DATAISM, INEQUALITY AND DEMOCRACY: THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY

DATAÍSMO, DESIGUALDADE E DEMOCRACIA: A INTERSEÇÃO ENTRE TECNOLOGIA E SOCIEDADE

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RESUMO

O presente artigo explora a interseção entre dataísmo, desigualdade e democracia no mundo contemporâneo. O dataísmo, visão de mundo centrada na primazia dos dados e de sua utilização para otimizar decisões, apresenta desafios importantes para a justiça social e ao funcionamento democrático. A concentração de poder sobre os dados nas mãos de grandes corporações e de governos pode exacerbar a desigualdade social, enquanto o uso de algoritmos opacos ameaça a transparência e a integridade das instituições democráticas. Para mitigar esses riscos, o artigo propõe a implementação de políticas de governança de dados os quais promovam a transparência, a equidade no acesso aos dados e a alfabetização digital dos cidadãos.

Palavras-Chave: Dataísmo. Desigualdade. Democracia. *Big Data*. Algoritmos. Transparência. Ética dos Dados. Governança Digital. Vigilância. Justiça Social.

ABSTRACT

This article explores the intersection among dataism, inequality, and democracy in contemporary society. Dataism, a worldview centered on the primacy of data and its use to optimize decision-making, presents significant challenges to social justice and democratic functioning. The concentration of data power in the hands of large corporations and governments may exacerbate social inequality, while opaque algorithms threaten the transparency and integrity of democratic institutions. To mitigate these risks,

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the article proposes implementing data governance policies that promote transparency, equitable access to data, and digital literacy for citizens.

Keywords: Dataism. Inequality. Democracy. *Big Data*. Algorithms. Data Governance. Transparency. Digital Ethics. Surveillance. Social Justice.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the rapid digitalization of society, driven by the advance of information and communication technologies, has transformed the way we relate, make decisions and interact with the world.

In this context, the concept of dataism has emerged as a new ideology, proposing that data collection and analysis are fundamental to optimizing decision-making in various spheres of life, from everyday choices to public policies.

Dataism, as a worldview, suggests that truth and efficiency are intrinsically linked to the primacy of data, often to the detriment of human factors such as intuition, emotion and experience.

While dataism offers the promise of greater efficiency and innovation, it also raises critical questions about its ethical and social implications. The increasing concentration of power in the hands of large technology corporations and governments, which control vast amounts of data, can deepen existing social inequalities and weaken democratic foundations. As society becomes increasingly dependent on data analysis to inform decisions, concerns arise about how this data is collected, analyzed and used, and who really benefits from this process.

This article explores the intersection among dataism, inequality and democracy, seeking to understand how these forces interrelate and shape the future of contemporary society. The analysis will draw on various examples and contexts to illustrate how the ideology of dataism can both offer opportunities and create significant challenges. Initially, the concept of dataism will be defined and contextualized, followed by a discussion of how it impacts social inequalities, including the role that algorithms play in perpetuating prejudices. Next, the impact of dataism on democratic institutions will be addressed, reflecting on the manipulation of information and surveillance practices.

Finally, the article will present proposals for ethical data governance, emphasizing the importance of policies that guarantee transparency, fairness and inclusion in the use of data.

Through this analysis, we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interactions between technology and society, as well as fostering a dialog about how we can shape a future in which data serves to promote social justice and strengthen democratic institutions.

1 DATAISM: A NEW IDEOLOGY OF INFORMATION

The term “dataism” was popularized by historian Yuval Noah Harari in his work: “Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow”. Harari describes dataism as an emerging ideology that considers data to be the main driving force behind decisions and actions in all spheres of human life. At the core of dataism is the belief that all forms of knowledge, human behavior and natural phenomena can be translated into quantifiable data. This ideology posits that data collection and analysis are essential to understand and ultimately control the world around us (Harari, 2016).

Dataism stands out for putting data at the center of the decision-making process. Instead of relying on human intuition, experience or emotions, dataism suggests that decisions based on data are more accurate and unbiased. This view is fueled by the idea that algorithms can process information more efficiently than humans, leading to conclusions that might otherwise go unnoticed. In this context, machines and algorithms are seen as the most effective tools for analyzing data, predicting behavior and optimizing results (Williams, 2011).

