THE DIGITAL ERA IS CHARACTERISED BY THE TRANSITION FROM MASS MEDIA TO A MASS OF MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the big changes that the digital age has brought about in how people communicate, share information, and interact with each other. This thorough investigation covers the change from analogue to digital storage devices, the rise of a highly connected online society, and the clear decline of traditional media's dominance. These four ideas are at the heart of this era: interactivity, which encourages dynamic engagement; momentariness, which emphasises how temporary digital content is; hyper textuality, which weaves information together in a non-linear way; and convergence, which brings together different types of media on digital platforms. Getting to the bottom of how the digital age has changed everything, from how content is made and distributed to how economic models have changed and how people behave, has been the main goal of this investigation. The widespread dissemination of false information in this situation poses a major challenge in ensuring people have access to accurate information while protecting their right to free speech. Furthermore, the complex relationship between sociability and individual autonomy highlights the paradox that comes with the mixing of social interactions and personal isolation in

this digital world. This study tries to help us better understand the social and cultural effects of living in the digital age by using careful analysis and academic inquiry. This paper tries to shed light on underlying dynamics, identify tensions, and describe significant changes, giving a more complete picture of the wide range of opportunities and problems that exist in the digital world that is always changing.

Keywords: *Digital era, characteristics of mass communication, social networks, content creation and information dissemination,*

INTRODUCTION

The velocity of change precipitated by the digital revolution has led to a disconcertingly swift transformation, characterized by the pervasive integration of a diverse array of technological innovations. Over the initial two decades of the twenty-first century, an array of technologies and their associated products have become both ubiquitous and integral to daily life. These innovations encompass high-speed and mobile Internet connectivity, platforms like blogs and podcasts, tools such as RSS feeds and Google News engines, social media giants like YouTube and Facebook, microblogging platforms such as Twitter, digital content distribution platforms like iTunes, and a multitude of portable devices including mobile phones, touchscreens, HD and 3D displays, Wi-Fi, GPS systems, iPods, iPads, iPhones, smartphones, tablets, e-readers, and Internet-enabled televisions. This digital metamorphosis further extends to image storage devices such as digital cameras, facilitating the creation and management of extensive media libraries (Smith, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020).

Notwithstanding the remarkable advancement in information transmission technology, the Internet's evolutionary trajectory can be broadly divided into two pivotal stages: the inception of Web 1.0 followed by the subsequent evolution into Web 2.0. The former phase, epitomized by pioneers like Netscape and Google, laid the foundational infrastructure, while the latter stage ushered in a paradigm shift characterized by user-generated content and participation through platforms like Myspace, YouTube, and Wikipedia (O'Reilly, 2005; Shirky, 2008). The advent of these technologies has precipitated profound changes in communication dynamics, disrupting the previously entrenched hierarchical structure of mass communication and inducing an identity crisis within traditional media (Jenkins, 2006; Boczkowski & Lievrouw, 2008).

Within the purview of R. Le Champion's research (2013: 13–15), a discernible transformation has emerged, wherein a multitude of media entities have begun supplanting the conventional paradigm of mass media. This shift is attributed to the growing communicative prowess of audiences and their capacity to actively generate content. The author delineates the intrinsic characteristics of the digital era, which govern alterations in information dissemination and audience behaviour. An intricate exploration of the interplay between conventional and social media is undertaken, delving into pertinent aspects of media content, distribution, perception, and perhaps most crucially, media identity and its societal role.

This investigation further encompasses the analysis of individual behavioural shifts and the potential consequences thereof. In sum, the rapid march of the digital age has catalysed a sweeping reconfiguration of the technological landscape, engendering a paradigm shift in communication dynamics and societal structures. This scholarly inquiry, grounded in R. Le Champion's research, scrutinizes the profound implications of these changes, unravelling the intricate tapestry of digital transformation and its cascading effects on information, communication, and societal fabric.

DIGITAL ERA CHARACTERISTICS

These innovations encompass high-speed and mobile Internet connectivity, platforms like blogs and podcasts, tools such as RSS feeds and Google News engines, social media giants like YouTube and Facebook, microblogging platforms such as Twitter, digital content distribution platforms like iTunes, and a multitude of portable devices including mobile phones, touchscreens, HD and 3D displays, Wi-Fi, GPS systems, iPods, iPads, iPhones, smartphones, tablets, e-readers, and Internet-enabled televisions, thus substantiating the seismic nature of this digital transformation (Smith, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020).

