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**Atıf Künyesi | Citation Info**

Agayev, T. (2025). Digital Modernity and Social Integration: The Impact of New Media on Social Structure  
*Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi*, 12 (3), 761-781.

## **Digital Modernity and Social Integration: The Impact of New Media on Social Structure**

### **Abstract**

*This article examines the impact of digital modernity on social integration in the context of the development of new media. It analyzes the changes brought about in the social structure of society by new media platforms (social networks, blogs, interactive forums, etc.). The main objective is to reveal how digital communication tools shape interpersonal relationships and influence levels of public trust and participation. The research is based on both theoretical models and empirical studies. The findings of the article indicate that new media can both strengthen social integration and, at times, increase fragmentation, leading to polarization within society.*

**Keywords:** Digital Modernity, Social Integration, New Media, Information Society, Social Structure, Digital Transformation, Virtual Communities, Social Capital

## **Dijital Modernite ve Toplumsal Bütünleşme: Yeni Medyanın Toplumsal Yapı Üzerindeki Etkisi**

### **Öz**

*Bu makale, yeni medyanın gelişimi bağlamında dijital modernitenin toplumsal bütünleşme üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Yeni medya platformlarının (sosyal ağlar, bloglar, interaktif forumlar, vb.) toplumun sosyal yapısında meydana getirdiği değişiklikleri analiz etmektedir. Temel amaç, dijital iletişim araçlarının kişiler arası ilişkileri nasıl şekillendirdiğini ve kamusal güven ve katılım düzeylerini nasıl*



*etkilediğini ortaya koymaktır. Araştırma hem teorik modellere hem de ampirik çalışmalara dayanmaktadır. Makalenin bulguları, yeni medyanın hem sosyal bütünlüğe güçlendirileceğini hem de zaman zaman parçalanmayı artırarak toplum içinde kutuplaşmaya yol açabileceğini göstermektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Dijital Modernite, Toplumsal Büyünlüğe, Yeni Medya, Bilgi Toplumu, Toplumsal Yapı, Dijital Dönüşüm, Sanal Topluluklar, Sosyal Sermaye*

## **Introduction**

In the 21st century, the rapid pace of technological development and its impact on human life have profoundly transformed the social structure of society. In particular, the phenomenon of digital modernity, which has emerged through the widespread adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT), is leaving new marks on social institutions, public relations, and individual behavior patterns. One of the main driving forces behind this process is new media – communication forms that are internet-based, interactive, and predominantly shaped by user-generated content. Unlike the unidirectional information transmission model of traditional media, new media offers a multifaceted communication format that enables social interaction. This format accelerates the flow of information among various groups within society, strengthens interpersonal connections, and increases opportunities for participation in public processes. As a result, social integration – that is, individuals' sense of belonging to society, adherence to social norms, and involvement in collective action – gains new forms and meanings under these conditions. This article aims to analyze the impact of new media on social integration in the context of digital modernity from a sociological perspective. By referring to contemporary sociological theories, empirical research, and global trends, both the integrative and disintegrative outcomes of this process are examined. The topic is of theoretical interest to the field of sociology and also carries practical significance for the formulation of social policy in the information society.

### *\*Relevance of the Problem*

The penetration of digital technologies into all areas of society, especially the transformation of how people receive, share, and interact with information, has brought new directions to sociological research. Studies on the impact of new media on social relations show that these technologies can, on the one hand, strengthen social integration, but on the other hand, increase the risks of individual isolation, information polarization, and social fragmentation. In this regard, the impact of new media on the structure of society in the era of digital modernity is a relevant scientific and social issue.

*\*Purpose and Objectives of the Research*

The main purpose of this research is to examine how new media influences the process of social integration within the framework of digital modernity from a sociological context. To achieve this purpose, the following objectives are set:

- To provide a conceptual explanation of digital modernity and new media;
- To determine the role of new media in information circulation and social interaction processes within society;
- To analyze the potential of new media to foster social integration or generate disintegration;
- To assess this process through the lens of contemporary sociological theories.

*\*Object and Subject of the Research*

The object of the research is the digitized social structures of modern society. The subject of the research is the impact of new media on processes of social integration and the sociological outcomes of this influence.

*\*Methodological Foundations*

The methodological basis of the research is grounded in classical and contemporary sociological theories, particularly A. Giddens' theory of structuration, M. Castells' concept of the network society, R. Putnam's notion of social capital, and J. Habermas' theory of the public sphere. The research also employs methods such as analytical-synthetic analysis, comparative approach, scientific generalization, and content analysis.

