Youth and political participation: a view over the Participatory [1]

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Abstract

The "Youth Participatory Observatory" is a social network released in July 2013 by the Brazilian government to encourage the collaboration of the youth over discussions addressed to youth policies. This interactive environment renders an integrated work with digital social networks for the purpose to get to know the youth and its concerns. The proposition is to enable debate to furnish subsidies towards public policies, legislation and other important subjects for the Brazilian youth. The essay document of Youth Participatory Observatory highlights that young people have long been askingfor a reliable space to discuss with researchers, managers and all the youngsters over the focal point of interest. Upon this article, we describe the creation process of the Participatory and furnish the analysis by means of the created groups as per the focal interest of the attending youngsters.

Keywords: Social Network; Public Communication; Participatory; Youth.

Contents: 1. Introduction. 2. The voice of youth. 3. Participatory Communities. 4. Considerations.

Jovens e participação política: uma visão do Participatório

Resumo: O "Observatório Participatorio da Juventude" é uma rede social lançada em julho de 2013 pelo governo brasileiro para incentivar a colaboração dos jovens nas discussões voltadas às políticas de juventude. Este ambiente interativo funciona de forma integrada com as redes sociais

digitais, com o objetivo de conhecer a juventude e suas preocupações. A proposta é que os debates possam servir de subsídios para políticas públicas, leis e outros temas importantes para o jovem brasileiro. O documento de apresentação do Observatório Participatorio da Juventude destaca que há muito tempo jovens reivindicam um espaço confiável para debater com pesquisadores, gestores e outros jovens sobre temas de seu interesse. Idealizado pela Secretaria Nacional de Juventude (SNJ) e Conselho Nacional de Juventude, órgãos ligados à Secretaria-Geral da Presidência da República do Brasil, o Participatorio conta com o apoio da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro e da Universidade Federal do Paraná. Neste artigo, descrevemos o processo de criação do Participatorio e analisamos por meio dos grupos criados quais são os interesses dos jovens que o frequentam.

Palavras-chave: Redes sociais; Comunicação Pública; Participatório; Juventude

Sumário: 1. Introdução. 2. A voz da juventude. 3. Comunidades do Participatório. 4. Considerações

1. Introduction

The participation of the public scope on the Internet has been widely explored in researches upon digital democracy for over a decade (Baber, 2003; Gomes, 2005; Dahlberg, 2011; Hansson and others, 2014). Through recent years there is a major concern to understand such public participation towards the political scope, where governments present themselves as to be open in view to encourage direct democracy. Gomes (2005: 218) highlights every time a technology infrastructure comes up it confers "the hope of alternative models of democracy, to implement a third way between representative democracy, which derives from the people the political decision, and democracy direct or entirely consigned to the citizen". In order to evaluate the involvement of the public in such area, Gomes presents different degrees of digital democracy. In the first one, the government renders availability over the Internet as per the public information and services in order to facilitate the life of citizens. In the second degree, the focus is to listen to your opinion in order to build a public agenda. In both cases, the communication flow is from the government to the citizen. In the third grade, it has increased transparency in account services. As per the fourth degree it is represented by the deliberative democracy. "The political scope remains, but the state becomes more porose towards popular participation". (Gomes, 2005: 219). As per such stage, the public may have access to the content of the government and may also deliberate over some decisions. In the fifth grade there are models of direct democracy, of which the public in entitled of the power of political decision. Not only it controls the political scope, but also provides solutions as of the citizen as a producer. In such case, the state maintains only public administrative functions.

The most recent discussions appoints over certain problems as found upon the development of digital democracy. Hansson, Belkacem and Ekenberg (2014) enclose a concept of an open government, which allows by means of technology of information and communication in order to transform e-governments inward more innovative and collaborative institutions. Upon this research, according to its own authors, there are apparently good intentions over the rendered project. Nevertheless, it is

missing adequate instruments to trigger public deliberation. In most part of the time, the focus resides over transparency and in exchange of information. The unequal access to internet also impedes the development of the gist of democracy.

