

## DIGITAL DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL MEDIA: THE INFLUENCE OF FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM ON THE 2024 MUNICIPAL ELECTION FOR COUNCILOR IN THE CITY OF MARÍLIA (SP)



<https://doi.org/10.56238/arev7n3-044>

Submitted on: 02/07/2025

Publication date: 03/07/2025

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### ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to analyze whether the number of followers on *Facebook* and *Instagram* influenced the number of votes and, consequently, the election of candidates elected for councilor in the city of Marília, in the 2024 election. The method used was deductive, as well as statistical analyses were performed from an analytical observational design. Initially, considerations are made about the modalities of democracy, with emphasis on representative, participatory and deliberative democracy, to then evaluate how such modalities can be increased in their results from digital democracy, resulting from the use of the internet and, in particular, social media. In the end, it was possible to verify that popularity on social networks, especially on *Instagram*, exerts a significant influence on the

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number of votes of the candidates, revealing a strong and positive correlation between these variables.

**Keywords:** Elections 2024. Municipal Legislature. Popularity. Social networks.

## INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century is marked, at its beginning, by the great expansion in access and use of the internet, which has caused the popularization of social media, such as *Instagram* and *Facebook*. With this, a parallel world is created, a virtual world, which comes to exist alongside the real world. Often these two worlds maintain a very large dissonance, generating a certain frustration of reality in the face of expectation. Thus, just like Plato's myth of the Cave, social media often bring only distorted representations of reality.

Other times, however, social media and the internet itself can be used to enhance reality, making it transform from the virtual world. This is what is observed in several aspects of the human being's routine, as we live in an era in which the internet is not only an instrument to achieve a certain purpose, but is also confused with the object of search itself.

What is commonly seen in social networks, by way of contextualization, is that not only the use of these networks as a mechanism to achieve sales promotion, the dissemination of ideas, self-valorization or the propagation of events and social movements is considered, but the engagement itself and the increase in the number of followers are considered ends in themselves in certain contexts and social relations. This is what justifies, in fact, the indispensability of specialized professionals exclusively for this attribution, in such a way that legal relationships are outlined in favor of this.

And in view of this reasoning, starting from the premise that democracy is a social practice and the definition of what the exercise of democracy would be is confused with its own nature, in the same sense it happens with the use of social networks in political campaigns, as it is linked to the very concept of political rights and duties currently exercised.

It is noteworthy that there is an advance in interdisciplinary scientific studies that point out that the internet, in addition to promoting quick access to information, has a significant potential for persuasion in the decision-making process of individuals, which has relevant consequences in society in various cultural, economic, social and, especially, political aspects. Therefore, it is plausible to investigate the issue in the context of the use of social networks in political campaigns.

Thus, the objective of the present work is precisely this: to verify whether the number of followers on *Instagram* and *Facebook* of the candidates elected for councilor in

the municipality of Marília (SP) influenced the number of votes obtained. It is recognized that the ideal would be for such an analysis to involve all candidates and not only those elected, but the number of candidates for a seat in the City Council of Marília (SP)<sup>7</sup> made such an analysis unfeasible.

Initially, some considerations about the main modalities of democracy are presented, presenting the basic concepts of representative, participatory and deliberative democracy. Next, it is discussed how the internet can be used to increase such democratic modalities, based on what is conventionally called digital democracy. Finally, the conclusions of the present study are presented, which used a deductive method, as well as statistical analyses carried out from an analytical observational design.

Furthermore, the present research is justified by the growing importance of social networks in contemporary society, especially in the political context, as the popularization of social media has transformed social dynamics, thus reaching the political sphere, creating innovative forms of interaction, engagement and influence.

## MODELS OF DEMOCRACY

When talking about democracy, it is normal that its Greek origin comes to mind of the interlocutors, which often ends up feeding some misconceptions, because, if it is true that the model adopted by the Greek polis had characteristics of a direct democracy, it must be borne in mind that only citizens could participate in debates and deliberations. and few men (and no women) met the requirements to occupy this space of deliberation (Wolkmer, 2019, p. 47).

Robert Dahl, an American political scientist, discussed in his work "On Democracy", the localities that may have originated democracy and one of the places that may have originated democracy.

Later, he cites Rome and explains that:

About the time it was introduced in Greece, popular government appeared on the Italian peninsula in the city of Rome. The Romans preferred to call their system republic: *res*, which in Latin means thing or business, and *publicus* - that is, the republic could be interpreted as "the public thing" or "the business of the people" (*ibidem*, p. 23).

<sup>7</sup> The municipality of Marília had 305 candidates for councilor in the 2024 election (G1, 2024).

The right to join the government of the (Roman) republic was exclusive to the patricians, that is, to the members of the aristocracy. At a later stage of democratic evolution, after intense battles, the people (the plebs) managed to win this right. As in Athens, political participation was limited to men, a practice that was perpetuated in all emerging democracies until the twentieth century (Dahl, 2001, p. 23).

Dahl (2001, p. 28) states that, despite the fact that the processes of political evolution have followed very different trajectories in the most diverse regions of the world, a brief description could be presented with the following perception: in different places, free men and nobility began to participate directly in local meetings and councils; Subsequently, these meetings expanded, giving rise to regional and national assemblies, consisting of representatives chosen through election.

