



## DIGITAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND INEQUALITIES IN THE NETWORK SOCIETY

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MauríCleiton Reisdorfer Silva – Farroupilha  
Federal Institute

#### SUMMARY

This paper aims to analyze the social transformations that have occurred in the digital age, with an emphasis on new forms of inequality and the role of digital social movements in the context of globalization and neoliberalism. Initially, the transition to the networked society is addressed, based on the theories of Manuel Castells, exploring how digital technologies reconfigure social, economic, and cultural interactions. Then, the concept of digital inequalities and social exclusion is discussed, based on the studies of Jan van Dijk and Mark Warschauer, highlighting how unequal access to information technologies reinforces existing social inequalities. The research also investigates the emergence of digital social movements and networked activism, analyzing their dynamics and strategies in light of the contributions of Zeynep Tufekci and Manuel Castells. Emblematic cases such as the #MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter are examined, highlighting the impact of digital technologies on social mobilization and the promotion of change. Finally, the impact of neoliberalism and globalization on contemporary social structures, including the precariousness of work and recent economic crises, is discussed, based on the theories of David Harvey and Saskia Sassen. The methodology adopted is qualitative in nature, based on a critical bibliographic review of the main sociological theories related to the subject. The results point to the need to understand the complexity of social dynamics in the digital age and recognize the importance of digital social movements in the fight against new forms of inequality. It is concluded that sociology plays a fundamental role in the analysis and understanding of contemporary social phenomena, contributing to the construction of a more just and inclusive society in the era of globalization and digital technologies. **Keywords:**Digital age, Digital social movements, Globalization, Neoliberalism, Inequalities.

#### ABSTRACT

This work aims to analyze the social transformations occurring in the digital age, with an emphasis on new forms of inequality and the role of digital social movements in the context of globalization and neoliberalism. Initially, it addresses the transition to the network society, based on Manuel Castells' theories, exploring how digital technologies reconfigure social, economic, and cultural interactions. Next, it discusses the concept of digital inequalities and social exclusion, drawing on studies by Jan van Dijk and Mark Warschauer, highlighting how unequal access to information technologies reinforces existing social inequalities. The research also investigates the emergence of digital social movements and networked activism, analyzing their dynamics and strategies in light of contributions from Zeynep Tufekci and Manuel Castells. Emblematic cases such as the # MeToo movement and Black Lives Matter are examined, evidencing the impact of digital technologies on social mobilization and the promotion of change. Finally, it discusses the impact of neoliberalism and globalization on contemporary social structures, including the precariousness of work and recent economic crises, grounding the discussion in the theories of David Harvey and Saskia Sassen. The methodology adopted is qualitative in nature, based on a critical literature review of the main sociological theories related to the theme. The results point to the need to understand the complexity of social dynamics in the digital age and recognize the importance of digital social movements in combating new forms of inequality. It is concluded that sociology plays a fundamental role in analyzing and understanding contemporary social phenomena, contributing to the construction of a more just and inclusive society in the era of globalization and digital technologies.

**Keywords:**Digital era, Digital social movements, Globalization, Neoliberalism, Inequalities.

1

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society has undergone profound transformations driven by the advancement of digital technologies and the expansion of the Internet. The emergence of the network society, as described by Manuel Castells, has redefined the forms of communication, social interaction and economic organization, creating new dynamics that directly affect the lives of individuals and communities. In this context, relationships

Social interactions are mediated by digital platforms, and information circulates on a global scale and in real time, significantly altering traditional social processes.

Despite the opportunities provided by digital technologies, such as increased access to information and the possibility of connecting people from different parts of the world, they have also intensified existing inequalities and generated new forms of social exclusion. The phenomenon of digital inequality, discussed by authors such as Jan van Dijk and Mark Warschauer, shows that unequal access to information and communication technologies reflects and reinforces socioeconomic disparities, limiting the full participation of certain groups in the digital sphere and, consequently, in society in general.