The open government has being a way to straighten the democracy by means of transparency, participation and collaboration in several countries, such as United States and Australia. (Hansson, Belkacem e Ekenberg, 2014). According to the authors, however, it is required to evaluate how these governments comprises three main aspects over the democratic process: understanding, deliberation and representation. The first one deals with citizens' rights to express themselves, their comprehension over the main issues and solutions of a country, city, neighborhood, community. The notion of understanding must be the core of the open government willing to enhance the quality of information from its sites and other devices. Upon the permanent dialer with the citizen, the e-government offers and receives important information in order to find solutions and/or the proper dispatch over a problem. As per Hanson *et al* (2014), this process is slow and time consuming, but it can lead to a resolution --the second aspect-- innovatively and collaboratively. Bearing this in mind, e-governments need to create appropriate tools to encourage citizen participation. The third aspect, as of representation, enlightens how the e-governments realized its citizens, i.e. as a voice at once as per diversified groups.

As per this essay we endeavor to launch a view over Participatory (http://juventude.gov.br/participatorio), once issued in July 2013 by the Brazilian government, of which began to test its pilot project in December 2012. Its creation was enticed by federal government by means of the National Youth Secretariat since 2011. The name is related to the merger of two words: participation and observatory. "The word is like a base to produce knowledge, to facilitate the interaction between governmental agency towards the youngsters and with researchers, aside to promote participation in related subjects to the youth". (SNJ, 2014: 9).

The Participatory can be interpreted as a public communication device as of times of culture convergence. In the attempt to hear different voices in order to plan public policies for the youth, the federal government sets a Webportal of the Youth for the purpose to create different communities, with one single interest, as per Brazilian society. To source them over the Participatory it is required to click on the subjects, such as security, education, work and income, culture, countryside and city centers, communication and technology, diversity and equality, sport and leisure, environment, social engagement, health and international. Although the Participatory Almanac, a publication which furnishes to future managers and stakeholders over the platform, an inclusion of 520 communities highlight, as per this survey –held in the first fortnight of March 2015– we couldn´t manage to source all of them. When we enter Social Participation, for instance, we spot four different communities: Live Youth –once created by the federal government in order to reduce the physical and symbolic violence against young blacks (25 participants); Cultural Center of the Youth (CCJ), once kept by Municipal Secretariat of Culture in São Paulo (10 participants); Public Policies Researches Network (85 participants) and Brazilian Unesco Regional MOST school (77 participants). Further subjects cover the same number of even less registered communities. Some of the communities also appear in

different subjects, such as Live Youth. As of the environment space for the communities, there are a few posts and its content, most of the time, is embedded with informative data, seminars and encounters.

The communication between the government and society tend to take place in local and immaterial venues from the public scope (Matos, 2009). However, the discussion between government and the social agents usually takes place in presential meetings towards the appointed communities from the Participatory Almanac. For the sake of the Participatory production it were held several meetings with communities of different Brazilian cities such as Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia and Sao Paulo, to discuss the content and form of such observatory, developed by the Center for Scientific Computing and Free Software of the Federal University of Parana, UFPR. Actions with the communities were organized by the School of Communication at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, UFPR.

In these meetings as held during the years 2012 and 2013, the National Youth Secretariat discussed with representatives of communities, networks, collective vessels and NGOs the different aspects which involve the deployment of collaborative platform, seeking to establish technologies and consensual methodologies of which would assist in strengthening the collective involved and their respective network actions.

The initial challenges renders relation to the joint perspective of collective detached youth --Rappers, Funkers, several community groups, popular movements, cyber-activists, media free speechers etc.-- with visions, procedures and actions differential. The concerns of the represented collectives in these events, which were followed by one of the researchers of this article, focused on real participatory platform's ability to account for the varied demands of the social movements of young users of digital media, with several thematic interests and activists who often reject to follow social conventions and who may rise to trigger conflicts even among the participating movements. Some of them reported problems with the digital social networks policies of which did not allow certain types of manifestations.

