

## The Societal Impact of Digital Technologies and Social Media

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### Abstract

*The massive use of digital technologies and social media platforms during the digital era has ushered in a new era of societal transformation. This study explores the complex effects of the digital age on a range of societal issues, such as identity construction, interpersonal relationships, activism, information sharing, and the digital divide. This study provides important insights into the complexity and nuances of the digital landscape by examining the experiences of various participants from a range of age groups, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The results show that the digital age has fundamentally changed how people create their identities by giving them access to previously unheard-of chances for self-expression and exploration through social media platforms and online groups. Nevertheless, there are moral questions about data privacy, permission, and responsible digital activity. Social interactions have changed significantly as a result of people communicating and interacting with each other online. This raises concerns about the quality and authenticity of these connections as well as the possibility of both beneficial and negative consequences on mental health. The study goes into further detail about how social movements and activism are affected by digital technologies. While the digital era has helped spread information and amplified activists' voices, participants also highlight problems like false information and the necessity for a comprehensive strategy that unifies physical and online activism initiatives. The study comes to a thorough conclusion with recommendations and future strategies for addressing the ethical and privacy issues brought on by the digital era.*

## Introduction

According to Tyagi et al (2020) Digital technology has exploded in the 21st century, and it has become increasingly integrated into our daily lives. These technological developments have changed how we communicate, connect, and traverse the world around us, from the ubiquitous use of smartphones and the internet to the ever-growing universe of social media platforms (Ullah et al., 2019). Sociologists must investigate the tremendous societal consequences of these game-changing instruments as we grow more and more ingrained in the Digital Age. This thesis aims to explore the complex web of ramifications that social media and digital technology have created. We specifically want to look at how they affect activism, social interactions, identity building, and information sharing. Understanding the complicated relationships between society and these digital entities can help us better understand the complexities of modern human interactions, paving the way for wise decision-making and constructive social change (Bozdog, 2023). According to Lavertu et al (2021) A new era of

connectivity and information accessibility has emerged as a result of the 21st century's quick and widespread adoption of digital technology and social media. The borders between the previously distinct realms of the physical and virtual have become hazy, changing the basic nature of human society (Cho et al., 2022). The effects of this technological revolution on social structures and human behavior have grown more significant as digital technologies continue to develop and permeate every area of our life (Sima et al., 2020). This thesis sets out on a quest to understand the complex societal effects of digital technologies and social media, exploring the subtleties of their impact on identity development, social connections, activism, and information distribution.

According to (Çöteli, 2019) People have started using digital platforms as places to express themselves, socialize, and create their identities in this age of continual connectivity. With its enormous selection of digital profiles, avatars, and carefully maintained personas, social media provides a singular window into how we view ourselves and how we want to be seen by others (Jain et al, 2021). Understanding the changing nature of the human experience requires sociologists to know how these digital spaces affect how we present ourselves and how our identities develop. According to Corazza & Glăveanu (2020) Digital technologies have an impact on every aspect of our social fabric, not just personal identification. Online communities have grown to be potent forces for social cohesion, bridging geographical divides and bringing like-minded people together from all over the world. These communities are driven by shared interests and passions (Glaze, 2020). We can learn more about the intricate linkages between the virtual and physical worlds and their effects on interpersonal relationships and community dynamics by examining the dynamics of these virtual connections and how they interact with more conventional face-to-face interactions.

Additionally, the development of digital technologies has altered the character of social movements and activism. Platforms for social media have become into essential instruments for gathering, mobilizing, and amplifying dissenting views (Javed, 2023). The rapid and extensive reach of digital communication has aided in the dissemination of ideas, making it simpler than ever for people and organizations to promote social change. The difficulty of negotiating the complexities of internet activism, as well as the possibility of both positive influence and unforeseen repercussions, come along with this unprecedented power. The movement of information has also been significantly changed in this digital ecology. Currently, social media users, influencers, and citizen journalists all of whom have significant sway on narratives and public opinion share the spotlight with traditional media outlets (Chitanana & Mutsvairo, 2019). People now have the ability to create and consume content thanks to the democratization of information distribution. However, in the digital age, it is very difficult to tell fact from fiction because of the abundance of unverified information and the dissemination of false information.

