

## POS-TRUHT AND DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

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### Abstract

This article proposes to address the phenomenon of post-truth and its impact on democracy in the digital era, introducing the figure of the “*democrat-cyborg*” in the context of post-thinking and digital rationality. Furthermore, it is pointed out that the influence of political mechanisms based on emotional persuasion and social networks has replaced the institutional with the virtual and technological, resulting in consequences such as irrationality in thought, manipulation of the human *psyche*, alienation and distortion of reality. Post-truth, therefore, seeks to disorient current societies by taking advantage of their vulnerabilities, affecting electronic participation and generating the emergence of a new type of human being: *homo digitalis*. In the last part of the paper, the need for a more rational and deliberative effort to generate political awareness in the citizenry is highlighted.

**Keywords:** Posttruth; digital democracy; electronic participation; social networks; postmodernity.

### Abstract

This article discusses the concept of “post-truth” and its impact on democracy in the digital age. It introduces the idea of a “*cyborg-democrat*” in the context of post-thinking and digital rationality. The article points out that political mechanisms based on emotional persuasion and social media have replaced institutional methods, resulting in consequences such as irrational

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thinking, human psychology manipulation, alienation, and reality distortion. Post-truth disorients societies and exploits their weaknesses, affecting electronic participation and creating a new type of human being called “homo digitalis”. Finally, the article emphasizes the need for a more rational and deliberate approach to generating political awareness among citizens.

**Keywords:** Post-truth; digital democracy; electronic participation; social media; postmodernity.

## **Sustainable Development Goal(s) (SDG) to which the research work is directed**

### **4- QUALITY EDUCATION**

#### **Description**

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

#### **Relationship with the research objectives**

This research promotes education based on truth and seeks to ensure that citizens are informed with true and reliable knowledge.

#### **Direct objective**

### **16- PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS**

#### **Description**

Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies.

#### **Relationship with the research objectives**

This thesis seeks to promote citizen participation, the exercise of freedom of information and expression, and the guarantee of a democratic virtual environment for the achievement of peace.

#### **Direct objective**

### **17- PARTNERSHIP FOR THE GOALS**

#### **Description**

Revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

#### **Relationship with the research objectives**

Through the respective documentary review, it is proposed to develop direct interaction between the government and civil society to achieve tangible results in decision-making.

#### **Direct objective**

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## 1. Introduction

“What are the consequences for democracy of the digitalization process that is rapidly transforming the economy, culture, [politics], and even our daily habits and perceptions?” (Arias, 2016, p.49). In order to answer this question and delve deeper into the effects of the technological world on democracy, it is necessary to understand that the 21st century has brought about the return of a new anthropocentrism.

The above implies the more entrenched return of relativism, skepticism and the alternative, where its bases acquire solidity in the cult of the present and formalism; what Sartori (n.d.) in Aznar (2018) calls “the state of emptiness of the void” (p.75). In this sense, postmodernity has focused its attention on the present and form, giving way to a twilight of ideologies, and the reduction of space for political discrepancies (Aznar, 2018).

This is reflected in the fragmentation of societies, where the construction and development of collective actions around a common good becomes difficult, creating ecosystems of isolation, polarization, conformism and apathy, generated mainly as a result of the evolution of social networks. In this way, globalization has changed the performance of communication and along with it, citizen attitudes. This is how the advance of technology has made society no longer of information, but of opinion, which not only consumes content in excess, but lacks analysis and understanding, where *doxa* prevails.

According to Aznar (2018) “modern man does not think, he informs himself” (p.75), and under this context, sentimentalism takes hold, since emotion takes precedence over reason positioning itself as the cornerstone within this new anthropocentrism; a paradoxical and confusing situation, being reason the ancient backbone of the Western world. Thus, individual beliefs take precedence over objective facts, “truth is relativized, and with it, the reality to which it obeys” (Aznar, 2018, p.75); hence, citizens are immersed in the post-truth era .<sup>1</sup>

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1 For the purposes of this paper, the definition of post-truth that best fits and adapts to the proposed objectives is the one proposed by Frederick De Backer (2019). This is constituted in circumstances in which “several facts and alternative interpretations with a claim to truth compete to influence the formation of public opinion, with the consequence of a devaluation of the concept of objective fact itself and a greater importance of emotion and one's own beliefs” (p.15).