Despite the remarkable progress in information transmission technology, the evolutionary trajectory of the Internet can be broadly divided into two pivotal stages: the inception of Web 1.0, followed by the subsequent evolution into Web 2.0. The former phase, epitomised by pioneers like Netscape and Google, laid the foundational infrastructure for digital communication, while the latter stage ushered in a paradigm shift characterised by user-generated content and participation through platforms like Myspace, YouTube, and Wikipedia (O'Reilly, 2005; Shirky, 2008). The advent of these technologies has precipitated profound changes in communication dynamics, disrupting the previously entrenched hierarchical structure of mass communication and inducing an identity crisis within traditional media (Jenkins, 2006; Boczkowski & Lievrouw, 2008).

Le Champion's research (2013: 13–15) reveals a discernible transformation, wherein a multitude of media entities have begun supplanting the conventional paradigm of mass media. This shift is attributed to the growing communicative prowess of audiences and their capacity to actively generate content. The author delineates the intrinsic characteristics of the digital era, which govern alterations in information dissemination and audience behaviour.

An intricate exploration of the interplay between conventional and social media is undertaken, delving into pertinent aspects of media content, distribution, perception, and perhaps most crucially, media identity and its societal role. This investigation further encompasses the analysis of individual behavioural shifts and their potential consequences.

Moreover, P. Josephe (2008) identifies quintessential features demarcating the digital age from preceding epochs. Noteworthy among these features are interactivity, momentariness, mass authorship, reduction of physical spaces, and cost reduction. Interactivity is conceptualised as a bidirectional discourse between communication partners that enables various levels of participation encompassing selection, construction, and communication (Boullier, 2000). The

digital era manifests instant communication responses subsequent to prolonged periods of information generation, distribution, and consumption. Furthermore, the disappearance of physical confines is increasingly conspicuous, while the phenomenon of mass authorship transforms information consumers into potential content creators.

In a comparative exploration of pre-digital and digital audiences, Rashid, M. H., et al (2022). & Monosson (2005) uses the method of opposition, contrasting traits such as heterogeneous versus fragmented audiences. According to M. Castells' concept of "digital exclusion" (1996), this highlights the changing nature of audience dynamics and the advent of digital inclusion. The concept of disorganisation, as opposed to fragmentation, more accurately captures the contemporary audience landscape, while the Internet has fostered a global sense of belonging among users (John-François Fogel & Bernardo Patino, 2013).

Concomitantly, the hybrid nature and convergence of digital content preparation are prominent features of the digital age (L. Manovich, 2001). Hybridity encompasses the circulation of diverse information types and expression styles, while convergence operates on multiple levels, including means, time, geography, and roles (Fogel & Patrick, 2013). As technology blurs traditional boundaries, notions of space and mobility undergo transformation, resulting in a new mode of engagement with digital media (Flichy, 1997).

In the digital age's rapid evolution has engendered significant shifts in communication dynamics, information distribution, and audience participation. The alteration of media landscapes, the emergence of hybrid content, and the alteration of audience behaviour highlight these transitions. The discourse surrounding the digital era encapsulates a complex interplay of technological, social, and cultural factors that collectively shape contemporary society's interaction with information and media.

TRADITIONAL AND NEW COMMUNICATION

The paradigm of demassification in the context of the digital age has led to significant disruptions, causing crises in media identity, public awareness, social bonds, and democratic institutions. Historically, daily newspapers and subsequent audio-visual mass communication channels have been pivotal institutions for the effective functioning of state administrations. Mass communication played a multifaceted role, serving educational and informational functions while cultivating public discourse and catering to the needs of the general populace (Habermas, 1978: 53). However, the advent of the virtual digital realm has disordered public space in a disruptive manner, challenging established communication norms (Jodoin, 2014: 51–58).
S. Jodoin (2014) juxtaposes conventional and new media across five dimensions, shedding light on the transformation of communication dynamics:

Transparency: Traditional media establish a certain level of transparency by presenting content in segmented formats. In contrast, new media push the boundaries of openness, even releasing

documents through platforms like Wikileaks. However, this influx of unverified information undermines the reliability and control of communication processes.

Dissemination and Exchange of Information: Traditional media primarily produce and disseminate information, while new media provide access to diverse forms and lengths of material. The concept of information freedom is a cornerstone, where traditional media adhere to legal and ethical codes while new media champion unrestricted expression, fostering a more egalitarian society.