*\*Scientific Novelty of the Research*

The scientific novelty of the article lies in its comprehensive evaluation of the impact of new media on social integration under the conditions of digital modernity, based on both theoretical and empirical foundations. This approach allows for the study of new media not merely as a tool for information dissemination but also as a factor that shapes social structure.

## **1. Main Part**

*\*The Concept of Digital Modernity*

Digital modernity is a phase shaped by the rapid development of information and communication technologies, which has deeply transformed the social, cultural, economic, and political structures of society. Unlike classical modernity, this phase is characterized by the central role of technology in determining social relations, and by the centrality of information production, dissemination, and usage in everyday life.

In sociological literature, the concept of digital modernity is explained from several perspectives:

- *Technological aspect* – Technological tools such as new media, artificial intelligence, automation, big data, and digital platforms play a dominant role in all spheres of life (Ismayilov & Bayramova, 2022b; Ismayilov, 2022).
- *Social aspect* – Relationships become networked, communication forms are transformed through digital tools, and individuals increasingly express themselves through "digital identities."
- *Cultural aspect* – A new lifestyle is shaped by digital technologies, redefining social behavior, consumption habits, and culture in an "online" context.

Sociologist Manuel Castells, in his concept of the "network society," explains digital modernity through the formation of global information flows and a network-based social structure. According to Castells, the development of information technologies is not merely a technical change but also a process of social transformation. Digital modernity constitutes both the ideological and practical foundation of this transformation.

On the other hand, Anthony Giddens' concept of "reflexive modernity" also plays an important role in interpreting digital modernity. He argues that the modern individual, due to the constant flow of information, increasingly makes daily decisions reflexively—that is, through continuous assessment of information and re-positioning of the self. Digital modernity is also analyzed through postmodern approaches. Jean Baudrillard describes this phase as the era of "hyperreality." According to him, new media produces simulacra—substitute representations—that replace reality and thus re-code the social structure of society. Thus, digital modernity is not merely an era of technological innovation; it is a new sociological phase in which the structure of social relations, collective identity, and public institutions undergoes a fundamental transformation. While some values of traditional modernity are preserved in this phase, their form and spheres of application change significantly.

*\*Functions and Social Role of New Media*

New media—unlike traditional media—is a system of digital information platforms that offers interactive, user-oriented, multi-source, and real-time communication capabilities. Selwyn, 2004). Social networks (Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter)), blogs, web portals, YouTube,

podcasts, and similar platforms are the main forms of new media. The social functions and roles of new media manifest in various spheres of society:

- *Information production and dissemination function:* New media enables individuals to become producers of information. This gives rise to a new role referred to as the “prosumer” (producer + consumer) (Qasımlı & Məhəmmədli, 2024a). Today, it is not only journalists or media organizations that create content—every user can generate and share information on a global scale. This leads to the democratization and diversification of information circulation.
- *Social integration and networking function:* New media provides a favorable platform for communication and interaction among people (Kazimi & Mahammadli, 2021). Through social networks, individuals establish relationships, join virtual communities, and group around common interests. This can enhance social integration, as people feel a sense of belonging to a particular group.
- *Personal identity and self-expression function:* New media offers individuals the opportunity to freely express their social identities. Users can adopt different roles on different platforms and build public personas by customizing their profiles. From a socio-psychological perspective, this contributes both to personal development and to the process of adaptation to society.

#### *\*Public Participation and Activism Function*

New media engages users in public discussions and stimulates social and political activism (Muhammadli, 2023). These platforms make it possible to launch campaigns, gather public support, and express freedom of thought. In this way, a foundation is created for the strengthening of civil society institutions.

#### *\*Intercultural Interaction Function*

The borderless nature of new media increases interaction between different cultures and fosters new forms of social communication. This can contribute to cultural integration and greater tolerance in the information-driven phase of globalization.