Thus, as Castellanos (2019) argues, the main problem of living in an era where truth is a social construct, replete with cultural submissions and servitudes through language and power structures is: “the conjunction between politicians who appeal to feelings, [and the media] thirsty for clicks, and [the] citizenry that is informed by what an algorithm decides, all of which constitute[s] a new reality on which post-truth germinates” (p.371). In this way, this phenomenon can have profound distorting implications on the processes of electronic participation<sup>2</sup> for public and political decision-making.

In this sense, this article aims to address the convergence between the phenomenon of post-truth and electronic democracy<sup>3</sup>, through the metaphorical explanation of the panopticon of infocracy, continuing with the conversion of politics into “post-politics”, through the end of digital communicative action; including, at the same time, the “liquid” transformation of truth, emphasizing the crisis it is going through and the affective supremacy.

Along the same lines, it delves into post-truth as *software* in electronic participation and the creation of a new type of democrat: the *cyborg*, based on the explanations of hyperreality, the theory of cognitive dissonance, and the weakening of the *demos*, ending with the existence of digital rationality and the era of post-thinking.

## 2. Post-truth and digital democracy: Panopticon of infocracy

In the “mediatized society, institutions, social and cultural practices are directly articulated with the media in such a way that the latter progressively become the place par excellence of the production of meaning, modifying the traditional ontology of social facts” (Muniz Sodré, 1998, in Giraldo, 2004, p.104). The concern lies in the fact that most media content is persuasive rather than informative, and mass culture is built around emotionality, immediate experience, enjoyment and intensity of the viewer, especially with the development of the “information society”. According to the philosopher Han (2022) the “decisive factor in obtaining power is now not the possession of means of production, but access to information, which is used for psychopolitical surveillance and behavioral control and forecasting” (p.6).

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2 Electronic participation (e-participation) has positioned itself as a participation that, supported by ICTs during governmental processes, has constituted the most powerful tool available to people to improve access to information, public services, as well as the formulation of public policies (Ford, 2019).

3 Electronic democracy (e-democracy) or digital democracy is a concept that has been emerging since the late 1990s. It can be defined as “active citizen participation and interaction with authorities and government through the use of digital media to influence public policy and decision-making” (Ford, 2019, p.42).

In this way, what he calls the “information regime” is configured, where exploitation arises in information and data; reducing people to the condition of “consumer cattle” (Han, 2022, p.6). Thus, the metaphorical Foucauldian explanation of the panopticon acquires a different meaning than the one originally proposed; for in the past, in industrial capitalism, bodies were docile, subjected to the machinery of exploitation and disciplinary power. Solitude was used as the first condition of absolute submission and domination, because the construction of the panopticon with cells isolated from each other was the ideal and symbolic representation of discipline; especially because prisoners cannot communicate with each other.

Today, information capitalism operates through communication and networking, making techniques and methods such as physical training obsolete. The modern regime of discipline transitions to a society of digital information surveillance; the greater the production of data through social networks, the more effective the supervision. The goal, therefore, is no longer biopolitical power, but the engineering of the mind and the appropriation of the *psyche*, through psychopolitics.

It is not fortuitous that intelligent devices are the main instruments of subjugation and control in the virtual world; where the sensation of freedom is what ensures domination: “domination is consummated at the moment in which freedom and surveillance come together” (Han, 2022, p.9). Hence, the subject of the informational regime thinks and believes himself to be free, and realizes himself, since he ceased to be “docile”. This is how the permanent obligation of panoptic visibility no longer occurs from an external coercion, but from an inner necessity; individuals expose themselves to the spotlight voluntarily (Han, 2022). “The paradox of the information society is that people are trapped in information. They themselves put on the shackles by communicating and producing information. The digital prison is transparent” (Han, 2022, p.9).

The domain, therefore, merges with everyday life; thus surveillance is subtly introduced and the digital prison is an intelligent welfare zone. Submission to the power of algorithms, information bubbles and *likes* excludes any possible revolution or resistance, and this leads by inertia to self-alienation<sup>4</sup>. In this way, the mechanisms and tools of power of information capitalism are positive incentives, as they control the will of the citizenry at the unconscious level. The information regime appropriates “the pre-reflective, instinctive and emotive layers of behavior ahead of conscious actions. Its data-driven psychopolitics intervenes in our behavior without our being aware of it” (Han, 2022, p.13); causing massive distortions in the political sphere and, therefore, in the democratic process. Democracy, therefore, degenerates into what

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4 In the words of Walter Benjamin (1973) in Marian (2016): “humanity (...) has now become a spectacle of itself. Its self-alienation has reached a degree that allows it to live its own destruction as an aesthetic jouissance of the first order” (p.217).

