

## **SOCIAL NETWORKS INFLUENCES ON CULTURE AND THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE GLOBALIZATION ERA**

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**ABSTRACT:** In a globalized world, where almost everyone possesses a digital device and there's Internet connection in every corner, social networks appear as people's favorite web places to navigate and personalize. When social networks become a tool of influence and behavior change, as a result of being an all-time occupation for individuals, they change the operating mode of every organization as well as the way we interact inside our community and with others. The aim of this paper is to analyze how the current importance of social networks and their use influences different cultural areas and the individual in addition to his personal relationships.

**KEY WORDS:** social networks, culture, ICT, Internet, individual, digital technologies.

**RESUMO:** Num mundo globalizado, onde quase toda a gente possui um dispositivo digital e existe ligação à Internet em todos os cantos, as redes sociais revelam-se os lugares favoritos das pessoas para navegar e personalizar. Quando as redes sociais se tornam uma ferramenta de influência e mudança de comportamento, como resultado de ser uma constante ocupação do tempo para os indivíduos, elas mudam o modo de operação de cada organização, bem como a maneira como interagimos dentro da nossa comunidade e com os outros. O objetivo deste artigo é analisar como a importância atual das redes sociais e o seu uso influenciam diferentes áreas da cultura e o indivíduo, assim como as suas relações pessoais.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** redes sociais, cultura, novas tecnologias de informação e comunicação, Internet, indivíduo, tecnologias digitais.

## Introduction

We are living in the age of globalization. The term “globalization” had one of its first appearances in 1930<sup>1</sup>, connected with the area of education. After that, it inspired several researchers, economists and scientists to develop and study this concept (Cuterela, 2012). Martin Albrow and Elizabeth King (1990) were sociologists who described globalization as “all those processes by which the people of the world are incorporated into a single world society.” Giddens (1991), one of the most outstanding modern sociologists, talks of globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa”. Media networks are of great importance for the process of globalization, spreading information on a global level and being free and accessible for anyone with Internet connection.

Networks are the appropriate organization for the relentless adaptation and the extreme flexibility that is required by an interconnected, global economy-by changing economic demand and constantly innovating technology, and by the multiple strategies (individual, cultural, political) deployed by various actors, which create an unstable social system at an increasing level of complexity. (Castells, 1999)

Boyd and Ellison (2007) explain the concept of social network as the “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”. Social networks support the interests and practices of its users, helping people to connect based on their activities, political and/or religious orientation but they also emphasize the connection between different people (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social networks spread ideas, influences and knowledge, creating an advantage for organizations looking for a specific target audience as well as for social movements or political activities. They also work as a hub for the consumption of culture, influencing behaviors, the creation of online commerce and the building of online communities (Papacharissi, 2010). In the words of Hepp (2011), “culture is always to do with the production of everyday meanings”, being these meanings established by the flow of information on

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<sup>1</sup>“Globalization”. Oxford English Dictionary Online. September 2009.  
[http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50297775?single=1&query\\_type=word&queryword=Globalization&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10](http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50297775?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=Globalization&first=1&max_to_show=10)

social networks. The construction of reality is increasingly a product of communication, present and delivered through media (Hepp, 2011). Hjarvard (2008) defends that cultural representation on the web “contribute to the development of a sense of identity and of community”, but also that, as there are no virtual frontiers between cultures and regarding the constant flow of cultural representations online, “no culture will be able to develop in isolation from others”. The use of social networks is central in today’s cultures and the ownership of a social network account is regarded as important. Dijk (2012) states that “networks cause a comprehensive restructuring of society at large”, they break the traditional modes of organization and are responsible for a social evolution. This virus of social networks, present in every sphere of everyday life, has effects in all contexts of culture and the way we live. Dijk (2012) remarks:

The result of this global network structure is diffusion and division of jobs all over the world. These days there are computer programmers almost everywhere, and even the poorest country is connected to the Internet. At the same time, the quantity and quality of jobs in the global economy across countries and regions is becoming more unequal. [...] existing tensions between subcultures and religions can explode in a few hours when a particular accident or violent attack happens and is broadcasted via television, Facebook and Twitter. (Dijk, 2012)

