

TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SPACES IN THE DIGITAL AGE: HOW TECHNOLOGY CHANGES THE FACE OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

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Abstract

This research examines the transformation of public space in the digital era and its impact on the patterns and quality of social interaction. Digital technology, especially the internet and social media, has played a significant role in revolutionizing the way individuals communicate and interact. Through a comprehensive literature analysis, this research illustrates how technology has enabled global connectivity, expanded social networks, and created new platforms for cultural expression and collaboration. On the other hand, this research also identifies challenges that arise as a result of these changes, such as social fragmentation, the decline in the quality of face-to-face interactions, and the complexity of digital privacy and ethical issues. This research highlights the importance of societal adaptation to new social norms and the development of digital literacy to effectively manage the impact of this transformation. Thus, this research not only provides insight into the role of technology in changing the face of social interaction but also emphasizes the need for a critical and reflective approach in dealing with these new dynamics.

Keywords: Transformation, Public Space, Digital Era, Technology, Social Interaction

INTRODUCTION

In this digital era, technological developments have brought significant changes to various aspects of human life, including the way we interact and communicate. Public space, which was previously understood as physical places such as parks, squares and cafes, is now increasingly expanded with the existence of virtual space. Social media, digital communication platforms and various applications have created new spaces where people can gather,

discuss and share information without geographical restrictions. This phenomenon gave birth to the term digital public space," which shifts the boundaries of what we consider to be traditional public space (Vekariya et al., 2024).

The changes brought by digital technology not only change the way we interact, but also change the social order and culture of society. Exchange of information and communication that previously required physical presence can now be done quickly and efficiently through various digital platforms (Ritika & Kumar, 2024). For example, meetings that previously had to be attended physically are now mostly conducted via video conference. This creates new flexibility in working and communicating, and allows for greater inclusivity with participation from different locations.

However, this transformation is not free from various challenges and negative impacts. The presence of technology brings new issues such as privacy, data security, and dependence on technology. Interactions carried out online often create emotional distance and reduce the intensity of deep social interactions. There are also concerns about increasing social isolation, even though we are technically more "connected" than ever. These changes force us to find a new balance between physical and digital interactions and understand their long-term impact on interpersonal relationships (Tuli et al., 2024).

On the other hand, digital technology also offers great opportunities for community empowerment. Information spread through social media can encourage active participation in social and political issues, which previously may have been difficult for the wider community to reach. Technology also enables the formation of new communities based on shared interests or goals, enabling them to collaborate and share resources in ways that were previously impossible (Bansal & Chauhan, 2024).

The transformation of public spaces in the digital era forces us to reconsider the definition of togetherness and social interaction. It is important to examine how technology can be used meaningfully to enrich our social experiences, while addressing emerging challenges. Maintaining a balance between the benefits offered by technological advances and maintaining the human aspect of social interactions will be key in dealing with these changes. Thus, we can utilize digital technology to create inclusive, dynamic and empowering public spaces without abandoning the fundamental values of human interaction (Yadav & Chauhan, 2024).

The transformation of public spaces into the digital realm brings various impacts, both positive and negative, which need to be appreciated and addressed wisely. One of the most prominent positive impacts is easy access to information. Digital platforms enable fast and efficient dissemination of information, so that people can be more aware and involved in various social, political and cultural issues (Torne & Pullela, 2024). In addition, digital public spaces enable communication across cultures and countries, bringing new perspectives and facilitating a richer exchange of ideas.

However, behind these benefits, there are also quite serious challenges. For example, the “echo chamber” phenomenon on social media where similar platform algorithms draw individuals into like-minded groups, ultimately reducing the diversity of perspectives and reinforcing prejudice. The spread of misinformation and hoaxes is also a serious problem that threatens the integrity of public information. With increasing dependence on technology, there is also the risk of personal data being exposed which could be misused and threaten individual privacy (Saraswat et al., 2024).

In a social context, although digital technology enables greater connections, this is often accompanied by a reduction in the quality of interactions. Fast and instant digital communication tends to be shallow and lacks depth compared to face-to-face interactions. Feelings of loneliness and social isolation also increase as physical interactions decrease, even though we are technically connected more often. The psychological implications of these changing communication patterns are an important concern for people's mental health (Gupta & Saraswat, 2024).