In turn, for Fábio Konder Comparato (1989, p. 178-179), whatever the way in which the idea of democracy is conceived, it always includes the possibility for the people to make decisions or act according to their own deliberation, without external impositions or serious internal conflicts, such as a civil war, that undermine this self-determination.

In this sense, democracy translates as a regime of popular autonomy, as opposed to heteronomy. The democratic ideal is closely associated with the value of freedom, understood as capacity (*ibidem*).

The Brazilian jurist adds that "in this fundamental sense, democracy is not a form of government, but a type of political regime. It is defined in terms of the ultimate holder of political power and not in the monarchical, aristocratic or popular way in which power is exercised" (*ibid*).

With the supposed evolution of humanity, another type of democracy gained strength: the one based on voting. The roots of representative democracy can be found in Rome, which already provided for the election of members of the Senate (Wolkmer, 2019), but its precepts gained constitutional contours with the Declaration of Virginia, with the independence of the United States, which expressly provides that all power emanates from the people and in their name must be exercised, and that "frequent elections, certain and regular" (Virginia Declaration of Rights, 1776, p. 1).

The premise of representative democracy is that, when we establish democratic procedures for the choice of our rulers (elections with the right to vote), the final result would also be democratic. This is the great premise of representative democracy regimes, which, in practice, is not always corroborated.

Let's see, for example, the recent Brazilian municipal elections. In the case of the municipality of São Paulo, in 2024, only 68.46% went to the polls, reaching the abstention rate at 31.54%. In addition, 3.67% of voters voted blank and 6.75% annulled their votes. In this scenario, if we add abstentions, null votes and blank votes, we will have a higher number of voters than those who voted for the elected candidate<sup>8</sup>.

Marcos Roitman Rosenmann (2007, p. 13) observed that in these cases democracy becomes a "set of procedures that allow maintaining the functioning of the institutions of the State through the election of an elite that governs" and "democracy is stripped of its vitality [...]". In the end, the author concludes, that there are now "democracies without democrats" (Roitman Rosenmann, 2007, p. 15).

For contextualization purposes, Marcos Roitman Rosenmann, a Chilean sociologist, political scientist and writer based in Spain, has a trajectory deeply marked by exile during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile, which took place from 1973 to 1990, an event that significantly influenced his critical perspective on the relations between power, inequality and democracy.

In his work entitled "*Democracies without Democrats*", first published in 2007, Roitman Rosenmann characterizes neoliberalism as a structural enemy of true democracy, a position that constitutes the core of this work. The author denounces the alleged hijacking of the concept of democracy by capitalism, which, according to Roitman Rosenmann, transforms it into an empty discourse used to legitimize systems of exploitation and social control.

Furthermore, the work in question is deeply marked by the political and economic context of the early twenty-first century, characterized by the strengthening of neoliberalism and the crisis of representative democracies. During this period, economic globalization consolidated structural inequalities, while social movements emerged in defense of ethnic, gender, environmental, and class rights, challenging the systemic power and abuses of capitalism.

The work reflects a time when several countries were facing crises of political legitimacy, often associated with corruption scandals, the weakening of democratic institutions and growing popular distrust of the ruling elites. Roitman Rosenmann

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<sup>8</sup> Ricardo Nunes was elected Mayor of São Paulo with 3,393,110 votes (59.35% of the valid votes). The sum of abstentions (2,940,360), null votes (430,756) and blank votes (234,317) totals 3,605,433 votes/voters (TRE-SP, 2024a; 2024b).

emphasizes the urgency of rescuing democracy as a citizen practice, guided by the defense of social justice and human dignity in the face of the commodification and depoliticization promoted by neoliberalism. This historical and ideological context gives Roitman's critique a relevance that goes beyond the period of its publication, establishing a current and pertinent dialogue with the challenges faced by contemporary democracies.

Thus, for this study, it is important to highlight the lessons of Roitman Rosenmann (2007, p. 10) when comparing the discourse of democracy to the analogy of the sale of Coca-Cola, which, in a free translation, emphasizes that from the marketing that the product quenches thirst and the state of unhappiness, the number of Coca-Cola consumption increases, Despite the cowardice of consumers in refusing to see the reality that the product does not quench thirst and depression, but the persuasive discourse remains.

It is from this reflection that the author argues that, regardless of the criticism of the difficulty in conceptualizing democracy in current times, democracy is not linked to the discourse to be consumed, as it is a way of life, highlighting that *"democracy is a social and plural practice of control and exercise of power, Since its being, it incorporates the ethical sense of human conditioning, it is a way of life. Si no se ejercita no existe"* (Roitman Rosenmann, 2007, p. 15).

Thus, the reasoning proposed by Roitman Rosenmann contributes to the assertion explored in the present study in the sense that one should move towards the evolution of analyses that emphasize the best ways to exercise democracy, considering, without fail, its necessary conceptualization as a social practice and exercise of power by the so-called "democrats", which is beyond the consumption of discourse without reflection and attitude.

In this regard, Frank Cunningham (2009, p. 35), when analyzing the theories of democracy and their respective challenges, argues that "democrats should dedicate themselves to the practical issues of how to nurture participation" in civil society organizations "instead of worrying about abstract theories". The author also recommends that theorists of democracy who want their points of view to have practical effects have the important task of presenting conditions to ensure, protect and extend democracy in facilitating ways (Cunningham, 2009, p. 37).

