# Internet and Social Media Technologies Philosophical Foundations and Implications to Inclusivity and Exclusivity in Society.

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## ABSTRACT

Internet and social media technologies have revolutionized society's functions, facilitating unprecedented global connectivity while raising complex ethical and philosophical issues. This paper examines the philosophical foundations of these technologies and their implications on societal inclusivity and exclusivity. The paper also analyzes how these technologies contribute to societal well-being, discussing their role in spreading information, fostering community, and influencing politics.

Further, the paper examines further on the role of the internet and social media technologies on both inclusivity and exclusivity and how we can mitigate the same. Mitigation measures such as implementing inclusive policies, education and awareness campaigns, and content moderation are explored.

**Keywords:** Internet; Social Media Technologies; Philosophy; Inclusivity; Exclusivity; Society; Ethical Considerations; Social Well-being; Mitigation Measures.

## INTRODUCTION

The rise of the Internet and social media technologies has changed the way individuals communicate, access information, and interact with the world around them. These technologies have become significant to modern society, shaping various aspects of our personal and professional lives (Hiremath & Kenchakkanavar, 2016; Dijck *et al.,* 2018). The rapid spread of the Internet and social media platforms has sparked discussions regarding their philosophical foundations and the implications they have on inclusivity and exclusivity within society.

The paper seeks to explore the philosophical foundations of the Internet and social media technologies and examine their contributions to the well-being of society, and their effects on inclusivity and exclusivity. The analysis encompasses both the positive and negative implications of these technologies, taking into account various aspects such as access disparities, empowerment of marginalized communities, algorithmic biases, and privacy concerns. Furthermore, the paper explores potential mitigation measures that can be employed to address exclusivity and promote inclusivity in the digital realm.

By examining the philosophical foundations and implications of the Internet and social media technologies, this paper aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of their role in shaping contemporary society and foster discussions on the ways in which we can leverage these technologies to create a more inclusive and equitable world. Similar study was done by Njoki and Wabwoba (2015) on the role of ICT on social inclusion. This paper will be a continuation of the study and it will look at internet and social media technologies instead of ICT.

## PHILOSOPHY OF THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES

The widespread use of the internet and social media technologies are not purely technological phenomena

rather, they represent manifestations of underlying philosophical orientations that guide their design, operation, and adoption. This chapter examines the philosophical foundations of these technologies.

## Philosophy of the InternetHistorical Development

The historical development of the Internet spans several decades beginning with the inception of computer networks in the mid-20th century. It emerged as a result of collaborative efforts among scientists, engineers, and researchers. Initially, the Internet was primarily used for military and academic purposes, but over time, it expanded its reach and became a ubiquitous tool for global communication and information exchange (Rajaraman, 2022).

In today's world, there is a growing trend of forming sharig networks, where individuals can share various types of content such as files, material and intellectual property through streaming or peer-to-peer technologies. As a result, the internet can be seen as a complex entity made up of five interconnected networks: the net, the web, social networks, IoT, and sharing networks. (Ropolyi, 2018).

In response to the social and cultural needs of the 1960s, interconnected computer networks  were established. By the 1980s, a global network of computers, known as The Net, had emerged and was widely utilized. The world wide web, a network of web pages, has since been developed on this foundation, beginning in the 1990s. Social networks, like Facebook, have been built on the potential of the coexisting net and web, starting in the 2000s. (Ropolyi, 2018)

## Conceptual Underpinnings

The philosophy of the Internet encompasses a range of conceptual underpinnings. At its core, the Internet is built upon principles of openness, decentralization, and interconnectedness. (Stantec Consortium 2022). These concepts reflect the vision of a networked society, where information flows freely, individuals can connect across geographical boundaries, and knowledge is accessible to all.