At the same time, social movements have adapted to the digital landscape, using social networks and other online platforms to mobilize, organize and disseminate their causes. Movements such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter exemplify how networked activism can amplify marginalized voices, influence political agendas, and promote meaningful social change. Analyzing these new forms of mobilization is essential to understanding the role of digital social movements in promoting justice and equity in the era of globalization and neoliberalism.

This paper aims to examine new forms of inequality and the impact of digital social movements on the networked society. To this end, it draws on the theories of authors such as Manuel Castells, Zeynep Tufekci, David Harvey and Saskia Sassen, seeking to understand how digital technologies reconfigure social and economic interactions and how neoliberalism influences these processes. The research aims to identify the challenges and opportunities that emerge in this context, contributing to the academic debate on social dynamics in the digital age.

The methodology adopted is qualitative in nature, based on a critical bibliographic review of the main sociological theories related to the topic. Academic works and articles that address the networked society, digital inequalities, digital social movements and the impacts of globalization and neoliberalism on contemporary social structures were selected. Through the analysis and interpretation of these theoretical references, the aim is to correlate the concepts presented with current social phenomena, offering insights that can help in the understanding and promotion of a more just and inclusive society in the digital age.

## 2 THEORETICAL REVIEW

To support the analysis of social transformations in the digital age, it is essential to explore the main theories and concepts that elucidate the dynamics of the networked society, digital inequalities, digital social movements, and the impacts of neoliberalism and globalization on contemporary social structures. The following theoretical review will examine the contributions of authors such as Manuel Castells, Jan van Dijk, Mark Warschauer, Zeynep Tufekci, David Harvey, and Saskia Sassen, providing a solid foundation for understanding current social phenomena and the new configurations of social, economic, and cultural relations in the digital age.

### 2.1 THE NETWORK SOCIETY AND THE DIGITAL AGE

The transition to the network society represents one of the most significant changes in the social, economic and cultural structures of the contemporary era. Manuel Castells, in his work "The Network Society", analyzes this phenomenon in depth, highlighting the central role of information and communication technologies in the reconfiguration of human interactions. He argues that the technological revolution has not only transformed the means of communication, but has also altered the material basis of society, influencing modes of production, power relations and cultural manifestations.

2 Castells proposes that the network society is characterized by a new social morphology, where digital networks become the basic structure of social organization. This configuration enables the instantaneous circulation of information on a global scale, connecting people, institutions and markets in an unprecedented way. The Internet, in this context, emerges as an essential infrastructure that supports these networks and enables global interconnectivity.

The reorganization of social relations is evident in the way interactions are mediated by digital technologies. Virtual communities and online social networks allow individuals to share interests, form collective identities and participate in collaborative activities, regardless of geographical limitations. This dynamic expands the possibilities for social participation, but also

It also presents challenges related to social cohesion and the fragmentation of audiences.

In the economic sphere, the networked society has a profound influence on production processes and market structures. The information economy, as Castells calls it, is based on the intensive use of knowledge and information as the main productive resources. Companies are restructuring themselves into flexible and decentralized networks, seeking greater efficiency and capacity for innovation. This economic transformation also impacts labor relations, with the emergence of new forms of employment and the need for digital skills.

Culturally, the digital age promotes the dissemination and interaction of different values, practices and symbols. The globalization of communications facilitates cultural exchange, but also raises questions about cultural hegemony and the preservation of local identities. Cultural production becomes more participatory, with individuals taking on active roles as producers and disseminators of content.

However, Castells warns of the challenges associated with digital exclusion. Not all individuals and communities have equitable access to information technologies, which can intensify existing social inequalities. Inclusion or exclusion in the networked society becomes a determining factor for full participation in economic, social and cultural life. Therefore, understanding the impacts of digital technologies requires an analysis that considers both the opportunities and the limitations imposed by this new social structure.

In short, Manuel Castells' theories on the network society provide a solid basis for understanding the profound transformations that have occurred in the digital age. The influence of the Internet on the reorganization of social, economic and cultural relations highlights the need for studies that address the challenges and implications of this transition, aiming to promote fairer and more inclusive integration in contemporary society.