This context reflects significantly on issues related to the formation of a political culture in a country that, in general terms, represents the set of values, feelings and opinions that the population has about politics, that is, about political institutions and



procedures (Lucas; German, 2024, p. 9801). From these considerations and leaving aside more complex classifications presented by the doctrine, it is possible to argue that, in a tight summary, there are three modalities of democracy according to the form of popular participation: representative, participatory and deliberative.

Representativeness, as already mentioned, is based on voting, from which citizens can elect their candidates for political office. Whether through a majoritarian system (the one with the most votes is elected) or proportional (the candidates of the parties that obtain the most votes are elected), the logic, in this case, is that the elected representatives will speak on behalf of the people, in an indirect democratic system.

In participatory democracy, in addition to voting, which is usually present, citizens are also invited to express their opinion on issues of interest to the State (Cunningham, 2009), providing elements that may (or may not) be taken into account by their representatives for the adoption of the measures required in the political management of the country.

Finally, in deliberative democracy, in addition to having a place of speech, the opinions and desires of the citizen consulted must effectively be taken into account, since their will must be taken into account in the formulation of public policies. The premises of deliberative democracy were launched by Habermas, who seeks to systematize its concept from "[...] of an ideal procedure of deliberation and decision, which should 'be mirrored' as far as possible, in political institutions" (Habermas, 1997, p. 28).

For the German philosopher and sociologist, this strand of democracy incorporates elements from both perspectives into the concept of an ideal process for deliberation and decision-making. This democratic model creates an intrinsic connection between pragmatic aspects, negotiations, debates about self-understanding, and discussions about justice, sustaining the premise that it is feasible to achieve fair and rational results through this procedure (Habermas, 1997, p. 19).

This theory proposes a perspective where the communicative processes and assumptions that democratically shape opinion and collective will are considered the main channels for the discursive rationalization of decisions made by government and administration, both subject to law and legislation. Rationalization has more value than simple legitimation, but it does not configure, by itself, the creation of power (*ibidem*, p. 23).

It should be noted that the power that is available in the administrative sphere is transformed over time, to the extent that it remains connected to this democratic formation



of will and opinion, functioning, in a certain way, as a guiding mechanism for the exercise of political power (*ibid*).

Consequently, the communication structures of the public sphere act as a wide network of sensors, reacting to the pressures caused by social problems as a whole and stimulating the formation of opinions with relevant impact (*idem*).

In this process, "[...] public opinion, transformed into communicative power according to democratic processes, cannot 'dominate' by itself the use of administrative power; but it can, in a way, direct it (*ibidem*).

Political scientist and philosopher Iris Marion Young (2001, p. 367-368), a scholar of deliberative democracy, capitulates this modality:

[...] As a process that creates a public, that is, citizens coming together to address collective goals, ideals, actions, and problems, Democratic processes are oriented around the discussion of the public good, rather than competition for the private good of each one. Instead of reasoning from the point of view of the maximizer of private utility, citizens transform, through public deliberation, their preferences according to public order ends, reasoning together about the nature of these ends and about the best means of achieving them. In a free and open dialogue, others test and challenge the statements and motives. The participants take care to separate the good reasons from the bad ones and the valid arguments from the invalid ones.

An excellent example of deliberative democracy can be observed in the Participatory Budget projects, which originated in Porto Alegre (RS) and spread to several cities in Brazil and around the world (Ramos Júnior; Dias, 2020). In them, the population is called upon to decide where part of the municipality's budget will be invested, and their decision is binding on the public manager.

In this regard, according to Claudia Tannus Gurgel do Amaral (2015, p. 282), the deliberative participatory budget is framed as an instrument of social participation along the lines of the Habermasian deliberative democratic theory, as it is "capable of developing among citizens a sense of belonging to the territory and adherence is inherent to the deliberative dynamics".

However, decision-making by the population does not necessarily need to be manifested through the so-called "official channels", since, based on legal pluralism and interculturality, it is possible to imagine other forms of popular manifestation:

The starting point is the one defended here: full exercise of deliberative democracy, different from representative, not only manifested through the normative elements explicitly provided for in the state norm (popular initiative, plebiscite, referendum, etc...), but through active "pressure forces" capable of changing positions and

constructing political, legislative and even legal ideas, at the moment when they interfere in the hermeneutics of the Courts (Ramos Júnior; Dias, 2020, p. 83).

From this premise, different cultural manifestations can represent tools in favor of deliberative democracy, such as the samba de enredo (Ramos Júnior; Dias, 2020) or manifestations on social media, the subject of this study.

Furthermore, it is emphasized that popular participation receives a degree of notoriety in favoring the dialectical relationship between practice and theory with regard to the development of the critical sense of individuals, which corroborates the guarantee of a politically, culturally and socially emancipated society, with the ability to overcome social inequalities through movements of demands and participation in the decision-making acts of the State (Baratelli; Lima, 2024, p. 8974).

Having made these considerations, this article will dedicate itself to analyzing representative democracy, with a special focus, however, on the influence that it has been suffering from social media, questioning to what extent the candidate's performance on social networks can influence the moment of voting of his voters and whether this can represent a slight induction from representative democracy to participatory and deliberative democracy. In addition, the work will raise questions about how this interaction between the virtual world and the real world can bring advances to deliberative digital democracy. First, conduit, some considerations will be outlined about what is conventionally called digital democracy.

