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Democracy in the Digital Era as a Challenge and Opportunity for Public Participation

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Abstract

Information and communication technology (ICT) has brought about significant changes in the political system and government, especially in facilitating public participation and promoting democratic values. This paper discusses the challenges and opportunities faced in strengthening public participation in democracy in the digital era. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a literature and data review method to discuss the extent to which ICT can increase public participation in the context of democracy. The research results show that information and communication technology provides new opportunities for public participation in political and governmental processes. Public participation through democracy in the digital era can increase accessibility, speed up the decision-making process and increase transparency in government. However, challenges such as the digital divide, information trust and security, and lack of organized citizen participation must be overcome.

Keywords: *Information and communication technology (ICT), Democracy, Digital Era, Public Participation.*

Introduction

Judging from the reality that is present in today's society, the development of information and communication technology (ICT) is something that continues to overshadow people's lives. The rapid advancement of technology inevitably provides various conveniences for society. Various conveniences that are felt at this time can be said to be able to reach various aspects, especially information. In the midst of ICT advances, people can easily obtain information through the technology they use, such as gadgets and laptops that are connected to the internet. Ease of accessing the information needed can be obtained by simply browsing through technology that is connected to the internet (Sasmita, 2011).

The rise of people who use gadgets is able to provide interaction with each other, so that information exchange can occur between people through technology. Media and technology have provided new ways for us to easily obtain information and ideas, to interact with friends and strangers and new ways of understanding the world, our identities and the future. In looking at how the current implications are. The use of technology is almost carried out by the world community, so that through technological media, the world community is able to interact with each other in the space provided by this technology which is called cyberspace (Hasfi, 2019).

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Indonesian society has also become an integral part of global developments in the ICT field. Data from the Association of Indonesian Internet Service Providers (APJII) in 2017 shows that the penetration of the Indonesian people to the internet has reached 143.26 million people. From this figure, 87.13 to 89.35 percent of them use social media Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, respectively, amounting to 130 million, 99.2 million and 53 million people. As many as 75 percent of internet users are Indonesian residents aged between 13 to 18 years (Permadi, 2017).

As we all know, normatively democracy has existed since independence, namely liberal democracy and Soekarno's guided democracy, as well as Pancasila democracy which gave birth to Suharto's autocratic leadership. However, substantially democracy in Indonesia has been running since the collapse of the Suharto regime in 1998 marked by regular general elections, participation of voters through parties, lawmaking through legislators, and monitoring of cabinet performance through government institutions, thus democracy is not a commodity. new to this country. Time has proven that democracy in Indonesia has been tested a lot. Civil liberties that were almost taken away, at the end of the period of Suharto's autocratic government which discredited ethnic Chinese descent, are now no longer visible and even one of the residents of Chinese descent, is now leading Jakarta (Denny, 2021).

The phenomenon of terrorism in Indonesia also colored the test of democracy, even to the emergence of efforts to establish an Islamic state in Indonesia (NII) and an Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (NIIS), democracy still survives in this country. It is not surprising that Freedom House, an American research institute that has mapped the success of implementing democracy in a country, said that Indonesia is one of the developing countries that has succeeded in implementing democracy (Rijal, 2017).

Democracy in the digital era is simply a political activity that uses digital channels, especially as a form of political participation or raising public support (Wilhem, 2003). Where in this sense public participation is manifested through technological media, for example the internet (kristian,2019). Digital democracy guarantees freedom of speech, so internet or information technology users can express their own opinions without significant control. Everyone can conclude or convey their ideas, even the craziest thing. Through this digital democracy, information or political studies can be produced freely, can be disseminated to public spaces, and can be fully manifested freely via electronic mail, even websites (Juniarto, 2016).

In addition, democracy in the digital era also has an impact on political representation and voter participation. In this case, digital media can influence public views of political candidates and political parties. Therefore, it is necessary to increase digital literacy and develop neutral and balanced media to avoid political polarization and strengthen rational voter participation (Alatas, 2014).

However, the freedom of speech guaranteed by digital democracy can also pose challenges, such as the spread of hoaxes and propaganda that can influence people's views on political issues (kristian, 2021). Therefore, efforts are needed to ensure that information disseminated through digital media is accurate and accountable. On the other hand, digital democracy also provides opportunities for civil society and the private sector to develop ICT initiatives and applications that encourage public participation and strengthen community involvement in political and governance processes. Thus, democracy in the digital era provides opportunities and challenges for inclusive and sustainable public participation (Nurdin, 2018).

