

A Reading into the Dimensions of Building the Media Role in the Digital Age

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Received: 25/04/2026 Accepted: 11/06/2026 Published: 10/07/2026

Abstract:

Introduction: The digital age has brought unprecedented transformations in communication technology, fundamentally altering the landscape of media and presenting new challenges to traditional media structures and functions.

Objective: This paper examines the problematic of constructing the media role within the context of digital technology and the information revolution, exploring how digital communication has transformed media functions, characteristics, and societal impacts.

Methods: The study employs a theoretical and analytical framework, reviewing existing literature on digital communication, media functions, and the challenges posed by technological advancements. It synthesises perspectives from communication theorists and analyses the multifaceted dimensions of media transformation in the digital era.

Results: The findings reveal that digital communication has introduced significant changes across multiple dimensions of media: the emergence of interactive, non-linear communication patterns; the fragmentation of audiences into specialised segments; the predominance of speed and immediacy in news dissemination; the commodification of culture and media content; and the blurring boundaries between entertainment, information, and cultural production. The study identifies that while digital technologies have democratised access to information production and consumption, they have also generated new problematics concerning media credibility, source verification, and the erosion of traditional gatekeeping functions.

Conclusion: The digital age represents a fundamental paradigm shift in media structures and functions. The transition from an industrial to a digital framework has transformed citizens from passive consumers into active participants, necessitating a comprehensive reconsideration of media roles, ethics, and regulatory frameworks. The study concludes that the characteristics of digital communication—its interactivity, speed, and accessibility—require renewed theoretical and practical approaches to understanding and navigating media in contemporary society.

Keywords: Digital Communication - Media Functions and Roles - Media Problematics in the Digital Age

1. Introduction

The era we live in today is indeed the era of media and communications; it is also a reality, for every individual in this vast world finds themselves—in one way or another—thrust into a communicative situation, concerned with understanding and misunderstanding, and with human interaction and responsiveness. The communication process has been and remains fundamental and essential to human activity and its societies, because social life requires individuals to participate, at the very least, in desires and aspirations, with the exchange of information, experiences, and ideas. Through media and communication, societies have emerged into existence (Al-Muslimi, 2005, p. 18).

1.1 Background

The electronic revolution—the third communication revolution—began with the use of radio in the early twentieth century as a means of transmitting symbols through the ether. Then came television in the first half of the 1920s, followed by satellites, which enabled radio and television to reach every corner of the world effectively. Satellite channels emerged as a fusion between computer technology and communication satellites, followed by the internet, which established itself as a modern communication medium with independent characteristics (Al-Dulaimi, 2011, p. 20).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The dimensions of the media and communication role have expanded through satellites, live broadcasting, the prevalence of the internet, and its connection to the world of informatics. This has made it easier to expose audiences to influence from various media on one hand, and to position them in confrontation with media producers on the other—what is termed cultural globalisation (Al-Haqil, 1402 H, p. 40).

The tremendous development in communication technology has altered many patterns of people's lives and added new burdens, particularly concerning freedoms, because these innovations have required substantial financial investment capabilities that only large capital holders can provide, whether individuals, companies, or governments. A significant change has emerged concerning the Western strategy to restrict freedom of expression through more effective policy by exploiting advanced technology (Al-Dulaimi, 2011, p. 30).

1.3 Research Questions

This research paper addresses the role of media under conditions of significant technological development through the following questions:

1. What is the nature of digital communication?
2. What are the characteristics of media in the digital age?
3. What are the functions and roles of media?
4. How has digital communication affected media?
5. What are the problematics facing media in the digital age?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study is significant because the use of digital technology has spread across every field of life, seeking to help individuals adapt and respond to the changes of this era while developing thinking skills to become partners in this rapid development (Al-Dulaimi, 2011, p. 31).

Understanding the transformation of media roles is essential for navigating contemporary information landscapes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Nature of Digital Communication

The term "digital revolution" applies to the current era following the integration of information technology and communication. Technically, "digital" means that letters, images, and sounds are converted into digital data that can be stored, processed, and transmitted by computers.

Digital communication is defined as the fundamental skill for most work that an individual must acquire within the framework of concepts, production, transmission, and reception of communication media. Digital communication is the ability to create effective communication through various digital media (Abdul Hamid, 2007, p. 24).

The development in digital communication technology has changed many patterns of human life and opened a wide scope of freedoms. Innovations in media and digital communication have spread at a speed far exceeding that of traditional communication media (Abdul Hamid, 2007, p. 25).