## **DIGITAL DEMOCRACY**

The term *e-democracy* was created by Steven Clift in 1994 to defend the use of the internet to strengthen democratic processes, expanding the interaction of citizens with the Government (Clift, 2024). The origin of its variant "digital democracy" became popular at the end of the twentieth century and, although it is not possible to attribute its creation to a single author, it can be conceptualized as "a semantic expedient used to refer to the experience of the internet and devices that are compatible with it, all of them aimed at increasing the potential for civil participation in the conduct of public affairs" (Gomes, 2005, p. 217).

Here a parenthesis is opened to converge digital democracy with Habermas' ideas on deliberative democracy, in the sense that public opinions configure potential for political influence, and can be used to intervene in the electoral behavior of citizens or in the

conception of will in parliamentary corporations, governments and courts (Habermas, 1997, 95)

This publicity influence, based on public ideals, is only transformed into political power, in other words, into a potential capable of leading to imposing decisions, when it is deposited in the ideologies of authorized members of the political system, being a driving force to regulate the behavior of the electorate, parliamentarians, officials and the like. In this sense, in the same way as social power, political-advertising interference can only be turned into political power through institutionalized processes (*idem*).

In deliberative democracy, according to Habermas, public debate must take place both in Parliament and in the institutions of civil society, so that the existence of fair and informed debates on both sides is an indicator of popular sovereignty in a democracy. In other words, it is admitted that the two dimensions remain separate and eventually connect through traditional means of representative politics (Rothberg, 2010, p. 15).

In this sense, although this approach represents an advance compared to classical liberalism (which emphasizes the centrality of informed debates in Parliament and maintains a fragile connection with a fragmented society), it is still limited compared to the potential offered by digital democracy instruments, such as online public consultations, which, in turn, provide a means for the population to express themselves about policies under construction to be discussed in Parliament, closes parenthesis (*ibidem*).

According to Wilson Gomes (2018), the political discourse exercised by the mass media and the so-called "futuologies", being publications that try to identify and interpret social trends, collaborate to instigate the use of electronic technology as a democratic instrument. Among the examples cited by the author, there are the movements that occurred in the American electoral campaigns from 1990 onwards, "when political rhetoric finally buys the idea of technology at the service of the renewal of democracy".

The author also emphasizes that digital democracy can be summarized in four dimensions, namely, records or consultations of public opinion, information, decision-making and deliberation, considering that, since 1990, the conviction had been established that the barriers to access to public information and social participation could be significantly reduced in the face of the development of information and communication technologies (Gomes, 2018).

Based on these considerations, it is possible to relate the concept of digital democracy to the modalities mentioned in the previous item, as it is one of the ways in which manifestations of representative, participatory and deliberative democracy can occur.

Thus, if digital methods are adopted to collect the votes of voters, we have a digital representative democracy. In this sense, online voting has been a reality in the lives of Estonian citizens since 2005, who can choose to vote in elections from a mobile phone application or computer, without leaving home (Brasil, 2022).

In the case of Brazil, voting uses electronic ballot boxes and the transmission of votes from the Electoral Offices to the Regional Electoral Courts and the Superior Electoral Court, although not instantaneous, takes place through the internet, which allows us to conclude that Brazilian representative democracy is already partially digital.

Furthermore, electronic voting was introduced with the objective of solving the serious problem of electoral fraud and ensuring the indispensable transparency of electoral processes in the context of the redemocratization of Brazil. In this sense, the electronic ballot box has become a symbol of the fight against fraud and the consolidation of a truly secure voting system, capable of ensuring fidelity between the electoral results and the manifestation of the popular will (Lima, 2023, p. 93).

In addition, when citizens, using the e-Citizenship website, maintained by the Federal Senate (Brasil, 2024), express their opinions on bills, we are facing a digital participatory democracy. Similar to the e-Cidadania website, there is also the e-Democracy initiative of the Chamber of Deputies (Brasil, 2024), which also aims to expand social participation in the legislative process. Both instruments were parliamentary initiatives based on Brazilian and foreign academic studies.

The advancement of studies around the aforementioned portals corroborates what has been called "*institutional e-democracy*", which is embodied in the transformations and resignifications of democracy in institutions, in order to embody the new paradigms that contribute to popular participation, ensuring the democratic legitimacy of political decisions (Ribeiro, 2019, p. 178-179).

However, despite the fact that these are significant advances for the Brazilian population to express their opinion before their parliamentary representatives without bureaucracy and expenditure of resources, the aforementioned portals foster participatory democracy and not deliberative democracy, since popular demonstration, in this case, does not bind political decision-making.

Finally, when citizens, through democratic instruments, can act directly in the political conduct of a country, this is an example of digital deliberative democracy. The cases of referenda or plebiscites carried out by digital means, which bind the holders of power in decision-making, are examples of deliberative digital democracy.

Thus, we see that the digital medium is a way to intensify interactions between citizens and between them and the Public Power, aiming to increase the tools available in each of the aforementioned modalities of democracy. Thus, public institutions, in this case, the Legislative Branch, must undoubtedly pay attention to the possibilities of using digital media to collaborate with the realization of popular participation, in a transparent and safe way, and invest in the mechanisms for improving these instruments.

It is also important to highlight that there are movements in the theories of fundamental rights that consider access to the internet as a fundamental right, in view of the indispensability of the use of the world wide web for various human activities inherent to the social demands of globalization, especially those arising from access to information and the fundamental principles of citizenship. since it is linked to the supervision of the State's actions and, as evidenced in this study, to popular participation in government, in addition to the relationship with the dignity of the human person as it is essential to the notion of autonomy and personal identity (Hartmann, 2008).