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Democracy in the digital era provides challenges and opportunities for public participation and the political process and governance as a whole (kristian,2022). This opportunity can be used to strengthen inclusive and sustainable public participation, as well as increase government transparency and accountability. However, challenges such as hoaxes and propaganda can threaten freedom of speech and sound political representation. Therefore, there is a need for cooperation between the government, civil society, and the private sector in developing regulations and initiatives that encourage healthy and quality public participation in the digital era (Irawan, 2017).

Based on the reality above, the authors feel interested in analyzing the phenomenon of the development of information and communication technology for the development of democracy in the digital era as well as opportunities and challenges for public participation with research entitled: Democracy in the digital era as challenges and opportunities for public participation. It is hoped that this research will contribute to readers regarding political participation which is the right of the people in the midst of today's modern technological advances. This research also serves as a reference and reference for similar research, so that it can be used as a model for other studies and then used to fill small gaps in the study of political participation and citizenship, especially in Indonesia.

Methods

The research method that researchers use is a case study research using a descriptive qualitative approach. As quoted from Moleong (2007) defines qualitative research as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written and spoken words from people and observed behavior. This approach was chosen in order to find out more about the phenomena contained in the research. Researchers also in research collect secondary data or study literature. This literature is in the form of scientific journals both nationally and internationally, as well as books that support the research process. The literature taken is adjusted to the research topic, namely about political participation and democracy. Literature review is carried out through the process of reading, summarizing and concluding discussions that are relevant to the researcher's research. The summary is then compiled into a schematic and analyzed to produce conclusions that can be selected as concepts or references in research.

Results and Discussion

Democracy in the Digital Age

Some 20 years ago there was much hope that digital communications would strengthen the democratization drive. Digital communication is seen as facilitating and expanding the exchange of ideas. In addition, it will be more difficult to control the voice of the people who want to be critical of those in power, be it the government or others. Recently, however, the opposite view has strengthened even more. Digital communication is seen as causing many problems, both as a means of consolidating the voices of the people who want change and as a means of political communication with the government (Heryanto, 2018)

In fact, do digital communications strengthen or weaken democracy? Does democracy produced by a digital society have a form that is not the same as conventional democracy? So far, many discussions about digital influence have looked at it in terms of impact, not from

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changes in the foundations of democracy itself. Is democracy interpreted as a government where the people can speak or is it interpreted as a government accountability system? The two are not always the same, where the second talks about the quality of the system and does not focus on the breadth of voice opportunities. The two will meet if the voice of the people can continue to improve accountability mechanisms.

According to Hacker & Dijk (2000) digital democracy is an effort to implement the concept of democracy without being confined by time, space, and physical conditions. Meanwhile, according to Hague & Loader (2005) digital democracy is a phenomenon of how the development of digital technology influences democratic practices and political processes. Digital technology plays an important role in strengthening democracy which is based on social networks. Many believe that digital technology can accelerate the development of democracy and facilitate the "quantum leap" of democratization. Professor Stephen Coleman from the Oxford Internet Institute argues that e-democracy methods and processes are able to transcend distances (geographical, informational, cultural, emotional) between people and are able to represent them, this is what is commonly referred to as direct representation (Coleman, 2017)

According to Dahlberg (2001) digital democracy has an important position. The answer to the needs of the future formulation of democracy. An era in which the entire system of life and statehood has been digitized. This demand is inevitable for democracy to adapt to this new horizon of information and communication systems. Available digital tools must be accommodated to strengthen democratic systems and practices. So that democracy is getting stronger in conception and more perfect in practice. Dahlberg (2011) then describes the position of digital democracy in political practice as individual liberal, deliberative, counter public, and autonomist Marxist. In these four sectors, digital democracy plays a very important role. The position is very beneficial.

Digital democracy opens opportunities for every individual to realize their interests through the available liberal political system. Digital devices offer all the conveniences for this by spreading information and communication channels for every citizen to use to realize their political aspirations. Digital democracy connects voters with their representatives in government or parliament. Digital devices facilitate the process of communication and interaction between the two. Digital democracy is a medium that is able to offer a perspective of increasing information effectively among individuals and representing it in the decision-making process as well as providing an opportunity for the public to obtain political information and directly related it through political practice (Sabrina, 2018).