The Internet has brought about significant changes in society, transforming various aspects of life. It has made information accessible to everyone, enabling lifelong learning and connecting individuals to vast knowledge resources. The Internet has also made communication and collaboration more efficient, overcoming the limitations of time and distance. Additionally, it has revolutionized industries like commerce, entertainment, and education, providing new platforms for innovation and interaction. (Manyika & Roxburgh, 2011)

One of the foundational principles underlying the Internet is the promotion of freedom of information and speech. It has brought many significant changes to society, transforming various aspects of life. Information has become accessible to all, facilitating lifelong learning and connecting individuals to vast knowledge resources. It has also revolutionized industries like commerce, entertainment, and education, providing new platforms for innovation and interaction (Manyika & Roxburgh, 2011). In addition, the Internet has empowered individuals to express themselves and participate in public discourse, amplifying voices that were previously marginalized. However, challenges such as censorship, content moderation, and the spread of misinformation have raised complex ethical and philosophical questions regarding the balance between freedom of expression and the need for responsible online communication (Figliola, 2012).

## Ethical and Privacy Concerns

The widespread use of the Internet has brought forth significant privacy concerns. As individuals engage with online platforms and share personal data, questions about data ownership, surveillance, and the protection of privacy rights have emerged (Dhiman, 2023). Corporations and governments collecting and

analyzing user data without proper consent and transparency has raised ethical concerns regarding consent, transparency, and the appropriate use of personal information. While personalized services and targeted advertising have benefits, maintaining privacy and data protection is a crucial challenge in the digital age (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009).

The philosophical foundations of the Internet provide a framework for understanding its transformative nature and its impact on society. By exploring concepts such as openness, decentralization, and freedom of information, as well as considering the challenges related to privacy and speech, we can gain a deeper understanding of the philosophical underpinnings that shape the Internet and its implications for inclusivity and exclusivity in society.

**Philosophy of social media technologies**

Social media technologies, a byproduct of this internet evolution, have emerged as influential platforms, enabling real-time communication and interaction among users across geographical boundaries. Services such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and numerous others, have gained prominence, attracting billions of users worldwide and profoundly impacting societal communication patterns (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020).

Social media technologies are born from the modern internet age and are deeply embedded within complex philosophical underpinnings. These technologies are not mere tools for communication but represent a shift in the way individuals construct identities, engage with others, and participate in society. This section looks into the underlying philosophical theories that inform social media's development and use, and their ethical implications.

The development and use of social media technologies are shaped by philosophical theories emphasizing user agency, democratization, and interconnectedness. These technologies facilitate a shift from passive consumption to active participation, embodying the philosophical principles of user empowerment and participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). Furthermore, the design of social media platforms reflects the concepts of openness and connectedness, promoting a new form of public sphere in the digital age (Loader & Mercea, 2011).

Various philosophical arguments are advanced regarding social media technologies. Some posit these technologies as democratizing forces, enabling individual agency and fostering a participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). Others argue that using algorithms and data practices, social media may compromise individual autonomy and privacy (Zuboff, 2019). Thus, philosophical perspectives shape our understanding of social media technologies, influencing debates about their implications for society.

# CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WELL-BEING OF SOCIETY

As dominant communication and information-sharing tools, social media technologies have significantly impacted the societal landscape. From fostering awareness of societal issues to influencing political participation, these technologies have reshaped the fabric of social interaction and engagement. This chapter explores these contributions, and their implications for societal well-being, examining both their benefits and challenges.

### Information Access and Dissemination

The Internet and social media technologies have significantly contributed to the accessibility and dissemination of information and awareness-raising on societal issues. They enable users to share and access real-time information on a global scale, facilitating public discourse and collective action on issues ranging from health crises to climate change. (Dhiman, 2023; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). The ability to

quickly and easily search for information, access online libraries, and engage in online discussions has empowered individuals with knowledge and promoted informed decision-making. This increased access to information has the potential to enhance the well-being of society by fostering critical thinking, promoting education, and enabling informed civic participation. Moreover, these platforms also amplify marginalized voices, fostering awareness of underrepresented issues and communities (Tufekci, 2017).

