



VNIVERSITAT
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Digital and emotional democracy

Blended Intensive Programme

Nova University of Lisbon, University of Pisa and University of Valencia

Party Change and the Challenges of Political Representation in the 21st Century

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Starting point



DIGITAL TURN

The digitalization of politics is nothing new, nor is the impact the digital world is having on all dimensions of social relationships. **Digitalization has entered our daily political lives.**

With the advent of the Internet and more recently, the explosion in the use of social networks, the social and political world is undergoing major changes—related mainly to **new sources of information, multiple geographies of connection and evolving forms of representation and mediation.**

AFFECTIVE TURN

The **speed and scope of technological innovation**—marked by the sudden rise of Artificial Intelligence—have focused public and academic debates on the sociopolitical transformations brought by these technologies.

Epistemological shift initially influenced by fields such as **neurology and cognitive psychology**, and which has reached political studies and social analysis

So...

It is worth asking about the relationship between the digital world and emotions:

How is public debate articulated in the digital space? Is it reinforced?

Is deliberation weakened?

And, more specifically, what role do rational argumentation, on the one hand, and emotions, on the other, play in this public space?

Digitalization of politics: toward global democratic governance

It is clear that the rise of information and communication technologies (ICT) has contributed to the rapid changes observed in recent decades in social, political, economic and cultural behaviour throughout the world.



The terms 'digital politics' or 'digitisation of politics' are often used to refer to political activities carried out through digital media, or that use digital technologies to intervene in political life:

- 1 Promoting citizen participation.
- 2 Influencing public opinion or decision-making.
- 3 Changing citizens' perceptions or assessments of their representatives or rulers.
- 4 Defending the rights of workers, among others.

Context

Currently, globalised societies immersed in the deployment of new information and communication technologies are facing new ways of constructing power relations, and their impact is manifested in multiple ways:



On the one hand, the internet and commercial relations have enabled the growth of virtual markets that escape the control of nation states.



This generates new axes of economic and political power, in addition to the fact that digital media themselves have become highly influential political actors.



On the other hand, also as a result of the use of digital communication networks, political organisations, protest and/or resistance actions, as well as social movements, have found in digital technology new tools to generate networks of solidarity and extend their strength, political influence and transformative capacity.

Politics in the digital field

Democracy implies a horizontal relationship between rulers and ruled, based on the principle of communication for the construction of the common interest and decision-making, in a scenario of confrontation and coexistence of communities characterised by diversity, heterogeneity and multiplicity of identities and interests.



‘The active and growing role of social media in social relations can be leveraged to promote greater citizen participation that transcends the voter-elect relationship and can position citizens as key players in the implementation, oversight, and evaluation of public policies that protect the interests of the community.’

Corrales (2015:1)

Politics in the digital field

Digital tools have started playing an important role in election campaigns since the 2004 U.S. presidential elections, and since then, electoral information on digital media has become the most consumed.