#### *\*The Impact of New Media on Social Integration*

New media functions as a dual phenomenon, capable of both strengthening and weakening social integration. The dynamics of digital platforms directly influence how individuals form a

sense of belonging to society, their attitude toward social norms and values, and their interaction with social institutions. This impact can be analyzed in several key dimensions:

- *Information-Based Integration.* New media allows various social groups to converge within a shared informational space. Particularly through social networks and online forums, users develop common informational experiences. This, to some extent, facilitates the creation of a unified public opinion and a shared social agenda. For example, collective positions on global events, public support campaigns, and virtual expressions of solidarity are indicators of this process.
- *Digital Communities and Network-Based Sociality.* Digital communities formed via new media transcend geographical limitations and foster new types of social bonds. These communities unite users around shared interests and goals, even when they do not personally know one another. Manuel Castells' theory of the "network society" attempts to explain this process sociologically: individuals increasingly construct new forms of identity and social integration through networks rather than traditional structures (e.g., family, neighborhood, class).
- *Public Participation and Democratic Integration.* New media broadens opportunities for engagement in democratic processes. On social media platforms, discussions on public issues, petitions, campaigns, and forms of individual activism become core mechanisms of civic participation in emerging societal models (Qasimli & Məhəmmədli, 2024b). In this regard, new media serves as an effective tool for promoting both political and social integration.
- *Risk of Social Isolation and Individualization.* Despite its integrative potential, new media may also lead to social isolation and fragmentation in certain cases. The abundance of information and personalized content (resulting from algorithmic filtering) can cause individuals to interact only with those who share similar views—leading to "echo chamber" and "filter bubble" effects. This, in turn, can weaken public consensus and foster social polarization.

*\*Digital Inequality*

The integrative potential of new media is not equally accessible to all social strata. Factors such as internet access, digital literacy, and the ability to use digital resources give rise to a new

form of social inequality known as the “digital divide.” This represents one of the structural barriers to the expansion of social integration.

*Social Integration and Networking Function.* One of the core social functions of new media in the context of digital modernity is to enhance social integration and create new forms of networking among individuals. This process can be analyzed within the frameworks of structural functionalism and the theory of communicative action in sociology.

#### *\*The Renewed Context of Social Integration*

Social integration is the process through which individuals, groups, and communities adapt to the norms, values, and institutions of society and participate in the social system. In traditional societies, this process occurred mainly through institutions such as family, education, religion, and the state (Bayramov & Məhəmmədli, 2025). In the digital age, however, new media increasingly assumes this integrative function.

The virtual environments created by new media allow for the sharing of ideas, values, and behaviors among individuals. Through online platforms, social identities are reconstructed, and the sense of belonging to society is reinforced through digital interactions. This integration can counteract individual isolation and contribute to the growth of social capital.

*Digital Networking: A Bridge Between the Individual and Society.* One of the defining characteristics of new media is its network-based structure. The social networks formed through digital platforms allow individuals to organize their interactions with each other and with institutions in an interactive manner. In this context, networking is not only a technological mechanism but also a social function—individuals form connections based on shared goals, interests, and values.

In this process, *network capital*—the digital connections and social resources an individual possesses—plays a significant role. Connections established through social media serve not only for information exchange but also as a means of emotional support, civic participation, professional development, and social integration. (Kushzhanov & Mahammadli, 2019b). Here, “*weak ties*” (as defined by Mark Granovetter) are considered key elements that expand the scope of social integration.

*Social Identity and Integration in the Network Society.* Manuel Castells’ concept of the “network society” is crucial for the sociological analysis of this process. According to Castells, individuals and groups form new social structures through information and communication

technologies, and through these structures, they define their relationship with society. In such an environment, social integration is increasingly measured by participation and activity within networks.

Network-based integration serves as a bridge across different cultures, social classes, and geographic spaces, facilitating coexistence in multicultural societies. However, the quality and sustainability of this integration depend on users' technological capacities, digital literacy, and the ethical and social policies of digital platforms.

*Individual Identity and Self-Expression Function.* In the era of digital modernity, the concepts of individual identity and self-expression are being reshaped and transformed within the new media environment. (Balginova, Maydangalieva, Satygalieva & Mahammadli, 2018). While in traditional societies individual identity was primarily defined through social structures such as family, ethnic-national belonging, religion, and geographic environment, in digital society this process is largely constructed through virtual interactions and chosen digital roles.

*Digital Identity Construction.* In new media, each user can present themselves differently across various platforms, leading to the phenomenon of "multiple identities." For example, a user might display an emotional-intimate identity on social networks, while portraying a career-oriented identity on professional platforms. In this context, identity relates not only to the question "What do we display?" but also "What do we conceal?" This duality is significantly analyzed within Goffman's "*presentation of self in everyday life*" theory.

