



THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION ON DEMOCRACY.A STUDY CASE ON #REZIST MOVEMENTS.¹

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Abstract. *This paper examines how the evolution of information technologies and digital tools has revealed their capacity to facilitate mass participation in legislative processes. Our primary objective is to highlight the transformative role of digital platforms in strengthening digital democracy. By analyzing the intersection of technology and civic participation, we aim to illustrate how digital tools are reshaping traditional democratic paradigms and empowering citizens to actively contribute to governance (Raiu, 2015). Particularly, the Romanian #rezist protest exemplifies the power of online organization and mobilization in contemporary activism through digital platforms. In this context, the #rezist movement underscores how digital technologies can facilitate rapid and effective mobilization, transcending geographical boundaries to foster a unified voice for social and political change.*

Keywords: *impact, digital transformation, democracy*

JEL CODE: D7

¹ DOI: doi.org/10.69581/RJPA.2024.09.04

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1. Introduction

Digital democracy is perceived as a decisive factor in changing the attitudes of both citizens and decision-makers regarding economic and social realities. Starting from the expectations that this new trend creates among all individuals, an important step is the conceptual clarifications aimed at ensuring a better understanding of digital democracy as a whole. To this end, this chapter will provide theoretical elements focused on defining the term digital democracy. Subsequently, starting from the complexity of the implications of digital technologies on the democratic process and acknowledging the variety of opinions expressed about digital democracy, we aim to discuss both the main advantages brought by this trend and the significant challenges it generates. In a world where digital technologies are becoming increasingly integrated into our daily lives and the functioning of democratic institutions, it is essential to evaluate their impact on political participation, governmental transparency, and other aspects of democracy.

The transformation of society has had a significant impact on the traditional democratic process, and the digital revolution has opened up new possibilities for civic participation and the functioning of democracy (Raiu, 2012). The Internet and social media have become crucial platforms for public debate, social mobilization, and political activism, with the concept of digital democracy gaining attention both in theory and in contemporary political practices. Thus, this research paper emphasizes that digital technologies not only transform democratic processes but also amplify citizen participation and engagement, thereby providing a new framework for contemporary democracy. It highlights the essential role of digital technologies in redefining political participation and promoting significant social changes.

Based on these statements, the primary aim of this research paper is to highlight the impact of digital technologies on the democratic process. To achieve this, I will focus on the phenomenon of digital activism, with a particular emphasis on the political movement #rezist. I will explore into how digital technologies have revolutionized traditional methods of political engagement and mobilization. By examining the #rezist movement, I aim to illustrate the power of digital platforms in organizing protests and disseminating information. This case study will provide



insights into the effectiveness of digital activism in influencing policy decisions and shaping political discourse. By bringing to light the dynamics of the #rezist movement, we aim to underscore the significance of digital activism as a vital component of modern democracy.

2. A literature review on digital democracy

The development of information technologies and digital technologies has brought to the forefront how these could enable the masses to participate directly in the legislative process (Tullock, 1967) (Dahl, 2008). The effects of this approach, known today as digital democracy, have been perceived as a *total revolution*, wherein technologies can address some of the existing problems both in the political sphere and regarding citizens' trust in government institutions (Snell, I., Thaens, M., van de Donk, W. (eds.), 2012, p. 50).

Digital democracy, defined as the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) and computer-mediated communication (CMC) to stimulate the democratic process or active citizen participation (Hacker, K.L., van Dijk, J. (Eds.), 2000, p. 1), has become one of the recent and widely discussed concepts in the academic literature of nowadays. Previously, the phenomenon was known under concepts such as *e-democracy*, *virtual democracy*, *cyber-democracy*, etc. Similarly, some of the previously points of view argue that digital democracy examines how technological developments can combine with basic social, economic, and political conditions to create new ways of practicing democracy (Hague, B.N., Loader, B.D., 1999). Summarizing the aforementioned opinions, *digital democracy* is understood as the practice of democracy where digital tools and technologies (Simon, J., Bass, T., Boelman, V., Mulgan, G., 2017) or self-governance facilitated by instant, peer-to-peer digital communication (Fuller, 2023, p. 3). Thus, digital democracy addresses the participatory potential of new communication technologies, including various forms of participation such as electronic voting and online deliberation (Asenbaum, 2019).

In line with the points mentioned earlier, digital democracy is considered an attempt to practice democratic principles without spatial, temporal, or other physical limitations. Thus, digital democracy complements traditional democracy rather than replacing it (Hacker, K.L., van Dijk, J. (Eds.), 2000). In other words, digital democracy should not supplant but rather integrate



representative democracy by harnessing computational tools and platforms (Contucci, P., Omicini, A., Pianini, D., Sîrbu, A. (Eds.), 2019). Therefore, digital democracy is assimilated as an evolution of the democratic process that encourages active citizen participation through technology and the internet, aiming to enhance it through the introduction of interactive and modern elements (Medimorec, D., Parycek, P., Schossböck, J., 2011). Drawing on the aspects mentioned above, we can acknowledge that digital democracy is defined not only by what we do (voting, debating, protesting) but also more fundamentally by who we are; in this context, digital democracy is defined by the material reconfigurations of individuals engaging in performative democratic processes both online and offline (Asenbaum, 2019).