## 2.2 DIGITAL INEQUALITIES AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The expansion of information and communication technologies (ICT) has brought about profound transformations in contemporary societies. However, this progress is not distributed equitably, resulting in digital inequalities that reinforce and widen existing social disparities. Digital inclusion and exclusion emerge as central concepts for understanding how unequal access to ICT influences individuals' social, economic and cultural capital.

Jan van Dijk (2005) proposes a multifaceted approach to understanding digital exclusion, emphasizing that it is not limited to the lack of physical access to technologies, but also includes aspects related to skills, meaningful use and full participation in the information society. He identifies four types of barriers that contribute to digital exclusion: lack of motivation, lack of physical access, lack of skills and lack of meaningful use. Van Dijk argues that these barriers are interconnected and that digital exclusion is both a cause and a consequence of other forms of social exclusion, creating a vicious cycle that hinders social mobility. According to van Dijk:

The digital divide is not only a problem of physical access to information and communication technologies, but also involves the lack of adequate digital skills to use these technologies effectively. Furthermore, even when people have access and skills, they may not use technologies in ways that contribute to their social and economic well-being (VAN DIJK, 2005, p. 10).

This perspective highlights that individuals with lower educational levels, lower incomes or belonging to marginalized groups tend to face greater obstacles in accessing and using ICT, limiting their opportunities for education, employment and civic participation.

Mark Warschauer (2003) complements this view by emphasizing that simply providing equipment and technological infrastructure is not enough to overcome the digital divide. He argues that:

3

Bridging the digital divide requires more than just providing computers and internet connections. It is necessary to consider the social, economic and cultural context in which people live. Technology alone does not lead to social inclusion; it is the meaningful use of that technology, in conjunction with human and social resources, that enables people to improve their lives (WARSCHAUER, 2003, p. 46).

This perspective highlights the importance of approaching digital inclusion holistically, recognizing that structural and contextual factors influence individuals' abilities to effectively use digital technologies.

ICT to promote improvements in their lives. Warschauer suggests that simply providing technological infrastructure is not enough, as people may not have the necessary skills, digital literacy or social support to fully take advantage of the resources available. By recognizing that technology is a tool and not an end in itself, space is opened up to promote initiatives that truly empower people and contribute to reducing social inequalities.

Digital exclusion is a phenomenon that occurs when individuals or groups have limited or no access to information and communication technologies (ICT), whether due to a lack of infrastructure, digital skills or socio-economic resources. This exclusion not only prevents access to essential information and services, but also reinforces existing social inequalities, limiting opportunities for education, employment and civic participation. Therefore, digital exclusion is a complex challenge that goes beyond the simple absence of technology, involving social, economic and cultural factors that require integrated approaches to promote inclusion and equity in contemporary society. In this sense, Van Dijk highlights:

Digital inequalities reflect and amplify existing social inequalities. Individuals with lower educational levels, lower incomes or belonging to marginalized groups tend to have less access and skills to use ICT, which in turn limits their opportunities for education, employment and civic participation (VAN DIJK, 2005, p. 27).

This situation creates a cycle of exclusion, perpetuating socioeconomic disparities through the interconnection between digital inequalities and existing social inequalities. This dynamic creates a vicious cycle of exclusion, where those who already face structural disadvantages are further marginalized by a lack of digital access and skills. For example, the lack of digital skills can prevent individuals from seeking jobs online, accessing educational resources, or participating in political debates on social media, deepening social and economic exclusion. Thus, digital inequalities not only reflect existing social disparities, but also intensify them, hindering social mobility and full inclusion in contemporary society.

Furthermore, lack of access and skills to use ICT can restrict access to essential information, public services, educational opportunities and political participation. Van Dijk warns:

The digital divide can lead to a modern form of illiteracy, where individuals are unable to participate fully in the information society. This not only limits their personal opportunities, but also affects the social and economic development of society as a whole (VAN DIJK, 2005, p. 34).

To address these challenges, it is necessary to adopt public policies and initiatives that promote digital inclusion in a comprehensive manner. This includes investments in technological infrastructure, digital literacy programs, development of relevant and accessible content, and approaches that consider the specific needs of different social groups.