Han (2022) calls an “infocracy”; which measures and analyzes through *microtargeting* and psychometric profiling, the behavior of Internet users, who have become active participants.

Thus, democracy faces a struggle where discursive rationality is threatened by affective communication, and where autonomy and free will are endangered; thanks to components of the post-truth era, since “information runs faster than truth, and cannot be reached by the latter. The attempt to combat infodemia with truth is therefore doomed to failure” (Han, 2022, pp.22-23). Hence, the medium constitutes the domain, and the dominant sphere is formed by the owners of the high-tech media, since “sovereign is the one who rules over information in the network” (Schmitt, n.d. in Han, p.13).

### 3. Post-truth and post-politics

The French essayist Christian Salmon (2007) defined through his book *Storytelling*, an era in which the narrative methods characteristic of literary fiction had crept into political communication. According to him, the objective was the creation of stories capable of formatting the minds of voters (Vicente, 2019). To this end, the communicational model was based on the substitution of rational debate for emotional language, including the elimination of any trait representative of a political ideology or an overt political position. The above was baptized by Salmon (2007) as “post-politics” (Riorda & Farré, 2012 in Sarasqueta, 2017).

According to post-politics, objective facts lack importance, making public opinion act on sentimentalisms and personal beliefs; relying on three substantial elements related to political trust: fear, hope and humiliation. This is how Aznar (2018) states that “post-truth becomes the lifeblood of this political conception” (p.60). He himself exposes that post-politics makes use of the social networks of a society with unlimited access to information (citizen infoxication), but with limited time for its analysis and discernment. Therefore, post-politics is a practice that implies:

(...) acting on emotions to reach reason, hollowing out a discourse that thus becomes resonant while stealing the political agenda from a citizenry that is kept entertained with secondary issues (...) furthermore, it escapes from the accountability inherent to the democratic model. The role of narratives and the capacity of penetration of imaginaries, accentuated (...) [by] new technologies and focused by technological tools of social understanding (...) is shown to be capital in such a disruptive scheme (Aznar, 2018, p.75).



## 4. Post-truth and the end of communicative action in the digital world.

(...) we are mutating from the human existence of *homo sapiens* (the human being who knows) to a *homo communicare* (the human being who communicates) and where knowledge and reason are no longer in command (it is the decline of Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*) and increasingly, communication (*communico ergo sum*) is what counts. To be is to communicate; to have is to communicate; to do is to communicate; to speak is to communicate (Hoechsmann, Carr & Thésée, 2018 in Aparici & García-Marín, 2019, p.11).

Communication on social networks has a post-truth basis that moves away from freedom and democracy, leading to a new citizen disability: the disintegration of the public sphere. Digital democracy suggests turning a *smartphone* into an electronic parliament with which to discuss anywhere and at any time; the problem is that followers have become the subjects of these platforms, allowing themselves to be trained by their influencers. Hence, digital swarms do not constitute a politically responsible collective (Han, 2022).

Thus, the digitalization of the communicational system has degenerated into a crisis of communicative action; it becomes irrational, "by being reduced to an instrument at the service of the technical interest<sup>5</sup> of the social system (...) and annulled in its own purpose, which is the understanding between individuals and the consideration of the other as an end in itself and not as a means" (Habermas, n.d. in Rodríguez, 2021, p.108). This supposes the alliance between the economic and political systems, which use the cultural system as a spokesperson for their actions. According to their interests and conveniences, these will issue information disseminated by the cultural system in order to reach the masses; thus limiting the emancipatory capacity of communicative action, which allows achieving "modes of communication that make interpretations or subjectivities rational and reasonable" (Rodríguez, 2021, p.107).

This irrationality confects a decoupling between the "world of life"<sup>6</sup> and the social system. However, the latter resolves this separation, integrating itself into the lifeworld by exercising external control through legitimations; which are systems of distorted ideas, produced by any system to support its existence and maintain the *status quo*. In this way, a "receptive public

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5 According to the theory proposed by Habermas, it means dominion and control of nature; "actions are oriented to the competition for money and power; where interactions are subordinated to market relations and domination" (Rodríguez, 2021, p.107).

