

A LEVEL
Delivery Guide

SOCIOLOGY

H580
For first teaching in 2015

**Theme: Globalisation
and the digital world**

Version 3



CONTENTS

Introduction	Page 3
Curriculum Content	Page 4
Thinking conceptually	Page 6
Thinking contextually: activities	Page 8
Thinking contextually: suggested answers to student resource sheets 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7	Page 25
References	Page 34



Introduction

Delivery guides are designed to represent a body of knowledge about teaching a particular topic and contain:

- Content: A clear outline of the content covered by the delivery guide;
- Thinking Conceptually: Expert guidance on the key concepts involved, common difficulties students may have, approaches to teaching that can help students understand these concepts and how this topic links conceptually to other areas of the subject;
- Thinking Contextually: A range of suggested teaching activities using a variety of themes so that different activities can be selected which best suit particular classes, learning styles or teaching approaches.

If you have any feedback on this Delivery Guide or suggestions for other resources you would like OCR to develop, please email resourcesfeedback@ocr.org.uk.



Curriculum Content

This delivery guide focuses on introducing learners to the Component 3 theme of globalisation which runs through both compulsory and option topics. This compulsory section, globalisation and the digital social world, focuses on two key questions:

1. What is the relationship between globalisation and digital forms of communication?

- Learners should actively consider various definitions of globalisation and consider the challenges involved with defining the concept
- Learners need to understand that the concept of globalisation is explored and used in a wide range of non sociological ways, in other disciplines and in wider society. However, students should be aware of the specific sociological use of the term
- Learners should consider theoretical interpretations of digital forms of communication. As well as this students should develop their ideas and evaluate how useful classical social theories are in understanding very new phenomena
- Learners should explore the issue of access to digital communication locally and globally as well as patterns of access and use. This can be done by considering the concept of social capital, as well as considering the response of the state in regulating and managing such new forms of communication
- Learners should develop an understanding of the impact digital communications have had on relationships; to what extent have digital forms of communications increased the number of relationships we have, and what impact have digital forms of communication had on the quality of relationships, thinking about whether relationships are superficial or meaningful. Learners should also think about the variety of opportunities digital forms of communication have provided.



Curriculum Content

2. What is the impact of digital forms of communication in a global context?

- Learners to explore the micro and macro effects of digital communication on individual and group identity, social inequalities and relationships using a range of contemporary examples
- Learners to consider the positive and negative consequences of using digital forms of communication and to recognise some of the unintended effects that occur
- Learners to explore the role of digital communication in conflict and change; understanding the role that new social media plays in vocalising political views and mobilising social protest
- Learners to consider the dominance of western ideology as a result of the spread of news forms of technology and the implications of this in terms of cultural homogenisation
- Learners to explore the use of digital communication as a form of cultural defence, using new forms of technology to retain traditional ways of life/cultural practices and identity.



Thinking Conceptually

Globalisation is a theme that runs throughout component 3, so it is important to make sure that learners have a solid understanding of the concept of the process of globalisation. Students are likely to have some understanding of global culture and ideas borrowed from other parts of the specification and from other disciplines, for example, Geography and Citizenship.

However, learners will need to be focused on the specific sociological ideas and explanations connected to globalisation. Due to the fact that learners are often very aware of new forms of digital communication, there may be a danger that they consider the issues in this part of the component non-sociologically. This is why conceptual knowledge is important to establish along with the idea that the topic is being looked at from an analytical sociological perspective.

Due to the complex nature of globalisation there is some overlap between the processes involved. It is important to establish that globalisation has a number of complex effects, simultaneously positive, negative, intended and unintended. Concepts are important here in helping learners understand these complex processes as well as to understand people's complex responses to globalisation. The study of digital communication is a relatively recent field in sociology and ideas and concepts are still emerging. It should be noted however that many established concepts can also be applied to the topic and this should be encouraged, where appropriate.