*Self-Expression and Individual Agency.* New media empowers individuals to communicate their opinions, worldviews, emotions, and daily lives to broad audiences. This fosters an enhancement of individual agency and increased participation in society. Tools such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and blogging platforms allow anyone to become a journalist, artist, activist, or thought leader.

In this process, the function of "micro-publishing"—the individual's ability to disseminate information about themselves—has become a key instrument of identity construction (Qasimli & Məhəmmədli, 2024a). From a social-psychological perspective, this also fulfills the individual's need for recognition, one of the fundamental motivations in Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

#### *\*Digital Distortion and Identity Crisis*

However, the formation of individual identity under digital conditions also raises certain issues. Much of the content shared on social platforms represents an "edited reality," which creates

pressure to conform to identity models accepted by other users (Ismayilov & Khalafova, 2022a; Mammadov, 2022a). This may lead to identity crises, self-acceptance difficulties, and psychological strain for some individuals.

Additionally, algorithmic governance and the structured rules of platforms can limit individuals' freedom to express themselves as they wish (Mahammadi, 2024). Filtering of information, automatic regulation of visibility criteria, and platform policies define the boundaries of self-expression, thus restricting the freedom of identity construction.

*\*Identity and Public Participation*

Digital identity is not limited to personal aspects; it also serves as a fundamental base for public participation. In social campaigns, civil society initiatives, and political movements, the form of digital identity reflects the individual's stance in society. For this reason, digital self-expression is an indicator not only of personal but also of social responsibility.

*\*Public Participation and Activism Function*

The development of digital modernity and new media has expanded opportunities for individuals and groups to participate in public life. Compared to the limited communicative capabilities of traditional media, new media platforms enable individuals to freely express civic positions, engage in public dialogues, and influence social change. In this context, public participation is characterized not only by voting and signing petitions but also by actively shaping the agenda through digital platforms.

*\*New Media and Civil Society*

New media acts as a catalyst in the formation of civil society. (Heydar, 2023). Online platforms provide flexible and interactive tools for organizing public initiatives, planning social actions, and implementing public oversight. Individuals can express opinions and coordinate joint activities on topics such as social justice, environmental protection, gender equality, and freedom of speech. This phenomenon has given rise to new terms such as "digital activism" or "clicktivism."

*\*Public Debate and Deliberative Democracy*

New media opens up extensive opportunities for conducting public debates. Through forums, blogs, social networks, and live broadcasts, public discussions become more transparent and participatory (Məhəmmədli, 2024). This process can be related to Habermas's concept of the "public sphere": in the digital public sphere, individuals independently exchange information and influence public opinion.

At the same time, new media plays a crucial role as a platform for the development of deliberative democracy—governance based on discussion. Citizens can participate in the decision-making process and contribute concretely to public governance via electronic voting and opinion polls.

*\*Forms and Impacts of Digital Activism*

There are various forms of public participation in new media, including:

- Hashtag campaigns (e.g., #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter)
- Online petitions (such as Change.org)
- Virtual rallies and live streams
- Microblogs and video statements (Kushzhanov & Dashqin, 2019c).
- Public positions taken by social media activists and influencers

These activities have sometimes led to real social changes and influenced state policy and public discourse. Particularly, the younger generation uses these tools to shape their civic stance and engage in collective actions.

*\*Risks and Paradoxes*

However, digital activism can sometimes remain superficial or symbolic—a phenomenon known as “slacktivism.” In such cases, users consider themselves active merely by sharing or liking content, while avoiding genuine participation. (Hampton, Sessions & Her, 2011). Furthermore, the spread of disinformation, manipulations via bots, and troll activities may reduce the quality and trustworthiness of public participation.

Algorithmic filters (filter bubbles) supply users only with information matching their worldviews, which can weaken the pluralistic foundations of public debate. The ownership structures of social media and commercial interests also delimit the scope of civic activism.

*\*Function of Intercultural Interaction*

With the expansion of digital modernity and new media technologies, the scale and intensity of intercultural interaction have significantly increased. While in traditional societies intercultural relations occurred mainly through physical migrations, diplomatic relations, and commerce, today's globalized digital environment facilitates virtual interaction among representatives of different cultures, turning it into daily communication.

*\*Digital Platforms and Intercultural Communication*

New media—especially social networks, video-sharing platforms, forums, and gaming environments—broadens communication opportunities among people of different languages, religions, and values. On platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, users not only present their national cultures but also gain access to other peoples' cultures. This process encompasses both cultural representation and the learning and appropriation of cultures.