This focus on data has resulted in a significant change in the way various areas operate. In the health sector, for example, data analysis can predict disease outbreaks and improve patient care. In education, adaptive learning systems use data to personalize learning experiences to meet the specific needs of each student. In the economy, the use of big data allows companies to optimize processes, predict market trends and personalize offers for consumers (Rancière, 2014).

Despite the promises of efficiency and innovation, dataism also raises important ethical and social questions. The almost exclusive focus on data can lead to the devaluation of crucial human aspects, such as empathy and ethical values. The result is a society that can become overly dependent on algorithmic logic, where critical decisions are made without considering the social or emotional context (Schneier, 2020).

In addition, the centralization of power over data raises concerns about privacy and surveillance. With large corporations such as Google and Facebook controlling vast amounts of personal data, there is a significant risk of abuse of power and manipulation (Castells, Couldry, Mejias, 2019).

This is because the huge growth of these companies means that the State can lose control of its accesses, and decision-making can thus be made primarily by the companies, rather than by the state. However, we must emphasize that the objective of the companies is based on revenue, and not on eliminating social inequalities, so that not only manipulation (SEE!!!) has the power to increase profits exponentially, but it would also be unfeasible for the State to control it (Andrejevic, 2013).

This data is not only collected, but often used to segment and target content in a way that can influence behavior and opinions, leading to a form of social control that can undermine individual autonomy (Zittrain, Zuboff, 2020).

As society adapts to this new, data-driven reality, new social dynamics emerge. The concept of the "digital divide" is becoming increasingly relevant, referring to the disparity between those who have access to technologies and data and those who do not. This unequal access to information can exacerbate social disparities, creating a divide between those who can navigate the digital world effectively and those who remain on the margins (Srnicek, 2017).

Data collection practices can also perpetuate existing prejudices. Many algorithms are trained with historical data that reflects social, racial and economic inequalities. As a result, automated decisions, for example in hiring, lending or policing, can reinforce pre-existing discrimination, harming already marginalized groups (Elmer, 2013).

In short, dataism represents a paradigmatic shift in the way we understand information and its role in society. While it brings significant opportunities for innovation and efficiency, it also imposes ethical and social challenges that cannot be ignored. As

society moves deeper into this new ideology, it is crucial that the discussion about its implications intensifies; seeking a balance between optimizing decision-making and protecting essential human and social values (Friedman, 2024).

2 DATAISM AND INEQUALITY

As dataism becomes a predominant force in contemporary society, its interactions with social inequality emerge as a critical issue. While data collection and analysis can bring significant benefits in a number of areas, how this data is used and who controls it are determining factors in perpetuating existing inequalities (Mann, Mit, 2018).

At the heart of dataism is the idea that information is power. However, this power is not distributed equally. Large technology corporations such as Google, Facebook and Amazon control vast volumes of personal and commercial data, giving them unprecedented economic and political influence. This concentration of data creates a "new oligopoly" that not only shapes the market, but also influences political and social decisions, exacerbating existing inequalities (Carr, 2010).

These companies have access to information that can be used to manipulate behavior, direct advertising campaigns and even influence electoral processes. The power that this data confers is not neutral; it can be used to marginalize dissenting voices and reinforce the domination of already privileged groups. The inequality of power surrounding data therefore contributes to the reproduction of social hierarchies (Dijk, 2015).

In addition to the concentration of power, the use of algorithms powered by historical data can perpetuate existing prejudices. Often, these algorithms are designed based on data that reflects social, racial and economic inequalities. For example, credit algorithms can be trained with data that has historically discriminated against racial or socioeconomic groups. This can lead to automated decisions that not only reflect but also accentuate these disparities (Morozov, 2018).

One alarming case is the use of predictive justice systems, in which algorithms analyze historical data to predict the likelihood of a crime being committed. These systems are often based on data that includes discriminatory police practices, resulting in

increased surveillance and punishment of marginalized communities. Thus, dataism not only ignores the complexity of social issues, but it also risks reproducing and intensifying the inequalities it should theoretically help to resolve (Morozov, 2013).

Dataism also accentuates inequality through what is known as the “digital divide”. This concept refers to the growing gap between those who have access to digital technologies and data and those who do not. Whenever society becomes more dependent on data to make decisions, access to information becomes a determining factor in social inclusion or exclusion (Turkle, 2011).

