

Interactive Media and the Construction of Social Meaning: An Analytical Approach in the Humanities

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Soumission : 23/10/2025

Acceptation : 08/01/2026

Publication : 16/01/2026

Abstract

This study addressed the subject of interactive media and the construction of social meaning. It focused on the transformations brought about by digital media in the process of communication within society. The study explained that interactive media is based on participation and interaction rather than passive reception, which has made the user an active agent in content production. It also showed that social meaning is no longer fixed; rather, it is constructed collectively through digital interaction among individuals. The study demonstrated that algorithms play an important role in directing content and, consequently, in influencing the way reality is perceived. Interactive media has also contributed to reshaping values and social identity as a result of cultural openness and the multiplicity of sources. The study concluded that digital interaction enhances the production of meaning but makes it more multiple and divergent. It also concluded that interactive media creates a dynamic environment for meaning construction, although it is unstable.

Finally, the study called for strengthening media awareness to confront the challenges of the digital space.

Keywords: interactive media, social meaning, digital interaction, digital space, humanities

Introduction

The contemporary world is witnessing profound and rapid transformations in the structure of human communication as a result of successive technological development and the emergence of new digital media that have radically changed the nature of the media process. The media is no longer merely a means of transmitting information from a sender to a receiver; it has become an open interactive space that allows individuals to participate in the production, circulation and interpretation of content. In this context, the concept of interactive media has emerged as one of the most important manifestations of transformation in the field of communication sciences, as it is based on the principles of interaction and participation rather than passive reception. This has led to the reshaping of traditional roles in the communication process.

This transformation was not merely technical; rather, it extended to include social and cultural dimensions, as individuals have become fundamental agents in constructing and circulating meanings within the digital space. Social meaning is no longer produced unilaterally by media institutions; rather, it has become the outcome of continuous interaction among users,

manifested in comments, shares, reposting and interpretation. This makes the study of interactive media closely linked to sociology and the humanities, given the dimensions it has in relation to understanding human behavior within digital environments.

Digital platforms have also contributed to the creation of new communicative environments characterised by plurality and openness. At the same time, however, they raise complex challenges related to the reliability of information, the influence of algorithms and the problem of constructing social truth. Continuous interaction among individuals within these platforms not only leads to the exchange of information but also contributes to shaping their perceptions of reality and reproducing social values and norms. From this perspective, interactive media becomes a fertile field for analysing how social meaning is formed under current digital change, especially from the perspective of social psychology, which is concerned with studying the influence of the group and interactions on the individual's perception and behavior.

Accordingly, this study seeks to elucidate the dialectical relationship between interactive media and the construction of social meaning through an analytical approach based on the intersection of several disciplines within the humanities. It aims to understand how digital interaction contributes to reshaping individual and collective awareness and to highlight the role of the user as an active element in producing meaning rather than as a merely passive receiver. It also seeks to explore the mechanisms through which this meaning is constructed within the digital space and to identify the most important resulting social and cultural effects in a world that is moving increasingly toward digitalisation and interactivity.

Accordingly, we pose the main question: How does interactive media contribute to constructing and reshaping social meaning among individuals within the digital space in light of the transformations experienced by the humanities?

Research Questions

- *- What is meant by interactive media, and what are its most prominent characteristics?
- *- How is social meaning produced within digital platforms?
- *- What is the role of interaction, including comments, shares and likes, in shaping this meaning?
- *- To what extent does the user contribute to producing content and meaning?
- *- What is the impact of interactive media on values and social identity?
- *- How do algorithms influence the direction of circulated meanings?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from the fact that it addresses a contemporary topic represented by the relationship between interactive media and the construction of social meaning in light of the widespread dissemination of digital media. Its significance also lies in the following:

- *- This highlights the shift from traditional media to media based on interaction and participation.
- *- Understanding how social meanings are formed within the digital space.

- *- Shedding light on the role of the user as an agent in content production.
- *- Enriching the field of communication sciences through a multidisciplinary approach.
- *- Contributed to an understanding of the social and cultural effects of new media.

Objectives of the Study

- *- To analyse the concept of interactive media and its fundamental characteristics.
- *- To study the mechanisms of constructing social meaning in the digital environment.
- *- To reveal the role of digital interaction in shaping social awareness.
- *- To clarify the influence of interactive media on values and identity.
- *- To highlight the relationship between interactive media and the fields of sociology and social psychology.
- *- To arrive at findings that help achieve a deeper understanding of the role of media in the digital society.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

First: Defining Interactive Media

Within the framework of communication sciences, interactive media is defined as a form of digital communication based on the exchange of roles between sender and receiver, whereby users are enabled to participate actively in producing, modifying and circulating content rather than merely engaging in passive reception.

