

**The role of virtual digital platforms in reshaping local culture and lifestyles:  
A field study on a sample of university students in the city of Bordj Bou  
Arréridj**

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**Abstract**

Social change is a key issue in both classical and contemporary sociology, as it is considered an inherent feature of social life. Based on this, this study seeks to clarify the parallel relationship between the outputs of information and communication technologies and culture and society, considering culture as a human and social phenomenon. This study also examines the impact of dominant digital content on social media platforms, which, in one way or another, influences social behavior and contributes to individual formation, as well as its effects on social structure. This, in turn, is reflected in the reproduction of social traits, forms, and practices. The study adopts an analytical approach, based on a field study conducted on a sample of university students.

**Key words:** Social change, digital media, culture, social behavior, university youth

**Introduction**

Human societies have historically been characterized by social change as a fundamental feature affecting their social structures. Theoretical approaches explaining the causes and consequences of ongoing social transformations have varied according to different underlying factors or major historical stages of change.

Within the classical tradition, one can highlight the fundamental contrast between Karl Marx and Max Weber in understanding the nature of modern societies and the reasons behind the spread of Western lifestyles across the world.

Marx considered that the driving force of social change in modern societies lies in economic transformations. The capitalist system, in his view, is distinguished by unprecedented characteristics compared to any previous system, representing a dynamic structure with virtually unlimited growth and expansion.

In contrast, Weber, as one of the most prominent critics of Marxist thought, argued that non-economic factors played the central role in the development of modern society. He emphasized that science and bureaucracy were the decisive forces, viewing bureaucracy as the only effective means of organizing large populations. This, in turn, reflects the broader concept of rationalization in organizing social life (Giddens & Al-Sayyagh, 2005, pp. 709- 710).

From another perspective, proponents of evolutionary theory argue that the most important aspect is that evolution is continuous and does not change its general direction. It represents a transition from the simple to the complex. Herbert Spencer emphasized the

principle of transformation, development, or inevitable change in societies, which—according to him—is associated with the continuity of progress and thus the movement toward greater complexity. Social growth and advancement are therefore fundamental characteristics of the social system, similar to a living organism; the more it develops, the more it becomes differentiated and specialized (Al-Dawood, 2016, p. 61).

Supporters of evolutionary theory also claim that society evolves continuously and is subject to an overall unidirectional trend. They believe that society progresses from simple systems of organisation to progressively more sophisticated systems. Among these theorists, Herbert Spencer stressed the unavoidable development and transformation of societies, emphasising the need for progress toward higher levels of complexity over time. This perspective holds that social growth and development are essential characteristics of society as a social system, analogous to a living organism; as a society matures, its internal composition becomes increasingly heterogeneous (which means that no two members of society will share the same characteristic). (Giddens & Al-Sayyagh, 2005, pp. 716 - 717).

In fact, both material and non-material factors have played a central role in driving continuous processes of social transformation across successive stages of human history. The Industrial Revolution, in particular, had a profound impact on the restructuring of society in all its processes and structures. It also played a major role in initiating a large-scale urban and architectural transformation. This urban expansion significantly altered the social, cultural, and economic composition of the regions in which it occurred, leading to increasingly complex systems of social relations and patterns of human interaction.

These new contexts were largely characterized by the weakening of primary bonds, values, and groups in favor of the emergence of secondary associations, mainly based on urban and utilitarian values. Within this framework, social statuses, roles, and positions became increasingly fluid and continuously changing, grounded in individualism.

In the modern era, the technological revolution has contributed to profound transformations in social lifestyles, particularly through its impact on social interaction and the restructuring of social relations. These relations have shifted from direct interactions, whether primary or formal, to indirect forms of communication that often take place in virtual spaces, detached from physical and temporal constraints.

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In the view of urban sociology, the city is not just a geographical location and physical space but also an urban social space that produces social change for the unique identity of city as both a cultural and urban influence since it has its unique culture on its own.

This brings forth a question of how much influence the physical form of urban space continues to impose upon the social fabric of everyday life. Especially now when the physical aspect of urbanism has largely transcended the experience of time/space, as it has increasingly become part of a larger virtual world and continues to be produced in the digital world.