Notwithstanding the fact that four constitutional amendments have been proposed to include the right to access the internet in the list of fundamental rights of the 1988 Constitution<sup>9</sup>, the issue received notorious attention at the UN General Assembly, in which since 2011 reports and resolutions have been provided focusing on access to the internet as an instrument for the promotion of human rights. such as freedom of expression and access to information (UN, 2013).

Thus, while there is no express inclusion of the right to access the internet as a fundamental right in the Federal Constitution, the national doctrine and jurisprudence, especially that of the Federal Supreme Court, recognize such a right in this capacity in view of the provision of paragraph 2 of article 5 of the Federal Constitution, and considers it as an implicitly positive right, in view of its instrumentality for the achievement of other fundamental rights.

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<sup>9</sup> Constitutional Amendment Project No. 06/2011, Constitutional Amendment Project No. 185/2015, Constitutional Amendment Project No. 08/2020, Constitutional Amendment Project No. 35/2022.

In this regard, Ingo Wolfgang Sarlet (2022, p. 756-757) argues that the consideration of the right to access the internet as a fundamental right stems from its very nature as a right to material benefits compensating for factual inequalities. The author justifies the statement in the following sense:

(...) in turn, they impact the levels of access necessary both for the enjoyment of civil and political rights, as well as access to the enjoyment of certain social rights, as is the case of the aforementioned rights to education and health, in addition to access to an immense range of goods and services indispensable for an adequate insertion in political life, social, economic, and cultural (Sarlet, 2022, p. 757).

Furthermore, it is notorious that the issue surrounding the guarantee of the right to equal access to the internet has received new paradigms throughout the covid-19 pandemic, given its indispensability from collaboration for isolation to access to information and popular participation in the inspection of government acts during the state of emergency that devastated the whole world. In view of this, in addition to the recognition of the right to access the internet as a fundamental right, the need for quality internet access is discussed, for the real effectiveness of the use of the instrumental right to guarantee rights, including those inherent to the search for the existential minimum.

However, despite the challenge of achieving quality internet access, there are regions of Brazil that do not even have access to the world wide web. According to the result of the survey "Characteristics of Households: Preliminary sample results", carried out by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), based on the 2022 census released in 2024, approximately 22.6 million people do not have an internet connection in their homes. Access to the network is proportionally lower in the states of the North and Northeast regions of the country<sup>10</sup> (IBGE, 2024).

In view of this, considering the instrumentality of the right to access the internet, for this study, in particular, its potential usefulness for the exercise of citizenship, it is emphasized that the digital divide increases the level of revelation of the social inequality

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<sup>10</sup> In Brazil, 89.4% of people had internet access at home in 2022. The Federation Unit with the highest percentage of the connected population was the Federal District (96.2%). The one with the lowest was Acre (75.2%). The data are from the IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) and were released this Thursday (Dec. 12, 2024). [...] The 3 states with the lowest percentage of internet access in 2022 were in the North region: Pará (79.4%), Amazonas (77.7%) and Acre (75.2%). The 3 states in the South were in the top 7 with the highest connection: Santa Catarina (94.8%), Paraná (92.5%) and Rio Grande do Sul (91.4%) (Rossi, 2024, p. 1-4).



already existing in Brazil, which gives rise to the need to seek equal and universal access to quality internet.

Thus, the object of this study emphasizes the relevance of digital instruments to enable and facilitate the social participation of citizens in the decisions and choices of their representatives, as the exemplification of the forms of relationship between digital democracy and representative, participatory and deliberative democracy, mentioned elsewhere, which should motivate the search for overcoming existing challenges, along with so many other fundamental rights that can be guaranteed through access to the internet.

Of course, the main tool of digital democracy is the internet, but it is also possible to analyze the modalities of digital democracy from social media, that is, how interactions that occur on social networks can increase practices related to representative, participatory or deliberative digital democracy.

The potential of interactions that occur on social networks is also demarcated by the relevance that Brazilians attribute to social networks in their routine. According to the "Digital Report 2024: 5 billion social media users", the result of the "Digital 2024 Global Overview Report", carried out by "We Are Social" with the agency "Meltwaer", the time of Brazilians in the use of the internet and social networks, totals 9 hours and 13 minutes per day. On a world stage, Brazil occupies the second position globally, just a few minutes behind South Africa, which records a daily average of 9 hours and 24 minutes (*We Are Social*, 2024).

It is also important to note that according to the report "Data Report 2024 Brazil", also prepared by "We Are Social" and "Meltwater", whose data covers social network users aged between 16 and 64 years, it reveals that the most used platforms in Brazil are *WhatsApp*, with 93.4% of reach, followed by *Instagram*, with 91.2%, *Facebook*, with 83.3% and *TikTok* with a reach of 65.1% (Kemp, 2024).

In addition, in 2023 Brazil was already ranked as the third largest consumer country of social networks worldwide, according to the report "Social Media Trends 2023" released by "Comscore" (2023), which mentioned that among the social networks most accessed by Brazilians, there is *Facebook* with a reach of 85.1% and *Instagram* with 81.4%.