The existence of digital media as a technology provides benefits for the functioning of democracy. Digital media is a means of providing information to the public so that they are able to develop people's political knowledge. The existence of digital media often helps democratic practices that run in society. The existence of digital media is able to provide a forum for the democratic process of today's society which is closely related to technology in social life. So that it is able to provide an opportunity for the community to be able to participate in the democratic process. Digital democracy also opens opportunities for direct democracy in society, especially with the government as a policy maker in a democratic country. So that there is a possibility that increasing public participation can occur in today's society (Firdaus et al, 2021).

In fact, the existence of information and communication technology is not only related to the availability of adequate physical infrastructure, although it cannot be denied that this

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infrastructure is one of the prerequisites for success. The most important thing actually relates to the ability of technology to bridge distances and expand access so that information is available and can be used by anyone, anytime, and anywhere. According to Leggewie and Bieber (2008) the freedom to obtain or provide information effectively is more important than the potential to gain access in digital political processes. From this opinion it is implied that the existence of information and communication technology is actually a cross-border intermediary in presenting and accessing information for the public. The important point lies in the public's ability to utilize available information to form their opinion on public issues which will then influence the formation of public policy.

The existence of media and technology is seen as a renewal of "Direct democracy a la Athens." Athenian democracy required a general commitment to the principles of civic policy: service to the republican city-state and submission of private life to public concerns and the common good. The public and private spheres are intertwined. The people (demos) were involved in legislative and judicial functions, for the Athenian concept of citizenship required their participation in these functions, by participating directly in matters of the state. If it is related to the existence of information and communication technology, the realization of the concept of citizenship as required by direct democracy in the style of Athens seems to be created better. Through the available technological media, citizens will be very easily involved and involve themselves in all aspects related to the common life.

Democracy in the Digital Age: Opportunities and challenges for Public Participation

Digital democracy or digital democracy is a political activity that uses digital channels, especially as a form of political participation or raising public support. Public participation in digital democracy is manifested through technological media, such as the internet. In a digital democracy, freedom of speech is guaranteed so that internet or information technology users can express their opinions without significant control. In a digital democracy, every citizen can draw conclusions or convey their ideas, even the craziest things. Through digital democracy, political information or studies can be freely produced, distributed to public spaces, and can be fully manifested freely via electronic mail, even websites (Juditha & Darmawan, 2018).

However, digital democracy also poses challenges and problems that need to be addressed. Some of the challenges and problems faced in digital democracy are as follows:

a. Inequality of Access or Digital Gap

In the current digital era, access to information technology and the internet is very important for political participation. Information technology and the internet provide opportunities for people to express opinions, seek information, and engage in political activities effectively. However, the main challenge faced in the era of digital democracy is unequal access to information technology in society (Putra et al, 2014; Kartini, 2017).

Unequal access to information technology can exacerbate inequality in political participation. Citizens living in remote or developing countries often do not have access to the internet and information technology, which prevents them from expressing their political opinions effectively. This can cause their voices to be heard or ignored, so that they cannot influence political policy.

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However, the problem of unequal access to information technology does not only affect political participation, but can also deepen social and economic inequalities. Citizens who do not have access to information technology often lack access to information and opportunities to gain new jobs or skills needed in the digital economy. This can exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities, and increase inequalities in political participation.

To overcome the challenges of unequal access to information technology, efforts are needed to increase access to information technology throughout society, especially in less developed areas. Governments can provide free internet access or subsidized internet access, and cooperate with the private sector and civil society to expand internet networks and information technology. In addition, efforts should also be made to build digital literacy and information technology skills among people who are less skilled, such as training in the use of information technology for farmers, fishermen, or remote community groups. Thus, all people can participate in digital democracy and benefit from advances in information technology without exception.

b. Bad policy

In the era of digital democracy, political policies are often made based on input from the public obtained through online platforms and social media. However, decision-making based on a majority vote on digital platforms does not always guarantee the quality of the decisions taken. The challenge faced in digital democracy is the possibility of the emergence of bad political policies, which do not consider broader interests or exacerbate existing problems (Wibowo, 2017).

One example of bad political policies that have emerged in the digital democracy era is the spread of false information or hoaxes. Incorrect or invalid information is often easily spread on social media and online platforms, and can negatively influence people's views and decisions. This can endanger the integrity of political policies and the credibility of political institutions.

In addition, online platforms and social media often provide space for acts of violence and extremism. Radical and extremist groups can use online platforms to spread propaganda and carry out acts of violence or intimidation against people who hold different views. These actions can threaten the security and stability of the country, as well as exacerbate existing social conflicts.