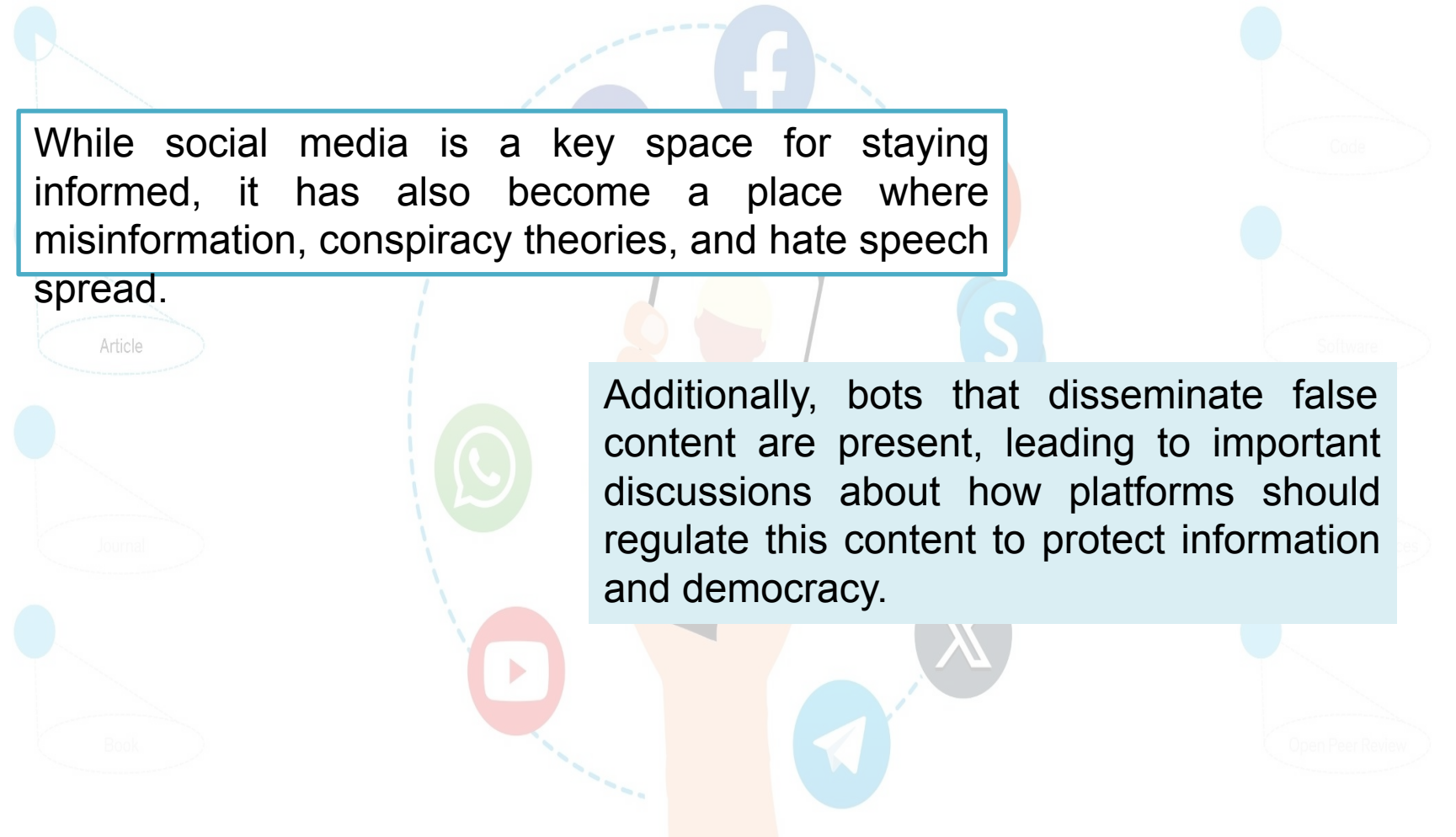


The 2008 Barack Obama campaign was a notable example of how to leverage social networks and cyber-activism, especially to attract young voters. During that campaign, over 74% of internet users searched for election news online, which helped mobilize a large portion of the electorate.



Later, Donald Trump innovated by using Twitter and Facebook to promote himself and attack opponents, reaching a wide audience. However, after the Capitol attack in 2021, debates intensified about social media's responsibility in spreading information, especially after Trump's accounts were suspended for spreading misinformation and inciting violence.

Politics in the digital field



While social media is a key space for staying informed, it has also become a place where misinformation, conspiracy theories, and hate speech spread.

Additionally, bots that disseminate false content are present, leading to important discussions about how platforms should regulate this content to protect information and democracy.

Digitalization and democratic deliberation


The Internet and ICTs are spaces of business dominated by large conglomerates that respond to power structures led by private actors and entities controlling the global market. These private actors have exercised their power both directly and indirectly, as noted by Ibáñez (2006).



Directly, companies have created technological innovations and business applications to gain market share and establish, through technical configurations, the rules of operation on the internet and in electronic markets

Indirectly, they have influenced the adoption of regulatory frameworks by public authorities, whether at the national or international governmental organization level, to their advantage

Digitalization and democratic deliberation



The digitalization of politics faces limits in successfully guiding democratic deliberation

While it serves as a forum for expressing interests, shaping public opinion, and even monitoring government actions, it is also a space where undemocratic practices can flourish unchecked (Jensen, 2020).