Thinking Conceptually

The following list contains some of the basic concepts for this topic. This list, however, is not exhaustive and teachers may wish to add to this list as they progress through the course:

- social capital
- digital revolution
- global village
- networked global society
- media convergence
- social media
- virtual communities
- digital social networks
- muted voice
- cultural homogenization
- cultural defence
- cultural transition
- glocal/globalisation
- the digital divide
- critical digital sociology.

Films that students may wish to watch:

Her <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1798709/>

The Social Network <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1285016/>

These can be used as a starter activity as the basis for a discussion about the implications of new forms of digital communication. They are obviously non-sociological but they raise many interesting questions about the issues covered in this topic.



ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Defining Globalisation

This introductory activity is designed to get students thinking about global society. Students are asked to consider different definitions of globalisation and why it can be problematic to define. See page 10.

Activity 2: Sociology and new forms of digital communication

This activity serves as another introduction to the topic. We first consider the impact of new forms of digital communication. We then move on to looking at this from a sociological perspective. It is vital that students apply sociological theories and concepts to this section, rather than a common sense approach.

Activity 3: Digital communication and social inequalities

This activity requires students to consider the impact that digital forms of communication have had on social inequalities and also peoples' relationships, using two source material extracts. The student worksheet is on page 15.

Activity 4 : Important concepts that relate to new forms of digital communication

This activity looks at important concepts in digital communication such as the digital divide, cultural defence and globalisation.

This activity also explores the positive and negative effects of digital forms of communication and encourages students to explore ideas of identity, inequality and relationships. This

activity works particularly well on a large scale, where students working in small groups decide which points indicate positive effects and which points are negative. These cards can be placed onto A4 sheets and put on a wall, along a washing line for example. If there is less space, the cards can be sorted on the desk.

Ask students to sort the cards into positive and negative effects of new forms of digital communication. Once they have done this, they should summarise each point in their own words onto the grid that follows (this could be blown up to A3 size).

Once they have done this, ask them to develop each point using sociological concepts, evidence or argument. They can use their notes for this, their own presentations, the fact sheet and concepts used in the previous activity.

The student worksheet is on page 16.



Thinking Contextually

Activity 5: Impact of digital forms of communication

This activity considers the positive and negative impacts of digital forms of communication of peoples' identity, social inequalities and relationships. This activity again gets learners to think further about the impact of digital forms of communication and many of the points raised in Activity 4 can be included here.

Divide the class into three groups and ask each group to explore the positive and negative impacts of digital forms of communication on (1) people's identity (2) social inequalities and (3) relationships.

Ask students to produce a table listing the positive and negative points they come up with and encourage students to back up their arguments with sociological evidence where possible. Then share the findings with the whole class. The student worksheet is on page 20.

Activity 6: Research project on non-western usage of new forms of digital communication

This activity is a small scale research project. Students are to look into non western usage of new forms of digital communication. Links should be made with globalisation. Students should present their findings as a Powerpoint presentation.

Divide students into small groups. Each group decides which topic to investigate (see suggestions on the worksheet). Each group needs to explore the ways in which groups and individuals are using new forms of digital communication

in order to protect or promote their rights or way of life. Encourage students to follow one particular campaign/case study and in their own words explain how the internet/other forms of new digital communication are being used to create changes.

Next, ask students to apply a range of concepts and theories to the topic, and to consider the possible advantages and disadvantages of using new forms of digital communication in this context. Encourage students to draw links with globalisation processes and explain how their example demonstrates glocalisation. Ask students to present their findings back to the rest of the group using a PowerPoint presentation with images, video clips etc.

Ask the students to assess how their example challenges the idea of the digital divide and to consider future directions of digital communication in around the world. Student worksheet 6 is on page 21.

Activity 7: The study of virtual communities

This activity focuses on the study of virtual communities. We examine Carter's study on Cybercity and Boellstorff's study on Second Life. Students may be more familiar with The Sims as a starting point. The student worksheet is on page 22.

Activity 8: Are social networks the new 'opium of the people'?

This final activity asks students to consider concerns about using social media networks. The student worksheet is on page 24.



