

Superconnected The Internet, Digital Media, & Techno-Social Life

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Questions for Further Discussion

Chapter 1. Superconnectedness

What are the pros and cons of to being connected to so many people all the time?

Are digital devices impacting offline communications? How?

Technologies reflect the interests of those who create it and fund them. Do you agree or disagree, and are there any limitations on this statement?

Do digital technologies cause people to act in certain ways, or is there a better way to understand their effects? Explain.

Who has the power to determine what digital devices we will become accustomed to using? How much power do consumers have, and how can they exercise it?

Do you tend to be an early adopter or a laggard when it comes to adopting a new digital technology, or something in between? Discuss and share your rationale.

Disruptive technologies are those that alter with startling impact what came before. List five of the most disruptive information and communication technologies of the last 5-10 years, and explain why they were so disruptive.

When is innovation good, and when is it problematic? List three innovations that have been largely positive, and discuss why they were positive, and three that have been largely negative, and discuss why they were negative.

2. Creating the Internet Age

In general, was communication clearer and more effective before the advent of social media? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?

What are some of the pros and cons of having access to so much information all the time on the internet?

With the advancement of technology, computers continue to get smaller and more powerful and widely used for artificial intelligence (AI). List three new AI technologies you have witnessed in the recent years and discuss how they will impact our lives

What we now think of as the internet actually began as an initiative of a department of defense agency for military use. Do you think the internet is now a major threat to our safety, especially when it comes to terrorism, cyberwarfare and protecting military secrets? If so, what should we do about this? If not, why not?

Search engines, which provide a means for people to find what they were looking for on the web, were not immediately seen as critical tools. Today, search engines with sophisticated algorithms are used for more than just to find information. Keeping this in mind, what are the most effective ways to use search engines in today's competitive business environment?

Lack of identity protection and anonymity due to search engines led to the birth of the “dark web”. But, today the dark web is often used for political and terroristic purposes. Do you feel teenagers and younger children should be restricted from accessing the dark web, even though the dark web has some positive uses? Why/why not?

How would the internet and the digital/social media experience have been different if Tim Berners-Lee had not insisted that it be decentralized and allowed to develop in an open fashion?

3. Inhabiting a Digital Environment

What are some of the key advantages and disadvantages of portability in technology use?

What are some of the social networks that you belong to? How do you manage your responsibilities to each yet retain your individuality, as networked individuals are called to do?

How do weak ties contribute to strong societies? Provide five examples of how weak ties have enhanced your life.

Have you ever experienced the “rush of human engagement” online? Provide a few examples and describe the experience.

Do you think the increase in digital spaces (social media platforms, websites, chat areas, discussion boards, online games, workspaces, classes, conferences, hangouts, email and text messages) has brought people closer together and/or encouraged isolation among people? Explain your position.

Discuss a current example of a symbolic representation such as a slogan, photo, logo or flag playing an important communicative role in a digital environment.

Why do some people like to spend so much time on digital spaces simply hanging out, without much of an agenda as to how to spend their time? What is the appeal of this?

With the advent of digital technologies there has been an increase in the number of ways one can present stories and/or his or her experiences. Describe the social media platforms you prefer to use in presenting your stories and experiences, and provide some examples of how you use them.

4. Sharing and Surveillance

Every Internet user by default is part of a “participatory culture” in which they actively take part in the creation and consumption of content. Are you more of a creator or a consumer, or both? Why do you think this is? Provide examples.

With social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, You Tube easily available on portable digital devices, people are now producing a mountain of content (digital labor) for free. Does this digital labor resemble the less visible, unsung forms of traditional women’s labor such as childcare, housework, and surrogacy? Why/why not?

Can you imagine and develop a specific means by which the digital labor that we routinely provide while online could be compensated?

Crowdsourcing can create a better and informed society through information gathering from a very large group of people through platforms like Wikipedia, a repository of information. But how and when does it fail to do so? Provide one or two specific examples and discuss their implications.