Individuals and communities with fewer resources - whether due to a lack of access to the internet, digital education or technological devices - are left on the sidelines in a world that is increasingly data-driven. This digital exclusion not only limits economic opportunities, but also weakens civic and political participation. Without access to crucial information, these communities are unable to influence policies that affect their lives, perpetuating a cycle of marginalization and inequality (Dreyfus, 2000).

These dynamics highlight the urgent need to consider the intersection between dataism and social justice. The promising use of data for social and economic purposes should not be an end in itself, but should be accompanied by a critical analysis of who benefits from this data and how. The struggle for a fairer society cannot be dissociated from the struggle for equity in access to and use of data (Marcuse, 1991).

Public policies that promote transparency in the collection and use of data are essential. In addition, the promotion of digital literacy and equitable access to technologies must be prioritized to ensure that all citizens can actively participate in the digital world. Only in this way we will be able to mitigate the risks that dataism, instead of being a tool for progress, becomes an engine of inequality (Shafranik, 2020).

In short, the relationship between dataism and inequality is complex and multifaceted. While dataism offers the promise of efficiency and innovation, its implications can exacerbate existing social inequalities. The concentration of power over data, the perpetuation of prejudices and the digital divide are issues that require a critical and proactive approach. It is crucial that society as a whole mobilizes to ensure that the data age is not synonymous with inequality, but rather with the opportunity to build a fairer and more equitable future (Brown, 2009).

3 THE IMPACT OF DATAISM ON DEMOCRACY

Dataism, as an ideology that prioritizes data collection and analysis, has a profound and ambiguous impact on contemporary democratic structures. While data analysis has the potential to increase government efficiency and improve public management, it also raises significant questions about transparency, the manipulation of information and the strengthening or weakening of democratic principles (Morozov, 2018).

One of the positive aspects of dataism in the democratic context is its ability to improve public management. Collecting and analyzing large volumes of data can provide leaders with valuable information about needs and preferences of the citizens, allowing them to better meet social demands. Tools based on big data can be used to identify patterns, predict crises and develop more effective public policies (O'Neil, 2019).

In this sense, dataism has the potential to democratize information, allowing governments to make more informed decisions in line with the needs of the population (O'Neil, 2019).

On the other hand, the use of data and algorithms can also threaten the transparency and integrity of democratic institutions. Unequal access to information and the control that some entities exercise over sensitive data can create an environment conducive to the manipulation of public opinion and disinformation. The personalization of content and micro targeting, widely used in political campaigns, raise concerns about the manipulation of the electorate and the erosion of democratic debate (Bauman, 2007).

An emblematic example of this was the Cambridge Analytica scandal, in which the personal data of millions of Facebook users was used to target political messages in order to manipulate electoral behavior. This practice not only compromised the integrity of the democratic process, but also exposed vulnerabilities in data governance structures and the protection of the privacy of citizens (Sen, 2001).

The rise of dataism is also linked to the increase in digital surveillance, which can be exploited by authoritarian regimes to monitor and repress dissent. In contexts where freedom of expression and political participation are limited, data collection technologies

can become tools of social control. Countries like China, for example, have implemented social credit systems that monitor behavior and actions of citizens, rewarding or punishing behavior based on the data collected. This form of surveillance compromises individual freedom and limits the space for political dissent (Andrejevic, 2013).

However, surveillance is not the exclusive prerogative of authoritarian regimes. Democracies have also resorted to surveillance measures under the justification of national security or fighting crime. The use of facial recognition technologies and large-scale monitoring systems raises concerns about privacy and the potential for abuse by the State. Thus, the line between security and control becomes blurred, generating a debate about the limits of surveillance in democratic societies (Brown, 2009).

For democracy to survive and thrive in the age of dataism, it is essential to promote digital literacy and civic engagement. The ability of citizens to understand and question the way their data is collected and used is crucial to ensuring transparency and accountability. Education on the use of data and algorithms can empower citizens to become active participants in the democratic process, not only as consumers of information, but also as critics and agents of change (Brown, 2009).

In addition, public policies must be adapted to ensure that the collection and use of data respects fundamental human rights, including privacy and freedom of expression. This implies the need for regulations that promote algorithmic transparency and limit the concentration of power over data in the hands of large corporations. It is necessary to create an environment in which technology and data serve the interests of society and democracy, rather than being used to undermine them (Sen, 2001).

The balance between enjoying the benefits of dataism and protecting fundamental democratic values is a central challenge for contemporary society. It is therefore imperative that discussions on the intersection between dataism and democracy intensify, promoting ethical data governance and strengthening citizen participation (Bauman, 2007).