6 This (...) creates a background consensus that stabilizes communicative action: "When speakers and listeners communicate with each other face to face about something in a world, they move within the horizon of their common lifeworld; this remains between the participants as an intuitively known, aproblematic and integral holistic background (...) The lifeworld defines a horizon and, at the same time, offers a repertoire of cultural assumptions" (Habermas, 1989 in Han 2020, pp.27-28).

opinion, uncritical of public notoriety” is created (Habermas, n.d. in Rodríguez, 2021, p.109). In addition, the disappearance of the “other” also occurs and, therefore, the consummation of the discourse. “The expulsion of the other reinforces the self-propagandistic compulsion to indoctrinate oneself with one’s own ideas. This self-doctrination produces infobubbles (...) that hinder communicative action” (Han, 2022, p.26). This is how spaces for discussion are subject to echo chambers, which engenders post-truth.

To recognize the other is to understand the existence of counter-argumentation, as Karl Popper rightly defended, in order to achieve not a unanimous response, but the emancipatory consensus proposed by Habermas. The problem is that, “without the presence of the other, my opinion is not discursive, it is not representative, but (...) doctrinaire and dogmatic” (Han, 2022, p.25).

### **4.1 Liquid truth and hyperreality: Crisis of truth and cognitive dissonances**

“(...) fluids do not retain a form for long and are constantly willing (and prone) to change it; consequently (...) they move easily (...) “fluidity” or “liquidity” are adequate metaphors to apprehend the nature of the current phase (...) of the history of modernity” (Bauman, 2003, p.8).

Despite philosophical and sociological attempts in search and defense of truth<sup>7</sup>, the digital world has obstructed this purpose. Although it sounds contradictory, since truth always is and never ceases to be, society is transitioning to a post-truth society, where truth has ceased to be solid, and has become a liquid state. It flows, spills, transforms, dilutes and dissolves in the ocean of feeling, where it becomes a castaway of reason; and now the word “depends” overwhelms it, drowning Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative.

“A new nihilism is spreading in our days (...) it is a phenomenon of the 21st century (...) the fruit of the pathological distortions of the information society. It rises when we lose faith in truth itself” (Han, 2022, p.38). And democracy is in check thanks to this situation; considering that between truth and politics there has always been a quite particular relationship, since a

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7 Since the Ancient Ages, the Greeks sought truth as opposed to falsehood. Thus, truth was understood as that which was identical to reality, and the latter equivalent to permanence in the sense of “always being”, whether in matter, substance, etc. Similarly, at present, Habermas suggests the consensual theory of truth, calling as “true” the statements that can be based on arguments that deal with universal values, and ensuring that the truth of a proposition implies the promise of achieving a rational consensus on what is stated or said (Técuatl, 2018 in Morales, 2018).

dialectical link has been built, every time that politics “cannot be completely servant of truth, insofar as, as an expression of reality, it aspires to change it” (Aznar, 2018, p.61). It is not by chance that politicians are those who have best understood the concept of post-truth, since for them their truth is the only one that matters; and this works for them as a strategy to attack their adversaries or to protect a current of opinion.

Thus, the digital ecosystem has constituted a reality that surpasses earthly dimensions, to such an extent that belonging to it is more factual than remaining in real existence; framed within the concept of “hyperreality” developed by Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard, concerned about the important role played by images, explains that society is not only mediated but also bombarded by them and, therefore, the perception of reality. Thus, for Baudrillard (1978) hyperreality is produced in a hyperspace without atmosphere:

(...) to a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation opens, then, with the liquidation of all referents - even worse: with its artificial resurrection in the systems of signs (...)... simulation (...) is the generation by models of something real without origin or reality: the hyperreal (...) [questioning] the difference of the “true” and the “false”, of the “real” and the “imaginary”<sup>8</sup> (pp.5-8).

The hyperreal, therefore, ends up establishing the parameters for understanding reality in the post-truth era. “Information now circulates, completely disconnected from reality, in a hyperreal space. Belief in factuality is lost. We live in a defactified universe” (Han, 2022, p.38). This leads to cognitive dissonance, since reality is subordinated to distortion; and according to Festinger’s theory (1957), people will try to avoid information that goes against their ways of thinking and inclinations to act in a certain way (Álvarez-Gálvez, 2012). Thus, post-truth turns out to be a success, since “the brain (...) does not necessarily seek the truth but its well-being; that is, pleasure and the absence of pain” (Elías, 2018 in Aparici & García-Marín, 2019, p.156).