In addition, it is crucial to address concerns of equity and access as we examine the ramifications of digital technology and social media. The digital divide, which is characterized by unequal access to technology and the internet, has the potential to worsen already-existing socioeconomic inequalities by limiting opportunities and widening the gap between those who have access to these resources and those who do not. This thesis aims to provide light on the complex interactions between digital technology, social media, and modern society through a thorough analysis of these broad subjects. We seek to advance awareness of the complicated link between people and their digital creations and encourage a more educated and inclusive approach to navigating the potential and difficulties of the Digital Age by analysing the societal impact of these transformational forces.

## **Identity Formation in the Digital Age**

Due to the widespread use of digital technology and social media platforms in the modern day, identity creation has undergone tremendous change. Each participant in this study displays their unique approach to self-presentation and identity exploration in the digital sphere, representing a varied spectrum of age groups and gender identities. P001, a 25-year-old woman, actively explores her identity on numerous social media platforms while cultivating a positive and aspirational online presence. P002, a 30-year-old male, on the other hand, adopts a more reserved approach, favouring restricted personal disclosure and preserving a minimum internet presence.

P003, a non-binary participant who is 18 years old, uses social media and online forums to truly express their identity and promote LGBTQ+ rights. P004, a 40-year-old woman, on the other hand, is wary of online interaction, shares little information, and prefers to converse primarily in person with close friends. P005, a male of 22 years old, deliberately creates his online persona with the goal of having a carefully curated online persona. Last but not least, P006, a 27-year-old female, actively explores her identity through connections with like-minded people on social media by sharing her vulnerabilities and participating in conversations. These various identity formations demonstrate the intricate and subtle ways that digital technologies influence how people portray themselves, connect with others, and explore their identities in the modern period.

## **Social Relationships and Connectivity in the Digital Age**

The dynamics of human connection and interaction have changed significantly in the digital age due to the fundamental changes in social interactions and connectedness. The participants in this study exhibit varied levels of engagement with online groups and digital platforms. P001, a 25-year-old woman, uses social media voraciously and boasts a vast network of more than 300 online friendships. They have a strong sense of social connectivity thanks to their regular encounters and active participation in online networks. P002, a 30-year-old male, on the other hand, keeps a more moderate attitude, has about 50 online pals, and occasionally shares content. He doesn't spend much time online, but he enjoys spending time with pals offline. P003, a non-binary person who is 18 years old, connects with like-minded people through social media and alternative news sources to create a community where there may be free talks and support for one another.

P004, a 40-year-old woman, tries to maintain a low profile online. She has 20 online acquaintances and uses social media seldom. Their closest circle of offline pals continues to be their main social network. P005, a male 22-year-old who maintains about 150 online acquaintances and frequently uses video conferences to communicate with pals, creates a balance between virtual and actual encounters. Last but not least, P006, a 27-year-old woman, considers her involvement in three different virtual communities enriching and enables her to connect with people who have similar interests and issues. These several instances show the many different ways that social interactions and connectivity are impacted by digital technologies. While some participants totally commit to online networks, others take a more measured approach, valuing in-person contacts in addition to their online connections. The digital age has created both opportunities and difficulties for social connections, influencing how people connect and stay connected, overcoming geographical barriers, and enabling new types of social cohesiveness.

## **Activism and Social Movements in the Digital Era**

The expansion of digital technologies and social media platforms in the digital age has had a profound impact on activism and social movements. The study's subjects demonstrate a range of online activism activity and how it affects their advocacy efforts. P001, a 25-year-old woman, is active in several internet initiatives that emphasize environmental problems. Her social media presence provides a forum for planning neighbourhood protests and increasing awareness, producing successful and significant results. P002, a 30-year-old guy, on the other hand, plays a more passive role, watching and occasionally sharing racial justice-related information. He acknowledges that internet activism has the ability to increase awareness, but he believes it has little real-world influence. P003, a participant who identifies as non-binary and is 18 years old, actively directs internet campaigns that support LGBTQ+ rights. They support the idea that internet advocacy can be both empowering and inclusive, often enhancing attempts at offline activism.

