

Chapter 9

Digital Intellectualism: Algorithmic Mediation of Public Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Digital scholarship has transformed knowledge production through platform-mediated dissemination, algorithmic curation, and networked collaboration. However, this transformation simultaneously democratizes intellectual participation and reproduces structural inequalities. This chapter examines how scholars negotiate authority, visibility, and epistemic legitimacy within algorithmically governed public spheres. Drawing on case studies from the UK, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, we analyze digital divides, algorithmic opacity, and epistemic fragmentation alongside community-led interventions fostering equitable inclusion. We explore how algorithmic truth regimes reshape knowledge validation and argue for socio-technical interventions to build transparent, democratically accountable digital knowledge infrastructures. The chapter articulates a vision for digital scholarship grounded in epistemic justice and democratic values, emphasizing coordinated action across academia, technology design, governance, and civil society

INTRODUCTION

Digital intellectualism represents a fundamental transformation in the production, validation, and dissemination of knowledge in the contemporary era. Traditional public intellectuals derived epistemic authority from disciplinary peer review, academic institutions, and established scholarly media outlets (Gomes & Bastos, 2024).

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In contrast, digital intellectuals must navigate algorithmic gatekeepers, platform affordances, and engagement metrics that reshape how knowledge is validated and perceived by the public (Boyd & Crawford, 2012).

Digital Intellectualism can be defined as an emergent ideological formation where power over intellectual authority is redistributed from traditional academic and media institutions toward algorithmically mediated and networked systems (Gomes & Bastos, 2024). This transformation is marked by three core elements: algorithmic epistemologies, visibility economies, and platform sovereignty. Algorithmic epistemologies describe the rule-based systems shaping knowledge credibility and dissemination (Sustainability Directory, 2025). Visibility economies refer to competition for attention through platform metrics such as likes, shares, and reach that increasingly stand in for scholarly consensus (Boyd & Crawford, 2012). Platform sovereignty refers to the power that corporate platforms exert in defining the parameters of discourse, such as ranking algorithms and moderation policies (Pariser, 2011).

It is essential to distinguish between digital intellectualism and the broader concept of epistemic ideology, as this manuscript addresses both but must clarify their relationship. Epistemic ideology refers to the foundational belief systems about what constitutes valid knowledge, whose expertise deserves credibility, and through which institutional or technological mechanisms knowledge gains legitimacy. In this sense, epistemic ideology encompasses the philosophical and political assumptions underlying all knowledge systems, whether traditional or digital. Digital intellectualism, by contrast, represents a specific ideological formation and material practice situated within the digital epistemic context. It describes both the emergent class of intellectual actors who leverage digital platforms for authority and the restructured power dynamics through which knowledge authority shifts from institutional gatekeeping (peer review, editorial boards, academic credentialing) to algorithmic mediation and network effects. Digital intellectualism is therefore a manifestation of contemporary epistemic ideology, specifically the ideology that privileges engagement metrics, platform visibility, and networked influence as proxies for intellectual merit.

This manuscript focuses primarily on digital intellectualism as an emerging practice and ideology, but situates it within the broader epistemic transformations of the 21st century. The critical distinction becomes apparent when considering that epistemic ideology shapes what gets recognized as “truth” at a systemic level, while digital intellectualism describes how individual and collective actors navigate and contest that system through platform-mediated means. Understanding this relationship is crucial for the subsequent analysis of algorithmic truth regimes, as these regimes are simultaneously products of dominant epistemic ideologies and mechanisms through which alternative epistemic ideologies are marginalized or amplified.

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