Through the various digital platforms, such as social media and interactive networks, and the growing number of digital applications, we have seen the massive increase in circulating and disseminating culture and way of life through symbols, discourse, and images; this has enabled a culture that originally emerged in a geographic space to proliferate and escape their geographic boundaries and evolve from products that were originally produced for a particular market, to products that are globally produced and consumed as symbolic representations of that culture.

These platforms also contribute to the re-production of culture in virtual forms based on selective processes that highlight certain elements while marginalizing others, in line with the logic of digital audience appeal. As a result, standardized and stereotypical representations of lifestyles are produced, whose primary source is the curated virtual image intended for dissemination and global consumption through digital content. These dynamics increasingly shape individuals' perceptions, behaviors, and social interactions.

In this context, local practices are directly influenced by these transnational symbolic messages, as users of digital media find themselves in a state of continuous connection and interaction with imported cultural forms carried by digital platforms. These influences shape perceptions and orientations through processes of adoption, imitation, and the ways in which they are expressed and embodied in everyday life, reflecting various manifestations of cultural imitation.

To study this topic, the following main research question is proposed:

How do digital communication media influence the formation and re-production of local culture and lifestyles among university youth?

Sub-questions:

- What is the reality of social media use and engagement with digital content among university students?
- How do digital contents contribute to shaping the individual's personality from the perspective of Algerian university youth?

- How do digital contents contribute to shaping individuals' perceptions and building local cultural awareness?

**Hypotheses:**

- Social media platforms and digital content enjoy a high level of use among university students.
- Social media has contributed to reshaping certain patterns of thinking among university students, reinforcing tendencies toward individualism and the influence of appearance.
- Digital content has contributed to reshaping certain elements of cultural awareness among university students.

**2. Significance of the Study:**

Given the considerable importance of studies related to social awareness in contemporary sociological research, as they play a key role in shaping public perception of important issues, strengthening social bonds, and reinforcing shared cultural belonging, they also contribute to addressing social problems that may affect the system of social interaction. Such outcomes can only be achieved through well-defined and regulated roles and positions for individuals and groups within a unified cultural framework.

Within this context, the problem of social change and its causes has always represented a key variable in sociological studies of society. Social change is reflected through accumulated representations and perceptions that shape the collective social imagination across different social groups.

Accordingly, the importance of this study lies in its attempt to uncover certain levels of awareness regarding rapid social transformations among Algerian university students in an era characterized by strong influences that have brought about fundamental changes in societal perceptions of many issues.

The study is also significant in that it seeks to provide a sociological reading of certain forms of social change, particularly within contemporary Algerian society, which has experienced rapid transformations across all aspects of social life. It also aims to interpret some meanings of modern practices by revealing the role of information and communication technologies in driving transformation and change, through a critical approach that combines sociological analysis with media and communication studies.

Finally, the study seeks to raise awareness of issues related to cultural dependency and intellectual and cultural alienation, and to draw attention to the necessity of protecting social values from cultural assimilation.

**3. Objectives of the Study:**

- To provide a sociological reading aimed at understanding social organization and analyzing Algerian society and its development through the study of social practices.
- To reveal the reality of social mobility in contemporary Algerian society, in order to better understand society and the sources of modern cultural formation linked to key

social issues, particularly at the level of social roles, while drawing researchers' attention to contemporary youth representations.

- To analyze the impact of virtual communication media in reshaping local culture.
- To identify the nature of the influence of digital culture on lifestyles within local communities.
- To examine the manifestations and causes of the decline of local cultural specificity under digital dominance.
- To highlight the impact of passive consumption of digital content on processes of cultural imitation.

#### **4. Definition of Concepts:**

##### **4.1 Concept of Digital Communication Media:**

In this study, digital communication media refer to platforms, interfaces, applications, and networks that rely on digital technology and the internet to facilitate communication and the transmission of information and data between individuals in all its forms (images, videos, messages, etc.), enabling interaction and rapid access.