Conversely, these technologies have been reported to widen the digital divide and creating disparities in access to information and opportunities, algorithmic bias and discrimination, amplification of misinformation (Njoki *et al*., 2015).

## Connectivity and Globalization

The Internet and social media technologies have facilitated unprecedented levels of connectivity and globalization (Akram & Kumar, 2017). These technologies have shrunk geographical distances, allowing individuals from different parts of the world to connect and collaborate effortlessly. The ease of communication and the ability to form global networks have opened up opportunities for cultural exchange, economic cooperation, and social interaction (Akram & Kumar, 2017). The increased connectivity has broadened perspectives, fostered cross-cultural understanding, and promoted a sense of global community, contributing to the overall well-being of society.

Social media platforms play a big impact on connecting people and creating communities, which can affect mental health and well-being of individuals. According to research by Naslund *et al*. (2016), these platforms enable individuals to maintain social connections, find support groups, and engage in communities of interest. This can give them a sense of belonging and improve their emotional well-being.

## E-commerce and Digital Economy

The internet and social media technologies have played a significant role in enabling the growth of e-commerce and the digital economy. Online marketplaces and platforms have revolutionised the buying and selling of goods and services, creating new opportunities for businesses and consumers alike. The convenience and accessibility of online shopping have resulted in more options for consumers choices while reducing the transaction costs. The digital economy has also created employment opportunities, encouraged innovation, and contributed to economic growth (Akram & Kumar, 2017). The ability to engage in online entrepreneurship and participate in the digital marketplace has positively impacted individual well-being and overall societal prosperity.

On the flip side, according to Rani, A (2019), full implementation of social media technologies erases boundaries, removes barriers, can increase engagement and help businesses reach potential customers.

The downside is that low social media "shares" can lead to negative social proof and destroy a business's reputation

## Education and Knowledge Sharing

The emergence of the Internet and social media technologies have revolutionized education and knowledge sharing (Akram & Kumar, 2017). This has led to the development of online learning platforms, open educational resources, and massive open online courses (MOOCs) making education more accessible, flexible, and affordable. With the wide range of educational materials available, the students can now easily access a wealth of educational materials, collaborate with peers and educators, and engage in interactive learning experiences. These technologies have also facilitated knowledge sharing among professionals, researchers, and experts, enabling the dissemination of cutting-edge research, advancements, and best

practices. The democratization of education and knowledge sharing has the potential to enhance individual skills, promote lifelong learning, and drive societal progress.

**Social Activism and Mobilization**

Social media technologies have played a significant role in facilitating political participation, democracy, social activism and mobilization. These platforms facilitate political discussion, mobilization, and direct action, enhancing democratic participation and fostering a new form of digital activism (Tufekci, 2017). Hashtags, viral content, and online petitions have played a significant role in empowering individuals to advocate for social justice, human rights and inclusivity. The power of social media in social activism has the potential to mobilize people quickly, bring about meaningful change and advance the well-being of society.

On the flip side, According to Butler, M (2011), , Social media is slowly killing real activism and replacing it with "slacktivism"

Even if social media activism raises awareness about social issues, the question remains whether this awareness translates into real change.

Some people argue that social sharing has encouraged people to use computers and mobile phones to express their concerns about social issues without having to actively participate in them.

Actual campaign.

Their support is limited to hitting the "Like" button or sharing content.

# INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES CONTRIBUTION TO INCLUSIVITY

The rise of internet and social media technologies has been transformative in opening up new spaces for conversation, representation, and support. These technologies offer unique opportunities to voice experiences and perspectives, particularly for marginalized communities. This chapter investigates these contributions and their challenges and prospects for fostering a more inclusive society.

