İnceleme Makalesi ● Review Article

Citizenship in the Techno-Politics Age

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history: *Received: 10.08.2021* *Received in revised form: 03.01.2022* *Accepted: 03.01.2022* Keywords: *citizenship,* *digital media,* *politics,* *techno-politics.*	In our modern world, where new communication technologies are hyperized, civil activities can be performed via these technologies, as a result of which digital citizenship concept is being discussed in numerous contexts. In this article, the digital citizenship concept will be addressed in a critical and theoretical context, and the concept of citizenship which changed with technology and the social reflections of digital citizenship will be discussed within the context of media, politics.

1. Introduction

Today, media has become very important from an educational, social, public, cultural and political standpoint thanks to its technological innovations. The features this new technology had introduced with regards to political life and its actors have attracted the attention of numerous social scientists. Some scholars claimed that the opportunities technology created for media harbored a potentiality which would allow plural participation, public domain, digital citizenship, and digital activism that would create a democratic society whereas others claimed that consequences in the opposite direction could be created due to algorithms, echo chambers, surveillance, and easy data collection (Castells 2013, Gerbaudo 2020, Shirky 2018).

According to these thinkers, the digital opportunities offered to society on grounds that technological advances facilitate citizens' lives, in fact, allow the governments to monitor each and every action of their citizens. This situation leads to problems regarding the protection of civil rights. The most important problem is the exploitation of citizens as data providers through surveillance and the ability to control and manipulate public perception in the politically desired manner.

In our modern world, where new communication technologies are hypered, civil activities can be performed via these technologies, as a result of which digital citizenship concept is being discussed in numerous contexts. In this article, the digital citizenship concept will be addressed in a critical and theoretical context, and the concept of citizenship which changed with technology and the social reflections of digital citizenship will be discussed within the context of media, politics

Digital Citizenship and Politics in Digital Media Age

As the Internet and digital world became an indispensable part of our lives, "Digital Citizenship" became one of the most popular concepts. Simply put the digital citizen is a person who exists in the digital world with his/her identity and entity, and who builds relationships with the society through the internet technologies. "Citizenship" became more digitalized as communication technologies developed.

When we examine the historical development of citizenship, we see that it is a right which was not granted to the dependent parts of society for centuries. The privilege of being a citizen, which was granted to the governing and sovereign sections of society who had free time, and who undertook numerous important duties like performing public responsibilities, participating in politics, and thus contributing to democracy during Ancient times and Middle Ages, was extended to all sections of society with the transition to the modern period. Even though everyone had been granted the right to citizenship in this period, this right requires certain qualities like "intelligence", "self-control" and "consciousness". In other words, a citizen is defined as someone who can understand the interests of society, who can repress his/her will in favor of the will of the society, and who can perform his/her societal duties. This definition expresses the effort to keep the masses in different stations together with a sense of social conscience and duty. As a consequence of this definition, holidays were institutionalized, low-level pastime was turned into high-level entertainment, and popular recreation was glorified. Moreover, new forms of entertainment were put forward which would be an alternative to the taverns and music hall where the working class drank. In other words, citizenship was rationalized and restricted to free time activities that would increase the productivity of the given system.

According to Habermas, bourgeois public realms, which he idealized, mediated between the state and the private realm in 18th century and they were the initial stages of capitalist modernity. Numerous public realms where individuals could discuss their general interests and the public interest, and where they could

criticize public and political order (e.g. literary clubs, newspapers, political magazines) were taken over by the state or private companies, who transformed them.

This situation gained a more sensitive dimension since the 1970s, (i.e. the neoliberal period) when new media technologies were developed alongside traditional media. When new media companies entered the public sphere, they colonized it and replaced citizens who discussed political and social affairs of common interest with atomized consumers who passively viewed the spectacles of mass culture in their homes (http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell6.htm).

In today's techno-capitalism age where we perform every activity via technology, technology is of vital importance. Thanks to technology, production has been globalized, and technological discoveries have accelerated communication, which decreased costs. New communication technologies created global assembly lines, and global capital did much more than what states could and created a new capitalist order where labor is cheap and people can travel all around the world. In this techno-capitalism where capital presents information and entertainment to masses via the developing technology, technology gained a global importance through computerization and digitalization. In this new formation of new capitalism, technology, automation, and information play a very important role in production processes.