The transformation brought about by digital technologies on democracy can be synthesized into four essential directions, as follows: (1) the role of governance and citizenship, (2) the public sphere, (3) the relationship between participation and representation, and (4) issues of domination and rights (Berg, S., Hofmann, J., 2021). Based on these considerations, there are views that support a broader perspective on digital democracy, defined as the pursuit and practice of democracy from any standpoint, using digital media in online and offline political communication (given that political activities occur not only on the internet but also in physical meetings where digital technologies are used for support) (Hacker, K.L., van Dijk, J. , 2000). Overall, these digital tools and practices represent the foundational pillars of participatory digital democracy, providing citizens with the opportunity to actively engage in political processes and contribute to building a more democratic, transparent, and inclusive society.

The implications of digital technologies on democratic processes highlight the challenges, opportunities, and fundamental changes in governance and citizen political engagement (Iftimoaei, 2015). Thus, digital democracy has opened up new possibilities for political action beyond participation and representation. Digital technologies enable citizens to exert their political influence through online activism, advocacy campaigns, and large-scale social mobilization (Chadwick, 2009). Examples such as Occupy Wall Street or the Arab Spring illustrate how digital technologies can influence social and political movements, facilitating the organization and coordination of political action on a global scale. However, these forms of



political action can also be vulnerable to information manipulation and control of digital platforms by interested actors.

Existing viewpoints in the specialized literature argue that the internet promotes democracy by: (1) multiplying channels for political information and participation; (2) providing new opportunities for communication, mobilization, and organization for citizens and civil organizations; (3) creating new pluralistic spaces where citizens can discuss issues of general interest; and (4) stimulating collaborative projects and knowledge exchange with political decision-makers (Mosca, 2013). Based on these considerations, a series of advantages or opportunities can be identified that arise from practicing democracy through the use of digital technologies.

Digital democracy, configured to allow extensive participation in decision-making processes, entails distributing responsibilities to the entire community, where each individual is called upon to make their own choices and initiate actions towards implementing policies they deem fair. The impossibility of outsourcing responsibility compels every involved actor to be aware and act proactively to address any deficiencies they observe within society. In these conditions, responsibility constitutes a fundamental yet often neglected element in the context of democracy. In other words, through technology, citizens are provided with a personalized way to participate in the democratic process (Parycek, P., Rinnerbauer, B., Schossböck, J., 2017). Consistent with these points, academic literature acknowledges that through digital technologies and the communication channels derived from them, citizens will be more vocal in shaping governmental agendas (Hacker, K.L., van Dijk, J. , 2000).

In the context of societal evolution, another advantage brought by the use of digital technologies in the democratic process is the increased transparency (Grossi, D., Hahn, U. et. al., 2024). Thus, the influence of digital communication is noted, which allows individuals to document any type of debate through unrestricted access to information. According to Gauja's opinion, digital platforms and social networks can be considered essential factors in strengthening democracy through active citizen participation in the online environment (Gauja, 2021). Taking into account the aforementioned aspects, we can affirm that digital technologies have facilitated direct involvement of individuals in the democratic process. An example of this is the adoption of



electronic voting, where technology has enabled the exercise of a fundamental right (Vayenas, 2017).

Digital platforms serve as indispensable tools in efforts to ensure transparency and government accountability to its citizens. They provide opportunities to present diverse information to the public, ranging from public budgets and current policies to performance evaluation results. This enhanced transparency serves as a cornerstone of a healthy and functional democracy, empowering citizens to monitor and assess governmental actions more efficiently and comprehensively. Through digital platforms, citizens can swiftly access updated information about how public funds are spent, political decisions, and their impact on the community. This direct access to essential information enables citizens to better understand governmental decision-making processes and actively participate in them. Furthermore, the transparency offered by these digital platforms encourages public debate and contributes to increasing civic awareness and engagement. Moreover, these platforms facilitate ongoing monitoring of government activities and how well it achieves its objectives and promises. By providing accessible and easily understandable data and information, citizens can evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of government in managing public issues. Thus, these digital platforms not only enhance government accountability but also promote continuous improvement in performance and public services.

Essentially, the evolution of digital platforms in governance exemplifies a proactive approach to democratic participation, leveraging technology to foster an informed and engaged citizenry. As technologies evolve, these platforms continue to evolve as well, adapting to new challenges and opportunities in the realm of democratic governance (Raiu C. , 2023). Thus, digital democracy entails an approach where participation in decision-making processes is extended, and responsibility is distributed across the entire community. Each individual is called upon to take personal involvement and initiate actions for implementing policies they deem fair. This evolution brings advantages such as increased transparency and facilitation of peer-to-peer communication on public issues, bypassing traditional intermediaries. Moreover, the use of digital technologies in democracy provides opportunities to enhance government transparency and accountability through digital platforms that grant access to information about public



budgets, policies, and government performance. These platforms facilitate the monitoring of government activities and encourage civic engagement, thereby contributing to the strengthening of democracy and increasing citizen awareness and participation in political processes.