**Digital Divide and Access Disparities**

The Internet and social media technologies have the potential to bridge the digital divide and reduce access disparities. By providing affordable and accessible connectivity, these technologies enable individuals from diverse backgrounds to access information, educational resources, and opportunities for economic growth. Efforts such as community-based initiatives, public access points, and mobile connectivity have played a crucial role in bringing the benefits of the Internet to marginalized communities (Dhiman, 2023). Bridging the digital divide is essential to promote inclusivity and ensure equal opportunities for all members of society.

**Empowerment of Marginalized Communities**

Social media technologies have empowered marginalized communities by providing platforms for sharing their stories, voices, and experiences. These platforms amplify the traditionally marginalized voices in mainstream narratives, promoting diversity and inclusivity. (Njoki & Wabwoba, 2015; Miladi, 2016; Chen *et al*., 2011). Individuals who were previously excluded from traditional media channels now have the opportunity to share their stories and contribute to public discourse. Such empowerment is crucial in

challenging biases, breaking stereotypes, advocating for social justice and promoting a more inclusive society. (Tufekci, 2017; Dijck *et al.,* 2018).

### Formation of Online Support Groups and Communities Facilitated by Social Media Platforms in Improving Mental Health Outcomes for Individuals Facing Specific Challenges or Conditions

Social media platforms have fostered the creation of online support groups and communities that transcend geographical boundaries. These virtual communities provide spaces for sharing experiences, support, and foster resilience among individuals with shared experiences, contributing to improved mental health outcomes (Naslund *et al*., 2016; Gunawardena *et al.,* 2009). These online spaces exemplify the power of social media in fostering inclusivity and support.

### Educational Opportunities and Outcomes, Particularly for Students from Marginalized or Under-Resourced Communities

Internet access and social media usage can positively impact educational opportunities and outcomes, particularly for students from marginalized or under-resourced communities. These technologies provide access to educational resources, learning communities, and global conversations that can enhance learning experiences and outcomes (Selwyn, 2016). However, the digital divide, reflecting inequalities in access and digital literacy, poses challenges to the potential of these technologies to foster educational inclusivity (Njoki *et al*., 2015).

# INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES CONTRIBUTION TO EXCLUSIVITY

While internet and social media technologies have contributed to inclusivity, they can also contribute to exclusivity, thereby leading to societal disparities. This chapter explores the potential adverse impacts of these technologies on widening the digital divide, perpetuating certain standards, reinforcing divisive discourse, and fostering a toxic online culture.

### Widening the Digital Divide and Creating Disparities in Access to Information and Opportunities

Despite the proliferation of internet and social media technologies, a digital divide persists, creating disparities in access to information and opportunities. Socioeconomic status, geographic location, age, and digital literacy levels can influence individuals' access and usage, leading to information asymmetries and opportunity gaps (Njoki *et al*., 2015). This digital divide underscores how these technologies can inadvertently worsen the societal inequalities.

### Algorithmic Bias and Discrimination

Algorithms play a significant role in shaping the content and experiences users encounter on the Internet and social media platforms. However, algorithms can exhibit bias and discrimination, reflecting the biases present in the data they are trained on or the values embedded in their design (Jhaver *et al*., 2023). Algorithmic bias can lead to discriminatory outcomes, such as the targeting of certain groups with harmful content or the exclusion of individuals from certain opportunities or resources (Pariser, 2011). This perpetuates systemic inequalities and contributes to the exclusion of marginalized communities, reinforcing exclusivity in the online sphere.

### Online Harassment and Cyberbullying

The use of the internet and socal media media platforms has made it easier for individuals to harass others

and bully others online. The ability to communicate anonymously can embolden individuals to engage in harmful behaviour, creating an environment of hostility and exclusion (Suler, 2004). These type of digital violence can target individuals based on their gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, or any other personal characteristics, leading to exclusion, causing emotional harm, and a chilling effect on free expression (Akram & Kumar, 2017). Online harassment and cyberbullying can create hostile online environments, silencing voices, and discouraging marginalized individuals from participating fully in online spaces, thereby perpetuating societal exclusivity.

