

## Digital Society and Digital Sociology One Thing Leads to the Other

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**This paper aims to contribute to the discussion on the inescapable relevance of digital sociology in the apprehension of this new world in which the physical and the virtual are often intrinsically linked.**

**Keywords:** Digital Sociology; Digital Divide; Digital Society; Society 5.0; Digital Methods  
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### Digital Society and Digital Sociology

**T**HE digital in the form of hardware, software and infrastructure (1, 2) is increasingly and inescapably present in the daily lives of the vast majority of us (3), either in a more explicit or a more latent way, to the extent that our society can be called a digital society (1, 4, 5), as an example of Society 5.0 (6), increasingly consisting of digitized humans (7). Meshcheryakova and Rogotneva (8) maintain that

*[...] digital transformation changes not only the quality of technologies, but also the social reality, the structure of society, the ways of social interactions, the social actor, and research methods. Four breakthrough technologies — cloud computing, big data, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of things — determine the direction of these changes (pp.175).*

This new context, in which the apprehension of the world is mediated by the digital (2), has brought increased complexity to social life and, consequently, to sociological analysis (8-11).

### Digital Sociology

Digital sociology takes on an increasingly high preponderance for its heuristic potential in capturing the presence of the social in the digital and vice versa (1, 7, 11-15). Fussey and Roth (1) argue that “Whereas early analyses separated ‘cyberspace’ from ‘real’ life, it is now recognized that the ubiquity of digital technology and the growing inseparability of online and offline in-

teractions renders this bifurcation obsolete (if ever adequate)” (pp. 660). An example of this is the transition, albeit not absolute, from face-to-face interaction to an interaction mediated by digital technology (1, 2, 16), such as virtual communities (17), as well as scientific dissemination itself that can happen in these and other virtual communities (18).

However, digital technologies are not neutral and can work either through access or practice as a reinforcement of existing social inequalities or as a generator of new inequalities in a digital divide scenario (1-3, 14, 19). This emerges as a crucial new area of study for sociology and can even revitalize sociological science (2, 7, 19). According to Lupton (2), the digital sociologist is shaped by dimensions such as

- *Professional digital practice:* using digital tools as part of sociological practice – to build networks, construct an online profile, publicize and share research and instruct students;
- *Analyses of digital technology use:* researching the ways in which people’s use of digital technologies configures their sense of self, their embodiment and their social relations, and the role of digital media in the creation or reproduction of social institutions and social structures;
- *Digital data analysis:* using naturally occurring digital data for social research, either quantitative or qualitative; and
- *Critical digital sociology:* undertaking reflexive analysis

of digital technologies informed by social and cultural theory (pp.15-16).

## Challenges

There are several challenges facing digital sociology, among which the following are to be highlighted:

- Its integration in the interdisciplinarity needed for the study of the digital (15, 20, 21);
- Mobilize in an articulated logic the macro, meso and micro social levels (22-25);
- Study the dark side or negative effects of the digital, such as privacy and security (2, 3, 26, 27);
- The use of digital footprints as a source of information for scientific research (28);
- The mobilization of appropriate methodologies to analyze the big data of this digital world (8, 29);
- The theoretical innovation with that of new sociological concepts and theories appropriate to account for this digi-

tal social (30-32);

- Ethics in sociological research in a digital context (2);
- The mobilization of the reflexivity, which is as characteristic of sociology as a science, and its dissemination (2, 33, 34).

## Conclusion

Digital sociology is an opportunity for sociological analysis given that the artifacts, practices and representations shaped by the digital have a socially and culturally constructed component (2), which enables sociology to study it, contributing to explaining this social by the social (35).

Sociology can contribute to a sociologically informed society, in which sociological scientific knowledge, although this is not its main goal (31, 32), can also be applied to foster a more integrated, inclusive and sustainable development (9, 11, 19, 20).

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