Internet and ICTs are intrinsically linked to power structures and relationships, generating risks that require democratic governance. In other words, where the regulation of monopolistic practices and the guarantee of freedoms are the result of broad and inclusive societal participation.

The global nature of the internet has disrupted traditional centers of control, such as the state and economic actors, shifting towards a decentralized management that diminishes the influence of conventional organizations.

Toward global digital governance

Jensen (2020:126) notes that:

“The governance of the digital world cannot happen nor will it happen in a vacuum. We must keep in mind that neither governments nor tech corporations are monoliths; the conflict between states and technology companies regarding regulations reflects both internal tensions and external pressures. Recent history offers lessons regarding rule-making, establishing norms, and the prevention, mitigation, and management of damages. However, it is likely that analogs in the physical world, such as maps with strict geographic boundaries and borders, will gain the most traction and do so more quickly among most stakeholders, but they may not make sense when applied in a domain where power is distributed and unlimited. Most importantly, pragmatism and a sense of perspective can greatly contribute to improving digital governance. Tensions are inevitable; we just need to remember that democracy is a generational process, not an idyllic destination.”



The return of emotion in politics

A true 'affective turn' has taken place across all disciplines, from philosophy (Nussbaum, 1994; 2013; Bodei, 1991; Elster, 1999; de Sousa, 1987) to anthropology (Lutz and Abu-Lughod, 1990), studies of social and protest movements (Goodwin et al., 2001), international relations (Bleiker and Hutchinson, 2008), and political science (e.g., Kingston, 2011).

This 'affective turn'—as often happens with epistemological 'turns'—occurs as a response to the excesses of the positivist approach of the second half of the 20th century, and to the absence—or deliberate marginalization—of emotions in the social sciences.



The return of emotion in politics

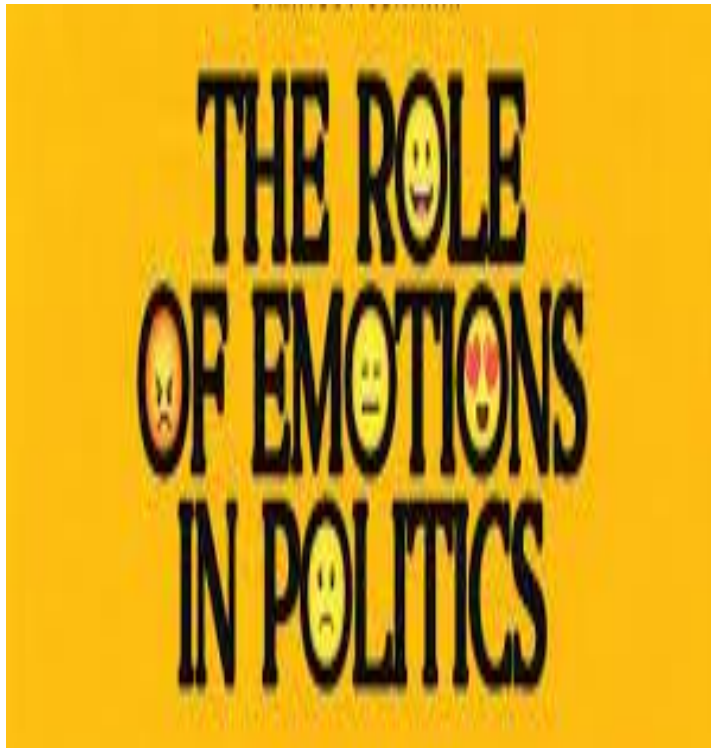
"The intrusion of feelings, emotions, or personal factors into the public sphere has been understood as something that would disturb the use of public reason"
(Rosenblum, 1987: 167).



Emotions, therefore, have generally been marginalized by contemporary liberal political science on the basis that they would pose a danger to social and political order (Solomon 2006: 3) and to rational debate (Hall, 2005)."

Emotions and politics

Social media intensifies **emotional communication** due to immediacy and visibility. This dynamic **transforms institutions, culture, and political conflicts**.



