


Chapter 4

Young People and Social Cohesion: Shaping Media Literacy in Postdigital Societies

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ABSTRACT

The impact of public communication media on social cohesion is multifaceted, primarily by facilitating the visibility, accessibility, and openness to dialogue of society itself. Social media, in particular, has been instrumental in enabling widespread participation of individuals and organisations in public discourse, thereby enriching the diversity of opinions expressed. However, concomitantly, these platforms have also given rise to socio-technical environments that foster the networking of anti-democratic actors and the propagation of disinformation and uncivil communication. The profound shifts in social participation engendered by social media have precipitated a dynamic shift in socialisation authority, particularly among younger people. This transformation is substantiated by the theory of post-digitality and articulated in the context of the concept of social cohesion. The article employs the German conception of media competence to advocate for a more expansive interpretation of media literacy.

POST-DIGITALITY AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Post-digitality refers to the cultural, artistic, and theoretical condition that emerges following the widespread integration of digital technologies into everyday life. This

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concept challenges the traditional dichotomy between the digital and the analogue, emphasising their convergence. It signifies a shift from the novelty of digital innovations to a critical engagement with their pervasive presence and implications. From one perspective, the exploration of the digital's restructuring of quotidian life is central to the post-digital theoretical framework. Conversely, a critical stance towards prevailing media literacy models is implied, as the purported transformation of daily life gives rise to novel challenges pertaining to social cohesion. In this regard, media literacy is inextricably linked to social cohesion.

The term “post-digital” initially gained prominence in the early 21st century, particularly within the domain of art and design. Post-digital aesthetics encompass a fusion of digital and analogue techniques, frequently accentuating the imperfections and glitches that emerge from technological processes. This approach challenges the pursuit of digital perfection, instead emphasizing the unique qualities that emerge from the interplay of different media. The employment of glitches – defined as unanticipated errors in digital processes – as artistic components serves to critique the notion of flawless digital reproduction, emphasising the materiality and fallibility of digital media (Cascone, 2000; Kemper, 2023).

Subsequently, post-digitality was adopted by media science. The post-digitality concept does not signify a disconnection from digitality; rather, it underscores the inevitability of the prefiguration of the living world through digital technology and algorithms. Digital technology is not a recent phenomenon; it is an emergent element that has already had a profound impact on all facets of life (Berry, 2024).

The consequences of digitality can be observed in three key characteristics of post-digital societies.

THE UBIQUITY OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

In Germany, 96 per cent of young people aged between 12 and 19 have an internet-enabled smartphone (Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest, 2024), and the daily internet usage time is 434 minutes (Beisch & Koch, 2023), of which 120 minutes is spent using social media (Bitkom Research, 2024).

Digital tools and platforms have become so pervasive that they are taken for granted. This ubiquity reduces the sense of awe associated with digital advances, prompting a shift in focus from the technology itself to how it shapes culture, behaviour, and society.

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