##### **4.2 Concept of Local Culture of Living:**

This refers to the set of customs, traditions, daily practices, patterns of interaction, values, and attitudes that characterize the members of any local society. These elements have evolved over time and represent the product of its specific historical and cultural context.

##### **4.3 Concept of Lifestyles:**

This concept refers to ways of living, including habits, practices, and forms of both individual and collective social life.

#### **5. Methodological Framework of the Study:**

##### **5.1 Adopted Method:**

This study relies on the descriptive-analytical method through both quantitative and qualitative analysis of field data collected from the study population.

##### **5.2 Fields of Study:**

- **Geographical field:** Mohamed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University – Bordj Bou Arréridj – Algeria.
- **Temporal field:** The study was conducted in several stages. The fieldwork and questionnaire distribution began in April 2025 and continued until July 2025.
- **Human field:** Students of Mohamed El Bachir El Ibrahimi University – Bordj Bou Arréridj.

##### **5.3 Sample:**

A non-random sample of students was used. After the initial screening process, 213 questionnaires were retained out of 301 distributed directly across the university's seven faculties.

Several conditions were observed, the most important of which are:

- Ensuring that respondents are university students.

- Distributing questionnaires according to the proportion of students in each faculty relative to the total university population.
- Including all academic levels: Bachelor's (Licence), Master's, and Doctorate.

Given the lack of studies addressing this specific dimension of the topic within the geographical and human context of this research—based on the researcher's knowledge—this study may provide a model for understanding the perceptions and representations of some Algerian university students regarding such issues.

#### **5.4 Data Collection Tools:**

**Questionnaire:** The questionnaire is defined as “a research instrument consisting of a set of questions formulated by the researcher to obtain scientific answers that serve the objectives of the study.”(Al-Ma'mari, 2021, p. 182)

**Observation:** The study also relied on direct observation, which is considered one of the tools used to collect facts and data that help define the research problem and identify its elements. It is a purposeful, precise, systematic, and in-depth observation that links different phenomena.(Ali, p. 119)

### **6. Field Study and Analysis of Results:**

#### **6.1 Social and Cultural Characteristics of the Sample:**

Regarding the age variable, the age group (21–25 years) represented the highest proportion, reaching 39.14%, followed by the (26–30 years) group with a significant percentage of 29.11%. The group under 21 years accounted for 22.72%, while those over 30 years represented 9.03%.

From another perspective, respondents aged 25 years or less accounted for 61.86% of the sample. Meanwhile, those aged 30 years or less collectively represented 90.97%. These results are considered normal and reflect a social and cultural reality that can be interpreted in light of the following factors:

- The rise in the educational level of society has contributed to increased parental attention to children's academic success. This has created a form of competitiveness, especially regarding the baccalaureate exam, which is considered the gateway to university admission. This is reflected in society through strong parental involvement, enrollment in private tutoring, and the allocation of significant household income to support students preparing for the baccalaureate. All of this has contributed to lowering the age of university entry to the minimum level, with no significant delays recorded.
- The age of 18 is the minimum age for university admission, except in rare cases. Considering possible academic delays, students may enter university at around 20 years of age at most.
- The completion of education has become accessible to most social classes without significant delays in academic progression, due to the spread of universities across various regions of Algeria, based on the principle of social equity in access to education.

**Gender of Respondents:**

Based on the analytical data of the respondents, the majority were female, accounting for 58.62%, while males represented 41.38%. These findings indicate a higher proportion of females compared to males within the sample.

From a sociological perspective, this distribution reflects the generalization of female education within Algerian society. Indeed, in many cases, females have surpassed males in numerical representation across several university disciplines, as confirmed by official statistics. This trend can be interpreted in light of the broader dynamics of social mobility in Algeria, which increasingly aim to reduce gender disparities across various fields, particularly in education and employment.

In addition, the growing culture of financial independence among young males may lead them to enter the labor market earlier than females. This may be linked to the specific social and cultural characteristics and traditions of Algerian society, where girls often remain under parental or family care until marriage.

**Occupational Status of Respondents:**

As previously indicated, the minimum age for university entry in Algerian society is in most cases between 18 and 20 years, with guaranteed access to free education and equal opportunities for students to pursue Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Consequently, the age of completing university studies is generally around 25 years. In this study, respondents under the age of 25 represented 61.86% of the sample.