In the techno-capitalism period, the political activities of the individual have been reduced to digital citizenship, which is carried out via digital technologies. In other words, citizens can take part in decision-making processes and the public sphere based on the information provided only through digital technologies. On the other hand, scholars debating the relationship between digital technologies and politics discuss the concept of "techno-politics" in today's world.

Techno-Politics Age and Citizenship

Today, the internet and computer technologies have become the arena where political debates occur, a situation which redefined the public sphere and gave rise to the concept of "techno-politics". The term "techno-politics", which was first used by Jon Lebkowski in 1997, means the prioritization of computers and information, the use of alternative information networks and new communication systems, and the opening of new public spheres that would enable the participation of citizens in a democratic society. For, when compared to traditional media which is full of pacifying infotainment and which moved people away from public matters, the new media technologies are interactive, participatory, and have the potential to offer a democratic dialogue (Haberer vd., 2016:502).

In contrast, many other authors criticize the concept of techno-politics. Digital technologies have revolutionary features in terms of digital citizenship, political participation, creating a global public sphere; however, it is believed that, from a political perspective, social media, which is one of the tools of techno politics, if more powerful in terms of the creation of consent than previous forms of media. The politicians of the previous eras who could communicate with their electorate through television, radio and newspapers outside election periods were replaced by a new generation of politicians who can access, different masses, even to a global audience 24 hours a day. For politicians and governments whose interaction with the citizens can transcend time and space thanks to techno politics, social media is an indispensable tool for creating consent (Kellner, 2021).

Social media, which is the most popular form of media today, plays a very important role in shaping political ideas. Many governments and statesmen who are aware of this fact use social media more frequently, and the digital media has turned into an forum for digital diplomacy. Due to its manipulative and "disinformational" character, this techno-politics, which is a digital propaganda instrument, means

consciously misleading the information on social media networks and spreading it through bots and algorithms. (Wolley ve Howard, 2019:4).

In the introduction to his book "Politics and Propaganda", Ünsal Oskay states that in Antiquity, free Athenians included the art of rhetoric into their educational system to make their speeches at the Agora more convincing as a part of being a citizen. Oskay adds that during the Roman Empire period, demagogy, which reflects the populist policies of the tyrants and the ruling class, became prominent. Demagogy is an effective method for manipulating the angry masses who have expectations regarding the tyrants' populist policies. At the same time, demagogy is a form of communication with the masses who have been excluded from political life, who are not the subject of political life but objects of it. This form of communication aims to ensure that ruled masses do not address the events of life through reasoning, but perceive them in an emotional and empirical way, which turns into motivation and manipulation (Domenach, 1995:5-7). As a matter of fact, today we can talk about a new form of politics, "techno-politics", where, thanks to social media channels, rhetoric is replaced by performance and style, and about the mediatization of politics, and right-wing populism.

The situation is not bright when we look from the perspective of the citizens, another actor of politics. Byung Chul Han says that new communication technologies allow not only the politicians, but also the neo-liberal individuals who freed themselves from external pressures, to generate themselves as a project. Neoliberalism, which is a mutated form of capitalism, does not allow society to form a political "us". In the techno-capitalism age when class contradictions are mystified and citizens are turned into consumers, new communication technologies seem to offer the individuals to design themselves, and to achieve "unlimited self-production". In this environment, where politics is not immune, the individual, who is simply reduced to a consumer, presents himself/herself to society within the context of this consumption mentality. Moreover, the politician creates his/her own political identity just like the ordinary people and regards the voters as consumers who must be satisfied. In this case, the participation of the individual in politics, who does so not as a citizen but as a consumer, consists merely of complaints. Han calls this neoliberal politics, which is made up of spectators and consumers, the "spectator's democracy". He calls this politics an age of "digital psycho-politics" which plays with and evoke emotions via new communication technologies. In this society, where new media and social media platforms legitimize transparency, all behaviors, including the actions of the voters, have become predictable. In this age, where data of individuals can be accessed easily, data have become a psycho-political device. The free will of the citizens and individualism, which have become identifiable, measurable, and manageable thanks to the data secured by transparency, have come to an end. The selves, which are quantified with absolutized data and numbers, emerge. This situation turned new communication technologies into a digital panopticon, and the individual into the object and consumer of politics (Han, 2020:68).