However, this approach can also generate challenges related to representativeness and fairness of participation, considering the unequal access to digital technologies and varying digital skills among citizens. In the context of the digital influence on the political sphere, issues such as governance transparency, the spread of misinformation, data privacy concerns, and the politicization of content distributed through social media channels have been discussed. Thus, there are concerns about the potential for digital platforms to be used to spread false or manipulative information, impacting public opinion and the integrity of the democratic process. Additionally, social media algorithms can contribute to political polarization by limiting users' exposure to divergent opinions and promoting content that aligns with their political profile.

The Internet has transformed and diversified participatory actions, providing a vast space for the expression of political attitudes and communication behaviors, essential for maintaining transparency in digital democracy. E-participation facilitates civic activism and improves communication between governments and citizens, thereby strengthening responsible policies (Raiu, C., Mina-Raiu, L., 2023). Social networks and virtual communities play a crucial role in digital democracy, offering new contexts for civic discourse. Globally used digital tools and platforms demonstrate how technology can enhance the quality, legitimacy, and transparency of decision-making processes. Thus, the Internet has played an essential role in transforming and diversifying participatory actions, providing a vast space for expressing and demonstrating various political attitudes and communication behaviors. Adapting to this ever-changing reality is crucial for maintaining transparency in democracy in the digital era. As a result, more and more actions of active citizen participation have emerged through the use of participatory platforms. In these circumstances, e-participation is defined as the expansion and transformation of societal participation in democratic and consultative processes, mediated by information and communication technologies, primarily through the Internet (Sæbø, O., Rose, J., Flak, L.S., 2008).



Civic activism using digital technologies facilitates citizen engagement, improves communication, and feedback between governments and citizens, thereby strengthening responsible policies (Webb, 2020). The permanent connection to the online environment has highlighted the importance of social networks and virtual communities in citizen participation as essential factors in implementing e-democracy or digital democracy (Robertson, S., Vatraru, R., Medina, R., 2009) (Maciel, C., Roque, L., Garcia, A.C., 2010). Currently, numerous digital tools and platforms are used worldwide, aiming primarily at active citizen involvement in the democratic process. This demonstrates how digital tools can be used to enhance the quality, legitimacy, and transparency of the decision-making process (Simon, J., Bass, T., Boelman, V., Mulgan, G., 2017). According to academic literature, social networks are considered a new type of online public sphere or a context for civic discourse and debate through public discourse and online discussions, offering opportunities for electronic participation and digital democracy. However, there are opinions suggesting that online engagement processes have had no visible impact on governmental legitimacy (Gastil, J., Richards, R.C., 2017). Additionally, according to opinions, blog readers are involved in a series of participative activities, both online and offline. This information supports the emergence of hybrid participation, which combines real and virtual engagement in political activities, defining digital democracy (Gil de Zúñiga, H., Veenstra, A., Vraga, E., Shah, D., 2010).

The emergence of digital technologies and shortcomings in the traditional voting system have led to the development of electronic voting, a part of e-governance and digital democracy, seen as a way to improve the democratic process and increase confidence in elections (Profiroiu, C.M., Negoită, C.I., Costea, A.V., 2024). Electronic voting allows voters to securely and privately cast their ballots online, in both supervised and unsupervised forms, promising to reduce logistical barriers, human errors, fraud, and electoral costs. However, its implementation involves political and security challenges, and its effects on political participation are complex and unpredictable. While electronic voting can enhance the accessibility and accuracy of voting, it is just one aspect of efforts to promote civic engagement and political commitment, requiring continuous and diverse measures to ensure equal participation of all citizens.



In the context outlined above, the exercise of democracy through digital technologies has significantly increased recently, involving citizens in the decision-making process through various digital tools. This trend underscores the potential of technology to transform the political sphere and the desire of citizens to exercise their democratic rights. Estonia, a pioneer in electronic voting since 2005, has demonstrated success in increasing voter turnout, and citizens' trust in e-governance is high. In Switzerland, Geneva and other cantons have adopted electronic voting, maintaining a balance between innovation and security. Norway ceased its e-voting program due to anonymity concerns, while Canada has successfully implemented electronic voting in Ontario and Nova Scotia. In Asia, Pakistan and India have conducted limited tests of electronic voting for diaspora and in certain states. These examples highlight the challenges and benefits of electronic voting, showing its potential to improve democratic processes through technology, provided integrity and security are maintained.