Some of them cast doubts whether the National Youth Secretariat would not use the collaborative platform to render control towards youth endeavors in Brazil, since the participatory emerged as an initiative linked to the General Secretariat of the Presidency. In this sense, discussions also developed over on how to hold the mediation upon the platform, in view of the collective to point out the legitimacy and strenghthening of their causes to reside in transparency and in effective participation of its members without any kind of prior censorship of the NYS. To the date the current communities over the Participatory must respect the terms of the platform and its use and only posts with illegal or contraty content are eligible to moderation.

In May 2013 the National Youth Secretariat decided the Participatory should be developed in free software and as an open source, in order to align with the idea of a collaborative platform and also towards the attempt to save investments in proprietary programs. The Center for Scientific Computing and Free Software of the Federal University of Parana, responsible for the development,

hosting and maintenance of participatory, proposed the use of Noosfero (http://noosfero.org/), a free web platform with social networking features (friends, communities, people and communities list, invitations by email, whether public or private profiles etc.), in the design of graphical user interfaces and attributes which had been designed in collaborative workshops which brought together managers and segments of communities, networks, collective and participating NGOs.

The public communication, according to Duarte (2009), is required to encourage people to play a leading role, autonomy and ability to produce their own information. The platform of Participatory, for instance, brings together important documents to support projects in various communities. In digital social networks such as Facebook, these communities have higher membership and tend to participate more. Notwithstanding the participatory advertising which triggers "freedom of expression and independent agendas" (SNJ, 2014: 13), we realize as per this new graphic interface a few demonstrations on the eligible platform to be the linked between government and society. The finding, however, does not invalidate the Participatory. In addition to the database of policy documents, the system brings announcements and news which can benefit communities with a focus on the youth.

The scenario, per se, triggers the reflection over the interactions of these communities upon digital social networks. Such tools seek inspiration as per the utilization and appropriation of which people render on the Internet, so throughout their history we may have noticed the inclusion of blogs, comments and social networks in digital diaries of the major press organizations. The simulation of digital social networkshas not been complete in such given environments. In most part of it, it lacks interaction with the public, who do not just want a space to record your comment. They want to be heard, to feel that actually have a voice and that is part of the environment. Upon this sense, digital social networks have driven companies from several sectors to invest in a transparent and interactive communication. As per Lloyd and Toogoog (2015), every organization, to the date, is held as a media organization. And social media has contributed to transparency and to open an infinite demand for engagement at all levels.

2. The voice of youth

In this article, our key interest resides in young people. According to Jenkins (2008), they are the ones who dictate fashion. In Brazil, young people are the majority in digital social networks. The E-Marketer, a company specialized in research, estimates 78.1 million people used digital social networks in the country at least once a month in the year 2014. (E-Marketer, 2015). From this total, 54.4% are aged between 18 and 24 years. The same research evidences Facebook to be the preferred digital social network, reaching 72 million people. And Twitter was in second place with 12.1 million users in Brazil.

According to Juliana Sawaia, head of Learning & Insights from IBOPE Media, "the Internet should be recognized today as a strategic platform for interaction and engagement with other means"

(IBOPE, 2014), considering young people also to consume other media: 92% watch TV and 69% listen to the radio. However, before thinking about the public participation through digital social networks it is necessary to know these young people who use it. The survey by the Pew Research Center- PRC (2015) shows that in Brazil the higher education level the higher is access to the internet.

The same research institute shows Brazilians to follow a global trend, seeking on the Internet socialization and information. In Brazil, 89% of Brazilians who go online want to keep in touch with family and friends. In regard to information, 58% seek news about politics and health. The news and services offered by the government are sought by 47%. And is the young rendering citizenship when sharing news on the Internet? According to the Pew Research Center, PRC (2015), the most shared subjects on Facebook and Twitter are about music (80%), products (58%), religion (36%) and politics (33%). Compared to the interest of Latin American countries on politics Brazil has one of the highest, inferior only to Venezuela (34%) and El Salvador (34%).

The convergence of media was considered by the creators of the Participatory platform. Ivana Bentes, professor at the School of Communication at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, who coordinated the preparation of mobilization methodology and communication of participatory, points out that the platform enables "to intensify dialogue with social movements and society, inter-ministerial relations, parliamentary and other levels of government and the potential linkage of the networks themselves among them. (Participatory Almanac, 2014: 33).