Therefore, from a political standpoint, new communication technologies are a very important instrument of power. Chul-Han claims that every "like" is a form of becoming a subject of power. Digital citizens who are not aware of this power believe that they are free. In this age of transparency where people are more than willing to communicate and reveal their preferences, capitalism has turned into a "like-capitalism". Like-capitalism, which prioritizes soul (psyche) instead of the body, has focuses on the soul thanks to data and transparency. Han criticizes Foucault in this respect and claims that bio-power was replaced by psycho-power which leads the way thanks to new communication technologies. This form of politics where psycho-power can be observed, appears as populism.

Bot accounts are one of the factors that prevent the creation of a "real" public opinion. Furthermore, click-based advertisements of the advertisers and the public relations industry, the misleading information they

continuously send, and spread, and these adverse aspects of social media lead to polarizations, to language of hatred, and to the manipulation of public opinion.

Conclusion

That media have been playing an important role in shaping political life for decades is undeniable. The masses who were kept away from politics in ancient times and during the middle ages and even in the relative impoverishment age might have moved to a position where they could take part in politics more, and become the "subject of politics" in the modern age with the use of communication technologies. However, as discussed above, the digital citizens also face digital misinformation and manipulation phenomena in this age of techno-politics when digital technologies became so dominant in social life. The most prominent examples of this situation were observed during Brexit and 2016 American elections when it was clearly demonstrated how digital technologies affected political decisions, and this subject was discussed in the communication literature with concepts like post-truth and fake news.

Fictionalization of reality by media, and the presentation of this fiction like reality thanks to the new media possibilities are very important instruments in the hands of those who want to steer politics. Media, which has gradually become more and more digitalized, is a very important device in the reproduction of reality. Today, there is almost no politician who conducts his/her campaigns without using the digital media. This situation, which started with Al Gore who carried out his presidential campaign by using all kinds of media to voice his opinions about the protection of the environment, has turned into digital campaign wars today. The only role of the citizens, who are mere spectators of these digital campaigns, is to watch them.

Today, the spread of the change caused by digital media in all areas of society to politics, forced mainstream parties to adapt to online strategies and instruments, enabled digital citizenship, and allowed alternative parties who could not reach to masses to be heard. It also led to some positive results like allowing different voices, which contribute to the creation of a democratic and pluralist society, to be heard, and to online activism. On the other hand, the intertwining of digital media technologies with politics led to many serious problems like manipulation, populism, propaganda, and polarization.

Democracy requires that citizen express their concerns about public life and actively participate in life. Media, on the other hand, claims that individual consumption will solve all problems. Democracy requires active public citizens whereas media privatizes the appearance of the merchandise instead of participation in social life. Thus, potential public opposition is inundated with popular music, TV stars and consumer goods which enact the ideological script of the culture industry, but the public opposition is emptied at the same time.

In the techno-politics age, the individual who gradually broke away from politics, and who was reduced to a mere consumer of politics among other things, have been transformed into a digital citizen via digital technologies. The digital citizens whose every activity became transparent with this technology present themselves to the society within the context of consumption, as Chul Han points out. In this context, the new communication technologies offer the individuals the opportunity to design and to "construct" themselves; however, the participation of the individual in politics, who joins it not as a citizen but as a consumer, consists merely of complaining. Therefore, as Chul Han remarks, what must happen is a new enlightenment that allows people to realize that the digital enlightenment is in fact a form of slavery.

Paolo Gerbuado, who discusses this subject from the perspective of social movements in his article entitled "From Cyber-Autonomism to Cyber-Populism: An Ideological History of Digital Activism", states that digital technologies moved away from creating an oppositional discourse in the political arena. Studying the protest activities which occurred on the Internet from 1990s through today, Gerbaudo states that

(2021:98) the Internet is no longer an instrument for political struggle, and that internet could not create an alternative internet environment, and that it led to a cyber-populism which is used for mobilizing masses on existing networks.

Otherwise, the digital citizens living in a digital society created by digital technologies and furnished with smart objects will be governed by technology if it finds a solution for everything. In this case, Evgeny Morozov's prediction that (2021:49) politics would be abolished as data rises in the techno-capitalist age must not be underestimated.

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