P004, a 40-year-old woman, wants to maintain a low profile online and prefers to engage with women's rights issues through conventional media. She participates in offline events, which have a minimal effect on her advocacy efforts, despite her limited online activity. P005, a male 22-year-old, is a good example of how crucially important digital activism is to mobilization and amplification. His active involvement as a pro-education reform internet organizer result in frequent rallies and events, which significantly advances his cause. Last but not least, P006, a female activist aged 27 who predominantly participates in online petitions and conversations for humanitarian reasons, sees the promise of internet activism. While acknowledging its function as a springboard for advocacy, she stresses the significance of closing the gap. These many illustrations highlight the complexity of social movements and activism in the digital age. While some people effectively use social media to affect change, others see it as an adjunct to their offline efforts. Advocacy has been transformed by the digital age, which has made it possible for people to mobilize and magnify their voices on a worldwide scale, breaking down geographical borders and promoting group action for social change. It also highlights the necessity for careful analysis of both the potentials and constraints of online activism in order to have a significant social influence.

## **Information Dissemination and Media Consumption**

The broad use of digital technologies and social media platforms has had a profound impact on the way that information is shared and how media is consumed in the digital era. The study's participants demonstrate a variety of online information-sharing and consumption habits. P001, a 25-year-old woman, posts news frequently on social media and relies on online news sources as her main information source. She takes a cautious stance, verifies material before it is shared, and believes conventional media to be accurate. P002, a 30-year-old man, combines both online and TV news sources when he consumes information. He occasionally discusses news with his close friends, but on digital platforms, he runs into false information. P003, a non-binary participant who is 18 years old, uses social media and alternative news sources, making sure to regularly fact-check and cross-reference information to confirm it. They regrettably have also encountered false information on social media platforms, which has led them to criticize the bias in traditional media.

P004, a 40-year-old woman, rarely shares information online and prefers to read print newspapers for news. She thus comes across less false information in her day-to-day life. P005, a 22-year-old man, selectively shares news information online and heavily relies on social media and news applications to stay informed. Unintentionally encountering false information makes him wary of the reliability of sources. Last but not least, P006, a 27-year-old woman, regularly shares trustworthy sources on social media, practices media literacy, and fact-checks

to guarantee accurate information is disseminated. She like the variety of viewpoints found on online news sites. These varied methods of information sharing and media consumption demonstrate how fluid the digital environment is. While some individuals actively examine facts and evaluate information, others unintentionally come into contact with false information. As a result of the democratization of information access brought about by the digital age, everyone may now produce and consume content. However, navigating the complexity of internet information and ensuring the responsible sharing of correct and reliable content also calls for increased discernment. This study highlights the importance of media literacy and critical thinking abilities for successfully navigating the large sea of information in the digital era.

### **Digital Divide and Social Inequality**

The digital divide and socioeconomic inequality have become urgent problems in the modern world, profoundly influencing who has access to and uses digital technologies. The participants in this study come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, shedding insight on the complex interaction between social inequality and the digital divide. P001, a middle-class 25-year-old woman, uses digital platforms frequently and has access to high-speed internet. She is able to easily traverse the digital world thanks to her superior digital abilities, educational possibilities, and university enrolment. P002, a 30-year-old working-class man, has difficulty accessing the internet, which affects his level of total digital involvement. Despite his infrequent usage of digital media, his unemployment limits his access to opportunities made possible by those platforms.

P004, a 40-year-old woman from an upper middle-class family, regularly uses digital platforms and has high-speed internet access. She has a competitive advantage in the world of digital technology thanks to her advanced training and postgraduate studies. P005, a low-income 22-year-old man, has restricted internet connection and finds it difficult to properly exploit modern technology. Despite technical expertise, he still has difficulties because of poor access and underemployment. Last but not least, P006, a middle-class woman of 27 years old, admits the existence of the digital divide and promotes closing it. Her employment situation and access to high-speed internet help her have a favourable attitude on digital potential.

The results highlight the ways in which the digital divide exacerbates already-existing social inequality. People with restricted access to digital technologies have less options for work, education, and general socioeconomic advancement. Those who have better access and more sophisticated digital abilities, however, benefit from improved opportunities in the digital age. Reduce socioeconomic inequality and promote an inclusive society by ensuring equitable access to information, education, and employment opportunities through bridging the digital gap. Collective action is needed to close the digital divide, including regulatory changes and a fair allocation of resources, so that everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, can succeed in the digital age.