In previous studies, Bentes *et al.* (2008) acknowledges communication as a public management tool. For them, communication is "essential to achieving the goals of various social policies." (Bentes *et al.*, 2008: 138). The authors also argue over citizenship to be linked to free access to information. The democratic process, appoints citizens to have the right to express their views on the various issues of society. The multiplicity of means, as shown Bentes et al. (2008) do not guarantee the participation and information diversity.

In Brazil, the Internet remains uneven upon equality. Social projects, such as participatory, have used the internet and digital social networks to disseminate and require cooperation in the construction of public policies. They are actions that stimulate dialogue between government and society and hence expand the work in communication. Plans for the expansion of the internet, however, should be encouraged in Brazil to achieve more satisfactory results in this type of social project. The report Brazilian Media Research 2015-media consumption habits of the Brazilian population, commissioned by the Social Communication Secretariat (Secom) of the Presidency, points out that "income and education create a digital gap between who is the connected citizen and the one who is not. Moreover generational or age elements show young people to be more intensive users of new media sources". (SECOM, 2015: 49).

The Participatory Platform works seamlessly with digital social networks, in order to encourage collaborative phenomenon to try to solve problems faced by the youth of the country. As per actions to promote the participatory are also posted by its engineers.

The proposal is that the debates can serve as support for public policies, laws and other important issues for the young Brazilian. Previous studies (Rodrigues, 2004 and 2009) show that not always the youth is heard at all stages of public projects for youth. In the first study Rodrigues (2004) shows the actions of the designs discussed above have been set down, which often results in failure. In the second study Rodrigues (2009) notes that governments are not as concerned with specific problems of youth and reveals the importance of local management to adjust them and monitor them. The presentation document of the Observatory Participatory Youth acknowledges as per a long time claim a trusted space to discuss with researchers, managers and other young people upon topics of interest.

The participatory as other private and public organizations, maintains a Facebook page to establish contact with citizens. In the first fortnight of March 2015, on the accounts of 6.220 likes. The posts address the actions developed by the Participatory and communities which support the platform. Posts are not daily held, but there are more comments than in the Participatory platform. The number of likes is higher than comments, which are usually to compliment an action or take a doubt about a particular event. The shares of posts on participatory actions can view the link different Brazilian communities. In the post February 24, 2015 on the 3rd. National Youth Conference for 109 shares of individuals and communities. According to Jenkins (2015), these platforms, such as Facebook, "have personal and collective meaning for the participants. We have to accept this fundamental contradiction before we can make sense of the shapes of the presence of social networks in contemporary culture. " (Jenkins, 2015: 110).

3. Participatory Communities

The Participatory comes at a time when the phenomenon in collaborative digital social networks mobilizes crowds. Henry Jenkins (2015: 109), participatory culture implies part "of something that is bigger than the individual, and the power, in this case, is claimed by groups and networks, not by individuals."

Communities are part of Participatory already have many stories to tell. Among them there is the Network Agency for Youth, which encourages the production of projects from different fields (culture, education, environmentalism, fashion etc.) among young people (15-29 years) of Rio de Janeiro communities. Awarded by the social projects developed with international partners, the Network Agency for Youth struck a deal with the participatory to build "mechanisms and practices (...) to enable the political, social and cultural participation through" the platform. (Participatory Almanac, 2014: 17). Present on Facebook with 8.350 likes, this community brings postings that extol the creation process of young people through its projects and activities. There are more likes than

comments. All posts working with images that show the published work. The visual design is youthful, with the aim of bringing the audience.

The (Viração) Turndown Educommunication is a national organization which aims to guarantee the rights of young people and the democratization of communication, from their involvement in this process. According to its leaders, the presence of the organization in participatory has yielded good results, "(...) over a year, a group of young people, in different locations in Brazil, began to contribute in discussions and articles on the reality in their territories, and also much used the library of materials that were available, free form (Almanac participatory, 2014: 25). However, the community is warning about two challenges presented to participants in the process in trial as per collaborative platform. For its members, the little connection to the digital social networks in vogue distances the public from participatory discussions. Also, do not know how civil society can be benefited with the content generated restless community. "What does the National Youth Secretariat render to demands which arise in such space?