In exchange for accumulating likes and follows, it is generally expected that one will like and follow in return. Is this labor, or fun? Why?

What are some of the pros and cons of self-publishing on the internet as opposed to publishing news, stories, books, etc. in traditional outlets? Think both personally and professionally.

How can you tell when information or websites on the internet are fake or credible? Explain and provide at least one example of each.

Should social media companies be regulated to keep bots, fake news, and surveillance to a minimum, or should they be allowed to develop and make decisions without government interference?

How can we preserve the open architecture of the internet to the extent possible? How possible will it be to protect and sustain a free and open internet in the future?

Who do you think should decide what kind of surveillance tools are acceptable for surveillance and against whom? Or should there be no surveillance at all?

5. Global Impacts and Inequalities

Some people think that the digital divide problem should be addressed on a global scale, while others believe it is better to deal with it nationally. Discuss both sides of this issue.

Making information and communication technologies (ICTs) accessible and available to the masses is critical for the economic and social well being of a nation. How can this be accomplished?

Should social networking be a part of the teaching and learning process? For students of what ages? How would this be implemented in school?

Does innovation tend to reduce social inequality or deepen it? Provide examples.

How is the internet of things changing the ways that we live? List and discuss five popular technologies/applications already in use and their personal and social impacts.

What is phishing and why is it so harmful? How can it be identified and avoided?

Are there enough tools to prevent and combat cyberstalking? Discuss the harm that can come from cyberstalking and provide an example.

How can internet and communication technologies (ICT's) best be leveraged to lessen or solve social problems? Explain with at least two specific examples.

How can social media be used to bring about greater understanding, rather than polarization, among people of different nations, races, genders, and other forms of social stratification?

What are some of the issues that people in marginalized groups have to deal with in using social media? Overall, is social media more helpful or more harmful to people who are not part of the societal mainstream?

Citizen journalism powered by digital technology is superior to traditional journalism. Do you agree or disagree? Back up your position with specific examples.

6. Techno-Socialization and the Self

Are digital technologies an extension of our selves? Why/why not?

Should children receive guidelines regarding screen time or social media use? What about teens? Draft a set of guidelines that seem reasonable to you (include children's ages). As a parent, how would you enforce these?

Should smartphones and digital devices be banned (or limited) in schools? What about in colleges? Why/why not?

Do people create new, different projections of themselves online, or do they stay close to their face-to-face identities? Discuss.

What are some of the benefits and hazards of engaging in online creativity and self-expression?

How do individuals' personal, social and cultural circumstances influence their self-expression online?

Having a strong, specific personal brand is more necessary in the digital era than in the pre-digital era. Do you agree or disagree, and why?

How important is branding to creating a professional identity? How about a personal identity? Is branding useful when launching a job search?

7. Friending, Dating, and Relating

List and discuss five creative ways that people meet others and make connections online.

With the increase in popularity of online dating platforms there has also been an increase in the misuse of the dating platforms which is popularly known as "catfishing." What are the dangers of catfishing and how they can be prevented and/or avoided?

Do you think that relationships formed online can be superior to those formed offline in terms of closeness? Is there a point at which an online relationship would have to migrate offline, for you? Discuss.

Do you know anyone who has met a romantic partner on a dating site? Find out and discuss how the “migration” of the relationship from online to offline proceeded. Was it smooth or rocky? What were the pitfalls or relevant issues to be overcome?

The chances of two people feeling a special attraction and an interpersonal spark (i.e. “chemistry”), are comparatively greater in a digital environment than offline. Do you agree or disagree, and why?

Do you think that people are becoming more impatient in the digital age? Does this have anything to do with the instant gratification of liking and following one another, and commenting and clicking on things, immediately in digital and social media settings? Why/why not?

Is it true that the more people use the internet and digital media, the more social contact they have with their existing friends? Why/why not?

Harassment—from trolling and name-calling to stalking and threats—is extremely prevalent online. How should we deal with this, as individuals and as a society, and how can we reverse this trend?