Digital communication technology has particularly brought about interactive media—a significant outcome that has revolutionised the reality of relations between East and West, and between developed and developing countries, facilitating the transmission of all that can influence peoples to mould them into a single framework (Al-Dulaimi, 2011, p. 27).

2.2 Characteristics of Media in the Digital Age

With the emergence of new digital technology from the second half of the twentieth century, media and communication have been distinguished by several characteristics that have had a broad functional role (Makawi, 2002, p. 106):

- **Diffusion:** Signifying the transformation of new media into essential and functional means.
- **Interactivity:** Interactive media refers to characteristics, media, or services that enable the audience to interact by expressing opinions, where sender and receiver exchange roles. Some specialists term these modern or interactive communication media (Makawi, 2002, p. 106).
- **Fragmentation:** Referring to the multiplicity of messages from which one can choose to suit individuals or small homogeneous groups, rather than unifying messages to suit large audiences.
- **A synchronicity:** The ability to send and receive messages at a time convenient for the individual user.
- **Mobility and Flexibility:** New media can be moved anywhere, such as personal computers and laptops.
- **Convertibility:** Digital communication enables the conversion of audio signals into printed or visual messages and vice versa.
- **Universality:** Digital data processing has become easier to organise.
- **Speed:** The transition has been made from multiple stages to a single-stage approach.

- **Organisation, Intensification, and Comprehensiveness:** Communicators can provide recipients with multi-faceted possibilities, and media present many things from divergent perspectives.
- **Universality of Knowledge:** Modern communication media have accelerated the dissemination of information to the extent that we can expect that no individual or group can escape those influences (Mansour, 1980, p. 103).
- **Predominance of Sensationalism:** To attract the largest audience, sensation is a fertile gateway ensuring media product continuity.
- **Dominance of Advertising Material:** Advertising is the gateway to capital accumulation, profits, and consumer purchasing power.
- **Manufacturing of Public Opinion:** Public opinion is manufactured by the dominant political, economic, and social class.
- **Triumph of the Image:** Media presenting images have shifted from competing with print media to winning, now occupying the largest part of individuals' time.
- **Consumerism:** Increasing the entrenchment of consumer behaviour through the transition from capital accumulation to commercial exchange.

2.3 Characteristics of Digital Communication

Digital communication possesses several distinguishing characteristics (Al-Dulaimi, 2011):

- Provision of wide and diverse information sources, such as electronic books and digital libraries
- Development of critical thinking and self-responsibility in learning
- Development of self-learning skills and independence
- Saving effort, money, and time
- Ease of movement and communication at any time and place
- Ease of retention, storage, and reuse
- Ease of development, conversion, and modification
- Speed of information processing with conversion possibilities
- Suitability for various scientific fields
- Creation of new learning environments such as virtual classrooms
- Provision of synchronous and asynchronous communication
- Exchange of opinions and experiences among global specialists

2.4 Functions and Roles of Media

2.4.1 Functions in Terms of Media Methods

The functional media role can be summarised in three main axes (Makawi, 2002, p. 65):

a. Individual Function versus Societal Function: Community media maintain societal stability and contribute to social, economic, and cultural change. Societal functions are the product of accumulation of functions for individuals.

b. Content Functions versus Medium Functions: Functions relate to message content rather than the medium itself.

c. Manifest Functions versus Latent Functions: Manifest functions are education, guidance, instruction, entertainment, and persuasion. Latent functions are those by which most people act, consciously or unconsciously.

d. Intended and Unintended Functions: Messages may perform functions entirely different from what was intended (cognitive dissonance theory).

2.4.2 Functions of Media for Society

Harold Lasswell identifies mass media functions: monitoring the environment, and correlating society's response to the environment. Merton views these as the exchange of opinions and support for social norms. McQuail considers societal functions as information, achieving social cohesion, social communication, entertainment, mobilisation, etc. (Abu Asba, 1995, p. 105).

2.4.3 Functions of Media for Individuals

- Monitoring the environment and seeking information
- Developing self-concepts through exploring reality
- Facilitating social interaction
- Recreation, relaxation, pleasure, and relief from boredom

3. Methodology

This study employs a theoretical and analytical research approach, synthesising and critically examining existing literature on digital communication, media functions, and the challenges posed by technological advancements. The research methodology involves:

Theoretical Framework: The study draws upon communication theories, including uses and gratifications theory, cognitive dissonance theory, and critical cultural studies perspectives, to analyse the transformation of media roles in the digital era.

Analytical Approach: The research analyses the multifaceted dimensions of media transformation, examining technological, cultural, economic, and social factors that have shaped contemporary media landscapes. It synthesises perspectives from Arab and international communication scholars to provide a comprehensive understanding of media problematics.