There are consequences for the ones left out of this digital world most societies are inserted in. When every organization, department and institution focus their work on the Internet, those with low income and education and consequently less Internet access, won’t be able to be part of global activity. All religious and political entities are starting to act through social networks, delivering their messages to the online world. Hodkinson (2011) points out to the fact that “the technical features of digital technologies are of great importance, but their social outcomes will depend on the interaction of these with existing relations of culture and power”. Concerning all media vehicles and their effects on society, he also reflects that:

Because media representations are selective and manufactures, this makes them distinct from the world they sometimes claim to reflect. It is this that creates the possibility that media may also have the potential to influence us. The repeated emphasis on certain opinions, themes, events or practices across media and the consistent exclusion of others may have a bearing on future attitude, identities, behaviors and social patterns. (Hodkinson, 2011)

In fact, social networks represent a manufactured tool, personalized by its users who can share all kind of information. With the actual concentration of people's attention on social networks, one can reach all kinds of communities managing these networks, influencing the audience. In order to better understand how the use of social networks affects our society, we ought to elaborate on the different aspects of culture in contact with them.

## **The Individual**

We are living our lives accompanied by the constant presence of Internet, disposed in our mobile phones, *calling* us all the time to check Facebook's news feed or Instagram stories. We wake up and check our phones, and we won't go to sleep before checking it once more. The younger generations living in developed countries are strongly branded by this social network addiction although it is also affecting a big amount of people from older age groups. Social networks are interfering in youngster's life in an eager way, as Dijk (2012) shows:

Young people in rich countries can no longer imagine a world without mobile telephony, the Internet and Facebook or any of the other social networking sites. Missing them for only a day would cause serious withdrawal symptoms. This dependence does not only apply for individuals. It also goes for organizations and society at large. (Dijk, 2012)

The dependence of social networks is thus a reality in every context of our everyday life, whether we are at school, at work or simply hanging out with our friends. However, this passion for social networking sites isn't born only in consequence of the possession of a mobile phone or any digital equipment, nor is it because these devices offer us Internet access and Mark Zuckerberg invented Facebook. There is an existing social pressure regarding the use of social networks in the *Network society*, a concept Dijk (2012) defines as "a modern type of society with infrastructures of social and media networks that characterizes its mode of organization at every level". Those living in developed countries are all part of the network society where "the more people participate in a network, the more other are likely to join" (Dijk, 2012), creating this social pressure and pushing people to connect. Someone who doesn't take part in social networks is seen

as less accessible to talk to, taking into account that communities nowadays center their means of communication on social networks, and this is regarded as an abnormal behavior.

Almost every place becomes a social place. It is becoming hard to avoid being accessible at any time and place. And even if one tries and succeeds in switching off devices and using blocking option, the chances of having to justify oneself are increasing. This is a threat to personal autonomy. (Dijk, 2012)

As Dijk (2012) explains, one cannot live without being connected to a social network and if we go offline for a big amount of time, our friends will worry (Dijk, 2012). In fact, individuals are spending more time alone, accompanied by their phones and digital devices as these work as a substitute for face-to-face meetings. One doesn't feel the need to meet with friends as social networks have become our companion, allowing us to interact with anybody. Social network profiles, like our Facebook page, operates like a reflection of ourselves. It is "a demarcation of some kind of personal garden, a coherent picture of 'my world'", in Dijk's (2012) words. It is well known that personal information is at stake when exposed on online networks. This leaves privacy under a threat as the individual loses his power over protecting it any more. People are creating a physical and personal sphere of life in social networks and sometimes are not aware of the risks of personal autonomy violation. Nevertheless, social networks also give us the tools to protect ourselves as well as our free will (Dijk, 2012).