This demographic structure is reflected in the occupational status of the respondents, which theoretically follows the completion of university education. Based on the field data collected, the majority of the sample were unemployed, accounting for 68.87%, while employed students represented 31.13%.

However, it is noteworthy that respondents aged over 25 years constituted 38.14% of the sample, which is theoretically the age at which most young people complete their academic obligations and begin entering the labor market. This relatively high proportion suggests a significant rate of delayed or limited integration of university youth into the labor market. In our view, this relatively high percentage can be explained in light of certain social specificities, most notably the continued role of the family in supporting children even after they reach the legal age of adulthood and employment. This role is rooted in local culture, as well as in prevailing social customs and traditions.

For females, in general, the girl remains under family care—parents, siblings, and relatives—until she leaves the family through marriage. More recently, and as a result of ongoing social change, this situation may extend until her entry into the labor market in some families, in accordance with prevailing customs, traditions, and broader social and religious values.

The same applies, to some extent, to males, where the young man remains under parental support throughout his educational pathway until graduation from university. At that stage, he is socially expected to enter the workforce, in line with dominant social norms.

**Marital Status:**

According to the quantitative analysis of the field data, the overwhelming majority of respondents were single, accounting for 91.44%. Married respondents represented 7.31%, most of whom were females. Divorced individuals accounted for 1.25%, also exclusively among females, while the proportion of widowed respondents was zero within the sample. These figures reflect ongoing social change, highlighting a clear trend toward the postponement of marriage compared to traditional patterns that previously characterized Algerian society. This indicates a gradual transformation in social norms and practices related to marriage and family formation.

**Place of Residence:**

The majority of respondents live with their families in the family home (with parents or in the marital household), representing 60.18% of the sample. In contrast, 37.95% reside in university dormitories (most of whom return to the family home during academic breaks). A small proportion of 1.87% of the sample live in independent housing (three female students and one male student).

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**Geographical Area of Residence:**

Most respondents reside in urban areas, accounting for 53.51%, followed by those living in rural villages with 27.69%, and finally those living in semi-urban areas or suburban zones with 18.80%.

These findings are consistent with official statistics indicating a continued trend toward urbanization in Algerian society, reflected in ongoing migration toward cities and the expansion of certain settlements into urban areas.

Previous studies have confirmed that this continuous population movement toward urban centers is largely due to weak infrastructure in rural areas and their limited access to essential services. It is also influenced by broader social dynamics linked to information and communication technologies. Moreover, the increasing generalization of education among children, along with the changing roles and social positions of women in society, has contributed to reinforcing the tendency to reside in urban areas, which offer greater opportunities in terms of employment and social mobility.

This is further reinforced by the scarcity of job opportunities in rural areas, in contrast to cities, which provide broader access to education, work, and social participation for both genders. In particular, the growing presence of females in higher education institutions reflects their increasing engagement in urban-based professional and academic pathways, marking an important indicator of social and cultural mobility in contemporary Algerian society.

### **Conclusions Related to the Characteristics of the Sample:**

The field data concerning the characteristics of the respondents allow for the identification of several descriptive features that provide important indications which can later be used to interpret the results obtained from the study population. These findings reveal the following:

- A clear tendency toward homogeneity with the general trends of Algerian society, whether in terms of population distribution by gender or age groups. Youth constitute the overwhelming majority of the university population, with a noticeable numerical predominance of females over males.
  - A marked and continuous increase in the educational level of society, with education remaining a key priority among young people, most of whom pursue their studies at least up to the Master's level.
  - As a result of the strong social value attached to educational attainment, there is a noticeable delay in entry into the labor market, generally until the completion of university studies, alongside a continuous rise in the age of marriage for both genders.
  - A steady increase in urbanization rates in Algeria, accompanied by the persistence of certain social specificities in the face of social change, particularly those related to the role of the family in supporting children until the completion of their studies, followed by marriage and employment.
  - Some cases of deviation from traditional social norms (such as independent living) have been recorded among young people, particularly females. Although these cases remain limited in number, they represent indicators that cannot be overlooked.
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## **6.2 Reality of Digital Media Use:**

### **Level of Use:**

Field survey results show that the overwhelming majority of respondents use digital communication platforms, reaching 97.04%, while a very small proportion of respondents reported not using these applications, estimated at 2.96%.