*\*Cultural Hybridity and “Glocalization*

Intercultural interaction in the digital environment is not only a diffusion process but also involves the integration of cultures, creating new hybrid forms. (Kushzhanov & Dashgin, 2019a). For example, music, fashion, cuisine, and even linguistic elements acquire new forms and content synthesized from multiple cultures. Sociologically, this process is called cultural hybridity.

At the same time, the process of “glocalization” (decentralized globalization) is also noteworthy: local cultural values are preserved and presented on global platforms in a distinctive format (Castells, 2010). This serves both the preservation of national identity and the enhancement of international visibility.

*\*Disruption or Reinforcement of Stereotypes*

Thanks to the capabilities of new media, various cultures can better understand and get to know each other. This process can strengthen mutual understanding and reduce stereotypes and ethnocentrism (Khalafova & Ismailov, 2024a). However, sometimes cultures are presented on these platforms in distorted, superficial, and commercialized forms, which can reinforce stereotypes or cause new cultural tensions. From a sociological perspective, this situation is explained by concepts such as cultural imperialism, cultural homogenization, and cultural resistance. The dominance of Western culture may cause concerns about the weakening of national identity in some societies.

*Transnational Communities and Cultural Attachment.* New media facilitates transnational diasporas to maintain their cultural ties while expressing themselves in other cultural environments. (Ismayilov, K., Ismayilov, N. & Mammadova, 2019). For example, Azerbaijanis living abroad preserving and promoting their culture on social platforms is an example of this phenomenon. This actualizes concepts such as cultural mobility, transnational identity, and digital diasporas.

*The Social Role of New Media.* As one of the main products of digital modernity, new media is not only a technological tool for transmitting information but also a powerful social institution influencing the structure and dynamics of society. Its social role manifests in several key directions:

participation in information production, formation of social behavior models, public monitoring, and organization of social order.

*The Position of New Media in the Information Society.* Unlike traditional information sources, new media allows any user to be both a consumer and a producer of information. This “prosumer” (producer + consumer) model leads to the decentralization and democratization of information flow. This function of new media plays an important role in the formation of social consciousness because various social strata, marginalized groups, and minorities can express their positions on these platforms.

*Socialization and Normative Systems.* New media has become one of the main actors in the socialization process of the younger generation. Alongside traditional socialization agents (family, school, religious institutions), social media platforms and digital environments play a leading role in adopting new values, norms, and social roles. (Mahamadli, 2018). This leads to changes in social behavior patterns, strengthening of individualism, and increased normative diversity.

*Public Monitoring and Transparency.* By performing the function of public monitoring, new media allows citizens to oversee the activities of government, municipalities, and other social institutions. News, reports, and user-generated content published on social networks create public reactions against corruption, human rights violations, and other social problems. Consequently, new media is positioned among society’s control mechanisms as an informal “fourth estate.”

*Collective Memory and Cultural Heritage Preservation.* New media platforms also participate in shaping social memory. (Hampton, Sessions & Her, 2011). Through online archives, digital museums, virtual libraries, and social media, the history and cultural heritage of society become accessible to broad audiences. This strengthens public identity and becomes an important tool in transmitting collective memory.

*Catalyst for Social Change.* New media is also an accelerator of social change. Changes in culture, politics, economy, and behavioral models are accompanied by the dynamics of new media. The transfer of global trends to local communities, organization of social revolutions (e.g., the Arab Spring), expansion of social movements, and emergence of new social strata (digital natives) are manifestations of this function. (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007).

*Information-Based Integration.* One of the key elements defining the structural and functional essence of modern society is information and its production, sharing, and assimilation. (İsmayılov & Məhəmmədli, 2024). As a result of the development of digital modernity and new

media technologies, information has become the main resource of society and one of the leading mechanisms of social integration. Information-based integration is a new model of community formed in the plane of connection, understanding, and cooperation among individuals, social groups, and institutional systems.

*Democratization of Information and Inclusiveness.* New media takes information production out of the exclusive control of elites and mass media institutions and puts it at the disposal of individuals and communities. (Kenzhebayeva, Urmurzina & Mahammadli, 2018). This situation leads to the horizontalization of information flow, meaning more users act both as information receivers and disseminators. This process increases social inclusion and strengthens the integration of marginalized social groups into society.