In short, the discussion on digital inequalities and social exclusion reveals the importance of addressing the digital divide in a comprehensive manner, considering technical, social and cultural factors. The contributions of Jan van Dijk and Mark Warschauer highlight that digital inclusion is essential for promoting social equity and empowering individuals in contemporary society. Implementing integrated strategies that address the multiple dimensions of the digital divide is essential to ensure that the benefits of information technologies are accessible to all.

## 2.3 DIGITAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND NETWORK ACTIVISM

4

The emergence of digital technologies and social media has revolutionized the way social movements organize, mobilize, and exert influence. Networked activism has become a defining characteristic of contemporary movements, allowing causes to gain global visibility in a short space of time. Authors such as Manuel Castells and Zeynep Tufekci offer in-depth analyses of the dynamics and strategies of these movements, highlighting their impact on contemporary society.

Manuel Castells (2015) explores the concept of “space of flows” and how networked communication enables the formation of collective identities and the coordination of actions on a global scale. He argues that digital social movements are capable of challenging established power structures by mobilizing individuals connected through the internet, creating new forms of political participation and civic engagement. Castells observes

va that the communicative autonomy provided by digital networks allows social movements to control their own narrative, without depending on traditional media.

Zeynep Tufekci (2017) expands on this discussion by analyzing how social media platforms influence the ability of social movements to organize and reach broad audiences. She highlights that while social media facilitates rapid and massive mobilization, it also presents challenges in terms of long-term sustainability and organization. Tufekci points out that the absence of clear hierarchical structures can make it difficult for movements to make decisions and implement consistent strategies.

Landmark cases such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter illustrate the power of digital social movements. The #MeToo movement, which began in 2017, used social media to denounce sexual harassment and abuse, allowing millions of people around the world to share their experiences. This movement generated significant debates about gender, power and justice, leading to changes in institutional and legislative policies. Black Lives Matter, which originated in 2013, mobilized against police brutality and systemic racism in the United States, gaining international support and influencing global discussions about racial equality.

Tufekci points out that these movements benefit from the “unprecedented scalability” provided by digital platforms, but they also face the “risk of superficiality” in mobilization, since online engagement does not always translate into concrete and lasting actions. In addition, digital platforms are controlled by private companies, which can limit the autonomy of movements and expose them to censorship or algorithmic manipulation.

Castells emphasizes that “autonomous networked communication” is essential for the formation of a new public space, where previously marginalized voices can gain visibility. However, he warns of the challenges related to the fragmentation of information and the creation of “information bubbles,” which can further polarize society.

In short, digital social movements represent a significant evolution in the way collective mobilization occurs. Digital technologies offer powerful tools for organization, information dissemination, and engagement, but they also present challenges that need to be considered. Analyzing the dynamics and strategies of these movements, in light of the contributions of authors such as Tufekci and Castells, is essential to understanding their impact on contemporary social transformation.

## 2.4 GLOBALIZATION, NEOLIBERALISM AND CONTEMPORARY CRISES

Globalization and neoliberalism are interconnected phenomena that have profoundly impacted contemporary social structures, causing significant changes in the economic, political and cultural spheres. These processes have been the subject of analysis by several theorists, including David Harvey and Saskia Sassen, who explore the social and spatial consequences resulting from these transformations, including the precariousness of work and recent economic crises.

David Harvey (2005) analyzes neoliberalism as a political and economic project that seeks to restore the power of economic elites by promoting policies of deregulation, privatization, and a reduction in the role of the state in the economy. He argues that neoliberalism has spread globally, influencing national policies and shaping the world economy. Harvey highlights that this ideology has led to increased social inequalities and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, while the majority face increasingly precarious working conditions.

The precariousness of work is one of the most notable effects of neoliberalism. Harvey notes that the flexibilization of labor relations, promoted as a way to increase efficiency and competitiveness, has resulted in job insecurity, low wages, and loss of employment benefits. This condition affects not only the well-being of workers, but also social cohesion, by exacerbating inequalities and reduce social mobility.