### **Ethical and Privacy Concerns**

As technology continues to change our lives, ethical and privacy issues have taken on a greater importance in the digital era. Participants in this study draw attention to a number of moral issues involving data privacy, consent, and ethical technology use. P001, a female user of social media sites who is 25 years old, expresses worry over the gathering and sharing of personal data without express authorization. She worries about the potential misuse of her data and how it might affect her security and privacy. The rise of online surveillance and the commercialization of personal information for individualized advertising concern P002, a 30-year-old male. According to him, such actions violate people's rights to privacy and autonomy,



posing moral concerns about how to strike a balance between convenience and surveillance. P003, a non-binary participant who is 18 years old, underlines the necessity of open data practices and informed permission, particularly when using facial recognition software and biometric data. To protect people's privacy in the digital sphere, they call for stricter data protection laws. P004, a 40-year-old female, acknowledges the possible repercussions of compromised personal information and expresses concerns about data breaches and cyberattacks. To safeguard users from data breaches and identity theft, she emphasizes the significance of effective cybersecurity measures. P005, a male 22-year-old, is concerned about the possible harm that addictive digital technologies could do, especially to one's mental health and general well-being. He highlights moral concerns on the need of IT firms to foster a positive online environment.

Last but not least, P006, a 27-year-old woman, promotes media literacy and digital literacy initiatives to help people navigate the internet world safely. To provide people the knowledge they need to make wise decisions regarding their online presence, she thinks ethical issues should be incorporated into educational curriculum. These various ethical and privacy issues highlight the urgent need for thorough and modern rules that protect people's right to privacy, data protection, and digital rights. Addressing these issues is crucial as technology develops in order to maintain the digital world as a place where people can practice their privacy and autonomy while taking use of technical breakthroughs. Building a more moral and responsible digital world will depend on encouraging ethical behaviour and digital literacy.

### **Future Directions and Recommendations**

The results of this study make it clear that future directions and recommendations are essential for addressing the new opportunities and difficulties brought on by the digital era. To close the digital divide and guarantee equal access to digital technologies, policymakers and other stakeholders must first give top priority to digital inclusion programs. Investment in digital literacy initiatives and infrastructure will enable people from all backgrounds to fully engage in the digital society. In order to safeguard people's personal information from misuse and abuse, data privacy laws must be improved. Organizations will be held accountable for their data practices through stricter enforcement and fines for data breaches. Thirdly, ethical AI development is necessary to guarantee fairness and transparency in AI systems as technology develops. Reducing biases and promoting trust in AI applications will be achieved by implementing rules and standards for moral AI. Fourthly, it's vital to encourage media literacy and digital wellbeing in order to support people in maintaining healthy relationships with digital technology and the ability to critically evaluate information. In an increasingly interconnected society, individuals' mental and emotional health will be supported by knowledge of digital well-being practices.

Additionally, technology businesses should prioritize ethical tech design, putting a strong emphasis on user security and privacy. A more user-centric approach will be facilitated by the inclusion of tools that provide people control over their data and digital experiences. To safeguard people and businesses from online dangers and data breaches, cybersecurity measures must also be improved. Governments and the business sector working together can improve cybersecurity infrastructure and guarantee data protection. Last but not least, multi-stakeholder cooperation is essential to addressing the difficult ethical and privacy issues brought on by the digital age. To create comprehensive rules and frameworks that uphold individual rights while promoting innovation, governments, business executives, academic institutions, and civil society organizations must collaborate. We can cooperatively manage the changing digital terrain and create a more inclusive, moral, and accountable digital society by adopting these future directions and recommendations.

## Conclusion

This study has illuminated the significant influence of the digital age on numerous facets of society. It is clear that technology has changed how we interact, communicate, and engage in the modern world. This transformation can be seen in everything from identity formation to social interactions, activism, information transmission, and the digital divide. The digital age has the potential to be transformative, but it has also raised a number of privacy and ethical issues that require immediate attention. The results highlight how crucial it is to close the digital divide in order to give everyone access to digital technology and possibilities. In order to reduce social inequality and give people from different backgrounds the opportunity to fully engage in the digital world, this gap must be closed. Additionally, a strong structure of data privacy laws is necessary to preserve personal data and shield people from data misuse. To negotiate the complicated difficulties and opportunities posed by the digital era, future directions and recommendations are required. A more moral, open, and responsible digital society will be made possible by putting an emphasis on digital inclusion, responsible AI development, media literacy, ethical tech design, cybersecurity, and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

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