Rafaelii indicates that interactivity means “the extent to which a communication medium can enable users to exchange messages mutually and sequentially”; that is, each message is a response to what preceded it, thereby creating a continuous dialogue (Rafaeli, 1988, p. 111).

Moreover, Jenkins considers interactive media to be part of the culture of digital convergence, in which production and consumption merge into a single process and the audience becomes a participant in content production (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3).

Second: Characteristics of Interactive Media

1. Interactivity

This means the user's ability to respond, participate and influence content directly, which transforms communication from a one-way process into an interactive one.

2. Participation

Interactive media enables users to produce content, including texts, images and videos, which enhances the role of the “produser”.

3. Immediacy

It is characterised by the rapid transmission of information and instantaneous interaction with events, which increases its influence on the audience.

4. Multimedia

It combines text, sound, image and video on a single platform, which enhances the understanding of the media message.

5. Non-Linearity

The user can move freely among contents without following a specific sequence, which gives the user greater control over the reception of information (Manovich, 2001, p. 53).

6. Personalisation

Platforms provide customised content according to the user's interests and digital behaviour (Negroponte, 1995, pp. 153, 155).

Role of Digital Interaction in Producing Meaning

Digital interaction is among the fundamental pillars of interactive media, as it contributes directly to the production of meaning within the digital space. Within communication sciences, the user is no longer a passive receiver but has become an agent who participates in constructing the media message through comments, likes, shares and reposting.

Walther indicates that interaction through digital media, or computer-mediated communication, enables individuals to construct shared meanings through the continuous exchange of messages, even in the absence of face-to-face interaction. This means that meaning is not transmitted ready-made; rather, it is produced gradually through interaction (Walther, 1996, p. 7).

Boyd also affirms that digital platforms constitute social environments in which meaning is produced collectively, as users interact with content and with one another, leading to the reinterpretation of media messages and the attribution of new connotations to them. A single piece of content may carry different meanings according to the nature of the interaction that surrounds it (boyd, 2014, p. 9).

Algorithms and Their Role in Directing Social Meaning

Algorithms are among the fundamental elements on which modern digital platforms are based, as they organise, arrange and filter the enormous volume of content circulated online. Within communication sciences, these algorithms are no longer merely neutral technical tools; rather, they have become influential agents in shaping social meaning and directing individuals' perception.

Gillespie indicates that algorithms play a central role in “organising visibility”, that is, in determining what the user sees and what is withheld from the user, which directly affects the way in which the user understands reality. The content that appears on the interface is not random; rather, it is selected on the basis of criteria such as previous interests, user behavior and interaction with content.

From this standpoint, the concept of “filter bubbles” proposed by Pariser emerges, whereby the user is exposed only to content that is consistent with the user's opinions and interests, which narrows the user's cognitive horizon and reduces exposure to different viewpoints. This algorithmic selection not only directs what we see but also contributes to shaping the meanings we assign to social events and phenomena.

Sunstein (2001) also confirms that this type of personalisation may lead to “social fragmentation”, whereby individuals are divided into separate digital groups that adopt different meanings and interpretations of reality, affecting the unity of public opinion.

On the other hand, algorithms rely heavily on interactions, including likes, comments and shares. This means that they enhance the most widespread or provocative content, regardless of its accuracy. This may lead to the amplification of certain meanings or the spread of misleading information, a matter discussed by Lazer et al. (2018) in their study on false news (Pariser, 2011).

Consequently, algorithms do not merely organise content; rather, they contribute to reshaping social meaning by directing attention, reinforcing certain interpretations and excluding others. This makes them a decisive element in understanding how meaning is constructed within the digital environment, in a clear intersection with sociology.

The Impact of Interactive Media on Values and Social Identity

Interactive media constitute one of the most prominent factors influencing the reshaping of values and social identity in contemporary societies, particularly with the widespread dissemination of digital platforms. Within the humanities, social identity is a dynamic construction formed through continuous interaction between the individual and the social and cultural environment.

Interactive media provides new spaces for self-expression, where individuals can display their identities and interact with others through texts, images and videos. Castells considers that the network society has created a new pattern of identity built through digital networks, in which individuals become part of virtual communities that transcend geographical boundaries.

Hall also indicates that identity is not fixed; rather, it is a continuous process of construction and reconstruction. This is reinforced in the digital environment, which enables multiple affiliations and diverse experiences. An individual may display different identities according to the digital context in which that individual is present.

On the other hand, interactive media affects the system of social values, as it exposes individuals to multiple cultures and different patterns of thought, which may lead to the adoption of new values or the reinterpretation of traditional values. Turkle confirms that interaction through digital media may reinforce certain values, such as freedom of expression and independence, but at the same time, it may weaken direct social ties.