4 THE FUTURE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As we move into an era dominated by dataism, the intersection between data, technology and society brings up a series of challenges and opportunities. While the potential of data to transform society is immense, it is crucial to address the ethical, social and political implications that emerge from this new paradigm. These are the main challenges that society must face, and the opportunities that can be seized to ensure the future of dataism (Shafranik, 2020).

We must analyze the concern surrounding the concentration of data in large corporations and governments. This dynamic not only widens economic disparities, but can also lead to political manipulation and the erosion of trust in democratic institutions (Elmer, 2013).

The increasing collection of personal data raises crucial questions about privacy. Increased surveillance practices by both governments and companies can result in the erosion of individual rights. The challenge will be to find a balance between security and the protection of the privacy of citizens by implementing regulations that guarantee the ethical and responsible use of data (Zittrain, Zuboff, 2020).

The digital divide remains a significant barrier. As more and more aspects of everyday life become mediated by data, those without access to digital technologies risk being marginalized. The challenge is to ensure that digital inclusion is a priority, providing access to the internet, digital skills and technological resources for under-represented communities (Dijk, 2015).

The monopoly of data by large companies makes it difficult to be transparent about how data is collected, processed and used, and it can lead to public distrust. Furthermore, the implementation of algorithms must take into account inequalities and unbiased standards in order to mitigate the risks of discrimination and manipulation. However, establishing clear standards and guidelines on data use and algorithmic ethics is a complex challenge that requires collaboration among different sectors of society (Andrejevic, 2013).

However, in the middle of the difficulties of its implementation and publicity, data analysis can lead to the discovery of new insights that make it possible to solve complex social problems. This is because using data to monitor and combat pandemics can result

in better responses to public health crises, while real-time analysis can improve the efficiency of resource allocation in critical sectors (Brown, 2009).

The greater awareness of the population through the knowledge provided by big data also makes greater control mechanisms possible, allowing for more effective state actions and the collection of the power granted by its citizens (O'Neil, 2019).

It is possible for guidelines to guarantee the responsible use of data, promote practices that respect human rights and encourage social justice. This approach can lead to the creation of a more inclusive and ethical data ecosystem (Turkle, 2011).

The future of dataism is a complex issue that involves a series of challenges and opportunities. To ensure that this new era does not result in increased inequality or the erosion of democratic values, it is essential that society takes a proactive approach to data governance, promoting inclusion, transparency and ethics. The balance between innovation and responsibility will be key to shaping a future in which dataism not only improves the efficiency and effectiveness of decisions, but also promotes social justice and citizen participation. How we face these challenges and seize these opportunities will determine the impact of dataism on society and its role in building a fairer and more democratic world (Dreyfus, Drainville, 2000).

CONCLUSION

Dataism, as an emerging ideology, represents an unprecedented transformation in how we understand and interact with the world around us. With the ability to collect, analyze and interpret large volumes of data, this vision promises to optimize decisions and processes in various sectors, from health to public administration. However, its rise is not without significant risks, especially with regard to social inequality and the functioning of democracy (Harari, 2016).

The debates on dataism lead us to reflect on the concentration of power that data gives to large corporations and governments. This centralized control can exacerbate social disparities, making inequality an even more present feature of our societies. Algorithmic decisions, often opaque and based on data that may contain historical biases, have the potential to marginalize communities and perpetuate discrimination. In addition,

the manipulation of information and the use of surveillance technologies threaten the foundations of democracy, creating an environment in which individual freedom is compromised and citizen participation becomes unequal (Zittrain, Zuboff, 2020).

Faced with these challenges, the need for ethical data governance becomes crucial. It is essential that we develop public policies that promote transparency, fair access to information and digital literacy. Promoting an ethical dialogue on the use of data is equally important, ensuring that fundamental principles such as privacy and human rights are respected (Andrejevic, 2013).

The future of dataism, therefore, is not an inevitable fate, but a social construction that depends on the choices we make today. The responsibility lies with all of us - governments, companies and citizens - to shape a digital environment that promotes social justice and strengthens democracy. By balancing technological innovation with the protection of democratic values, we can aspire to a world in which data are not just instruments of control, but tools of empowerment and inclusion. It is essential that we work together to ensure that the data era is marked by fairness, transparency and mutual respect, ensuring that everyone can benefit from a fair and equal digital future.

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