One of the main attractions of new media, especially social networks, is that they are channels where communication activity is intensified. Their dynamics are based on immediacy, and as most studies suggest, this dynamic favors the trend of political contestation increasingly shifting to the media arena (Priess, 2000).

The consolidation of the use of emotions in the realm of politics has resulted in a decisive and concerning step away from traditional political socialization processes. Therefore, it is urgent to analyze emotions within the political sphere to assess how the main political actors behave (García-Hípola et al., 2021). This issue raises numerous implications for democracy, as it threatens the stability of political systems and even social coexistence itself (Mudde, 2004).

Emotions and politics

**Electoral
campaigns**

Electoral campaigns are the main stage where emotions are a prominent trend in communication. However, this communication takes place in a space where speeches are exchanged—sometimes contradictory and antagonistic—by actors who have legitimacy to publicly express themselves about politics.

**Sensationalis
m**

Arises from the need for political information to be consumed.

**Spectaculariz
ation
of politics**

Effects that are strengthened by the prominent role of emotions.

**Americanizat
ion
of politics**

This term refers to the false perception that the media and electoral campaigns generally transfer narratives to the public—regardless of the specific political system in which these dynamics occur—that are strongly presidentialist, even in parliamentary elections

**Fake
news**

This success is determined by their effectiveness, which results from a strategy of fictionalizing a reality that lacks objectivity.

Consequences of emotional politics



Spectacle and manipulation
distort political discourse

Emergence of a “new
campaign politics” globally

Personalization of
campaigns

Leader-centric narratives

Dominance of
“horse-race” style
coverage in media

Emotions and digital turn

With the widespread access to the Internet, a "second media era" began (Poster, 1995), in which new media burst onto the public sphere, shaping a new communication system where information consumers also become producers.

Traits

Citizens become active participants in the public life of the State, and the informational offering becomes fragmented, displacing traditional media from their relative monopoly over public opinion.

Emotions acquire a new significance.

While the unifying capacity of traditional media once played a moderating role in public opinion, the fragmentation associated with digital society contributes to the radicalization of public opinion

Emotions and digital turn

Using Han's terminology (2013), a 'swarm democracy' is produced from the sum of reactive crowds that are moved by flows of praise or disparagement and that shake up the public space, filling it with noise and, in many cases, preventing calm reflection.

Social media amplify and modulate public moods and place feelings and emotions at the centre of public debate.



From cyberpolitics to videopolitics



From cyberpolitics to videopolitics

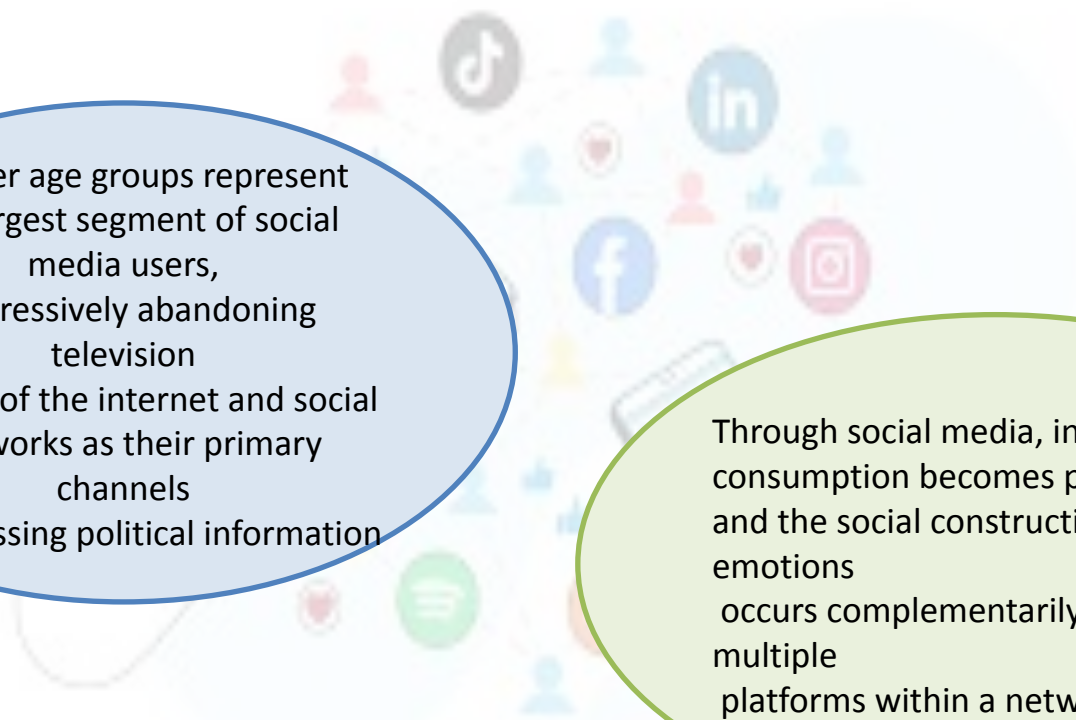
- ✓ While during the era of mass parties messages were aimed at specific, homogeneous, and loyal target audiences (Katz and Mair, 2004), the growth of the middle class blurred collective identities and increasingly heterogeneous groups emerged.
- ✓ Societies began to fragment around multiple identities that no longer aligned with classical lines of division.
- ✓ The construction of these discourses initially found space for development and expansion in television, radio, and the printed press.