These figures indicate that digital communication media have become a central component of human interaction, and indeed represent the most important communication tools among university youth.

**Most Used Digital Applications:**

Regarding the most frequently used digital platforms, TikTok ranked first with 41.19% of usage, followed by Instagram with 29.00%, then Facebook with 27.73%, and finally YouTube with 2.08%.

As for communication applications, WhatsApp recorded a usage rate of 63.02%, while Telegram showed increasing popularity with 44.87%. Viber came last with a usage rate not exceeding 21.14%.

The high usage of TikTok and Instagram can be attributed mainly to the nature of their content, which is fast, short, and video-based. In contrast, the lower use of Facebook and YouTube may be explained by the nature of their content, which is often more discussion-oriented, formal, and based on longer videos that require more time and attention. This is in addition to psychological and cultural factors, particularly the influence of the social environment and living context.

The explanation lies in the fact that young people increasingly focus on visual content and prioritize speed, in a way that satisfies needs consistent with the fast-paced rhythm of urban life. This is precisely what distinguishes TikTok and Instagram, as they allow a tendency toward entertainment and escapism from daily pressures. In contrast, the declining use of Facebook and YouTube indicates a reduction in interest among this group in intellectual issues, thematic content, and in-depth knowledge.

**Motivations for Digital Media Consumption:**

The motivations behind young people's use of digital platforms vary across different forms of engagement. Learning and knowledge recorded the highest percentage at 40.14%, followed by entertainment-driven use at 32.44%. Habitual use without a clear purpose accounted for 14.63%, while use for work and income generation represented 7.97%. Finally, escapism from reality accounted for 4.82%.

From another perspective, positive consumption (learning/knowledge and work/income generation combined) represents a majority of 48.11%, while negative consumption (habitual use without purpose and escapism from reality) is estimated at a lower rate of 19.45%.

A clear variation can be observed between motivations reflecting positive consumption and those reflecting negative consumption, which may represent a risk for young people. Entertainment-based use, on the other hand, can be considered a natural human need; however, it may become problematic when it turns into excessive and unproductive consumption.

Accordingly, the digital space has become an integral part of daily life. At the same time, in some cases, it may reflect concerning indicators of the sense of emptiness experienced by certain university students.

### **Time Spent on Digital Content Consumption:**

Responses to the open-ended question regarding the duration of digital content consumption reveal results that raise several important questions related to this variable. Reported usage times range from one hour to five hours per day.

The findings show that the majority of respondents, representing a very high proportion of 86.25%, spend more than five hours per day browsing digital content. This is followed by 11.01% of respondents who spend between three and five hours per day. In contrast, only 2.74% reported spending between one and three hours daily on digital platforms.

These results indicate an intensive level of engagement with digital media among university students, suggesting that digital platforms occupy a significant portion of their daily time.

The purposes of browsing also vary according to the type of application used during this period. The combined variables of learning/knowledge and work/income generation account for 48.11%, while the combined variables of entertainment, habitual use, and escapism from reality represent 51.89%.

These statistics suggest a pattern of intensive engagement with virtual platforms, confirming the widespread presence of digital culture among university youth, to the extent that it has become an integral part of their daily lives. The majority spend most of their free time in the digital space, which has increasingly become a form of refuge.

### **Feelings After Digital Content Consumption:**

For this multiple-choice variable, the feeling of fatigue recorded a high rate among respondents, reaching 80.99%. The feeling of emptiness was also significant at 66.13%, while the feeling of enjoyment accounted for 37.09%. In contrast, the feeling of regret was absent.

These results can be explained by a combination of psychological and social factors. The high level of fatigue indicates intensive use of digital platforms among young people, confirming the findings of the first question. This reflects the presence of digital strain resulting from prolonged exposure to screens.