What kind of return can we expect? How can we identify the incidence being generated from the platform?" (Participatory Almanac, 2014: 25). Facebook, the Turndown, which has 3.976 likes, is transparent in your messages. Accountable for their actions and also brings a lot of pictures of smiling young men in their posts. As in other communities, there are more tanned than comments.

Created in 2000, the Collective Puraqué consists of cyber-activists who work in Santarém, Pará. Its purpose is to spread the inclusion and digital culture, using free software. Its main actions relate to the socio-digital, cultural and environmental areas, involving community participation in outlying areas of the state capital. Bruna Pedroso, member of the Collective Puraqué, believes that the participatory is a space for interaction, mobilization and youth interest discussions: "(...) it serves to help our young people, intellectuals employees and participants in the Young Students Group Programming Free Software-JovensCodeirXs, to join this network, gaining freedom of expression to defend their ideas and share the local reality involving cultural sites, social and political (Almanac participatory, 2014: 26). The Collective Puraqué does not use fanpage, like other communities already mentioned. Opted by the user profile, which has a limit of 5.000 friends. Links to the site and for the collective blog do not work on Facebook. The posts are also outdated, the last was in October 2014. The existing Collective in profile Puraqué deal with organized courses, always showing its participants.

The Favelas Observatory is a social organization of research, consulting and public action dedicated to the formation of knowledge and policy on slums and urban phenomena. This organization is tasked with the development of concepts, methodologies, projects, programs and practices which collaborate with public policies aimed at social equality and respect for citizenship. In 2005, the Observatory of Favelas created the Critical Communication Popular School, ESPOCC, in partnership with several institutions, including the Federal Fluminense University and Federal of Rio de Janeiro. The school proposes review prejudiced social concepts in relation to the slums and outskirts of communities and furnish cultural and technical support to young people living in order to make them

social actors for democratization of communication and information. Social organization understands that the interactive virtual environment participatory articulates with the institutional mission and the nature of the actions set up under the ESPOCC: "(...) the link with groups and relevant stakeholders in the youth policies field provides a fundamental dialogic relation both to the training process of these subjects, as in the production and circulation of knowledge." (Participatory Almanac, 2014: 19). The ESPOCC, with 6.584 likes on your fanpage on Facebook also discloses their courses and frequent form of shares. The Observatory of Slums, school creator, has 39.054 likes fanpage on Facebook. Discloses courses, has produced videos and actions to enhance the couple's periphery. By having more followers, it also has the most tanned in their posts. Comments are not many, but interest on the treaty issue is present by the large number of shares of these posts.

4. Considerations

The use of digital social networks can enhance public communication, expanding the spaces of interaction between society and the government. Facebook, the social network most used in Brazil to share music, opinions about sports, products you use, religion and politics with friends and family, can also function as a renewed agora. However, it is necessary to invest in the expansion of internet access because, as noted earlier, the digital divide is unequal in Brazil.

The participatory takes an important step towards the construction of public policies for youth, creating a space for dialogue with those directly involved. In this first phase of participatory, we realize that we need to persist with the communication to strengthen ties created in-person meetings. Digital social networks can indeed promote debate, but so far are used more as dissemination of the actions of communities and participatory own. The debate takes place in-person meetings where participatory organizers continue promoting. It is still early to assess the degree of society's participation in the construction of public policies for youth through participatory, so no need to monitor how public opinion is being inserted in the new government projects.

The follow-up of meetings in participatory deployment phase revealed that communities want to be heard before drawing up any project to benefit the Brazilian youth, but do not want to be supervised let alone lose the autonomy and freedom to transform the future of many citizens. They need support, but they know very well what they want.

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Note

1 Part of this essay was presented at XIV Ibercom International Congress 2015 promoted by Ass, Ibercom – Ibero-American Communication Association, ECA-USP – School of Communication and Arts of São Paulo University and Socicom – Brazilian Federation of Scientific and Academic Communication Association, held in São Paulo, SP, Brazil as of March 30th to April 02nd, 2015 at the Division of Ibercom (DTI) number 3 – Communication And Citizenship.

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