Summarizing the previous aspects, it can be stated that the internet and digital technologies have profoundly reshaped how citizens participate in the democratic process, offering new opportunities for political expression and civic engagement. E-participation and electronic voting have shown that technology can facilitate stronger civic activism and more efficient communication between governments and citizens, thereby enhancing the transparency and legitimacy of the decision-making process. Examples from various countries highlight both the potential and challenges of electronic voting, underscoring the need for a careful balance between innovation and security. While digital technology promises to improve the accessibility and accuracy of the electoral process, its success depends on ongoing measures to ensure security and public trust. Therefore, efforts to promote digital democracy must be comprehensive, encompassing not only advanced technologies but also policies that guarantee equal and informed participation of all citizens.

3. Methodology

Taking into account the digital transformation at the level of society, the main objective of this paper is represented by the identification of the impact that digital technologies have on the traditional democratic process. Subsequently, the research question can be summarized as follows: *what is the impact of digital technologies on democracy?*



Starting from the main objective and the previously mentioned research question, the following secondary objectives were identified, aimed at ensuring a better structuring of the present research endeavor:

Specific objective no. 1: Identifying the main opinions from the academic literature regarding the concept of digital democracy;

Specific objective no. 2: Analyzing the model of digital activism, by analyzing the events organized in Romania in 2017, known as the #resist protests, as a result of the adoption of Emergency Ordinance no. 13.

In order to achieve the main objective, but also the secondary objectives, the present research paper was properly structured to provide the required framework for identifying the impact that digital technologies have in the democratic process and, in particular, the way in which democracy was founded digital. To this end, each section aims to bring to the fore key elements from a theoretical point of view and, complementary, to ensure the anchoring in social and political reality, by providing relevant examples that strengthen the theoretical arguments. Subsequently, a systematic review of the academic literature was undertaken and the available data regarding #resist protests were analyzed.

4. Results and discussions

The extent of digital technologies' use in the democratic process has been highlighted by numerous examples identified in the specialized literature. Theoretical landmarks have underscored how some traditional activities have acquired a digital dimension, such as electronic voting or e-participation. These transformations have been facilitated by the rapid progress of information and communication technologies, which have democratized access to information and enhanced citizens' interaction with political institutions.

The theory of digital democracy is based on the premise that digital technologies not only extend and diversify the ways in which citizens can participate in political processes but also fundamentally transform the nature of this participation. Through online platforms, citizens can inform themselves, debate, and influence political decisions in a much more direct and efficient



manner than in the past. These platforms allow for constant and bidirectional interaction between voters and representatives, promoting a more transparent and accountable form of democracy. Thus, to complete the theoretical picture of digital democracy constructed in the first two chapters, we propose in the following sections to present a large-scale digital activism event in recent years in Romania, known as #rezist, which emerged in reaction to Emergency Ordinance No. 13 from 2017.

On January 31, 2017, the Romanian Government led by Prime Minister Sorin Grindeanu adopted Emergency Ordinance No. 13 (O.U.G. 13), which proposed a series of amendments to the Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure. The main legislative changes proposed in the ordinance included the following aspects (Government of Romania, 2017):

- Introducing a value threshold for the offense of abuse of office, establishing that the act would be considered a crime only if the damage exceeded 200,000 RON. If the damage was below this threshold, the act would not be penalized criminally.
- Narrowing the definition of the offense of abuse of office, specifying that it applies only if the act is committed in violation of the law and not just secondary or internal regulations.
- Reducing the penalty for abuse of office from 2-7 years to 6 months - 3 years in prison or a fine.
- Granting amnesty for certain penalties, especially for offenses with a lower degree of social danger.

The legislative measures proposed by O.U.G. 13 were perceived as a direct attack on justice and an attempt to shield corrupt politicians from prosecution. Many voices from civil society and the political sphere accused the government of intending to protect its own members and allies from criminal accountability, with critics highlighting that the ordinance would allow well-known corrupt politicians to evade punishment. This perception was reinforced by the political context in which the ordinance was issued, where several high-ranking politicians were under investigation or on trial for corruption. Consequently, O.U.G. 13 was seen not merely as a



technical amendment to the criminal legislation but as a strategic move to directly influence ongoing cases and trials in the courts.

The fight against corruption became a public issue. In this context, the adoption of O.U.G. 13 generated an immediate massive reaction from civil society. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of Romanian cities, especially in Bucharest, to express their disapproval and protest against the ordinance, demanding the resignation of the government. The protests were mainly organized through social networks, where the hashtag #rezist became a symbol of the resistance movement.

On the evening of the adoption of Ordinance 13, a spontaneous protest took place in Bucharest, gathering approximately 25,000 people mobilized through the use of the social network Facebook. Existing opinions support that the first 24 hours were decisive in establishing a cohesive civic movement (Tompea, 2018), primarily mobilized through digital tools. The protests continued in the following days in Bucharest and other cities across the country. February 5th marked a peak in mobilization, with the event being heavily covered and analyzed in the media. Over 600,000 protesters took to the streets nationwide on this date. This day remains in contemporary Romanian history as the moment when the largest protests since the Revolution of 1989 took place, reflecting the profound dissatisfaction of citizens with the government and its decisions (Trif, 2017).