Dijk (2012) points out another effect of the dominance of social networks in the individual: social networks are boosting the individual as the center of the network. Individuality is then the most valued and important characteristic in this digital world, creating a wave of concentration in individualization, removing the sense of being part of a community, group or place. Society is becoming individualized, as Dijk (2012) affirms: "the use of networking is an evident social need in an individualizing society. Networks can be seen as the social counterpart of individualization". A change in the social environment can be observed to the extent that collectivity is being extinguished and replaced by individuality. People do not attend public spaces in group to chatter and hang out. Instead, public areas are becoming abstract, converting into wireless hotspots people search to be immersed in social networks (Dijk, 2012). Dijk stresses that "[...] members of a particular community or nation are no longer tied to a given territory to meet each other and build collectivities. [...] Personal characteristics, interests or concerns are

deciding, not group identities given birth and kept all life.” Apart from the individualization of the self, social networks have an effect of distortion when talking about the individual perception of the world. Dijk (2012) explains, “the social environments made by humans increasingly adopt the character of a natural environment; individuals therefore feel that they face an anonymous, opaque, inaccessible and uncontrolled reality. Symptoms of alienation and uprooting are widespread”. The social environment is becoming our reality sphere as people spend most of their time inside this dimension. In his study of *Cultures of Mediatization* (cultures whose primary resources are mediated by technological means of communication), Hepp (2011) agrees with Dijk, stating that “we are additionally confronted with a process of anonymization”, being that when using technology as a means of communication, we are interacting with a “potential number of others” instead of a specific chosen person. This can be applied to when we share some personal content or opinion on Facebook.

We can sum up the personal effects of social media in the fall of boundaries between reality and the social network world, leading the individual into an environment where privacy and the exposure of identity is at stake, in consequence of social pressure outcomes. However, one cannot conclude the analysis of the implications of social networks in the individual without regarding how personal relationships are influenced.

### **Personal Relationships and Social Networks**

With the rise of social networks as the main mean of communication between people with the addiction of an eager need to be online all the time, personal relationships gain new horizons. Indeed, social networks give us the power to reach people from the other side of the world without spending money, only requiring Internet connection. They also enable the making of new friendships or the start of conjugal relationships. Social relationships are the most important subject for most people using social networks and these networks work as “reinforcing tools” for relationships, expanding them (Dijk, 2012). The spectrum of personal relationships in social networks can in contrast bring uncommon experiences for its user, as Dijk (2012) explains:

The quantity and quality of social relationships might improve if communication technology enables us to easily get in touch with almost everybody, even over long distances. On the other hand, our social

relationships may withdraw into computer and telephone communication and only interact in safe, self-chosen social environment. (Dijk, 2012)

The habit of communication intensively based on social networks can restrain our relationships to this digital environment. People start to lose the capability of developing relationships face-to-face, relying only on these digital means. Social relationships constructed on networks are mostly weak in comparison with the existing ties in traditional families, communities and neighborhoods. In institutions like these (families, neighborhoods, etc.), people share a sense of inclusiveness, contrasting with the network atmosphere where one has a need of showing self-value in order to be noticed (Dijk, 2012). Elaborating on love affairs, Dijk (2012) states that “there is a danger that people will start living in artificial reality offering less room for personal experience and experiences shared directly with others”. He develops that with love relationships being grown on social networks, the individual won’t build that connection through physical contact and face-to-face experience, losing all direct and tangible features shared when interacting with one another. Online dating and the numerous users connected in them reflects the preference and will of people to use networks as a means to meet new partners. Getting to know and seducing new people on the Internet limits greatly people’s actions, movements and manners of expression. Dijk (2012) alerts that “in the long run this may shorten the life span of romantic and sexual relationships. After some time, the traditional skills of courting and flirting may be lost and replaced by skills of online impression management”. Hjarvard (2008) noted how non-mediated communication (face-to-face) and mediated communication differ in the way people interact and experience that interaction. He observed that media change “the ability of individual actors to steer how the social situation is defined, to steer the use of verbal and non-verbal communication and accessories, and to define territorial boundaries in the interaction”. All these factors of awareness lost in communication in social networks gives individuals the ability to talk to more than one person simultaneously, to enhance the conversation to their own advantage and to forget traditional and acceptable behavior norms like the tone of voice and posture. Actors in an interaction can manipulate the conversation to their own advantage as they don’t have the pressure felt in face-to-face communication and own a greater control over the information sent which they can measure and think about for the amount of time wanted. They are also able to decide when to answer the co-actor’s messages as well as to manage the projected image of the self to others (Hjarvard, 2008). According to Hjarvard (2008), the majority of people choose to use channels of

communication like SMS, e-mail and Messenger instead of channels with image and voice display, having less proximity with the other person and their behavior. Users of social networks opt for the less intrusive and consequential channels of communication.