The feeling of emptiness suggests a gap between what users receive from digital content and their internal expectations, as they may perceive that the content does not add meaningful personal value compared to their real-life experiences.

The presence of enjoyment reflects a rational and selective use of digital platforms among urban youth. Meanwhile, the absence of regret may indicate that users do not apply strong personal criteria for evaluating their digital consumption experience.

### **Conclusions of the First Axis:**

- Digital communication media have become an essential component of human communication and represent the most important communication tools among Algerian university youth.
- The indicator of most used platforms reflects a tendency among university students toward fast, entertaining content and visual-based consumption, while avoiding in-depth content and formal discussions.

- Although positive consumption motivations constitute the largest proportion of reasons for engaging with the digital world, negative consumption motives cannot be overlooked, as they reflect elements of emptiness and entertainment-oriented use.
- The indicator of time spent browsing reflects intensive engagement with virtual platforms and the widespread presence of digital culture, which has become an integral part of daily life.
- Users' post-browsing feelings are closely linked to the type of consumption motives (positive or negative), ranging between feelings of enjoyment, emptiness, and fatigue, and are also associated with the duration of digital media use.

### **6.3 University Youth Representations of the Impact of Digital Content on Personality Formation:**

#### **Superficiality vs Depth and Usefulness:**

The majority of respondents (71.00%) stated that digital content is characterized by superficiality, while 29.00% considered it to be deep and useful.

This variable can be analyzed in relation to the motivations for using social media platforms. As previously shown, entertainment as a motive represents a significant proportion of usage. In addition, habitual use without a clear purpose accounts for nearly half of the respondents when combined. When adding escapism from reality, this proportion rises to 51.89%, exceeding that of positive motives such as learning and work.

Furthermore, the growing culture of monetization—such as the pursuit of fame and financial gain among content creators—has encouraged the adoption of strategies aimed at attracting young audiences, particularly in light of long browsing durations and perceived feelings of emptiness. This has contributed to the widespread dissemination of short, fast, and emotionally engaging content, in contrast to in-depth content that requires time, cognitive effort, and concentration to benefit from.

Also, within the context of growing digital dominance that increasingly imposes its messages and content on users, digital platforms have become a means of disseminating cultural practices promoted by technologically dominant countries and organizations, which have turned these platforms into tools of attraction and behavioral orientation.

The spread of “shallow” and superficial content is, according to some experts, driven by channels and algorithms that reinforce a culture of rapid consumption. This aligns with earlier findings indicating the high use of TikTok and Instagram compared to other applications. The expansion of superficial content can also be explained by the fact that digital production is increasingly governed by visibility and virality rather than value, by prioritizing numbers over meaningful impact, and by the dominance of the attention economy rather than knowledge-based or depth-oriented content production.

#### **Awareness of Imitating Foreign Practices:**

In response to the question regarding university students' perceptions of imitating foreign customs related to behavior, appearance, and daily practices, the results revealed that

100% of respondents believe there is an uncritical imitation of the other's behaviors and appearances.

However, in the question related to self-awareness of imitation practices, the largest proportion (53.62%) stated that they do not engage in imitation, while 29.17% acknowledged that they do imitate. The remaining 17.21% reported that they live their lives normally without consciously thinking about imitation.

Comparing these findings reveals the absence of a clear evaluative standard among young people for measuring imitation, as there is a contradiction between acknowledging its existence in others and denying it in oneself. This suggests that such practices occur largely without conscious awareness or critical reflection.

These statistics indicate the strong influence of digital platforms in embedding their cultural messages and discourses, thereby reshaping local youth lifestyles. This makes young people more susceptible to adopting behaviors promoted by social applications in pursuit of social integration, often without realizing it, due to intensive exposure to digital content. Such influences may appear in clothing styles, speech patterns, imitation of virtual influencers, or even the adoption of specific attitudes and ideas. The overall result is the increasing dominance of appearance over substance.

### **Impact of Digital Content on Personality Formation:**

The majority of respondents confirmed that digital content has a clear influence on personality formation, accounting for 51.67%, while the remaining respondents believed that digital content does not affect the construction of their personality.