Thus, there are five mechanisms that favor it: 1) confirmation bias; 2) conspiracist paradox; 3) partisan bias; 4) motivated reasoning; 5) counterproductive effect (Elías, 2018 in Aparici & García-Marín, 2019). Each one is a key element to understand the anatomy of post-truth, because these “determine that individuals believe more in their emotions and prefixed perspectives of the world than the force of facts” (Aparici & García-Marín, 2019, p.34). Even,

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8 The author defines four successive phases through which a representation goes through to become hyperreal: 1) it exists as a reflection of reality, doing so as an attempt to create something equivalent to the real object; 2) it distorts the basic reality it represents; 3) it masks the absence of the reality it represents, as the image conjures the evanescence of reality, maintaining a simulacrum of what it was; 4) the image ceases to be related to the basic reality, it becomes more real than the reality on which it is based (Schackmuth, 2018).

one of the reasons why human beings find it difficult to detect lies, was named by Daniel Kahneman (2015) as “cognitive ease”; he explains that people tend to turn away from facts and/or data that force the brain to work harder; since, they do not seek the truth naturally, but most of the time they try to avoid it. “People instinctively accept the information they receive as true” (Ayala, 2017, p.363).

Kanheman (2015) in Ayala (2017) states that the brain makes decisions in two ways: a) System 1: fast, intuitive, emotional, being energy efficient; b) system 2: slow, logical, rational, consuming significant amounts of energy. Human beings will avoid using “system 2” whenever possible, because stopping to analyze each event or occurrence would result in a disproportionate energy expenditure. That “includes electoral decisions, especially in those citizens who do not have much time to devote to carefully analyze the various alternatives when voting” (Ayala, 2017, p.348).

According to Han (2022), truth is capable of eliminating ambivalence and contingency by providing meaning and orientation; however, this is not the case in the post-truth society, which is empty of meaning. Truth has the purpose of understanding and consensus, guarantees social cohesion, stabilizes society, and exerts an internal force that keeps it bound. “The crisis of truth is always a crisis of society. Without truth, society disintegrates [and is only] held together (...) by external, instrumental economic relations” (Han, 2022, p.44).

In this sense, the new nihilism germinates within the process, leading to a crisis of electronic democracy. Post-truth is situated in a problematic place, as falsehood goes unnoticed in the design of social network interfaces (Aparici & García-Marín, 2019), and truth is subordinated to the supremacy of affect. “Truth disintegrates into informational dust blown by the digital wind. Truth will have been a brief episode” (Han, 2022, p.48). Therefore, it is necessary to remember that, “the heart is not an organ of democracy. When emotions and affections dominate political discourse, democracy itself is in danger” (Han, 2022, p.40).

### **5. Post-truth as *software* in e-participation: The *democrat-cyborg***

(...) We instinctively “get” populism and polarization; post-truth does not (...) Post-truth, in the context of democracies, constitutes a new and terrifying phenomenon (...) [It] shakes our sense of reality and thereby turns populism and polarization from a normal political nuisance into something different and much more important: an existential threat to the very continuity of governments and free societies. [This is why] we have only begun to discover the capacity of post-truth to destabilize democratic public spheres (Naím, 2022, pp.199-227).

For Castellanos (2019), the most dangerous aspect of post-truth in the political sphere lies in its direct link with citizen participation, giving rise to: “participatory post-truth”; one of the most threatening enemies for democracy in the digital era. This is due to the fact that citizen participation requires a real effort, which demands from people an active presence regarding a specific problem, and which is produced when they acquire political awareness; that is, the knowledge of reality, through truthful and unbiased information.

Although *Facebook* and *Twitter* could be presented as favorable scenarios for a democratic situation of this style, where the number of participants is equal to those who can give their opinion; in this era, when post-truth is at work, no one is aware of it, the tyranny of the algorithm does not allow it. Moreover, all arguments are equally “valid” and “respectable”; the more homogeneous the opinions, the better:

(...) the most varied and esoteric rumors can appear in a user’s *timeline*, along with fine and accurate analysis of the political situation. All of this is presented at the same level. A communicative hierarchy is not provided that allows to clearly discern relevant and reliable information, versus those that are neither one thing nor the other (Viner, 2019 in Castellanos, 2019, p.371).