Personal relationships are poorer when established through digital social networks. A great amount of interaction characteristics in face-to-face communication are lost as well as the spontaneity of reactions. The connection created between actors of the interaction lacks proximity and physical experiencing. In the end, social networks allow us to contact anyone anywhere, but they don't appear as the better tool for the development and creation of new relationships.

### **Social Networks & Religion**

With the powerful spread of the use of social media and its importance in people's life, religious communities didn't stay in closed doors from this tendency. In fact, they saw social media as a weapon for the development of religious communities and the connection of believers from each corner of the world. As Hepp (2011) states:

Globalization and mediatization, by contrast, facilitate a more intensive development of communication networks among religious communities. This is very plain in the case of traditional organizations such as the Roman Catholic Church, which, by introducing a World Youth Day in 1986, created an event which deterritorialized communitization of Catholics, but which created something to be more widely reported both within the Church and in the wider media, networking religious communities on a lasting basis. (Hepp, 2011)

Today, the World Youth Day has its own website and Facebook event, gathering even more followers and popularity. Another example of the employment of social media made by religion is the sharing of Church activity, events and Prophets' word, put into practice by the Prophetic churches in southern Africa. This dynamic not only gives believers the possibility to follow the Church's activity but also boosts the spread and discussion of religious thoughts (M. Kgatle, 2018). Thus, the handling of social media provides religion with the potential to increase its followers and a more active religious experience for the ones involved in these networks. Although there is a reinforcement of spiritual exercise, there is also space for negative ideas to be exploited against the Church. Kgatle (2018) explains this, as such:



As much as Facebook can help the church to promote her work among believers and non-believers, there is a disadvantage when it comes to negative publicity. The same users who used to promote the pastor will be the ones to demote him when they face challenges in life. (Kgatle, 2018)

In fact, the freedom of speech provided by social networks might be used to exert an influence against the Church ideas and beliefs as well as to disseminate any kind of religion to seize new followers which become connected through social media (A. Hosseinzadeh, 2011). Lindsay (2007) studied evangelical elites and their diffusion in American society, discovering that they took advantage of social networks to influence people and diffuse their spirituality. They accomplished to be a maintained religious voice in America, although they couldn't establish a complete social change.

Congregation Beth Adam, Ohio, launched in 2008 the OurJewishCommunity.org. Rabbi Laura Baum, who is part of the organization of this platform, reported that, through technology, they were able to reach more young Jews as well as a big diversity of participants from different places and ages, and also to connect people that once didn't have a good relation with the Jewish community and now are pleased to have found this organization, which has a liberal voice and expresses itself using technology (Rabbi Miller, 2011).

Religious activity is enhanced when people are part of communities with groups in social networks or who are friends with people of the same religion (Stroope, 2012). Being immersed in a social network environment connected to religious practice brings the individual to join the spiritual activity as his friends pull him to. Stroope's investigations concluded that:

[r]eligious actions such as attending educational classes, reading scripture, volunteering, and musical expression are often behavior subject to friends' direct surveillance (a person either attends or is absent), and so when participation wanes, network attention is induced, producing more air-tight social pressure when friends are clustered in a single congregation. (Stroope, 2012)

As people start to develop and give more importance to friendships in social networks, these come out as a means of stimulation for religious practice when our friends

are active believers. Stroope (2012) resumes that being surrounded by friendships connected to the Church is the key which leads people to display their religiosity.