Conceptual Analysis: Key concepts such as digital communication, interactivity, commodification, and media functions are examined through existing theoretical and empirical literature.

Synthesis of Literature: The study integrates findings from multiple scholarly works to identify patterns, contradictions, and gaps in understanding the media role in the digital age.

The analysis is structured around identifying: (1) the nature and characteristics of digital communication; (2) the functions and roles of media; (3) the impact of digital communication on media; and (4) the problematics facing media in the digital age.

4. Results

4.1 Digital Communication's Impact on Media

Technology constitutes a significant outcome of organised knowledge related to fields, discoveries, and inventions, particularly in communication rights and media. The entry of machinery into every detail of the communication process has profoundly affected its outputs. This has made media, as both means and end, enable the recipient to perceive the essence of the media message in a closer and easier manner, and facilitated broadcasting to the targeted audience regardless of influence and persuasion calculations (Al-Dulaimi, 2011, p. 27).

The technology used in media facilitates communication of a vast number of messages containing opinions and ideas of different natures that often intersect, creating confusion

among audiences. The modern development in communication media has radically changed an important aspect of societies' beliefs, convictions, and cultures, reflected in the material and conceptual change in the course of their lives (Al-Dulaimi, 2011, p. 28).

4.2 Media Problematics in the Digital Age

4.2.1 Manifestations of Change in Media

The most prominent aspect of media in the digital age lies in the medium itself. Each new tool meets social and cultural needs different from those that preceded it and carries non-neutral contents. With technological development, individual communication media have increased at varying rates, allowing individual consumption of cultural and media contents (Abdullah, 2010, p. 134).

4.2.2 The Trend Towards Specialisation

The digital age has been accompanied by a trend towards specialised radio stations and television channels addressing vertical rather than horizontal audiences. The significant increase in channel numbers has undermined the status of general-character media channels. Radio and television programming no longer addresses the audience as one nation but as diverse social groups (Abdullah, 2010, p. 134).

4.2.3 The Trend Towards Specialised Channels

Success in the digital age is measured by commercial return rather than cultural or social value. Public-sector channels are forced to align with private-sector financing through advertising. Public channels' programmes compete with private channels, leading researchers to question the viability of public television (Abdullah, 2010, p. 135).

4.2.4 Commodification of Culture and Media

The commodification of culture is an issue raised by the Frankfurt School from the 1940s, critiquing "mass culture". The will to commodify cultural materials has been imposed by political pressures, such as imposing market laws on cinema, television, and video. Many voices concerned about cultural materials have condemned these pressures (Abdullah, 2010, p. 136).

4.2.5 Overlap Between Entertainment, Media, and Culture

The contribution of digital communication is confirmed in the overlapping axis between media, entertainment, and culture. Industrial companies deliberately create overlap in these fields, transforming media into a trade seeking to attract a broad audience (Abdullah, 2010, p. 137).

4.2.6 Between Communication and Media

The past century was the century of media, leaving a legacy in cinema, opinion journalism, and intellectual platforms. The age of communication has highlighted seductive audio and visual effects, shifting attention to form at the expense of content. This transformation has produced what Daniel Bouniou calls the "ideology of communication"—the proposition that what matters is that we connect (Bouniou, 1999, p. 35).

4.2.7 Media and the Consequences of Speed

The fundamental aspect of media development is speed—the speed of news and information flow (Laayadi, 1991, p. 140). Speed of presenting news, which was a means of transmission in the 1950s and 1960s, has turned into an end in itself—an ideology of sanctifying speed. Success

in news is now measured by speed and the ability to surpass what is current, not by connection to reality (Abdullah, 2010, p. 137).

4.2.8 Change in the Nature of Media

The exchange value of media seeks to dominate its use value under transformation of the media-producing institution, based on demand rather than supply. Media and information have become material for capital accumulation. The number of media professionals is continuously increasing, including technicians and specialists in collecting, storing, and broadcasting information, raising ethical, moral, and legal issues (Abdullah, 2010, p. 142).

4.2.9 Truth and Freedom in Media

The characteristic distinguishing media in the age of globalisation is the gelatine-like barrier between reality and imagination through the spread of virtual images. Raising the ceiling of media freedom does not necessarily raise the ceiling of practising the right to media. The greatest danger is the absence or occultation of the source, which liquefies the right to media and allows the right to mislead (Abdullah, 2010, p. 143).