To overcome the challenges of bad political policies in the era of digital democracy, efforts are needed to increase digital literacy and critical skills among the people. Communities must be trained to be able to distinguish between correct and incorrect information, as well as understand the implications of the political policies taken. In addition, the government also needs to take action to limit the spread of false information and online acts of violence through effective regulations and strict law enforcement.

Therefore, it is necessary to collaborate between the government, online platforms, and civil society to build a safe and inclusive digital environment. This can be done through increasing the transparency and accountability of online platforms, as well as building public awareness and oversight of harmful actions in the digital environment. With this effort, it is hoped that the political policies adopted can reflect the interests of the wider community and maintain the integrity of political institutions.

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c. Privacy and Security Concerns

Concerns about privacy and security are major challenges that arise in the era of digital democracy. Along with the increasing use of digital technology, users often submit their personal information into digital systems to carry out daily activities, such as shopping, communicating with other people, and conducting financial transactions. However, concerns often arise because users feel they lack confidence in the security and privacy of their data. One clear example of privacy and security concerns in the digital democracy era is the rise of data breaches by hackers. Hackers often take over users' personal data, including credit card numbers, email addresses, and other important information. This can lead to financial losses and identity theft, and often hinders public participation in digital democracy activities (Andriani, 2022).

In addition, concerns about privacy and security can also be related to the unethical use of data by certain parties. Many companies or organizations collect user data to develop marketing strategies or even make political decisions. However, users are often unaware of the consequences of collecting their data and how this data is used. This can threaten user privacy and security, and lead to mistrust of public policies.

Privacy and security concerns can also be barriers to public participation in digital democracy activities. Users who feel a lack of trust in digital systems or platforms may be reluctant to participate in online discussions or voting, or even express their opinions. This can threaten the quality of public participation in digital democracy activities, as well as reduce the ability of digital democracy to represent the public interest effectively.

Therefore, the challenges of privacy and security concerns in the digital democracy era need to be seriously addressed by parties involved in the development and use of digital technology. There needs to be clear and strict policies and regulations to protect user privacy and security, and ensure ethical and responsible data use. In addition, it is also important to continue educating users about the importance of data privacy and security in the digital democracy era, as well as providing fair and equitable access for all users. In this way, privacy and security concerns can be addressed and digital democracy can thrive and be more inclusive.

d. Lack of Regulation

The lack of regulation in digital democracies is a serious challenge facing us today. Without proper regulation, problems related to security, privacy, transparency, and the sustainability of digital democracy itself can arise. There needs to be rules governing the extent to which public participation can be carried out in the digital space and how law enforcement will be carried out in the event of a violation.

Without clear regulations, public participation can be manipulated by parties who have certain interests (Cahyono, 2005). This can threaten the sustainability of digital democracy and encourage the emergence of misuse of technology for unhealthy political purposes. Therefore, clear and firm regulations are needed to prevent such things from happening. In addition, the lack of regulation can also threaten the security and privacy of internet users. Internet users must be protected by regulations governing their personal data and how it can be used. In the absence of adequate regulation, users' personal data may be misused and may jeopardize their physical and financial security.

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Lack of regulation can affect the level of public trust in digital democracy. If internet users feel insecure about participating in politics in the digital space, they tend to avoid using this technology and prefer not to participate in democratic processes. This can threaten the sustainability of digital democracy and can affect the outcome of the democratic process as a whole. In facing this challenge, cooperation from various parties is needed to develop effective and adequate regulations for digital democracy. Governments, international agencies and the private sector must work together to develop the right regulations to create a safe, open and democratic digital environment.

Besides the challenges and problems of digital democracy, it also creates opportunities for public participation. Some of these opportunities are increasing accessibility, accelerating decision-making processes and increasing transparency in government. The explanation is as follows:

a. Improve accessibility

One of the opportunities that arise in democracy in the digital era is increasing accessibility for the public to participate in political activities. With the internet and information technology, individuals can easily obtain information about public policies and express their opinions on issues that are considered important.

This increase in accessibility can be done in various ways, such as by providing internet access that is more affordable and more accessible to the public. The government can facilitate the development of adequate telecommunication infrastructure in all areas, including remote or neglected areas. In addition, the government can also open access to public data and information through portals or online platforms that are easily accessible to the public.