Each group provided its own justification. The first group argued that adapting to the requirements of the modern era in terms of lifestyles and patterns of living is necessary, emphasizing that digital content has become an integral part of daily life and plays a role in shaping attitudes and behavioral patterns within local societies, particularly among young people.

The second group maintained that personality is primarily shaped through the process of socialization, and that its formation is rooted in the nature and specificity of the society to which individuals belong. According to this view, personality development originates mainly from the family and the surrounding social environment.

This divergence reflects differences in levels of awareness and perception regarding digital influence among respondents, as well as a lack of critical self-reflection, contrasted with a more critical evaluation of others.

### **Influence of Virtual Culture on Personality Formation:**

From another perspective, when respondents were asked about their perceptions of the effects of virtual culture on youth in general, the results of the study showed that they classified the manifestations of this influence on local youth (i.e., on others) as follows: consumption patterns ranked first with 44.81%, followed by clothing styles with 28.14%, then values and behaviors with 11.88%, social relations and ways of living and interacting with others with 8.79%, and finally language and daily expressions with 6.38%.

From one point of view, the predominance of consumption patterns can be explained by the strong influence of virtual culture on local society, which is mainly reflected in consumer behavior. This is largely linked to content promotion strategies, as previously discussed. The second-ranking position of clothing styles reflects the interest of urban youth in appearance and their strong exposure to visual culture in digital spaces, often prioritizing image over substance, within fast-paced consumer-oriented patterns.

In contrast, the lower percentages related to values and behaviors, language and daily expressions, and social relations may indicate either respondents' perception that the strongest influence is material and appearance-based rather than value-based, or alternatively the relative resilience and continuity of local cultural values.

On the other hand, there is a general acknowledgment of the influence of virtual culture on youth personality formation, particularly when referring to "others," which highlights a lack of critical self-reflection regarding one's own practices.

### **Conclusions of the Second Axis:**

- Most respondents believe that the majority of digital content is characterized by superficiality.
- At the level of awareness regarding the impact of digital platforms, most respondents acknowledge a strong influence on others, while this percentage decreases when assessing their own exposure. This suggests that imitation may occur without conscious awareness or critical reflection, which indicates the strong influence of these platforms.
- Regarding the impact of digital content on personality formation, respondents acknowledge that digital communication plays an important role in shaping the orientations of Algerian university youth.
- In terms of personality construction and development, virtual culture plays a significant role in influencing youth orientations and choices, particularly in relation to appearance and personal tendencies. At the same time, local values and culture appear to remain resilient, especially regarding the core elements of personality.

### **6.4 University Youth Representations of the Impact of Digital Content on Cultural Awareness:**

#### **Decline of Traditional Values in Local Societies:**

The majority of respondents (81.19%) acknowledged that traditional social values—such as solidarity, modesty, and simplicity—are in a rapid and continuous state of decline. While these values still exist, respondents deny their stability and sustained influence. This reflects a general awareness of ongoing social change. When asked about the possible causes of this decline, respondents' answers varied, with differing proportions pointing to cultural transformation, the spread of individualism, and the rise of relationships based on interests.

Additional explanations included a shift toward formal relationships, limited social interaction, lack of familiarity among individuals, and the breakdown of the traditional extended family system and neighborhood-based social organization. These changes highlight a

transformation in traditional social structures as a likely consequence of exposure to a consumer-oriented culture.

Such dynamics affect the system of values, customs, and traditions through the spread of foreign behaviors under the influence of what may be described as digital urbanization or digital acculturation.

### **Appearance vs. Substance in Local Culture:**

All respondents (100%) agreed that, today, appearance has become more important than substance in local culture.

This can be explained, according to the study sample, by the culture of display, idealized lifestyles, and the pursuit of luxury and individual independence, all of which have been reinforced by social media platforms. These platforms have contributed to transforming values into performative displays through digital content, reinforcing the idea that an individual's social status is closely linked to their outward image, which shapes others' perceptions. Consequently, appearance has gained a significant position and influence, reshaping certain aspects of local cultures.