Thus, Castellanos (2019) distinguishes the symptomatology of post-truth: 1) Speed and immediacy (speed demands immediate decisions; time for reflection and evaluation of options is scarce). 2) Technological dispersion (technology causes a decrease in people’s ability to maintain a permanent attention span; post-truth makes it difficult for the individual to discern the real from the imaginary, with the ephemeral triumphing over the consistent). 3) Futbolization of politics (post-truth politics becomes a set of radicalized camps that only accept messages that reinforce their own identity, being reluctant to any other position). 4) Post-truth and narrative (post-truth is in charge of building a worldview alien to reality, through a simplified and emotive narrative).

Thus, “electronic] participation has become an inescapable and unquestionable word of democracy [in the digital era]; but post-truth has reduced it to a small-scale substitute for conventional voting, transmuted into a click” (Castellanos, 2019, p.379). Endangering “the integrity of electoral processes, given the difficulty of determining, in most cases, who is behind this type of practices, which already have an offer of services and companies intended for that purpose” (Rúas & Capdevila, 2017 in Aparici & García-Marín, 2019, p.126).

The above degenerates into what Aparici & García-Marín (2019) call “*politics-cyborg*”, characterized by a continuous robotization of the political message; that is, the automated dissemination of content on social networks, especially around electoral events. Therefore,

its effects and the automatic responses generated by the citizen, extend to the emergence of the “*democrat-cyborg*”: “a hybrid subject that resorts to the permanent use of technology to enhance its organic capabilities” (Aparici & García-Marín, 2019, p.126). But is this human being a true democrat? Actually, it is an evolution of the *homo videns* proposed by Sartori (1998), of the *homo symbolicus* defined by Henshiwood (2011), and of the *homo electronicus* described by McLuhan in Han (2013). However, the soul of this *democrat-cyborg* is the *homo digitalis* deepened by Cendoya (2013), which is nothing more than the representation of the post-truth society. According to Aparici & García-Marín (2019):

We are players seduced by the promise of participation in a global game where our voice hardly ever resonates loudly, but where our actions have political and economic value that is profitable to technological elites. Post-truth is primarily a question about us. If digital technology is the *hardware* of our world, post-truth is its *software* (p.43).

Hence, “only an appearance of democracy can be built on deception, but it is worrying that we pretend to build an authentic democratic model, supposedly advanced and regenerative of public life, on a mere appearance of truth” (Castellanos, 2019, p.352).

## 5.1 Weakened *Demos* in a digital world

Democracy means “power of the people”, that is, sovereignty and command of the *demos*; no one doubts that this is the principle of legitimacy that establishes democracy (Sartori, 1998). So far, according to Fukuyama (1992) and other authors such as Arellano (2022), democracy has become the best system for governing, although it is sometimes complicated. Today, its digitalization and the technological strategies that political leaders have acquired and used to gain power are eroding its institutionality in order to perpetuate themselves in power. Naím (2022) states that these are based on the “3Ps”: populism, polarization and post-truth; as they have discovered that through them they can generate messages consolidated in FUD ( : fear, uncertainty and doubt), and thus take advantage of the “revolutionary communication technologies and put them at the service of confusion and conflict” (p.218).

Thus, Sartori (1998) states that there is a latent concern, since the *demos* is the essential part of democracy and in this era, the axis of its information is configured in an alarming, critical and argumentative poverty. A much more direct democracy is constantly requested and demanded; what he calls “a growing dose of directism”, especially as a result of social networks and the breaking down of barriers between the leader and the citizen. But for this, “every increase in demo-power should be matched by an increase in demo-knowledge. Otherwise

democracy becomes a system of government in which it is the most incompetent who decide. In other words, a suicidal system of government” (Sartori, 1998, pp.124- 125).

Currently, the paradox arises of a people who demand, but do not know what they demand, thanks to the generic ignorance of democracy. Hence Sartori (1998) makes a distinction between “politically educated” and “politically informed” people, since the former are cognitively prepared to respond to the problems involved in politics, and the latter have probably only read headlines. The fact is that the capacity for abstraction has been deactivated, and with it the capacity to confront reality rationally. In these conditions, Sartori (1998) points out, he who “appeals to and promotes a *demos* that governs itself is an unscrupulous swindler, or simply irresponsible, an incredible unconscious person” (pp.127-128).