Continuous interaction within digital platforms can also contribute to shaping what is known as “digital identity”, namely, the image of the individual as it appears online, which may differ from the individual's identity in reality. This divergence raises problems related to authenticity and belonging (Castells, 2010, p. 33).

Moreover, the influence is not always positive, as it may lead to value conflicts, especially among young people, as a result of exposure to contradictory content or digital social pressures, such as seeking acceptance through likes and followers.

Consequently, interactive media play a dual role in strengthening and deconstructing values and social identity. It opens the way for diversity and openness but at the same time imposes challenges related to value stability and identity harmony, which makes it a central subject at the intersection of sociology and social psychology.

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Challenges of Interactive Media in Constructing Meaning

1. The spread of false news and misleading information: Interactive media contributes to accelerating the spread of inaccurate news because of the ease of publishing and resharing, which leads to the distortion of the construction of social meaning.
2. Weakness of information verification: Users often rely on reposting without verifying the accuracy of content, which weakens the reliability of information circulated within the digital space.
3. Information overload: The abundance of daily content prevents the user from distinguishing between important and unimportant information, which affects the user's perception of social meaning.
4. Influence of algorithms on directing content: Algorithms enhance the most interactive content, even if it is not accurate, which leads to the amplification of certain meanings and the concealment of others.

5. Multiplicity of interpretations and the dispersion of meaning: The differing cultural and social backgrounds of users lead to multiple readings of the same content, which makes social meaning nonunified.
6. Weak credibility within the digital environment: The decline of reliable traditional sources in favour of open content leads to the erosion of trust in circulated information.
7. Information disorder: The mixing of truth with rumours and interpretations makes the process of constructing meaning more complex and unstable (boyd, 2014, p. 79).

Findings derived from the study

On the basis of the analysis of interactive media and the construction of social meaning in light of the scientific literature, the following findings may be derived:

- *- Interactive media has changed the nature of the communication process, as communication has moved from a one-way model to an interactive participatory model, making the user part of producing the media message rather than merely a receiver of it.
- *- Social meaning is no longer fixed but has become dynamic, as it is produced and reproduced continuously through digital interaction, including comments, shares and discussions, which makes it change according to the social and digital context.
- *- The user has become a principal agent in constructing meaning, as individuals contribute to interpreting content and reformulating it, thereby enhancing the role of the group in shaping perception and meaning within the digital space.
- *- Algorithms indirectly affect the construction of meaning by controlling the type of content displayed, which directs attention toward specific meanings and marginalises others.
- *- Interactive media contributes to reshaping values and social identity through openness to multiple cultures and diverse patterns of expression, which leads to the flexible and changing reconstruction of identity.
- *- The spread of false news represents a threat to the construction of accurate meaning, as it leads to the distortion of reality and increased informational confusion among users.
- *- The multiplicity of interpretations within the digital space creates multiple and divergent meanings, which makes it difficult to achieve a unified social meaning within the digital society.

Conclusion

Through the study of interactive media and the construction of social meaning, it becomes clear that contemporary digital transformations have brought about a radical change in the nature of the communication process. The media has moved from being a means of transmitting information in a one-way manner to a participatory interactive space in which users contribute to producing, interpreting and reshaping content.

The study has shown that social meaning is no longer fixed or imposed by one party; rather, it has become the product of continuous interaction among individuals on digital platforms, which has made it variable, dynamic and multidimensional. The findings also showed

that algorithms play an indirect role in directing this meaning through controlling the content displayed, which affects individuals' perception of reality.

Although interactive media contributes to strengthening participation and self-expression, it raises important challenges, such as the spread of false news, information overload and the multiplicity of interpretations, which is reflected in the stability of social meaning within the digital space.

Accordingly, interactive media has become a central element in reshaping social awareness, values and identities in contemporary society, which makes it a fertile field of study within the communication sciences and humanities.

Among the recommendations provided by our study are the following:

- The need to strengthen media education among users to enable them to distinguish between accurate and misleading information.
- *- Encouraging scientific research on the influence of algorithms on shaping public opinion and constructing social meaning.
- *- Working to develop mechanisms for verifying information within digital platforms to reduce the spread of false news.
- *- Strengthening the role of educational institutions in spreading awareness of the responsible use of interactive media.
- *- Encouraging interdisciplinary studies between sociology and social psychology to achieve a deeper understanding of the influence of media on social behavior.
- *- Supporting regulatory policies that ensure the transparency of algorithmic operations and their influence on digital content.

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European Journal of Philosophical Research. 2026. 13 (1)

E-ISSN: 2413-7286

Volume-13/Issue-1/2026