### **Contribution of Digital Content to Expanding Cultural and Intellectual Awareness:**

Respondents' answers varied regarding the contribution of digital content to expanding cultural and intellectual awareness. A majority of 59.14% denied any such contribution, while 37.44% acknowledged a positive role. The remaining 3.42% considered that there is only a limited or relative contribution compared to traditional educational patterns.

This divergence in responses can be explained by the nature of respondents' exposure to digital content. Those who perceive a positive contribution attribute it to openness to global ideas and cultures, as well as access to diverse intellectual and social issues worldwide. In contrast, other responses suggest that digital content tends to promote stimulation and superficiality rather than critical thinking and meaningful cultural development.

### **Orientation of Digital Content Toward Critical Thinking:**

The majority of students in the study sample (86.49%) stated that the digital content widely circulated on social media platforms does not support critical thinking at all.

Based on the variable related to the most frequently used platforms, this finding can be interpreted as respondents emphasizing the superficial nature of digital information, which often lacks analysis, discussion, and reflection. Instead of fostering knowledge and contributing to the development of logical and analytical thinking, such content is perceived as primarily consumptive and immediate.

This perception can also be explained by the specific characteristics of individuals in the local urban environment, which is marked by the fast pace and sometimes chaotic nature of daily life. Combined with intensive digital exposure and rapid content consumption, these social factors limit opportunities for the development of critical thinking within the local urban context.

**Promoting Illusion Instead of Awareness:**

The results show that the majority of respondents agree (77.19%) that some digital content promotes illusions for individuals rather than genuine awareness.

This finding reflects university students' awareness of the nature of digital discourse, which is primarily driven by promotion and commercial profit-making. This is particularly evident in messages that construct idealized lifestyles and encourage comparisons between local and virtual patterns of living. Such dynamics increase unconscious consumption, especially among urban individuals who attempt to improve their social image by adopting appearances and behaviors associated with wealth and success, and even self-worth itself, based on unrealistic representations derived from a virtual culture that often contradicts the values of their local urban society.

These results can also be explained by the deliberate spread of non-rational digital narratives, such as the idea of "online wealth," which produces an uncritical culture built on expectations rather than reality. Consequently, digital platforms increasingly function as tools for producing an illusory intellectual and social culture disconnected from real social conditions.

**Conclusions of the Third Axis:**

- Most respondents believe that traditional local values such as solidarity, modesty, and simplicity are in continuous decline, largely due to their absence from digital content, which is increasingly driven by popularity-oriented production strategies.
- As a result of the spread of digital culture among youth, the sample acknowledges the growing importance of appearance over substance within contemporary lifestyles.

Digital content and media do not contribute to the expansion of cultural and intellectual awareness, according to the majority of respondents.

- Digital content does not promote critical thinking; instead, it contributes to the expansion of excessive material consumption patterns.
- Digital platforms are perceived as promoting illusions rather than awareness among users, reinforcing non-reality-based perceptions of social life.

**7. Conclusions**

This study shows that digital communication technology is an enormous influence on the creation of the lifestyle and values of young people at Algerian universities. At the same time, how digital media is expanding rapidly and how people use digital communication technology has changed the way that people communicate and interact with each other culturally; this has resulted in greater use of quickly produced, visually nice, and entertaining material. Although participants were aware that most digital content is characterized by surface-oriented and consumer-oriented themes, they are often influenced to a large extent by it with little or no conscious awareness.

Another important finding from this study is that virtual culture is a significant factor in influencing individual choices, social behaviour, and identity; particularly with respect to

appearance and modern day lifestyles. Despite the gradual decline of local traditional values such as solidarity, modesty, morality and respect for knowledge due to the growing impact of globalised digital culture, local traditional values continue to exist in parallel. The simultaneous occurrence of transformation and resistance is indicative of the contradictions that characterise contemporary social change.

This study reinforces many current views about the impact of globalisation, communication technologies, and artificial intelligence in shaping cultural and social understanding and suggests that cultural differentiation and generational differences are likely to increase. However, local social institutions (e.g., family, education, and popular culture) continue to play an influential role in shaping culture and society through time.

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