The #rezist movement quickly transcended Romania's borders, garnering support from Romanian communities in the diaspora. The #rezist protests spread to 81 cities in 36 countries and led both to the repeal of the ordinance and the fall of the government (Adi, A., Lilleker, D. , 2017). In support of the Romanians in the country who took to the streets to protest and condemn the controversial legislative measures, numerous European capitals witnessed diaspora protests organized in front of Romanian embassies and consulates. These movements attracted international media attention and sensitized global public opinion to the situation in Romania. Considering the aforementioned aspects, the #rezist protest is regarded as one of the most extensive and well-organized civic movements in Romania's recent history, reflecting civil society's struggle against corruption and for the defense of the rule of law.



The #rezist protests were a remarkable example of democracy in action, highlighting the citizens' ability to mobilize against abuses of power and demand transparency and accountability from the government. The global expansion of these protests demonstrated the solidarity of the Romanian diaspora and drew international attention to the fight against corruption in Romania. By repealing the ordinance and the fall of the government on February 5, 2017, the #rezist movement demonstrated that the voice of the people can bring about significant changes in a country's political leadership, thus strengthening democratic values and the rule of law.

The #rezist movement clearly illustrates the potential and impact of digital technologies on contemporary democracy. Studying this movement provides valuable insights into how citizens can use new technologies to influence political processes, defend democratic values, and promote significant social changes. Thus, digital democracy is not merely an extension of traditional democratic practices, but a profound transformation of how political participation is conceived and exercised in the 21st century.

The increasing reliance on digital platforms for political information and organization underscores the transformative impact of technology on contemporary forms of civic engagement and protest participation. As digital literacy continues to grow globally, the potential for online mobilization to influence political outcomes and drive social change is likely to expand even further, profoundly reshaping the dynamics of political participation.

Previously published studies have demonstrated that protest participants increasingly use political information obtained online (Mosca, L., Quaranta, M. , 2016). This approach enhances the likelihood of individual participation in the democratic process, highlighting the essential role of digital platforms in shaping modern political landscapes. Online channels provide accessible, real-time information that can mobilize individuals by raising awareness of social and political issues, facilitating the organization of protests, and fostering a sense of community among activists. Moreover, the interactive nature of social networks and other digital platforms allows for the rapid dissemination of information and the formation of networks that transcend geographical boundaries. This interconnection enables protest movements to gain momentum quickly, involve different participants, and efficiently coordinate actions.

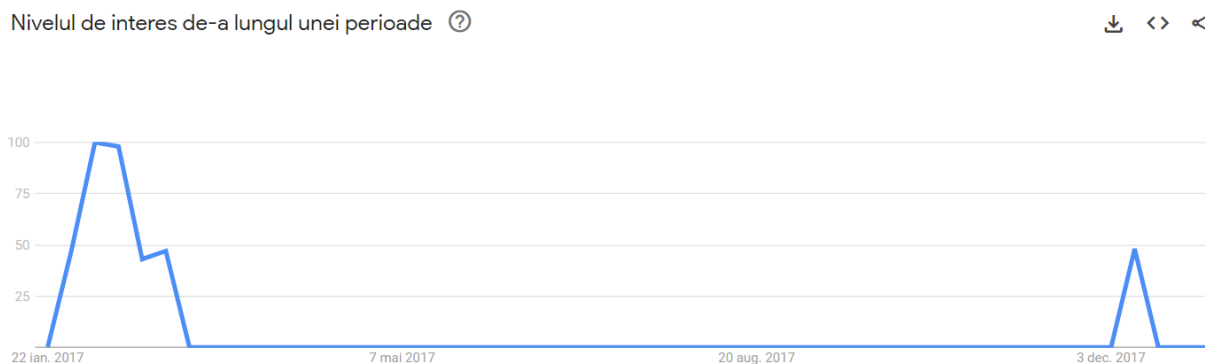


Social movements that emerge online require clear direction and prior mobilization efforts to be effective. Creating a strong collective identity is essential because messages become more powerful and meaningful when there is a sense of unity and unanimity among movement members. A well-defined collective identity helps consolidate group cohesion, clarify common objectives, and motivate participants to act in a concerted manner. Additionally, it can attract more supporters and enhance the movement's visibility and credibility in the eyes of the general public and potential allies (Bennett, W.L., Pfetsch, B., 2018). In the political context of early 2017, the hashtag #rezist became a symbol of civic resistance and solidarity against abuses of power. Through social media, the #rezist movement managed to draw international attention, increase pressure on political decision-makers, and maintain a high level of public participation. The analysis of this movement reveals how the digitalization of activism allows for rapid and efficient mobilization, facilitating citizen participation in ways that transcend traditional constraints of time and space.