The number of people discussing faith on Facebook has been increasing and more than 43 million people all over the world follow a religious Facebook page (Preston, 2011). People start to prefer to be part of a spiritual community online where they can discuss and share beliefs and to follow religious entities and pages on Facebook, where they can read or listen to their words instead of attending religious ceremonies at the church (Rabbi Miller, 2011). In Rabbi Miller's words, "like a website, the Facebook page is an efficient way of disseminating information for a congregation, but it adds the social interaction features that promote community and have made Facebook the killer app of social media".

As social networks gather a great amount of the world population, together in one platform, these represent a source of great importance for religious communities nowadays. They determine the diffusion of the Church's word and the way its followers lead their spiritual life. Social network relationships also push people to be more religious active. The presence of religion on these networks keeps it alive and creates a dynamic share and manifestation of religious thoughts.

## **Social Networks & Politics**

The presence of social media in the everyday life render them also as the source of information for people. Whatever the theme, they read about it on the Internet and make up their mind about the subject based on what they read. This comes as a warning for the Govern and political parties and entities who want to reach people in a positive way, to reflect a good image and spread their ideas. Political forces everywhere are becoming aware of the power and benefits of the use of technologies and social media. In fact, "it [ICT] can help to improve public support for the government and the administration by offering more and better information in both directions" (Dijk, 2012). Political identities can make use of the channel of information embodied by communication technologies for a better expression of themselves and diffuse their political thoughts and orientation. At election time, wiser is the Politic who catches people's support using the social media as these carry their words to an enormous audience. It is important to political institutions to engage in an active way in political communication through social media, particularly during election campaigns. Public

opinion on policies and political views are best transmitted and disclosed using social media as well as the development of a community support for the ones running for public offices (Zeng et al., 2010). The case of Barack Obama's use of social networks in his campaign for the presidential elections in 2008 in the USA, carried out by Jennifer Aaker and Victoria Chang, is an excellent example of the great value of these networks and their advantages:

A major success factor was how Obama's campaign used social media and technology as an integral part of its strategy, to raise money, and, more importantly, to develop a groundswell of empowered volunteers who felt they could make a difference. Obama's campaign garnered 5 million supporters on social networks. (Aaker & Chang, 2009)

But as social networks are free to be used by anyone, they can also be used for the proliferation of hate speeches from extremist groups or new public opinions and policies developed by groups of citizens (Dijk, 2012). All over the world, political forces are turning communication technologies into means of fortification and affirmation of their governments or parties. In a global view, according to Dijk (2012), western democracies which are the most dominant political forces are using communication technologies to strengthen the status of the state. From another perspective, states are concerned about their sovereignty being threatened by ICT networks. This threat comes from a considerable power of the digital global financial markets which counteract the national states' will. Dijk observes:

National sovereignty is at stake because nations are conceding their grip on their own economy, culture and politics to the networks of international broadcasting, the Internet, global industry and, most important of all, international financial markets working with networks of ICT. (Dijk, 2012)

Today almost everyone has a profile in the most popular social networks, and so do politicians. Operating with social networks like Facebook and Twitter gives politicians a closer insight of people's opinions as the 'like/reaction' button conveys whether someone agrees or not with the content we are sharing. Social networks also make it easier for these entities to communicate with their target audience and these with them. This digital environment also makes room for politicians to manage their campaign in new innovative ways and freely. Of course, the exposure through social networks leaves them unprotected from negative comments and reactions from opponents or any person, which

might change the opinion of their proponents (Kathurwar, 2017). The new and innovative ways in which politicians campaign in social networks attract youth attention and engagement in the political life. Indeed, the political presence in large social networks appears to be fundamental to stimulate the interest of younger people as they value the use of social media tools. Being inserted in a social network where friends get involved in political issues drives youngsters to participate in political activity, revealing friendship-driven activity as a fundamental cause for political issues exposure (Kahne & Bowyer, 2018).

All in all, it can be said that presently the presence of politics in social networks reveals itself as a great strategy for the proliferation of political issues as well as political entities' voice. It brings closer the interaction between Politicians and the community, engaging even more people in the political life who are inserted in the largest social networks. Social networks are a channel of information and messaging and a mechanism of winning supporters for the political arena.