How can internet and digital media help people understand one another better so they can build stronger relationships?

Have you ever talked “to” someone who was deceased on social media, or seen someone else do this? Why do you think this is sometimes done?

8. The Techno-Social Institutions

How are digital technologies changing the dynamics and dimensions of family life?

Are parents now forced to learn the use of computers and smart phones to communicate with their children, and if so, is this a good thing or a bad thing?

Wearable devices like i-watches are now fitted with heart rate trackers, gyroscopes and accelerometers to help keep the user healthy and physically fit. Do you think more technologies will create a healthy and better society in the near future? Can you reconcile your response with the high level of obesity in American society?

With the advent of digital media technologies religion and religious rituals have found a new dimension. Today one can find cyberchurches and watch 3D virtual reality, live streaming of rituals etc. on their smart devices. Can you see any problems arising from this trend?

Does trust play an important role when it comes to buying something online? Why/why not/to what extent?

In what industries will robots replace human workers? How should workers and their families and communities handle this transition, especially if they are over the age of 50 or so?

What part did branding play in the 2016 election of Donald Trump? How about his presidency?

What part did social media play in the elections of Barack Obama and Donald Trump? How about their presidencies? Discuss some similarities and differences in their use of social media, and some of the results of their uses of it.

List some specific steps that could be taken by individuals, groups, and organizations to strengthen our social institutions. Why is this important to do?

Which of the techno-social institutions do you think is in the most peril right now, in terms of strength and solidity. Which is in the best shape?

9. More Benefits and Hazards of 24/7 Superconnectedness

Like it or not, in this modern techno-social life many of us are always-on and always connected. How can we make sure that we do not become completely overwhelmed and dependent on digital technologies?

Is it necessary to unplug sometimes? How much/how often? What would be the benefits and what would be the drawbacks? If not, why not?

Are there any benefits to allowing ourselves to simply be bored? Should we try to introduce more boredom to our lives (and children's lives)? Discuss.

List three advantages and three disadvantages of online gaming, and provide some examples.

How should individuals deal with information overload? Do you find it to be a problem? Why/why not?

Do you consider technology over-use an addiction? Why/why not?

With increasing use of information and communication technologies (ICT's), many of us think we have mastered the art of multitasking. Or -- are we deluding ourselves, and what could be the possible results of such a delusion?

Does social media add to or decrease users' stress? What are the relevant factors involved?

The increasing dependency and use of smart phones has led to nomophobia, the fear of being out of mobile contact. How can we overcome this issue, or is it not necessary or feasible to do so?

How can we build a society in which everyone can enjoy the benefits of digital technology and be protected from its hazards? What would be some good first steps in this direction?

10. Our Superconnected Future

*Nanochips that can be implanted in the body give external access to the most private personal information, human dignity and individuality. Should such technologies be prohibited from use? Why/why not?

Will people be more or less healthy in the future? What are the relevant factors, and what role will digital technologies play?

Will there be greater social equality in the future? What are the relevant issues, and what role will digital technologies play?

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become embedded in the way we live and think. Keeping this in mind, discuss the technologies you carry with you for communications and how you might best ensure that they are influencing your thoughts and activities positively rather than negatively. What specific steps can you take?

Soon, children in technology-rich communities and societies will never have known a world filled with digital devices. When that time arrives, what will be lost? What will be gained?

Do you think that upcoming generations of digital connectors will have more comfort in interacting and building social worlds online? Will they have a greater agility to move between online and offline spheres with more control over their lives? Or will they be more entrenched in the digital world? Discuss.

Will “being human” be a different experience 10, 50, or 100 years from now, due to the role of digital technologies in our lives? How? Explain, using case studies and examples from your own experience to make your points.

Can humans and manifestations of artificial intelligence develop genuine, meaningful relationships? Why/why not?

How can ordinary citizens join together to make the changes that will improve their societies, especially where the role of technology in society is concerned? Can social media be part of this effort?

Make five thoughtful predictions about the digital future, and back each one up with solid research.

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