An analysis conducted through the Google Trends platform highlights how searches using the keyword #rezist evolved during the period from January to December 2017. The numbers indicate the level of search interest corresponding to the highest point in the chart, for the specified region and period. A value of 100 reflects the maximum popularity of the term, while a value of 50 indicates that the popularity is half of the recorded maximum. A score of 0 signifies a lack of sufficient data for the analyzed period. Considering these aspects, it is noted that the period of maximum interest is associated with the week of February 5-11, 2017, when the most numerous protests occurred (see *Figure 1*). Similarly, another keyword associated with the analyzed period is *protest*, which had a similar evolution (see *Figure 2*).

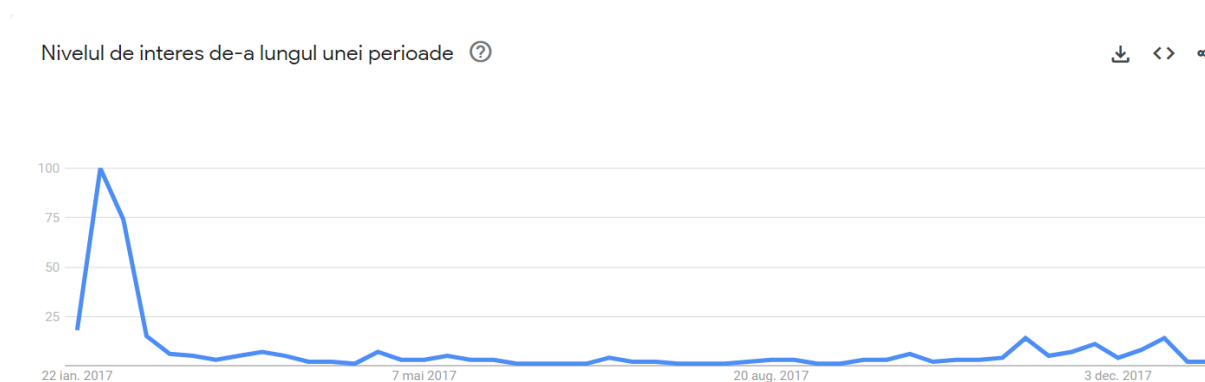


Figure 1. *Level of interest for #rezist during January – December 2017*



Source: Google Trends

Figure 2. *Level of interest for protest during January – December 2017*



Source: Google Trends

Based on sub-regions, we can identify the areas where searches for the keyword #rezist were most popular (see Figure 3). According to the available data, the most searches for #rezist were recorded in the counties of Galați (100 points), Ilfov (82 points), Brașov (73 points), and Bucharest Municipality (57 points). Additionally, searches were significant in the counties of



Timiș (52 points), Iași (49 points), and Arad (43 points). Considering the same criteria, the most searches for the keyword protest were recorded in Bucharest Municipality (100 points), and the counties of Cluj (90 points), Ilfov (74 points), Sibiu (74 points), Timiș (65 points), and Iași (62 points).

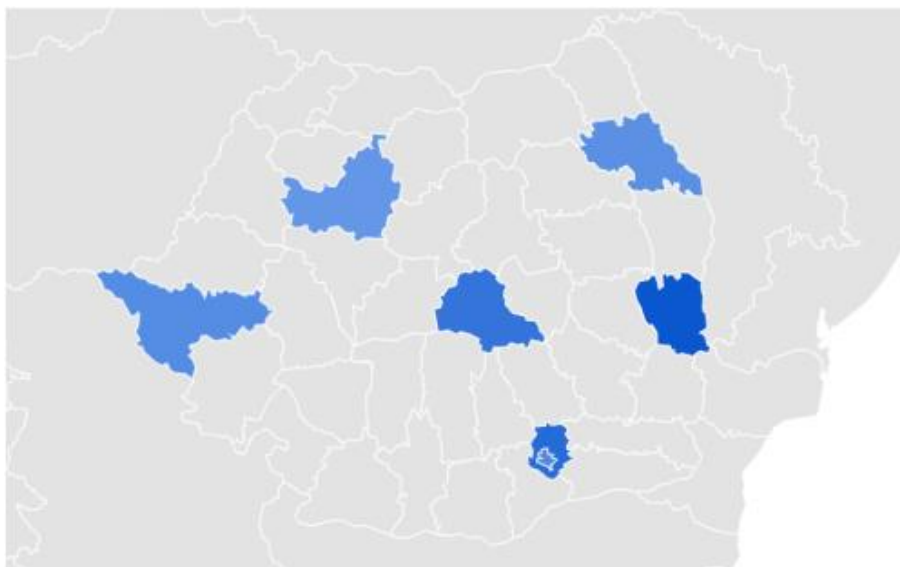


Figure 3. Areas of interest for #resist during January-December 2017

Source: Google Trends

The #rezist movement mobilized hundreds of thousands of Romanians through various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. These platforms played a crucial role in coordinating protest actions, disseminating relevant information, and garnering public support. The use of hashtags, live broadcasts, and online petitions can amplify the reach of a protest, attracting attention from both national and international audiences. The #rezist movement is a striking example of civic mobilization and engagement facilitated by digital technologies, highlighting the significant influence of social networks and other online platforms in organizing and conducting protests.