Another opportunity is to reduce technological barriers to public participation. This can be achieved by providing training and technology support for individuals who are less familiar with technology or lack access to technology tools. The government can also facilitate the provision of affordable technology devices for the community, such as by providing subsidies or loan programs to purchase these devices.

In addition, another opportunity is to provide more open and inclusive participation spaces. Governments can facilitate wider citizen participation in decision-making processes by considering different groups of people and ensuring that their voices are heard and given the attention they deserve. One way to achieve this is by introducing an online platform that allows for open discussion and collaboration between government and society.

In this digital era, people also have the opportunity to actively participate in political campaigns and social movements through social media and the internet. This opportunity can be utilized by individuals and community groups to voice their views and aspirations, garner support, and influence public opinion widely. The government can support public participation in campaigns and social movements by providing support or training for those who want to be involved in these activities.

Thus, increasing accessibility is one of the great opportunities in democracy in the digital era to increase public participation. The government can facilitate this opportunity by providing affordable and easily accessible internet access, reducing technological barriers,

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providing more open and inclusive participation spaces, and supporting public participation in campaigns and social movements.

b. Speed up the decision-making process

Another opportunity for democracy in the digital era is to speed up the decision-making process. In a conventional democratic system, the decision-making process involves many stages, which can take months or even years. This is due to various factors such as lengthy legislative processes, complicated administrative policies, and time-consuming processes of public consultation.

In a digital democracy, the decision-making process can be carried out more efficiently and quickly. Technology allows governments to collect data and feedback from citizens in less time and at lower costs. For example, online surveys, digital polls, and online discussion forums can help governments understand people's needs and preferences quickly and efficiently. In this way, decisions can be made in a more timely manner and result in better and more targeted decisions.

In addition, technology also makes it possible to speed up the process of collecting and analyzing data needed for decision making. With a sophisticated management information system, data can be retrieved and analyzed in a much shorter time than if it had to be done manually. This can help the government to make decisions that are more targeted and avoid mistakes or wrong decisions.

Furthermore, the use of technology also enables wider and more active public participation in the decision-making process. In a digital democracy, people can provide feedback directly through online platforms and social media. This allows the government to get more and more diverse input from the public directly, and quickly respond and take the necessary action.

c. Increase transparency in government

Democracy in the digital era provides opportunities to increase transparency in government. Transparency in government can be defined as the ability of the community to monitor and supervise government activities and access to public information. In the digital era, information can be easily accessed via the internet and other technologies. Therefore, the government can utilize technology to expand the accessibility of public information and increase transparency.

One example of using technology to increase transparency in government is by providing an online platform for the public to view information about government spending, including budgets, expenditures, and contracts. Platforms like these allow the public to monitor government activity in real-time and find violations or non-compliance more easily.

In addition, by using social media, the government can promote transparency by informing public policies and enabling the public to provide feedback and input on these policies. Governments can also use social media to announce public events and meetings, which will increase opportunities for the public to participate in decision-making processes. By expanding the accessibility of public information, the public can become better informed about government policies and decision-making processes. This will help increase public participation in the political process and increase public trust in government.

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By increasing transparency in government, the public can have more trust in government and public participation can be increased. In addition, it can strengthen government accountability and help minimize corruption. Therefore, the government must utilize technology to increase transparency in government and expand the accessibility of public information to create a more open and accountable government.

Conclusion

Digital democracy offers significant opportunities for public participation in the political process. However, digital democracy also raises challenges that need attention and solutions. Ensuring that digital democracy is inclusive and fair, promoting transparency and accountability, and addressing concerns around privacy and security are critical to strengthening public participation in democratic processes. To fully realize the potential of digital democracy, governments, civil society organizations and citizens need to work together to develop effective policies and regulations that promote transparency, accountability and inclusiveness. Digital democracy has the potential to transform political processes and increase citizen engagement in discussing important issues affecting society, but it should be remembered that digital technology cannot completely replace direct participation in political life. Therefore, public participation in other forms such as public debates, elections and community forums remains important in maintaining citizen involvement in the political process. In addition, the role of education in promoting public participation is also very important. Education can help increase digital literacy and skills needed to participate actively in democratic processes. Overall, digital democracy can be an effective tool for promoting inclusive and equitable public participation in the political process. However, to fully exploit this potential requires addressing challenges such as inequity in access, poor policies, concerns around privacy and security, and lack of regulation. By strengthening cooperation between governments, civil society organizations and citizens, and promoting public education and awareness about the importance of public participation, we can create a digital democracy that is inclusive, just and resilient.

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