While reality becomes more complex, and difficulties increase, minds are simplified; so that, instead of enjoying a direct democracy, “the *demos* is directed by the mass media” (Ionescu, 1993 in Sartori, 1998, p.130). “It is not only a question of “information malnutrition”, but also “those who select the information become administrators of the symbolic domain of the masses” (Sartori, 1998, p.129). Thus, the *demos* is weakened and distorted, and if this “does not worry us, perhaps it is because we are already in the age of post-thinking” (Sartori, 1998, p.129).

## 6. Digital Rationality: The Age of Post-Thought

To understand how post-truth manages to justify and validate itself, Max Weber and his theory of rationalization are a crucial factor. This is understood as a “set of theoretical explanations that justify the system with rational arguments or seek to expand the universe of its domain; [where] rationality and rationalization end up converging in an inherently instrumental condition (rational action with respect to ends)” (Albujas, 2011, p.28). This is supported by the use of modern science and technology as legitimizing principles, which imply in their actions a greater willingness to dominate or obey. However, “Marcuse is convinced that (...) in the name of rationality what is imposed is a certain form of hidden political domination” (Habermas, 1994 in Albujas, 2011, p.43).

If this were to be transferred to the era of digitalization, science would be the technology and technique the post-truth. Although the system that makes use of post-truth cannot be conceived in terms of rationality, since it is in itself pure emotionality, the problem lies in the legitimacy of the that it is anchored in, since today's societies submit to it voluntarily, believing that the system acts in favor of their needs, obeying it without apparent critical opposition.

Likewise, Habermas works with Sigmund Freud's concept of rationalization, since from this perspective the process "comes to disfigure reality with the purpose that the rationalizing subject justifies his behaviors no matter how irrational they may be. Undoubtedly, Freud defines it as one of the mechanisms of preservation and protection of the self" (Habermas, 1994 in Albuja, 2011, p.51). New political leaderships such as Trump and Bukele rely on the use of this type of rationalization to argue their irrational actions (or proposals), distorting reality.<sup>9</sup>

It is evident that Habermas' attempt to rationalize communication has been in vain; that is, to achieve a society of free communication, "concretized in a culture of dialogue, based on an ethics of discourse, where the idea of truth refers to a form of interaction free of any distorting influence" (Habermas, n.d. in Rodríguez, 2023, p.37). Thus, communicative action has diminished and, in contrast, what Han (2022) calls "digital rationality" has emerged:

[This is opposed to communicative rationality, which drives discourse. What constitutes communicative rationality is, in addition to the ability to reason, the willingness to learn (...) Artificial intelligence does not reason, but computes. Algorithms replace arguments [and] are continuously optimized in the machine process (p.32).

Thus, the optics of the "dataists," according to Han (2022), does not include the person acting rationally, but rather advocates a digital behaviorism, where society is predictable, can be precisely controlled, and where the general will is determined by the algorithm. But is this really rationality? For Sartori (1998) "there are those who theorize about a weakened rationality and there are those who pretend that a rationality still exists even when it does not exist" (p.132), because according to him, post-thinking is the current resistance, which makes up the mentality of *homo digitalis*. In this regard:

(...) children are not educated in knowing, but in accessing, they are taught where to look for information, therefore, we are deconstructing the brain, because [it] when it has its own data, (which can be right or wrong), [in] the decision process (process of freedom) what it does is to compare the data it has, the *inputs* it receives with its mental structures; it weighs them and makes a decision. If we do not fill the brain (...) because it is not necessary, since we have everything here [*smartphone*] and what we do is to access, what we are [creating] are living beings who intellectually are nothing like us; who know where to look for information, but [do not know] if [it] is truthful, (...) good, (...) balanced and (...) fair (Cendoya, 2022 in El Montonero, 2022, mins.16:10-17:20).

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9 Arguments based on psychosocial variables prevail: external locus of control and mythical thinking.