According to a report by ZeList Monitor (ZeListMonitor, 2024), a Romanian social media monitoring tool, between January and February 2017, the hashtag #rezist was used over 150,000



times on Twitter. On February 1, 2017, #rezist was among the most frequently used hashtags globally. Similarly, Facebook events related to the protests, such as „Nu vrem să fim o nație de hoți” (“We don't want to be a nation of thieves”), had over 50,000 people marked as “Participating” and another 150,000 marked as “Interested”. Facebook emerged as one of the most popular online tools used by users to share news from the media about the controversial decision made by the government in Bucharest. The subject #rezist had the most posts (38.5%) and the greatest impact (69%) on Facebook (Muresan, R., Salcudean, M. , 2019). These findings underscore the significant role of Facebook in mobilizing protesters (Dogaru-Tulică, 2019).

During the protests, live broadcasts from major media outlets and from individual protesters reached audiences of over 1 million viewers per broadcast. In terms of activity on Instagram, in February 2017 there were over 30,000 posts tagged with #resist, with a significant level of engagement in terms of both likes and comments. On YouTube, protest-related videos uploaded by media organizations and individuals have accumulated millions of views. For example, a collage of images from the protests made by ProTV garnered over 1 million views within weeks of the protests (Dogaru-Tulică, 2019). Taken together, this information provides an overview of digital engagement around the #resist protests.

Complementary to the previous aspects, it can be stated that digital platforms often serve as alternative sources of news, offering perspectives that might be underrepresented or censored in the mainstream media. This democratization of information empowers citizens to challenge dominant narratives and hold government authorities accountable, thereby increasing civic engagement and participation. The availability of online forums and discussion groups also provide spaces for deliberation and debate that can deepen political understanding and individuals' commitment to causes. In addition, integrating digital tools into protest activities can increase organizational effectiveness. For example, secure messaging applications or fundraising through online platforms have revolutionized the way movements plan and support their activities. These technologies not only streamline logistics, but also ensure the safety and security of participants, protecting their anonymity and enabling easy communication.

Another example that supports mobilization in the online environment is the creation of different groups, whose objective was the provision of relevant information and the coagulation of the



people involved. #REZISTENTA was the largest closed group associated with the protests since early 2017, with over 55,000 members. The group was founded by Andrei Roșu, with the intention of finding people to replace him, if necessary, in the situation where he could not manage the protest further and would have to be absent from the demonstrations. From the third day of the protests, Roșu moved his office to Piața Victoriei, managing his online business from there. Braving the cold, he worked from his laptop, answering questions and coordinating activities. Andrei Rosu hoped that the government would resign and new elections would be called. His continued presence in the square was intended to ensure a constant presence at the protests, not just in the evenings and weekends when most people were off work. On his fourteenth consecutive day of protest, he notified his friends and followers on Facebook, where he had more than 20,000 followers, and posted a link to the group on his blog. The response from members of the Facebook group was impressive: in the first hour, 2,000 people joined the group, and after the first 24 hours, the number increased to 20,000. This massive response highlighted that Andrei's outrage and dedication was widely shared by others, strengthening the movement's collective action and solidarity. In addition, the group strengthened civic responsibility by placing a number of responsibilities. Thus, 15 of the 55,000 members became administrators of the group, and about 200 of them joined specialized groups, where the PR and legal teams permanently supported the online activity (Adi, A., Lilleker, D. , 2017).

Overall, the #resist movement clearly demonstrates the potential and significant impact of digital technologies on contemporary democracy. The #resist movement has mobilized hundreds of thousands of Romanians through the use of social networks and other digital platforms, demonstrating the major influence of these technologies in organizing and conducting protests. Through hashtags, live broadcasts and dedicated groups, the movement managed to attract national and international attention, increase pressure on policy makers and maintain a high level of public participation, illustrating the ability of digital technologies to facilitate civic mobilization and engagement, transforming thus the modern political landscape.

The #resist movement is a relevant example of digital democracy, supported by the way it used digital technologies to promote citizen participation, transparency and government accountability, in the context of events that could negatively influence the democratic process. In the context of



the adoption of Emergency Ordinance no. 13, #resist managed to mobilize a large number of people in a very short time, through social networks and other online platforms. Facebook, Twitter and other social media channels have been essential for organizing protests, distributing information and coordinating actions. This rapid and massive mobilization is an eloquent example of digital democracy, where digital technology facilitates the active involvement of citizens in political life.

Providing real-time information about government actions, proposed legislative changes and their impact on society has been shared online on social media using #resist. By promoting transparency and facilitating access to information, the movement contributed to better informing citizens, another key principle of digital democracy. The protests organized by the #resist movement had as their main objective the accountability of the government. Through public pressure exerted through digital platforms, the movement was able to attract international attention and force the government to be more responsive to citizens' demands. This dynamic is essential in a digital democracy, where technology helps create a balance of power between citizens and government institutions.