Student resource 1: Defining globalisation

1. In a pair or small group, come up with your own definition of globalisation.



Student resource 1: Defining globalisation

2. Next listen to the lecturer in this video explain what globalisation IS and IS NOT. Add to your group/pair's definition:

<http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=defining+globalisation&&view=detail&mid=325AB9BD947ADF09B99B325AB9BD947ADF09B99B&rvsmid=7DA9055F90B4513938337DA9055F90B451393833&fsscr=0&FORM=VDFSRV>

3. Now watch this video of students defining globalisation.

<http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=defining+globalisation&&view=detail&mid=80E4696DFAFE041111A980E4696DFAFE041111A9&rvsmid=7DA9055F90B4513938337DA9055F90B451393833&FORM=VDQVAP&fsscr=0>

Again, add any further definitions to your existing definition.

As a class, using the definitions of globalisation previously written, create a whole class definition. Then watch <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=defining+globalisation&&view=detail&mid=00B79BBE9EFA5B32267800B79BBE9EFA5B322678&rvsmid=7DA9055F90B4513938337DA9055F90B451393833&FORM=VDQVAP&fsscr=0> and/or watch this: <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=defining+globalisation&&view=detail&mid=6DA0EDA240A78771AEDC6DA0EDA240A78771AEDC&rvsmid=7DA9055F90B4513938337DA9055F90B451393833&fsscr=0&FORM=VDFSRV>

4. Consider the class definition and what was suggested in the video – what are the problems with defining globalisation?



Student resource 2: New forms of digital communication

Sociology and new forms of digital communication

Sociologists attempt to understand and explain change in the world around them. One of the most significant changes of the past twenty years has without doubt been the increasing availability and use of new forms of digital communication. Sociologists do not claim to be experts in the use of such new forms of communication, their interests lie in:

understanding the reasons for the development of new forms of digital communication

understanding the patterns of interaction with new forms of digital communication (including those who do not interact) amongst different individuals and social groups

understanding who has the power in defining and controlling new forms of digital communication

understanding the impact of new forms of digital communication on other areas of social life

considering the interesting relationships between the positive and negative effects of digital communication.

Given the speed of the development of such new forms of technology, sociological research and theories can quickly become out of date, so interestingly, these new developments are resulting in changes to the way that sociologists work and think.

What are new forms of digital communication?

The word **digital** can be defined as all forms of information that can be reduced to binary code, which can then lead to the proliferation (growth) of small and large-scale phenomena (Horst and Miller 2012).

Digital communication relates to all forms of binary communication that use electronic equipment to pass on information. Unlike conventional pre-digital forms of communication, which rely on human voice and writing, and take time to convey, digital communication is much faster and can take very different forms. For example, sending an e-mail to the other side of the world means that it will arrive immediately. Writing a letter with similar information requires a considerably longer amount of time to write and send physically. Digital communication also enables one person to speak to many people at the same time. Digital communication is challenging to conceptualise and research, since much of it is understood in abstract form. This means that we cannot physically see or touch these messages in the way that people can hold a letter or hear a voice, rather we have to imagine the process by which messages are sent through digital mediums.

New forms of digital communication create many questions about sharing and restricting access to information. On the one hand, some claim that digital communication allows the opportunity for sharing information for all. For example, Wikipedia was established with the aim of providing a free open source of information to all. On the other hand, others claim that the drive for profit means that information becomes power as businesses seek to commodify digital communication, and use it as a powerful tool of media.



Student resource 2: New forms of digital communication

Some statistics about new forms of digital communication:

- More people are active on social networks than are not. 52% of Americans have a profile on Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace or elsewhere. (<http://www.convinceandconvert.com/social-media-research/9-surprising-new-facts-about-social-media-in-america/>)
- Only 13% of contributors to Wikipedia are women (Glott, Schmidt and Ghosh 2010).
- News broadcasting using new forms of digital communication has become participatory: around one-fifth of Americans, 21% of respondents in the US, comment on a news story in any given week.
- News no longer refers to your traditional image/text format. Short video clips and streaming of live news online is becoming increasingly popular, with the United States leading the way with the largest amount of short form videos being consumed online (accounting for 27% of news consumption).
- Live-Blogs: 40% of consumers think that live-blogs are more balanced than article pages because they give a range of opinions. (Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2013).
- In 2012, Twitter had 500 million registered profiles and the top three countries using it were the USA, Brazil and Japan. (http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/twitter-statistics-2012_b18914)
- A study published by the Public Library of Science (2013) conducted by Ethan Kross of the University of Michigan and Philippe Verduyn of Leuven University in Belgium, has shown that the more someone uses Facebook, the less satisfied they are with life. The study conducted by Dr Kross and Dr Verduyn is the first to follow Facebook users for an extended period, to track how their emotions change. The researchers recruited 82 Facebook users for their study. (<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0069841>)
- According to Youthnet, Young people aged 16 to 24 are digital natives, meaning that the internet is a 'natural' space for them and is fully integrated in to their lives. The fact that young people can interact, maintain their anonymity and compare information sources empowers them. Young people's use of 'new media' allows them to create a continuous stream of multiple conversations, interweaving differing media formats. They associate the internet with a strong sense of community. Young people use a number of digital devices and different modes of communication, at the same time.
- **45%** of young people said they felt happiest when they were online.
- **75%** of young people claimed that they couldn't live without the internet.
- **86%** loved how new technology helps them communicate with people.
- **96%** of 16 to 24 year olds say they use another media device whilst using the internet. (<http://www.youthnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Life-Support-Report.pdf>)



Student resource 2: New forms of digital communication

Activity

- Read the information above. In small groups discuss each 'fact'. What is your response to it?
- How valid (truthful) is each point likely to be and why?
- Does each point reflect your own perceptions? Why?
- How can sociologists understand the ways that new digital communication affects people's lives?

Using the table below suggest ways that existing sociological perspectives might interpret new forms of digital communication.

Theoretical perspective	Views on the role of new forms of social media/relevant concepts	Evaluation (strengths and weaknesses)
Functionalism		
New Right		
Marxism		
Feminism		
Interactionism		
Postmodernism		



Student resource 3: Digital communication and social inequalities

Read the material below:

Source A

Digital technologies have created many new products which have been adopted widely. A recent study has suggested that digital social communication is having a significant impact on our lives. Our social networks are being extended and we are reaching a much wider range of people. This seems to be giving more power to ordinary people to both create and receive different types of communication, from sharing events to distributing music. In addition we are building new digital communities that bring people together from many different social backgrounds and cultures. This may be reducing social inequality by breaking down the barriers between people.

Source B

Who needs social media and mobile phones?

"I just don't agree with those people who say that digital technology and social media create better relationships, keep us in touch with family and friends, and help us to be safer."

"If they do promote better relationships, why do young people's conversations rarely go beyond a few sentences? What is the impact on relationships when talking to someone else is interrupted by a call that 'cannot be missed'? Where is the real social interaction between people face-to-face? And what about cyber bullying and stalking? We are losing the ability to relate to one another properly."

In relation to the sources discuss in small groups:

- how social media might extend social networks.
- the extent to which digital communications might be seen to weaken social relationships
- whether they think digital communications have reduced social inequalities



Student resource 4: Important concepts that relate to new forms of digital communication

Introduction

Digital: all forms of information that can be reduced to binary code, which can also produce small and large-scale effects. There are interesting relationships between the positive and negative effects.

Digital communication: all forms of passing information that rely upon binary systems.

The digital divide: the differences in terms of who has access to digital technologies, for example some groups such as the poor, those of lower education levels, women and the elderly, have less access. This concept has been criticised for being too simple as access, use and knowledge of digital communication is highly complex.

Social capital: benefits gained through having connections with certain groups or individuals.

Digital revolution: the transition from technical equipment to digital equipment that has taken place over the last three decades.

Networked global society: the idea that around the world people form a part of a group that is connected by communication using new forms of digital media.