5

Saskia Sassen (2001) contributes to the understanding of these processes by exploring the concept of “global cities”. She analyzes how economic globalization reconfigures urban space, concentrating advanced financial and service functions in specific cities that become centers of global economic power. Sassen argues that this concentration generates spatial and social inequalities within cities, where privileged areas coexist with regions marked by poverty and social exclusion.

Furthermore, Sassen highlights that globalization and neoliberalism promote international migration, both skilled labor and low-skilled workers. These population movements

tional are influenced by global market demands and economic disparities between countries. Migration, in turn, contributes to the cultural diversification of global cities, but can also lead to social and political tensions due to restrictive migration policies and xenophobia.

Recent economic crises, such as the 2008 financial crisis, are analyzed by Harvey as manifestations of the internal contradictions of neoliberalism. He argues that the deregulation of financial markets, a central feature of neoliberal policies, has created conditions for the formation of speculative bubbles and economic instability. The consequences of these crises are felt globally, with negative impacts on employment, income and public services, particularly affecting the most vulnerable groups.

Sassen also explores how economic crises affect social structures, emphasizing that the effects are uneven and often deepen existing disparities. She notes that policy responses to crises tend to prioritize the stability of financial markets over social needs, resulting in public spending cuts and fiscal austerity that undermine essential services and the well-being of the population.

In summary, David Harvey and Saskia Sassen's analyses reveal that globalization and neoliberalism have profound and multifaceted impacts on contemporary social structures. The precariousness of work, economic and spatial inequalities, and recurring crises are consequences of policies that favor market liberalization and reduced state intervention. Understanding these dynamics is essential to discussing alternatives that promote social justice, equity, and economic sustainability.

### 3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This paper aimed to analyze social transformations in the digital age, with an emphasis on new forms of inequality and the role of digital social movements in the context of globalization and neoliberalism. Based on a comprehensive theoretical review, based on authors such as Manuel Castells, Jan van Dijk, Mark Warschauer, Zeynep Tufekci, David Harvey and Saskia Sassen, we sought to understand how digital technologies reconfigure social, economic and cultural interactions, as well as the implications of these processes for contemporary society.

The research conducted has shown that the networked society, driven by digital technologies, has brought about significant changes in the forms of communication and social organization. However, it has become clear that these technological innovations have also intensified existing inequalities and created new forms of social exclusion. The analysis of digital inequalities has shown that unequal access to ICTs not only reflects but also amplifies socioeconomic disparities, limiting opportunities for education, employment and civic participation for already marginalized groups. Authors such as van Dijk and Warschauer highlight the need for integrated approaches that consider technical, social and cultural factors to promote effective digital inclusion.

Regarding digital social movements, it was observed that networked activism has emerged as a powerful tool for mobilization and political engagement. Movements such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter illustrate how digital platforms can amplify previously silenced voices and influence political and social agendas. However, challenges related to the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of these movements were also identified, as pointed out by Tufekci and Castells. In addition, the influence of neoliberalism and globalization on contemporary social structures, discussed by Harvey and Sassen, revealed that these processes have contributed to the precariousness of work, the increase in inequalities and the occurrence of economic crises that disproportionately affect the most vulnerable groups.

It is concluded that, through the theoretical review and critical analysis of the concepts presented, it was possible to understand the complex dynamics that characterize the network society and the challenges imposed by the digital inequalities and the current socioeconomic context. The research problem, which sought to investigate how digital technologies affect social relations and contribute to the perpetuation or mitigation of inequalities, was addressed comprehensively. Although it cannot be said that the problem has been completely solved, promising directions have been identified for promoting a more just and inclusive society.

Given the findings, the importance of public policies and initiatives that aim to reduce digital inequalities, promoting the inclusion and empowerment of individuals through ICT, becomes evident. In addition, strengthening digital social movements and understanding their challenges can enhance their impact in promoting social change. Future research can deepen the investigation



on effective digital inclusion strategies and the analysis of specific cases of social movements, contributing to the development of solutions that address the complex issues of the digital age. Sociology, thus, reaffirms its crucial role in understanding and transforming contemporary social realities.

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