Furthermore, there are several factors and mechanisms that influence the number of votes obtained by candidates in a democratic process. For many years, what stood out was the time for free electoral propaganda. It turns out that the advancement of technology,



combined with the growing access to the internet and the popularization of mobile devices, the intensive use of social networks by candidates for political office in several countries, have promoted electoral campaigns and the success of the results at the polls. In this way, social networks become an important element for electoral campaigns, as they promote the dissemination of the candidate and transform the interaction between candidates and voters (Souza, 2019, p. 13/14).

In Brazil, the 2012 elections were the first to have advertising on social networks (Chamber of Deputies, 2012). In the 2018 elections, the use of boosting content on the internet for electoral purposes was allowed, as long as it was properly identified and contracted exclusively by political parties, coalitions, candidates or their representatives.

Thus, the demands of the globalized world, the advancement of technology and the consequent potential of the use of social networks in electoral campaigns, the Superior Electoral Court issued resolutions for the corresponding regulation (TSE, 2024), because, just as the use of social networks led to positive results for electoral campaigns and for the democratic exercise, there was also a boost to the proliferation of "fake news", whose problem occurs in several countries (Federal Senate, 2019).

In view of this general panorama, considering that 89.4% of the Brazilian population has access to the internet (IBGE, 2024), as well as the intensiveness with which Brazilians use social networks and the potential of this mechanism as an influencing factor in votes, studies aimed at the local verification of this influence on elections are relevant, as it is significantly related to the new paradigms of democracy, as a social practice.

Based on this premise, it will be analyzed, in the next item, whether the number of followers on the social networks *Instagram* and *Facebook* influenced the election for councilor of the Municipality of Marília, in the year 2024.

## **METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION**

From the deductive method, having established the major premises regarding deliberative digital democracy, the minor premise is outlined for local analysis and for a determined period, which is the 2024 elections for councilors in the municipality of Marília (SP). To this end, the study is conducted using the statistical auxiliary method, which, according to Orides Mezzaroba and Cláudia Servilha Monteiro (p. 86, 2023), is the method that performs preconditions based on data collection.

On October 6, 2024, immediately after the announcement of the candidates elected for councilor in the municipality of Marília, which took place at 7:24 pm, specifically between 4:36 pm and 4:51 pm, the profiles maintained by the new councilors on *Instagram* and *Facebook* were consulted, which can be seen in the Table below:

Table 1: List of elected candidates, with number of votes and followers

Alderman	Total votes	Instagram Followers	Facebook Followers	Party
Fabiana Camarinha	4.281	10.8k	4.9k	CAN
Guilherme BKS Burcão	3.420	7.250	4.6k	Anno Domini
Federal Agent Júnior Féfin	2.657	4.342	4.9k	UNION
Danilo da Saúde	2.409	14.4k	1.4k	PSDB
Engineer Nardi	2.070	2.092	4.8k	CITIZENSHIP
Thiaguinho	2.042	1.466	-	PP
Dr. Élio Ajeka	1.974	3.601	2.3k	PP
Vania Ramos	1.945	3.729	4.9k	REPUBLICANS
Professor Daniela	1.875	3.797	6.1k	PL
Marcos Custódio	1.800	3.417	5.8k	PSDB
Professor Galdino of Unimar	1.752	1.909	-	CITIZENSHIP
Delegate Damasceno	1.621	1.747	2.8k	PL
João do Bar	1.553	440	-	PSD
Delegate Rosana Camacho	1.436	2.918	4.9k	PSD
Potato Corredato	1.411	1.299	-	PP
Chico do Açougue	1.294	2.141	1 thousand	FORWARD
Mauro Cruz	1.146	251	1.7k	SOLIDARITY

Source: Table prepared by the authors; adapted with data extracted from the profiles of the new councilors on *Instagram* and *Facebook* and from the Regional Electoral Court of São Paulo, referring to the Voting Results by Municipality (2024).

From the analysis of the data in the table above, as well as the data on gender and age of the elected officials, the results that will be presented in the next topic were obtained, which were essential for achieving the objective proposed in this study.

## STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Categorical variables are described by the distribution of absolute (N) and relative (%) frequency. To analyze the difference in the distribution of proportion of categorical variables, the Binomial test was performed. Numerical variables were described as mean, standard deviation (SD) and standard error of the mean (SME). To compare the mean, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was verified by Levene's test and the Student's t-test was applied for independent samples. The relationship between the variables was explored using Pearson's correlation test. The correlation coefficient (r) was interpreted as follows:  $\pm 0$  to 0.25 (low);  $\pm 0.25$  to 0.50 (moderate);  $\pm 0.50$  to 0.75 (strong);  $\pm > 0.75$  (very strong). A linear regression model was constructed to analyze the effect of independent

variables (age, gender, *Instagram* followers and *Facebook* followers) on the dependent variable (number of votes). The quality of fit of the model was analyzed by the linear R<sup>2</sup>, which represents the explanation factor, which indicates the percentage of variation of the dependent variable explained by the variation of the independent variables. The level of significance was set at 5% and the data were analyzed using the SPSS software (version 27.0).

## RESULTS

Based on the data collected, a higher proportion of males was observed (Table 2). No significant difference was observed between the sexes for age, number of votes and *Instagram* followers, but in females a higher average of followers on Facebook was observed than in males (Table 3).

In the correlation analysis, a significant correlation was found between the number of votes only and the number of followers on *Instagram*, indicating a strong and positive correlation (Table 4). The R<sup>2</sup> of figure 1 indicates that the variation in the number of *Instagram* followers explains 51.9% of the variation in the number of votes.