## **Organizations & Social Networks**

Organizations have incorporated social networks in their everyday work, establishing through them the connections needed to survive in the business organizational world. Nowadays it is true that, as Dijk (2012) emphasizes, “almost every organization in the developed world has become completely dependent on networks of telephony and computers. When they break down, the organization simply stops working”.

Organizations can be interconnected with other organizations through a wide array of social and economic relationships, each of which can constitute a social network. These include supplier relationships, resource flows, trade association memberships, interlocking directorates, relationships among individual employees, and prior strategic alliances. (Gulati, Dialdin & Wang, 2002)

Without all these components related to the organization work, the organization is incapable of remaining active. The network presents itself as the means of linking the organization with all their partners and co-actors, being essential for the organization structure of resources and working method. An organization has better chances of

surviving and growing when linked to a network because this gives them access to the market and resources, information and learning from other organizations and the possibility to create partnerships, achieving status and knowledge (Gulati, Dialdin & Wang, 2002). Social networks are also of aid for human resources departments. Dijk (2012) points out that “because profiles are the pivotal part of social networking sites (SNS), they can be used to search and find the right persons or experts and the best teams for particular tasks both inside and outside the organization”. LinkedIn is the social network where organizations are the most concentrated, looking for people to recruit, disclosing their imaging and being in contact with other firms or partners. It has a main role in the recruitment procedure and, as Armstrong & Taylor (2013) note, “by far the most popular site for recruiters is LinkedIn, which provides the LinkedIn Recruiter tool, enabling employers to search for potential candidates by sector, job level, specialism and location, and then to contact them directly”. It has become of great importance for organizations to be present in social networks so that they reach people with their messages. Apart from this, organizations start to publicize themselves through the now called ‘influencers’ as these people, who gather a great number of followers on social networks, are the vehicle of information to most people using social networks. “Traditional marketing in the last ten years has been focused on finding society’s influential people that supposedly are recognised as influencers by the majority of the population” (Bria, 2013). As Dijk (2012) mentions, “with the rise of social media, all kinds of traditional advertisement, marketing and government information run into difficulties because people start to inform themselves using their own social contacts instead of the official sources of information from outside”. The conception of time and space becomes blurred with the phenomenon of globalization resulting from the emergence of the Internet. We can say that there is a compression of time and space, leaving organizations with questions like how to know they’re operating business on time when business is happening all the time from any corner of the world. How to know they are locating in the right place is no longer a concern. The presence of organizations is marked through social network which finds most people any time in any place (Dijk, 2012). Social networks allow organizations access to people’s preferences and interests registered in a data base, which give organizations useful information when developing a business. They also foster space for anyone to express their opinion or simply communicate in a more easy, fast and direct way with the organization (for example, through a Facebook page) (Bria, 2013).

Overall, innovation management research considers social media platforms as new open innovation intermediaries that enable firms to integrate external resources and ideas early in the innovation process and capture value produced outside the boundaries of the firm. Innovation scholars have also adopted the knowledge-based view of the firm, drawing on the community of practice perspective to explain the rise of virtual communities or Internet-based communities of practice that organisations need to manage in today's complex environment. (Bria, 2013)

The use of social networks is then a weapon for organizations, carrying different possibilities and benefits for the internal development of the business strategy focused on the consumer as an individual driven by his tastes and priorities which the organization studies in order to earn its own profit and also on the communication and relation with other organization, sharing knowledge and content, and entities that might deliver future partnerships or actual partners collaborating with the organization's activity. Although an existing profile on social networks offers space for negative appreciations, it is a colossal requirement for organizations preventing them from a premature shutdown and for them not to be overshadowed by other companies intervening in the digital world.