Therefore, it is important for us to be able to navigate this transformation wisely. Digital education and media literacy are the keys to overcoming emerging challenges. With a good understanding of how to use technology responsibly, we can maximize the benefits of digital public spaces while reducing their negative impacts. In addition, a regulatory and policy framework that is responsive, adaptive and protects the public interest needs to be developed to ensure that technology truly functions as a unifying and empowering tool, not the other way around.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study in this research is qualitative with literature. The literature study research method is a research approach that involves the analysis and synthesis of information from various literature sources that are relevant to a

particular research topic. Documents taken from literature research are journals, books and references related to the discussion you want to research (Earley, M.A. 2014; Snyder, H. 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Changes in Social Dynamics

The transformation of public space into the digital realm has fundamentally changed the way individuals and groups interact. In the digital world, communication occurs almost without geographical and temporal boundaries, allowing people to connect and interact in ways that were previously impossible. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram create spaces where people can share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences instantly, creating a dynamic global dialogue (Windemer, 2023). However, behind this convenience, there is a fundamental change in the quality of social interactions. Often shallow and rushed conversations replace the deep discussions that are more likely to occur in face-to-face interactions.

Furthermore, digital public spaces often create 'echo chamber' and 'filter bubble' phenomena, where social media algorithms tend to display content that matches our views and preferences. This can predispose individuals to become isolated in a homogenous information environment, which minimizes exposure to different perspectives. In the long term, this can reinforce prejudice, increase polarization, and reduce diversity in public dialogue. While digital spaces facilitate greater interaction, they can also orient us into less ideologically heterogeneous groups, hindering the ability to understand and empathize with different points of view (Spivak & Korol, 2024).

However, digital public spaces also open up great opportunities for social empowerment. Online communities and digital forums allow individuals with similar interests or struggles to come together, share information, and support one another. This is especially relevant in the context of modern social movements, where advocacy and protest campaigns can be mobilized quickly through digital platforms (Wojsz, 2022). For example, the MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements gained global momentum due to the digital space's ability to mobilize support and spread awareness. Therefore, despite significant challenges, digital spaces also serve as powerful tools for social empowerment and positive changes in group interaction dynamics.

While the opportunities to connect and empower oneself through digital spaces are significant, there are also risks and challenges that

accompany this change. One of the main risks is the threat to data privacy and security. In digital public spaces, personal data is often collected and used for various purposes that are not always transparent or consented to by users (Diviák et al., 2022). This raises concerns about tracking, surveillance, and potential misuse of information. In addition, the anonymity often provided by digital platforms allows negative behavior such as trolling, cyberbullying, and the spread of false information (hoaxes), which can disrupt social harmony and individual mental well-being.

Additionally, increased reliance on digital interactions has implications for traditional social skills. The habit of communicating online in a short and often informal manner can reduce an individual's ability to communicate effectively in a face-to-face context. The ability to read non-verbal expressions, listen attentively, and respond empathetically may be degraded. This poses special challenges in the world of work and social interactions that require collaboration and interpersonal skills. Education and training may need to adapt to ensure that future generations do not lose these important abilities (Farid, 2024).

On the other hand, digital public spaces can also be a catalyst for social inclusion and democratic participation. Access to information and platforms for opinion allows individuals from diverse backgrounds to take part in public discussions and political processes that they might not otherwise attend. For example, e-petitions, digital campaigns, and online discussions can give voice to those who have been excluded from decision-making processes (Gladkikh & Vyatkina, 2022). Therefore, the challenges that arise from the digital public sphere require us to develop strategies that optimize its benefits while mitigating its risks. With the right approach, digital spaces can become a vehicle that enriches social interactions, promotes inclusion and strengthens social cohesion.

Participation and Accessibility

Technology has brought about a significant revolution in terms of participation and accessibility in public spaces, enabling various levels of society to more easily engage in public discourse and social activities. In this digital era, online platforms such as social media, discussion forums, and community participation applications enable every individual, regardless of geographic location or physical condition, to contribute to a wide range of conversations. For example, someone who lives in a remote area or suffers from a physical disability can now attend virtual community meetings, provide

feedback on public policy, or even organize social movements using digital technology (Wolter, 2022). In this way, technology not only reduces physical barriers to participation, but also expands the reach and inclusion of societal voices that may have previously gone unheard.