Table 2: Distribution of absolute (N) and relative (%) frequencies of the variable sex in the sample.

Sex	N	%	p-value
Female	4	23.50%	0.049*
Male	13	76.50%	

Note: \* indicates a significant difference in sex distribution by the Binomial test for p-value ≤ 0.05.

Source: Table prepared by the authors; adapted with data extracted from the profiles of the new councilors on *Instagram* and *Facebook* and from the Regional Electoral Court of São Paulo, referring to the Voting Results by Municipality (2024).

Table 3: Comparison of the mean, standard deviation (SD) and standard error of the mean (SEM) of the numerical variables in relation to gender.

		Average	DP	EPM	p-value
Age (years)	Female	50.8	11.3	5.6	0.937
	Male	50.2	11.3	3.1	
Votes (n)	Female	2384.3	1284.4	642.2	0.34
	Male	1934.5	618.2	171.5	
Instagram Followers (n)	Female	5311.0	3681.1	1840.5	0.541
	Male	3411.9	3784.1	1049.5	
Facebook Followers (n)	Female	5200.0	600.0	300.0	0.017*
	Male	2545.7	1905.2	528.4	

Note: \* indicates a significant difference between the means by the independent Student's t-test for p-value ≤ 0.05.

Source: Table prepared by the authors; adapted with data extracted from the profiles of the new councilors on *Instagram* and *Facebook* and from the Regional Electoral Court of São Paulo, referring to the Voting Results by Municipality (2024).

Table 4: Distribution of absolute (N) and relative (%) frequencies of the party variable of the candidates elected in the sample.

Party	N	%
FORWARD	1	5.9%
CITIZENSHIP	2	11.8%
Anno Domini	1	5.9%
PL	2	11.8%
CAN	1	5.9%
PP	3	17.6%
PSD	2	11.8%
PSDB	2	11.8%
REPUBLICANS	1	5.9%
SOLIDARITY	1	5.9%
UNION	1	5.9%

Source: Table prepared by the authors; adapted with data extracted from the profiles of the new councilors on *Instagram* and *Facebook* and from the Regional Electoral Court of São Paulo, referring to the Voting Results by Municipality (2024).

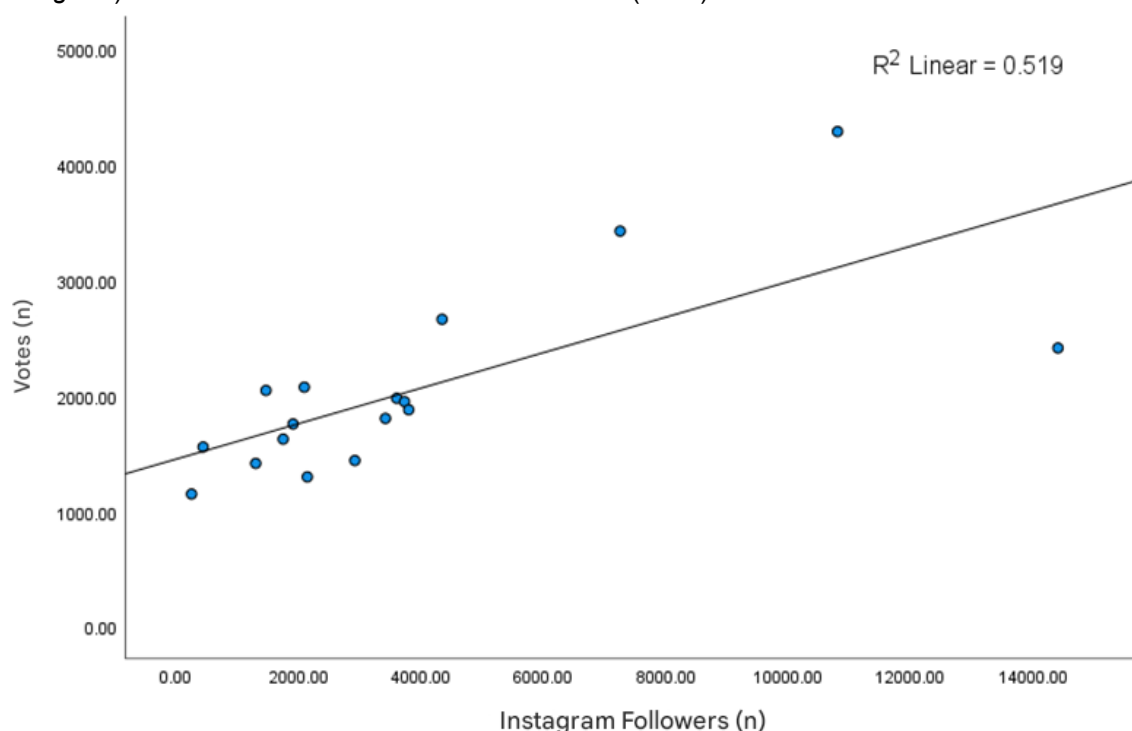
Table 5: Analysis of the correlation of the number of votes with gender, age, *Instagram* followers and *Facebook* followers.

	Votes (n)	
	r	p-value
Gender (1=F; 2=M)	-0.247	0.340
Age (years)	-0.359	0.157
Instagram Followers (n)	0.720	0.001*
Facebook Followers (n)	0.415	0.097

Note: \* indicates significant correlation by Pearson's test for  $p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$ ; correlation coefficient .