From cyberpolitics to videopolitics



Within digital media, social networks have risen as the primary source of information. Beyond interpersonal communication, social media becomes a space where news is not only sought but also encountered in users' feeds. This leads to the incidental consumption of news, resulting in a loss of context and a weakening of the journalistic hierarchy in the audience's experience.

From cyberpolitics to videopolitics



Younger age groups represent the largest segment of social media users, progressively abandoning television in favor of the internet and social networks as their primary channels for accessing political information

Through social media, information consumption becomes personalized, and the social construction of emotions occurs complementarily across multiple platforms within a networked model

From cyberpolitics to videopolitics

Citizens began to have access to multiple and diverse sources of information, gaining autonomy from political power and large media corporations. Thus, cyberspace opened the door to consolidating a new form of communication autonomous from government and media control.



New media enabled real-time information consumption and became a showcase for public opinion.



The battle over ideas and narratives is no longer waged solely through traditional communication channels but also through social media and digital platforms.

From cyberpolitics to videopolitics

New media and communication strategies have emerged, vulnerable to populist temptations, relying on exaggeration and simplification, ridiculing opponents, lying, disinformation, the spread of hoaxes, and conspiracy theories



Digital media and their new ways of presenting and disseminating political content make it more difficult to fact-check news.


The new communication ecosystem has led to processes of demassification through selective personalization of sources and content, and the proliferation of fake news.

Under this logic, political discussion becomes superficial, and politicians are forced to operate in an environment shaped by the society of the spectacle, seeking alternative audiences.

Along with increasing social fragmentation, individualization, and declining party loyalty, has resulted in the personalization and trivialization of politics.

A public debate emerges in which facts seem to matter less than the feelings they evoke, and in which there is a constant appeal to emotion.