In addition to facilitating broad participation, technology also increases the accessibility of essential public information and services. Governments, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations are increasingly using websites, apps, and digital platforms to provide information that is easily accessible to the public. E-governance, for example, allows citizens to access government services, submit applications, or pay taxes online without having to come to a physical office. This is especially beneficial for community groups who may have difficulty accessing physical services, such as the elderly, housewives with large family responsibilities, and those with limited mobility. This technology can help reduce access gaps and ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to utilize public services (Hale & Coit, 2023).

However, while technology offers great potential to increase accessibility and participation, there are several challenges that must be overcome to ensure true inclusion. One of the biggest challenges is the digital divide, which refers to disparities in access to technology between different groups in society. Not everyone has the same access to digital devices, high-speed internet, or adequate digital literacy. For example, people with low incomes, the elderly, and minority groups often experience barriers in accessing and using this technology (Aznan et al., 2022). Therefore, to maximize the benefits of technology in increasing participation and accessibility, it is important for public policies and education programs to focus on reducing this digital divide. With an inclusive and sustainable approach, technology can become a very powerful tool to empower all levels of society and ensure that public spaces are accessible to everyone without exception (Lynch & Miller, 2023).

Overcoming the digital divide requires a holistic approach involving various stakeholders, including government, the private sector and civil society. Governments can play a key role through policy initiatives that ensure adequate digital infrastructure, especially in remote and less developed areas. Cheap digital device and internet subsidy programs can also help disadvantaged groups to access technology (Findley & Crutchfield, 2022). In addition, educational programs regarding digital literacy need to be implemented at various age levels, from basic education to training for the elderly, to ensure that all individuals have the necessary skills to utilize

technology effectively. Collaboration with the private sector, such as technology companies and internet service providers, is also critical to developing innovative and sustainable solutions to address this gap (Boye, 2022).

Apart from initiatives from government and the private sector, the role of civil society and non-profit organizations is also no less important. These organizations can serve as a link between technology and underserved communities, and develop specialized programs that address the specific needs of these groups. For example, local communities can be trained to use digital applications that help them access health services, education and other important information. In addition, the existence of public access centers, such as libraries equipped with computers and internet, can be a short and long term solution in increasing digital access (Lindemann & Ariel, 2024). Thus, this cross-sector collaboration will strengthen an inclusive digital ecosystem and help reduce existing gaps.

In the future, continued efforts to expand accessibility and participation through technology will not only be inclusive, but also adaptive to rapid technological change and development. Technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT) can be used to make public spaces more welcoming and accessible to everyone (Xu et al., 2023). For example, sensors and AI technology can help in creating more accessible environments for individuals with disabilities, such as pathways that can detect and provide sound feedback for the visually impaired. Additionally, governments and community organizations need to continue to monitor and evaluate the impact of these technologies in an effort to ensure that they truly increase accessibility and participation for all levels of society. With an evolving and adaptive approach, we can ensure that the benefits of technology are felt equally by all levels of society.

Quality of Social Interaction

Social interactions in digital environments have a significant positive impact, especially when it comes to connecting individuals living in different geographical locations. Digital technology allows people to stay connected with family and friends, regardless of physical distance. Social media platforms, video calls, and instant messaging applications facilitate fast and efficient communication, strengthen social relationships and enable global collaboration (Chen et al., 2023). In addition, online communities can be a supportive place for various interests and hobbies, as well as giving individuals

access to join groups with similar interests, which may be difficult to find in real life.

However, negative impacts also arise from social interactions in the digital environment. One of the main issues is the emergence of "echo chambers," where individuals are only exposed to information and opinions that reinforce their own views. This can encourage polarization and reduce opportunities for healthy and balanced discussions (Nur & Anggraeni, 2023). Additionally, digital social interactions are often less immersive than face-to-face interactions, which can lead to feelings of isolation and a lack of emotional engagement. The phenomenon of cyberbullying and the spread of fake news (hoaxes) can also affect individuals' mental health and the security of the information they receive.