### **Social equality in the digital era**

We are living in a world where almost each one of us has a Facebook and Instagram profile, requiring Internet access, creating a worldwide digital network. But what happens when a minority of people isn't part of these social digital networks everybody is connected to? If the Internet and mainly social networks are the new source of information for communities where does it leave the ones which are not receiving this information? For Dijk (2012) the concept of *information society* describes a "contemporary developed and modern societies marked by a high level of information exchange and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs)". In this society, he affirms that:

Social equality is at stake, since certain categories of people participate more than others in the information society. Some profit from its advantages, while others are deprived. Technology allows for a better distribution of knowledge. Its complexity and costs, however, may serve to intensify existing social

inequalities, or even create large groups of ‘misfits’ – people who do not fit in with the information society. (Dijk, 2012)

The information delivered in digital online platforms does not reach those who aren't involved in them, leaving these people uninformed and unaware of the world's occurrences and main topics of discussion. While a majority taking part in the digital world are on the edge of common everyday knowledge, walking side by side with the current tendencies and everyday news, the rest of the people remain apart, in a segment of society who isn't conscious of the present feet the world stands on.

More than 4 billion people, mostly in developing countries, still don't have access to the internet. This means that over half of the world's population is missing out on the life-changing benefits of connectivity, from financial services to health and education. (Luxton, 2016)

If we look at the bigger picture, this is developing an existing social inequality in some parts of the world. We can perceive the mentioned social inequality most between the rich developed western countries and the least improved ones. Dijk (2012) states that “the cultural identity of poor or less developed countries and of closed communities is seriously threatened by broadcasting satellites, international computer networks such as the Internet, and the powerful databanks and databases of the rich western countries”. The developed western countries, accompanied by China and Japan, are the pioneers and at the top of technological development. With an enforced presence of western culture on the Internet, being its users mostly original from these countries, the proliferation of this culture is evident in a digital online environment and generates from the constant sharing and intervention of western people. As Dijk (2012) shares, “the exchange of experiences through networks on a global level has led to a general diffusion of western urban culture”. Culture frontiers are being broken in a globalized world as there are no barriers to the diffusion of one culture dominant in social networks. Western culture is then touching people *online*, in a social network environment, diffusing itself and suppressing other minor cultures. Apart from Internet access, the lack knowledge of how to use technological devices and engaging in the online world is also an obstacle keeping minorities to enter the information society.

What is most important about ICTs is not so much the availability of the computing device or the Internet line, but rather people's ability to make use of

that device and line to engage in meaningful social practices, specifically to communicate with people, to access information, and to publish information. Those who are illiterate, who have never learned to use a computer, and who do not know major languages will have difficulty even getting online much less using the Internet productively, at least with the types of computers, Internet connections, and online content currently available. (Warschauer, 2011)

According with Warschauer (2011) a weakness in cultures, which enable their people to be part of the digital world, is the illiteracy of how to deal with the Internet. With the constant presence of the Internet as a tool in everyday life as in organizations and work places, this illiteracy leaves these people with a deficiency of skills needed to win most job places. This way, the social inequality is reflected not only in the information access but also in the job market. Dijk (2012) writes:

The consequences of this systematic pattern of unequal use will be more or less participation in all relevant fields of contemporary and future society, first of all the job market. Increasingly, the old media and face-to-face communications will become inadequate means of full participation in society. Progressively, more people will be completely excluded from particular fields of society when they do not have Internet access or have a low level of digital skills using only the simplest of applications. (Dijk, 2012)

We can thus feel the alarming need for less developed cultures to have both Internet access and using instruction. Less developed minorities are becoming more apart from the nowadays digital world expecting that in the proximate future they will have increasingly less opportunities and means of subsistence. The dominance of digital networks is proved to be path for social exclusion regarding less instructed smaller cultures, which might cause their extinction.

## **Conclusion**

We can conclude that social networks changed the way organizations, religious and political entities act, revealing themselves as the most precise weapons for reaching people. Social networks are also proved to be the origin of change in the means of communication and interaction between people, also transforming the development of relationships. The alarming situation of minorities leaving in undeveloped poor countries



calls our attention for the power of social networks and ICT over our globalized society and its consequences. The digital world is ruling the way we live our days, making changes in every corner and becoming essential for every person, organization and entity.

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