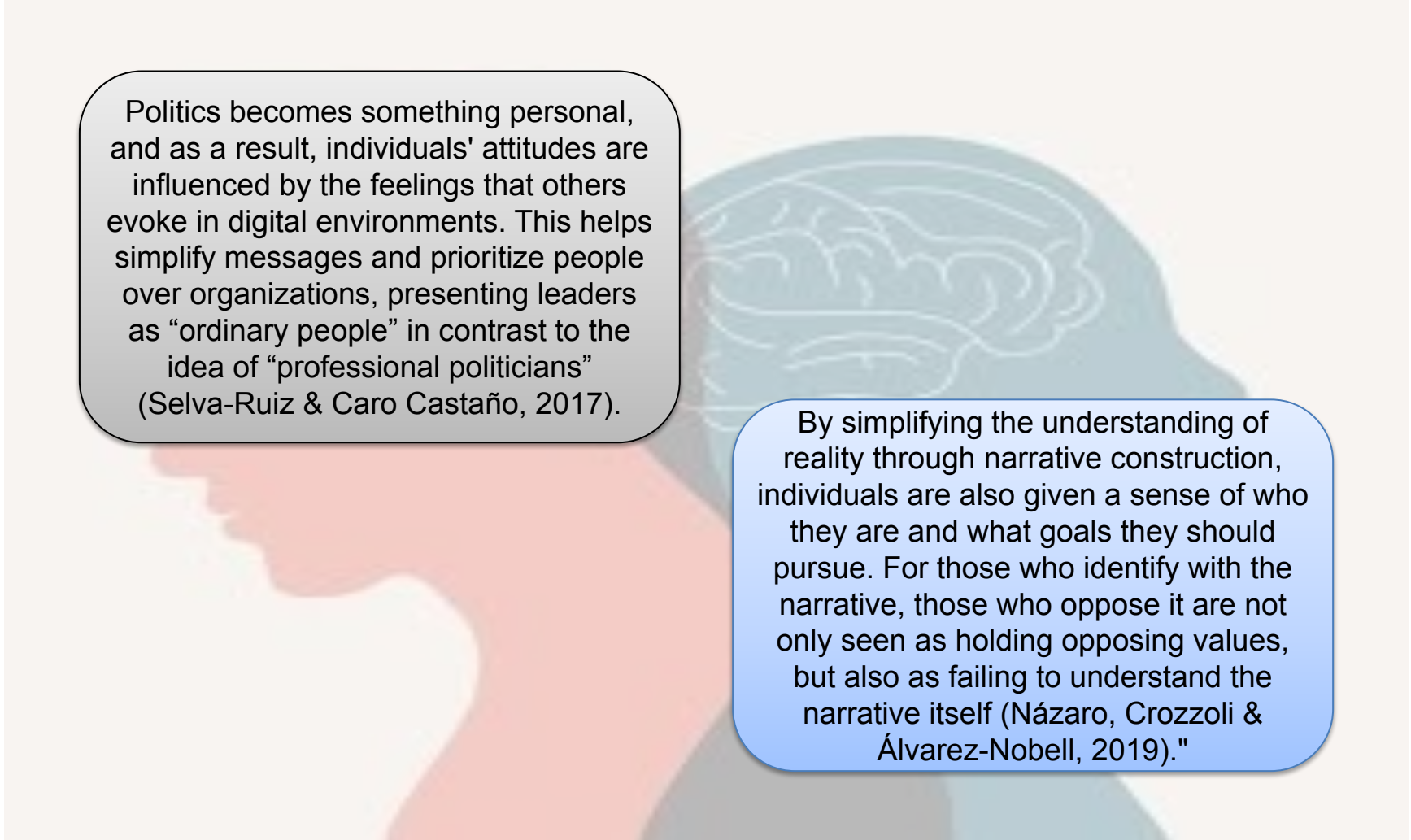
Impact of digital democracy: rise of emotional democracy



Digital environments contribute to emotional appeal by allowing for message simplification and the creation of communities for the exchange of information, opinions, and emotions.

This is important because, as D'Adamo and García Beaudoux (2013) point out, political narratives aim to mobilize, seduce, evoke, and engage through the activation of senses and emotions.

Impact of digital democracy: rise of emotional democracy



Politics becomes something personal, and as a result, individuals' attitudes are influenced by the feelings that others evoke in digital environments. This helps simplify messages and prioritize people over organizations, presenting leaders as “ordinary people” in contrast to the idea of “professional politicians” (Selva-Ruiz & Caro Castaño, 2017).

By simplifying the understanding of reality through narrative construction, individuals are also given a sense of who they are and what goals they should pursue. For those who identify with the narrative, those who oppose it are not only seen as holding opposing values, but also as failing to understand the narrative itself (Názaro, Crozzoli & Álvarez-Nobell, 2019)."

Impact of digital democracy: rise of emotional democracy

The process of emotionalization in democratic politics is undeniably linked to the expansion of digital communication.

However, the apparent affinity between the digital world and affective dynamics should not mislead us: even before the affective turn, politics was not defined solely by its rational character, and in today's hyper-connected and digital world, politics is not purely about emotions either

It is precisely the task of the social and political sciences to unravel the dynamics that characterize this relationship.

The digital world and political affectivity seem to go hand in hand—especially in the digital public debate that takes place on social media.



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