In addition, the presence of digital technology in social interactions can distract attention and reduce the quality of time spent together. For example, the presence of a cell phone at the dinner table when gathering with family can divide attention and reduce the quality of the conversation (Kilani & Rajaobelina, 2022). Thus, although digital technology offers convenience and various opportunities for interaction, it is important to be aware of its limitations and use it wisely to ensure that the quality of social interactions is maintained. Efforts to create a balance between digital and face-to-face interactions can help optimize the benefits of technology while minimizing its negative impacts.

To improve the quality of social interactions in a digital environment, several strategies can be implemented. One of them is evaluating and managing time for technology use. By setting time limits on how long a person spends on social media or other digital platforms, individuals can ensure that technology does not dominate their lives and that face-to-face interactions still receive attention (West et al., 2024). Additionally, it is important to choose digital platforms that support positive communication and avoid online spaces that are prone to conflict or polarization.

Digital education is also an important aspect in improving the quality of social interactions. By providing education about digital literacy and internet ethics, people can better understand how to use technology wisely and responsibly. This includes an understanding of how to recognize and counter fake news, privacy protection practices, and developing a positive attitude toward online communications. This education can be started early in the school and family environment so that the younger generation can be better prepared to face challenges in the digital world (Dossou, 2023).

Finally, to ensure more meaningful social interactions, the technology itself can be optimized. Technological developments such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) offer more immersive and immersive experiences, which can enrich social interactions with sensations that are closer to real life. Additionally, social media platforms and communication applications need to introduce and strengthen features that encourage positive interactions, such as better comment moderation, algorithms that prioritize useful content, and an emphasis on diversity of perspectives (Yusdiana et al., 2023). Thus, technology is not only a means of communication, but also a tool to improve the quality of social interaction in a digital environment.

Cultural and Social Implications

The digitalization of public spaces has brought many significant changes in the way people interact and shape culture. One of the main implications is the emergence of digital culture, where social media has become the center of many people's social lives. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow individuals to share thoughts, images, and videos in real time, which accelerates the spread of information and cultural trends. In addition, this digitalization introduces new phenomena such as virality and cultural memes, which can change public discourse and create a homogeneous global culture (Maxwell & Leat, 2022). On the other hand, this also results in social fragmentation, where special interest groups may form closed communities that may reinforce their own beliefs and behavior without external challenge.

Another emerging change is in the way we consume and produce cultural content. With easy access to platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and TikTok, anyone has the opportunity to become a creator and find a global audience. This creates a new dynamic where independent artists and creators can gain recognition without needing to go through traditional channels. As a result, we are seeing a diversification of cultural content with a multitude of unique perspectives and new voices gaining ground. However, on the negative side, this can also create pressure to continuously produce content to satisfy platform algorithms, which can lead to a decline in the quality and originality of cultural and artistic works (Park, 2022).

From a social perspective, the digitalization of public spaces has changed the way we interact and build interpersonal relationships. The ability to connect with other people around the world in a matter of seconds has

opened up new possibilities for collaboration and exchange of ideas. However, this also affects relationship dynamics, where face-to-face interactions may decrease and be replaced by communication via screens. Society must now navigate new norms in digital ethics, including matters of privacy, consensus, and acceptable behavior in online spaces. Thus, the digitalization of public spaces demands continuous adaptation from individuals and communities in understanding and carrying out healthy and constructive social interactions in the digital era (Thanises & Meshelemiah, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The transformation of public spaces in the digital era has created various new dynamics in our social interactions. Technology, with the increasingly widespread use of the internet and digital devices, has changed the way we communicate and interact with each other. Social media and digital platforms are enabling unprecedented connectivity, opening the door to global collaboration and faster cultural exchange. They enable anyone to be a producer and consumer of content, blurring the lines between creator and audience, and introducing new forms of cultural expression such as virality and memes.

However, this transformation does not only have positive impacts. There are also significant challenges to overcome, such as social fragmentation and a decline in the quality of face-to-face interactions. This new dynamic forces society to make adjustments in social norms and digital ethics. Society needs to develop the capacity to navigate interpersonal relationships in online contexts, where issues of privacy and acceptable behavior are becoming increasingly complex.

Overall, technology has changed the face of social interactions in profound and inevitable ways. Although it brings many opportunities, the digitalization of public spaces also demands a high level of adaptation and awareness from all of us to ensure that this change brings maximum benefits without sacrificing important aspects of healthy and constructive human interaction.

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