**Amplification of Misinformation**

The rapid spread and amplification of misinformation is another challenge associated with the Internet and social media technologies. The ease of sharing content on these platforms can lead to the dissemination of false or misleading information, which can perpetuate harmful narratives, stereotypes, and discriminatory beliefs (Dhiman, 2023). Misinformation can contribute to the exclusion of marginalized groups, reinforce biases, and hinder the pursuit of truth and inclusive dialogue. Addressing the issue of misinformation requires critical media literacy skills, fact-checking, and responsible platform governance.

**Digital Surveillance and Privacy Concerns**

The widespread use of Internet and social media technologies has raised concerns about digital surveillance and privacy. Online platforms collect vast amounts of user data, which can be used for targeted advertising, surveillance, or profiling (Dhiman, 2023). This constant monitoring and data collection can lead to a loss of privacy and autonomy, creating a chilling effect on freedom of expression and  self-disclosure. The pervasive surveillance and lack of control over personal information can exclude individuals who are wary of sharing their thoughts, ideas, or personal details, thus contributing to a sense of exclusivity.

**Ethical aspects of internet and social media technologies**

As Internet and social media continues to evolve and permeate all facets of human life, it has brought forth a range of ethical challenges. The vast amount of personal data being collected, stored, and analyzed raises concerns about privacy infringement, surveillance, and the potential for misuse (Mccann, 2023). The use of algorithms and artificial intelligence algorithms may result in biased decisions, discrimination, and the erosion of human agency. Additionally, issues such as job displacement, digital divide (Wabwoba & Wechuli, 2020; Mccann 2023; Njoki & Wabwoba, 2015) and cyber threats highlight the need to address the ethical implications of the internet and social media usage. The focus on IT Ethics has increased in recent years owing to the fact that technology has become ubiquitous and majority of individuals rely on it for both personal and work-related purposes. (Mccann, 2023).

# MITIGATION MEASURES TO MINIMIZE EXCLUSIVITY

Reflecting on the above challenges is crucial for leveraging internet and social media technologies to combat societal exclusivity. Despite their potential for inclusivity, these technologies can inadvertently perpetuate exclusivity through the digital divide, biased content, divisive algorithms, and toxic  online culture. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts toward ethical tech design, inclusive content, algorithmic transparency, and online safety.

This section explores the potential mitigation measures that can be taken to reduce the extent of exclusivity perpetuated by internet and social media technologies. These include implementing inclusive policies and guidelines, education and awareness campaigns, case studies of successful initiatives, and the role of content moderation.

## Promoting Digital Literacy and Media Literacy

Promoting digital literacy and media literacy is crucial in minimizing exclusivity on the Internet and social media platforms. Digital literacy equips individuals with the skills and knowledge to navigate online spaces critically, evaluate information sources, and engage responsibly with digital technologies. Media literacy empowers individuals to analyze and interpret media messages, discern fact from fiction, and understand the potential biases and manipulations present in media content. By promoting these literacies, individuals can better recognize and challenge exclusivity, misinformation, and discriminatory narratives, fostering a more inclusive online environment (Dhiman, 2023). Various initiatives like the Be Internet Citizens program by Google and the Digital Literacy Initiative by Facebook aim at educating users about responsible and inclusive online behaviour (Google, 2021; Facebook, 2021). Evaluating the effectiveness of such campaigns can provide insights into their role in reducing social media exclusivity.

## Regulation and Policy Interventions

Regulation and policy interventions are necessary to address the challenges of exclusivity on the Internet and social media platforms. Policymakers should consider enacting legislation and regulations that promote inclusive practices, protect user privacy, and combat discriminatory practices (Milosevic, 2016). These measures can include antitrust regulations to ensure fair competition, data protection laws to safeguard user privacy, and policies that encourage platform accountability and responsible content moderation. Additionally, collaboration between governments, civil society organizations, and technology companies is essential to develop and implement effective policy interventions that minimize exclusivity and promote inclusivity in the digital sphere (Obar & Wildman, 2015).