*Networked Information Systems and Social Coordination.* Networked information systems created through digital platforms ensure continuous and real-time communication among various social actors. This strengthens the coordination of social institutions, creates new opportunities for organizing collective actions, and plays an important role in maintaining social order. The function of social media in information exchange during crises (e.g., pandemics, natural disasters) exemplifies this role.

New information technologies *Reconstruction of Social Boundaries through Information.* and platforms transcend national, ethnic, religious, and geographical boundaries, facilitating interaction between social groups. (Nadir & Sevda, 2022; Mammadov, 2022b). This promotes transnational integration, reconfiguration of social identities, and the formation of intercultural cooperation. Thus, information becomes not only a carrier of knowledge but also a tool for restructuring social structures.

*Legitimacy of Information and Social Trust.* One of the main conditions for social integration is the formation of a reliable information environment. Disinformation, fake news, and manipulative content weaken information-based integration and can lead to social fragmentation. (Baym, 2015). Therefore, ethical and professional oversight of new media information products, media literacy, and the concept of digital responsibility are of special importance.

*Digital Communities and Network-Based Sociability.* The rapid development of digital technologies and the penetration of new media into society's information structure have transformed traditional social relations and given rise to new phenomena such as digital communities and network-based sociability. These concepts are regarded in sociology as modern

forms of social organization and elevate interactions of individuals both in real and virtual worlds to a new level.

*Characteristics of Digital Communities.* Digital communities are social groups formed beyond geographical and temporal limitations based on shared interests, beliefs, experiences, and goals. Their main characteristics include:

- Activity in virtual spaces (forums, social networks, messenger groups);
- Interactivity and mutual communication (comments, sharing, co-creation of content); (Ismayilov & Khudiyeva, 2023; Ismayilov & Khalafova, 2022b).
- Balance between individuality and collectivity (both personal expression and collective identity);
- Rapid dynamics and transient nature (short-lived but intense interactions).

*Network-Based Sociability: Manuel Castells' Approach.* According to Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells' "network society" theory, in the era of digital modernity, the primary organizational principle of social structure is networks. These networks enable flows of information, power, culture, and identity through technological platforms. Network-based sociability in this context is characterized by:

- Decentralized structure — a multipoint connection system not managed from a single center;
- Global localism (glocalization) — integration of local cultures into global networks;
- Digitization of social capital — formation of relationships and trust via online platforms (Takhirov & smaylov, 2011).

#### *\*New Models of Social Identity*

Digital communities provide individuals with the opportunity to construct alternative identities (Karabalina, Maydangalieva, Satygalieva, Ahmetalina & Mahammadli, 2018). Through the "self" images they represent on social media, individuals experiment with various roles and freely express their affiliations to certain groups (Rheingold, 2012). Unlike classical sociological models of identity, this leads to a multilayered, fluid, and contextual understanding of identity (Shirky, 2008).

*Social Functions of Digital Communities.* Digital communities perform a variety of social functions:

- Support and emotional sharing (especially in communities related to health, psychological help, loss, and trauma);
- Social mobilization and activism (e.g., hashtag campaigns and petitions);
- Education and knowledge sharing (MOOCs, thematic forums, Telegram channels, etc.);
- Cultural integration and exchange (language learning groups, transnational communities) (Mammadov, 2013; Khalafova & Ismailov, 2024a).

*\*Risks of Social Isolation and Individualization*

While digital technologies and new media enhance communication among individuals, paradoxically, they also increase the risks of social isolation, loneliness, and psychosocial individualization. The transition of socialization to digital forms can weaken real social relationships and lead to individuals becoming detached from their social environment. This phenomenon is recognized in modern sociology as the "digital paradox": technology creates connection but can deepen loneliness.

*Superficiality of Virtual Relationships*

The fast, instant, and filtered forms of communication offered by new media cannot fully replace deep and emotionally rich real-life relationships. This leads to social ties becoming instrumental, reducing sincerity and causing relationships to break more easily. Although "likes" and "comments" on social networks substitute emotional communication to some extent, they do not fully satisfy a person's need for social bonds.

*\*Individual Screen Culture and Social Alienation*

The main mode of new media use—individual screen culture (smartphones, tablets, computers)—contributes to distancing individuals from public spaces and family structures. Even when people are physically present in the same space, social interactions may decrease, creating "psychological distance." This can negatively affect family relationships, friendships, and the sense of solidarity. (Ismayilov, Mahammadli & Gasimli, 2023b).