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The results of this study reveal that the digital age has fundamentally restructured media in ways that challenge traditional conceptualisations of media functions and roles. The transformation from analogue to digital communication has introduced characteristics—interactivity, fragmentation, and asynchronicity—that have profound implications for how audiences engage with media content. The shift from passive consumption to active participation, where audiences become "users," represents a significant departure from mass communication models that dominated the twentieth century.

The findings align with theoretical perspectives on technological determinism and social shaping of technology. The characteristics identified—particularly interactivity and fragmentation—support arguments that digital media create new forms of social connectivity while simultaneously fracturing shared public spheres. The trend towards specialisation and the decline of general-interest media channels suggest a movement away from the mass audience concept toward niche markets and targeted content delivery.

5.2 Implications for Media Functions

The findings have significant implications for understanding media functions in the digital age. Traditional functions such as surveillance, correlation, and socialisation (Lasswell, 1948) are being transformed by the characteristics of digital communication. The surveillance function is now distributed across numerous platforms and sources, challenging the gatekeeping role of traditional media institutions. The correlation function is complicated by algorithmic content curation and filter bubbles, which may reinforce rather than bridge social divisions.

The commodification of culture and media content raises important questions about the relationship between media economics and democratic discourse. When media success is measured by commercial return rather than cultural or social value, the public service function of media becomes compromised. This tension between media as public good and media as commodity is central to understanding the problematics identified in this study.

5.3 The Speed-Accuracy Trade-off

One of the most significant findings concerns the emphasis on speed in news dissemination. The transformation of speed from a means to an end reflects a fundamental change in journalistic values. The prioritisation of immediacy over accuracy and depth has implications for the quality of public discourse and the ability of citizens to make informed decisions. This finding supports critiques of the "24-hour news cycle" and its effects on political communication and democratic deliberation.

5.4 Ethical Implications

The study identifies several ethical challenges facing media in the digital age. The absence of source verification, the commodification of cultural content, and the blurring of boundaries between information and entertainment raise concerns about media credibility and the public's right to accurate information. The concentration of media ownership and the predominance of advertising as a funding source create structural biases that may undermine media's democratic functions.

5.5 Comparison with Previous Research

These findings extend previous research on digital communication by providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the multidimensional nature of media transformation. While earlier studies have focused on specific aspects such as interactivity (Rafaeli, 1988) or audience fragmentation (Webster, 2005), this study synthesises multiple dimensions—technological, economic, cultural, and ethical—to present a holistic analysis of media change in the digital age.

5.6 Limitations

As a theoretical and analytical study, this research is limited by its reliance on existing literature and conceptual analysis. Empirical research would be valuable to test the theoretical propositions identified here, particularly regarding audience behaviour and the effects of digital media characteristics on information consumption patterns. The study also focuses primarily on Arab and Western perspectives, and future research could incorporate more diverse geographical and cultural contexts.

6. Conclusion

The digital age has become a time of great transformations that destabilise stability in an unprecedented manner. With the collapse of old structures and the erosion of existing laws and customs, others have replaced them. The structure of the industrial age—comprising government, market, and society—is now undergoing fundamental transformation with the dominance of technologies. Digital communication has become a gateway to new forms of interaction with citizens that allow participation, transforming citizens from mere consumers into active partners.

The characteristics of digital communication, its astonishing spread, and the potentials it provides indicate the importance of reconsidering concepts that have been directly affected, foremost among them the problematic of the media role in the age of communication and the information revolution.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Media Literacy Education: Develop comprehensive media literacy programmes to equip citizens with the skills to critically evaluate digital media content, identify sources, and navigate the complex information environment.
2. Regulatory Frameworks: Establish regulatory frameworks that balance the freedom of digital media with the public's right to accurate, reliable information, addressing issues of source verification and content accountability.
3. Public Service Media: Strengthen public service media by ensuring adequate funding and independence, enabling them to fulfill their democratic functions in the face of commercial pressures.
4. Journalistic Standards: Reinforce professional journalistic standards, particularly regarding verification, accuracy, and the ethics of speed, to maintain media credibility in the digital environment.
5. Research and Monitoring: Support ongoing research to monitor the evolving effects of digital communication on media functions and societal outcomes, informing evidence-based policy and practice.
6. International Cooperation: Promote international cooperation on media policy issues, given the transnational nature of digital communication and the challenges it poses to national regulatory frameworks.

6.2 Future Research Directions

Future research should explore:

- Empirical studies on audience engagement with digital media and the effects of interactivity on information processing
- Comparative analyses of digital media development across different cultural and political contexts
- Longitudinal studies on the evolution of journalistic practices and values in response to technological change
- Investigations into the economic sustainability of quality journalism in the digital age
- Studies on algorithmic governance and its implications for media diversity and democratic discourse

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