## Strengthening Online Safety Measures

To minimize exclusivity, it is essential to strengthen online safety measures to combat online harassment, cyberbullying, and hate speech (Okuku *et al.,* 2015). Social media platforms should implement robust community guidelines, moderation policies, and reporting mechanisms to address harmful content effectively. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have adopted community guidelines that encourage respect, diversity, and inclusion and discourage behaviours that could lead to exclusion (Facebook, 2021; Twitter, 2021; Instagram, 2021). Providing users with guidelines to control their online experiences, such as privacy settings and content filtering options, can empower individuals to create safer online environments (Milosevic, 2016). These guidelines are important in fostering an inclusive social media culture.

## Ensuring Diverse Representation in Technology Design

The inclusion of diverse perspectives and experiences in technology design is essential to minimize exclusivity. By involving individuals from different backgrounds, cultures, and identities in the design and development processes, technology can better address the needs and interests of diverse user groups. It is important to foster inclusive design practices that consider accessibility, cultural sensitivity, and the avoidance of bias. By ensuring diverse representation in technology design, we can create more inclusive platforms that reflect the diverse realities and experiences of users (O'Donovan, 2018).

## Transparency in Algorithmic Decision-making

Transparency in algorithmic decision-making is crucial to address the issue of algorithmic bias and discrimination. Social media platforms should strive to be transparent about the algorithms they use and how they shape user experiences. Providing users with information about how content is curated,

recommended, or prioritized can help individuals understand the potential biases and exclusions present in their online interactions. Transparency can also enable independent audits and evaluations of algorithms to identify and mitigate any discriminatory effects (Jhaver *et al*. 2023). By promoting transparency, we can work towards reducing the negative impacts of algorithms and fostering more inclusive online spaces.

By implementing these mitigation measures, we can work towards minimizing exclusivity on the Internet and social media platforms. Promoting digital and media literacy, strengthening online safety measures, ensuring diverse representation in technology design, fostering transparency in algorithmic decision-making, and implementing appropriate regulation and policy interventions are crucial steps in creating a more inclusive online environment for all individuals.

## CONCLUSION

Internet and social media technologies, as pervasive as they are, have a profound impact on the well-being of the society, affecting how individuals interact, access information, and participate in public discourse. This paper has explored the philosophical foundations of these technologies and their implications on societal inclusivity and exclusivity.

While these technologies have democratized information access, fostering global connectivity and providing platforms for marginalized voices (Njoki & Wabwoba, 2015), they have also contributed to societal exclusivity. Digital divide, algorithmic biases, the promotion of certain standards, and a sometimes toxic online culture can lead to disparities and exclusivity (Njoki et al, 2015).

Various mitigation strategies by the policymakers, technology companies, or civil society organizations, including implementing inclusive policies, legislation and guidelines, promoting digital literacy initiatives, content moderation, and successful initiatives promoting equal participation, have been highlighted as some of the potential ways to counteract exclusivity (Facebook, 2021; Google, 2021; Roberts, 2019). However, these measures are not without challenges and require continued efforts and multi-stakeholder collaboration for their effective implementation.

According to Imran (2023), instead of focusing on increasing productivity and efficiency from digital technology, it is imperative that we broaden our horizons. We must elevate the importance of issues related to exclusivity as fundamental considerations when designing IT interventions. This is particularly relevant in government service delivery, which must consider a diverse population that includes individuals across ages, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds and statuses.

It is important to recognize that digital interventions cannot be implemented with a narrow, one-size-fits-all approach. Rather, it requires a collective effort to confront the countless forms of inequality that persist in our society.

By working together to address these challenges comprehensively, we can work towards a more equitable and inclusive digital future.

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