sections that do not understand each other, and the erosion of the concept of nation, which is perhaps the most important element of modernism. The raid on Congress in the United States and the rise of the far right in many European countries and their victory in the elections have led to a situation contrary to the expectations about digital democracy.

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