Autonomy: Traditional media are characterised by hierarchical organisational structures, delineated roles, and a sense of subordination. In contrast, new media emphasise individual autonomy, diminishing central control and enabling self-expression.

Influence: Traditional mass communication holds power in the hands of the owners of information creation and distribution. In the digital era, the ability to exert influence is democratised, with virtually anyone capable of impacting others.

Modern media present a range of concerns (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001):

1.	The perpetuation of an endless information cycle generates continuous tension and cognitive overload among consumers.
2.	Source credibility supersedes the importance of interpretation, prompting audiences to seek raw data and primary sources.
3.	Accessibility to content production is democratised, as individuals can create content without specialised training or credentials.
4.	The lack of trustworthy filters and assessment criteria has increased scepticism surrounding information credibility.
5.	The proliferation of the click culture has led to an influx of sensational and inconsequential information, diluting its impact.

The emergence of social media at the juncture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries addressed specific communicational needs and encouraged volunteer contributions to open publishing websites. This shift reflects a broader realisation that education and communication are not the exclusive domain of experts but should involve all citizens. Notable examples include the Huffington Post and Demand Media, which highlight both collaborative and industrial approaches to information creation (Rauline, 2010).

Hyper textuality, a hallmark of content creation in new media, integrates connections to other sources within information material. However, while this facilitates rapid information absorption, it also presents challenges in managing the overwhelming content volume (Tremayne, 2005). Journalists, along with other internet users, are ensnared in the present-oriented, rapid-fire nature

of digital media, often compromising historical context and future perspectives. The digital age confronts media with the digital age confronts media with audiences' reluctance to pay for consumed content, leading to debates about access restrictions and the right to freedom of expression (Poulet, 2009). Moreover, content marketing blurs the line between journalism and advertising, as advertisements are presented as journalistic pieces to enhance profitability. F. Braudel's (1988) model of a new digital capitalism delineates distinct layers, involving Internet users, internet giants (GAFA: Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon), and data-driven decision-makers. The monetization of data, the most valuable asset in the digital realm, has transformed content search engines into tools for advertising businesses and users into unpaid contributors (Fuller, 2010: 58).

This evolution has been termed "emotional marketing," where individuals' behaviours and preferences are collected and manipulated to drive advertising efforts. In essence, the transition to demassification has instigated multifaceted shifts in media dynamics, introducing challenges related to transparency, autonomy, credibility, and sustainability. The digital landscape has transformed not only the structures of media industries but also the roles of journalists, consumers, and advertisers within them.

PARADOXES OF DIGITAL ERA

The contemporary era, characterised by its digital landscape, has engendered a state of affairs both exhilarating and disconcerting for its inhabitants. The advent of new media, celebrated for dismantling traditional communication hierarchies and dissolving limitations, is often hailed as the embodiment of genuine freedom of expression due to its apparent absence of constraints or regulations. Advocates argue that while mainstream media under specific organisational control fosters a homogeneous society with standardised perspectives, the rise of new media serves to educate individuals. Proponents of participatory democracy and discourse contend that the digital realm's symmetrical structure nurtures an equitable link between message senders and receivers.

However, Rosnay (2006) & Rashid, M. H., & Sipahi, E. (2021). posits that conventional media have historically and currently propelled social democratic processes, whereas the digital age, which replaces public discourse with insular dialogues among like-minded individuals, threatens to push democracy to its brink. Internet-based interactions frequently lead to confirmation of preexisting beliefs rather than intellectual conflict, creating an echo chamber society. This phenomenon, termed "pair society" by S. Tisseron (2001), arises from horizontal digital networks forming closed groups, which may result in a democracy of the like-minded. Furthermore, the speed inherent to the internet's functioning renders it incompatible with the deliberate pace of conventional political and public institutions, situating it on the fringes of political life and bureaucratic decision-making processes.

The internet's propensity to segregate people based on characteristics like ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, religion, and interests undermines the effectiveness of the

digital sphere in fostering collective consciousness (Fogel & Patino, 2013). Additionally, the spread of unreliable content by amateur providers jeopardises the accuracy of online information (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001).

In their pursuit to establish themselves as credible alternatives to professional media, social networks challenge the established relationships between content producers and consumers. Consequently, unfiltered and prohibited content disseminates unchecked on platforms like Twitter, raising concerns about its detrimental impact on mental well-being. Amidst these shifts, scepticism surrounds the actions of major internet players such as Google and Facebook, often seen as encroaching on and polluting public space by serving as repositories for others' content (Fogel & Patino, 2013). The resultant lack of trust in information breeds rumours, manipulation, and disinformation, diminishing the quality of public discourse. M. Castells (1996) characterises the digital model as a departure from conventional media's one-size-fits-all approach to mass self-communication, or new individualism, which erodes social bonds.