Source: Table prepared by the authors; adapted with data extracted from the profiles of the new councilors on *Instagram* and *Facebook* and from the Regional Electoral Court of São Paulo, referring to the Voting Results by Municipality (2024).

Figure 1: Scatter plot for analysis of the relationship and linear R2 between social network followers (*Instagram*) and number of votes of elected councilors (n=17).



Source: Graph prepared by the authors; adapted with data extracted from the profiles of the new councilors on *Instagram* and *Facebook* and from the Regional Electoral Court of São Paulo, referring to the Voting Results by Municipality (2024).

To analyze the joint effect of the variables sex, age and number of followers on social networks on the number of votes, a regression analysis was constructed (Table 6). Model 1 indicates that the independent variables explain 65.9% ( $R^2$ ) of the variation in the number of votes, but only the number of *Instagram* followers showed a significant independent effect. Considering that the regression constant did not present a significant effect, model 2 was constructed without the regression constant. In model 2, the independent variables explain 94.8% ( $R^2$ ) of the variation in the number of votes, but without a significant effect regardless of age. In model 2, it was found that the increase in the number of followers on social networks and being male is related to the increase in the number of votes. Although model 2 has indicates a high quality of fit ( $R^2$ ), this model may not accurately reflect reality due to the constant drawdown, which provides a fit for random error. However, in model 3, considering the constant and the number of *Instagram followers*, the value of  $R^2$  indicates that this independent variable represents half of the explanation factor for the number of votes.

Table 6: Linear regression analysis for the effect of gender, age and social network followers on the number of votes of elected councilors (n=17).

Variables		B	95%CI		p-value (a)	Model	
Dependent	Independent		READ	LS		p-value (b)	R2
Number of votes (n) - Model 1	(Constant)	1678.8 <sub>9</sub>	-634.21	3991.9 <sub>8</sub>	0.140	0.008**	0.65 <sub>9</sub>
	Age (years)	-19.12	-47.80	9.57	0.172		
	Gender (1=F; 2=M)	194.36	-629.38	1018.1 <sub>1</sub>	0.617		
	Instagram Followers (n)	0.13	0.04	0.21	0.007*		
	Facebook Followers (n)	0.16	-0.02	0.34	0.084		
Number of votes (n) - Model 2	Age (years)	-7.11	-31.66	17.43	0.542	<0.001**	0.94 <sub>8</sub>
	Gender (1=F; 2=M)	639.60	63.87	1215.3 <sub>4</sub>	0.032*		
	Instagram Followers (n)	0.15	0.07	0.23	0.001*		
	Facebook Followers (n)	0.21	0.04	0.38	0.019*		
Number of votes (n) - Model 2	(Constant)	1448.0 <sub>7</sub>	1017.1 <sub>1</sub>	1879.0 <sub>3</sub>	<0.001*	0.001*	0.51 <sub>9</sub>
	Instagram Followers (n)	0.15	0.07	0.23	0.001*		

Note: regression coefficient (B); 95% confidence interval (95%CI); lower limit (LI); upper limit (SL); \* significant effect of the independent variable for p-value (a)  $\leq 0.05$ ; \*\* significant effect of the model (set of independent variables) for p-value (b)  $\leq 0.05$ ; R<sup>2</sup> (explanation factor that indicates the percentage of variation of the dependent variable explained by the variation of the independent variables).

Source: Table prepared by the authors; adapted with data extracted from the profiles of the new councilors on *Instagram* and *Facebook* and from the Regional Electoral Court of São Paulo, referring to the Voting Results by Municipality (2024).

In view of the data presented, the results of this analysis show that popularity on social networks, particularly on *Instagram*, exerts a significant influence on the number of votes obtained by candidates for city council in the municipality of Marília/SP.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this analysis indicate that popularity on social networks, especially on *Instagram*, exerts a significant influence on the number of votes of the candidates, revealing a strong and positive correlation between these variables. This finding highlights the growing relevance of digital platforms in politics, suggesting that an established and active presence on *Instagram* can be a determining factor for electoral success, especially among voters who value digital interaction as a means of engagement.

In addition, the linear regression analysis reinforces that, although the variable "age" did not present isolated significance, the final model shows that the number of followers and the male gender are associated with greater vote capture. These factors, when

combined, explain a substantial portion of the variation in votes (94.8% in model 2), indicating that demographic and digital elements together form an important predictor of electoral performance.

In summary, this study highlights the need for strategies focused on digital presence for candidates, especially on social networks. The analysis proposes that the strategic use of these tools can significantly increase the reach and influence of candidates, transforming online interaction into one of the pillars of the modern electoral campaign. This trend can also be expanded and used to enable new forms of popular participation and deliberation, allowing the advancement and increase of deliberative democracy.

Thus, in the same way that the interaction between candidates and voters on social media results in votes, this digital space can foster important tools for the voter, after the election, to maintain contact with the elected candidates and start to participate and influence their decisions, advancing from representative democracy to deliberative democracy, because, after all, It is not possible to deliberate without participating.

Therefore, the potential of using social networks as a collaborative instrument for popular participation is notorious, from access to information about electoral campaigns and the possibility of interaction with candidates, to inspection and participation in deliberations with elected political agents, which corroborates the exercise of citizenship and popular sovereignty, considering the new perspectives of digital democracy in favor of the Democratic Rule of Law.



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