*\*Algorithmic Isolation and the Effect of Information Bubbles*

The algorithmic selection of content on social networks, which shows users only material aligned with their interests, leads to the formation of information bubbles. This isolates individuals not only informationally but also ideologically and in terms of worldview. As a result, social pluralism weakens, empathy declines, and mutual understanding becomes more difficult (Askerova & Mammadov, 2025; Ismayilov & Khalafova, 2023).

*\*Digital Self-Expression and Social Comparison Pressure*

The "ideal lifestyle" images created on new media differ sharply from real life, prompting users to compare themselves with others. This comparison often leads to low self-esteem, psychological distress, and social withdrawal. The abundance of digital self-expression tools can create cognitive dissonance between individuals' real identities and their social media personas.

*\*Digital Inequality*

Despite the opportunities digital modernity brings to societies, access to technology and the ability to benefit from it are not equally available to everyone. This situation results in a multifaceted social problem known as digital inequality (digital divide) (Ismayilov, Mahammadli & Khudiyeva, 2022). It is not limited merely to access to technological equipment but is also closely linked to factors such as digital literacy, social status, educational level, and cultural capital.

*\*Main Levels of Digital Inequality*

Sociological literature typically analyzes digital inequality in three main stages:

- *First level (access inequality):* Unequal distribution of ICT infrastructure (internet, computers, mobile devices). This is especially evident in rural areas, underdeveloped regions, and low-income social groups.
- *Second level (usage skill inequality):* Unequal digital literacy and skills. Education level, age, and profession are key criteria in this area.
- *Third level (benefit inequality):* Unequal opportunities to gain real social and economic benefits from technology. For example, there is a difference between those who use technology solely for entertainment and those who use it for education, work, and social participation.

*Gender and Age Aspects of Digital Inequality:*

- *Gender differences:* In some societies, women's access to and use of technologies is limited compared to men. This is especially notable in regions dominated by patriarchal social structures (Ismayilov, 2015; Ismayilov & Aliyeva, 2023).
- *Age differences:* Although younger generations adapt more easily to technology, older generations have a lower level of integration into the digital environment. This can lead to social isolation and information gaps among the elderly.

*\*Social Stratification and Digital Opportunities*

Unequal distribution of digital technologies can deepen existing social stratification (İsmayılov, Məmmədli & Gəsimli, 2023a). Those with digital skills gain more information and access to better education and employment opportunities. This creates a social model where social mobility (opportunities for advancement) is available mainly to those with technological advantages.

*Social Consequences of Digital Inequality:*

- Restricted access to information and civil rights;
- Weakening of democratic participation (e.g., inability to participate in online surveys or public initiatives);
- Increased inequality in education and labor markets;
- Delays in cultural integration and social marginalization.

**Conclusion**

The scientific analyses conducted in the article show that digital modernity, through new media, exerts profound and multifaceted effects on the social structures of society. These effects manifest both positively (social integration, individual self-expression, public participation, intercultural dialogue) and negatively (social isolation, individualization, digital inequality). New media functions not only as an information transmitter but also as a powerful structure shaping social norms, identities, and public relations.

The analyses have led to the following conclusions:

1. New media facilitates the acceleration of social integration and expands communication opportunities among different social groups.
2. At the same time, new risks arise such as digital individualization, psychological loneliness, and the superficiality of social relationships.
3. Digital inequality remains a significant barrier to social justice and the formation of an inclusive society, potentially deepening social stratification.
4. The intercultural interaction, public participation, and self-expression functions of new media strengthen individuals' adaptation to society and social activity.

*Scientific and Practical Recommendations:*

1. National education programs on digital literacy should be developed, and inclusive training should be organized especially for the elderly, youth, and socially vulnerable groups.

2. Legal and normative frameworks should be strengthened for the regulation and ethical use of new media.

3. The social responsibility of digital platforms should be increased, and their algorithmic structures must be made transparent.

4. Expanding internet infrastructure in rural and regional areas should be prioritized to reduce digital inequality.

5. The positive social role of new media should be enhanced, turning it into a tool for civil society development, public debates, and democratic participation.

Thus, the relationship between digital modernity and social integration is a multifaceted research area that must be studied comprehensively, including technological, sociological, psychological, and cultural aspects. Future research in this field will enable a deeper understanding of societies' digital transformation.

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