Moreover, Baudrillard (1999) contends that virtual technologies engender a secondary reality, distorting genuine experiences. This transformation of traditional experiences, accompanied by a blurring of temporal and spatial perceptions, culminates in a timeless and spaceless network. T. Ericsen (2001) identifies two overarching developments of this age: the individualization of information consumption and the manipulation of time, both of which exert profound influence.

In this landscape, social skills morph as emotions are transmitted without facial cues, intonation, or gestures, solely through agreed-upon indicators. In essence, individuals become content DJs, orchestrating information flows and links. Social media platforms facilitate novel communication behaviours, exemplified by the abundance of "friends" on sites like Facebook and Twitter, notwithstanding the superficiality of connections (Kaergyt & Liubinien, 2015).

Desynchronization and delocalization redefine social spaces, contributing to collective individualism, a state where individuals are physically together yet fundamentally isolated (Compiegne, 2011). The digital milieu merges textuality, visual elements, mass effects, individuality, and interactivity within a multidimensional screen (Peiulis, 2012: 24–52), altering users' perceptions of time and distance (Rantanen, 2009).

As a self-organising system, the internet's evolution is driven not only by technological advances but also by users' behaviours and needs (Leviathan, T. Hobbes, 2010). This fluidity encourages linkages, engagement, and activity, turning users into contributors (Smith, 2010). The internet's transformative power lies in its capability to connect individuals with shared interests rather than diffuse information indiscriminately (Smith, 2010).

The ubiquity of the digital era impacts individuals' lives, provoking attention deficits, phantom vibration syndromes, and addiction-like behaviours (Fogel & Patino, 2013). These experiences of hyperactivity and constant connection reflect the culture of the present tense, creating a perpetual state of surprise and communication-induced shock. The comparison of an Internet user to Faustus,

ceding personal identity, thoughts, and emotions to digital space, resonates (Smith, 2010). This transcendental engagement, devoid of physicality, reflects a realm where the self becomes communal property, blurring the lines between private and public. Amidst this sense of connectivity, individuals become captives of an ever-encroaching digital realm (Manovich, 2001).

The digital age's impact on communication, democracy, social bonds, and individual experiences is profound and multifaceted. The democratising potential of the internet coexists with concerns about echo chambers, unreliable information, and the erosion of traditional societal norms. The omnipresent digital environment's influence extends to mental health and social interactions, transforming the very nature of human existence.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the digital age has ushered in a plethora of transformative qualities that reshape communication paradigms and societal dynamics. Interactivity, momentariness, mass authorship, and the erosion of physical boundaries have become hallmark features of this era. Open access and hyperlinks have facilitated unparalleled access to an immense repository of information, altering the ways in which individuals engage with knowledge. The convergence of communication forms, exemplified by hybrid and diverse content formats, underscores the novel landscape of modern communication.

At the heart of the digital age's impact is a redefinition of communication behaviour, transitioning individuals from passive consumers to active contributors. This transformation holds implications for social structures as new frameworks like digital democracy blur the lines between professionals and amateurs, content creators and recipients. Civic media movements, exemplified by information volunteers and emerging digital democracies, contribute to the demassification of media and challenge traditional hierarchies. Yet, the proliferation of narrow, like-minded discussions raises concerns about citizen awareness, information credibility, freedom of expression, and the vitality of democratic processes.

Compounded by the phenomenon of "capitalist communism," where reluctance to pay for information abounds, content creation costs decrease, leading to a proliferation of low-cost industrial content production aimed at maximising profits. This shift in content creation habits further intertwines with the altered behaviours brought about by new media. Virtual communication fosters a distortion of time and space perception, while fractured attention spans struggle to grapple with the overwhelming flow of information, often of uncertain value. The digital age's multifaceted influence on communication, information dissemination, and social structures underscores the complexity of this transformative era. While it brings forth unprecedented opportunities for connection, expression, and democratisation, it also necessitates careful consideration of its challenges, from information reliability to the impact on civic discourse. As we navigate this dynamic landscape, critical analysis and continued research are

paramount to comprehending and harnessing the potential of the digital age for the betterment of society.

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