Román Cendoya explains that the child is subordinated to the browser and, therefore, when he is an adult he will not have sufficient criteria to create knowledge, beyond what appears in the first search link; because if he is asked what freedom is, he will not know how to answer but “what Google says “. The objective, therefore, is to stop thinking, because rationality requires time. Sartori (1998) states: “for the prophets of the digital world and cyber-navigation, the fact that users on the net (...) are rational beings is not of the slightest importance. These prophets know very little about rationality, and they offer something in return: an almost infinite freedom” (p.134), but is that really freedom? It would seem so, since the citizenry is happier and more content living in a *meta-world*.

For citizens, truth is no longer something of great importance. Moreover, the “lack of interest in the rational and objective aspects of discourse has generated distrust, indifference and apathy in the population. With political discourse devoid of any argumentative support and uprooted from the real, it is not at all strange that voting intention is determined by irrational motivations” (Márquez, 2016 in Aparici & García-Marín, 2019, p.154). Even, states Zafra (2017) in Aparici & García-Marín (2019), that even knowing that it is false information, they are self-deceived, because they prefer to believe in a lie that generates tranquility, than a reality that produces uneasiness. And in the post-truth era, it is assumed that “there are as many truths as individuals and each one chooses his own, as if it were a *buffet*” (Aparici & García-Marín, 2019, pp.41-42).

Large corporations are turning citizens into instrumental reason. “The man of post-thinking, incapable of abstract and analytical reflection” (Sartori, 1998, p.136) is the *homo digitalis*, who lives in the culture of post-truth, who tolerates, collaborates and feeds deceptions and half-truths. What then is democracy in the digital era? The *homo digitalis* has degenerated in the disappearance of intermediaries, and electronic democracy to work is not enough with the digital operating system, if those who put it into practice constitute its real operating system. “It is not possible to conceive an unreflective democracy, because democracy is, ultimately, the reflective and shared search for truth” (De Lucas & Vidal, 1980 in Castellanos, 2019, p.373); and this will never be possible as long as we continue to be “the real actors of post-truth” (Aparici & García-Marín, 2019, p.12).

## 7. Conclusions

In a diverse, multi-referential and multidisciplinary world, defined by the prefixes *post-* and suffixes *-isms*, society lives in a constant “behind”, or “after”, where there is a framework of

overcoming (or disappearance) together with another one that supposes a tendency, a bias or a radicality. Thus, subjectivity has become a *sine qua non* condition of the life of the human being, reflected in his doing, saying, acting and thinking; leaving behind objectivity as a chimera. This is how French post-structuralism seems to have triumphed, since these precepts have spread in society and have been configured as a mentality that defends the position where reality is interpretative.

Truth, therefore, turns out to be a social construct, and the human being is subject to its production from power, and this cannot be exercised except through the creation of it; that is, he who has power possesses the truth (Aznar, 2018). Thus, the principles of postmodernity have been positioned as the starting point for the success of post-truth. This is a structure of thought; a referential framework to explain the world through the cognitive construction of a series of stereotypes that are substantiated and concretized by the *fake news*, disinformation, misinformation, and alternative facts (Aparici & García-Marín, 2019).

It is evident that post-truth is not constituted as a philosophical truth, but as the possibility of being. Although lies have always existed, and politicians have used them as a tool for citizen manipulation, what is innovative about post-truth is that the tension between truth and lies is increasingly blurred, with a tendency to disappear. What really matters is to strengthen the other vision offered of reality, or the conviction that it may be different from the way it is presented; it is no longer denied that lies have been told. This is how post-truth employs a series of novel techniques in the political field, which have converged with modern media and digital democratic structures.

The replacement of the institutional by the virtual and the technological has generated important and serious consequences: irrationality as the substantial basis of thought, manipulation, domination and control of the human *psyche*, alienation, the murder of critical analysis, cognitive dissonance, distortion of reality and the emergence of *homo digitalis*. Thus, post-truth seeks to strike at the cracks and fractures of today's weak societies, until they collide and enter into complete disorientation. As a consequence, electronic participation has been altered and affected by post-truth, since citizen participation requires a greater rational effort, where citizenship advocates a deliberative process and is configured in an argumentative platform, which allows it to generate political awareness.

However, in a world in which the irrational is rationalized, truth is liquid and virtual reality (hyperreality) is more present in the mind of the citizen than the physical reality in front of him; in electoral campaigns it is no longer the best arguments that prevail, but the most intelligent algorithms. Hence, citizens interact as opinion robots (*democrat-cyborg*) and are swayed by certain political actors, who interfere in their electoral behaviors and decisions.

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