#Rezist demonstrated the power of digital collaboration by successfully uniting diverse groups and organizations from across the country and even from the diaspora around common objectives. Digital platforms facilitated not only mobilization but also collaboration among various entities, thereby promoting a form of participatory and collaborative democracy. Thus, the use of digital technologies within the #rezist movement serves as a pragmatic example of how citizens can innovate and rapidly adapt new technologies to achieve their democratic goals. Whether through live-streaming protests, using hashtags to organize conversations, or developing online platforms for petitions, #rezist exemplified how technology can be used to support democracy.

#Rezist has revolutionized the way citizens interact with the government and exercise their democratic rights, highlighting how digital technologies can amplify citizens' voices and promote social change. This movement demonstrated that through the effective use of social networks and other digital platforms, citizens can organize massive protests, disseminate essential information, and pressure authorities to be more transparent and accountable. Additionally, through #Rezist,



citizens discovered the collective power they can wield when mobilizing in the digital space. Online platforms facilitated broader and more inclusive democratic participation, enabling people from various regions and the diaspora to actively engage in the country's political life. The coordination of civic actions online, through different platforms, exemplifies the adaptation of democratic processes to digital transformation.

5. Conclusions

The rise of digital technologies has fundamentally reconfigured the structure of today's society, offering both new opportunities and challenges across all levels. These changes are particularly evident in the socio-political sphere, notably in the transformation of the traditional democratic process. Through digital technologies, widespread internet access and the availability of new platforms are key aspects facilitating political communication, mobilization, and civic participation. Social networks and online platforms now enable citizens to organize quickly and efficiently, debate ideas, and bring critical issues to public attention, contributing to a more inclusive and participatory democracy. Additionally, digital technologies have democratized access to information, allowing citizens to monitor and evaluate governmental activities transparently, providing an alternative for immediate responses to any political missteps.

In the context of transformations driven by the development of technology and communications in contemporary society, the main objective of this research material was to identify the impact of digital technologies on the traditional democratic process. To address the research question derived from the main objective—namely, what is the impact of digital technologies on democracy—secondary research directions were established. These directions aimed to provide theoretical frameworks on the studied topic and identify concrete situations from everyday realities that support the existence of digital democracy. To ensure the theoretical and pragmatic framework necessary for understanding the topic at hand, each section of the paper aimed to highlight essential theoretical elements and to anchor the analysis in social and political reality by providing relevant examples to support theoretical arguments. This structure allowed for a detailed examination of how digital technologies influence democratic processes, highlighting both their potential to enhance citizen participation and engagement, as well as the significant challenges that must be addressed to ensure a robust and inclusive democracy in the digital age.



Firstly, the essential theoretical elements from the academic literature, providing an overview of the topic under study were illustrated. The most important perspectives on digital democracy and underscored both the opportunities arising from the use of digital technologies in the context of the democratic process, as well as the challenges and risks involved were highlighted. Thus, a solid theoretical foundation for understanding digital democracy, highlighting its potential to enhance democratic processes and the significant challenges that need to be addressed was provided. Secondly, concrete methods of exercising the democratic process in today's society were explored. The opinions from academic literature regarding how activities unfold in digital democracy were highlighted, with reference to aspects such as electronic voting and online civic participation. Furthermore, relevant examples were provided to support theoretical arguments, especially in the context of the international adoption of electronic voting. Overall, a detailed perspective on how digital technologies can transform democratic processes, demonstrating how they can be effectively used to enhance citizen participation and engagement in democratic governance was adopted. Finally, the context of events associated with the civic movement #rezist, an emblematic example of digital activism in Romania was landscaped. In January 2017, the government adopted Emergency Ordinance no. 13, which proposed controversial amendments to the Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure, including partial decriminalization of abuse of office. These changes were perceived as an attempt to protect politicians involved in acts of corruption. The adoption of the ordinance triggered an immediate and vehement reaction from civil society. Tens of thousands of Romanians took to the streets to protest against corruption and to defend the rule of law. The movement was promoted and organized mainly through social networks and other online platforms, which facilitated the rapid and efficient mobilization of protesters. The hashtag #rezist became the symbol of these protests, reflecting the determination of citizens to fight against corruption and to protect the integrity of the judicial system.

Synthesizing the previous information, we can conclude that the present research on *the impact of digital transformation on democracy* brings to the forefront a contemporary topic and contributes to a better understanding of the democratic process within a society permanently connected to online. Each aspect discussed, from conceptual clarifications to the analysis of the #rezist



protests, provides an overview of digital democracy. Thus, the theoretical information identified in the literature is validated through real-life situations. Adopting a perspective that combines both theoretical and practical dimensions has contributed to achieving the main objective of the research, namely identifying the impact of digital technologies on the traditional democratic process.

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