Media convergence: Convergence means coming together. It can be taken to mean how individual consumers can interact with others socially and use media platforms to create new experiences. It is also used to describe the process by which technological changes have enabled us to consume media on a single device such as a smart phone. It is sometimes referred to in discussions regarding media ownership with large media companies spreading over various aspects of the media industry.

Social media: the use of new forms of digital technology which allow people to interact, share ideas, create new knowledge and modify existing forms of knowledge.

Virtual communities: social networks of individuals who use a specific form of social media to share common interests.

Digital social networks: groups of people with social connections who are connected through digital media.

Muted voice: groups in society who do not have the ability, skills or access to vocalise their views, wishes or concerns eg women, children, the elderly and the disabled.

Cultural homogenization: the idea that cultural practices are becoming increasingly similar; that there is less cultural diversity.

Cultural defence: the idea that individuals and groups reinforce certain aspects of their culture in response to changes linked with globalisation.

Cultural transition: the idea that various aspects of people's culture or identity become increasingly important when they undergo a period of change, for example in moving from one place to another. This provides them with a sense of belonging, identity.

Glocalisation: a process by which globally produced goods are adapted to have local features incorporated in them. In other words something that combines both local and global processes/ideas or features.



Student resource 4: Important concepts that relate to new forms of digital communication

Critical digital sociology: sociologists who take a conflict view of the role of digital communication and address the types and scale of the inequalities that are created as a result. As well as this, critical digital sociologists question and challenge how well other sociologists, as part of an academic discipline, are responding to, investigating and explaining new forms of digital communication. Important concepts that relate to new forms of digital communication.

This activity explores the positive and negative effects of digital forms of communication in relation to identity, inequality and relationships. To start with, using the cards, in small groups decide which points indicate positive effects and which points are negative. These cards can be placed onto A4 sheets and put on a wall, along a washing line for example. If there is less space, the cards can be sorted on the desk.

Next summarise each point in your own words onto the grid that follows.

Once you have done this, develop each point using sociological concepts, evidence or argument.



Student resource 4: Important concepts that relate to new forms of digital communication

New forms of digital communication provide muted groups voice.	New forms of digital communication enable individuals greater agency and free will in selecting parts of their identity.	Some groups are unable to access new forms of digital communication.	Certain powerful groups control digital communication.
New forms of digital communication increase the quality and quantity of relationships.	New forms of digital communication are difficult to police.	New forms of digital communication are easy to access through hand held devices, any time of the day or night.	New forms of digital communication lead to problems such as cyber bullying.
Individuals can get support through new forms of digital communication, and find other like minded people regardless of their geographical location.	New forms of digital communication allow people to transcend parts of their identity.	Problems with access to new forms of digital communication results in even greater inequalities between different social groups.	New forms of digital communication perpetuate patriarchal ideology as those in control are mainly men.
New forms of digital communication lead to greater opportunity for different types of crime e.g. identity theft.	Building relationships through digital communication means that people's other social relationships are affected negatively.	New forms of digital communication mean that people can choose different work practices, working from home, for example which may benefit family life.	New forms of digital communication result in greater exposure to the mass media.



Student resource 4: Important concepts that relate to new forms of digital communication

Positive effect	Sociological interpretation	Negative effect	Sociological interpretation



Student resource 5: Impact of digital forms of communication

Using the table below, consider the positive and negative impacts of digital forms of communication on

1. People's identity.
2. Social inequalities.
3. Relationships.

	Positive impacts	Negative impacts
People's identity		
Social inequalities		
Relationships		



Student resource 6 : Research project on non western usage of new forms of digital communication

The aim of this lesson is to explore the impact of digital forms of communication in non-western cultures. In small groups prepare a presentation of one example of where this is occurring and then apply sociological concepts and theories.

Some suggested examples to investigate:

- **Survival international** <http://www.survivalinternational.org>
Cultural Survival <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/none/internet-and-indigenous-groups>

Websites which seek to raise issues about indigenous groups who are trying to maintain their way of life by campaigning for indigenous rights.

- Smartphone/mobile phone use in Africa <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/03/africa/vodacom-ceo-interview/> and <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/03/africa/vodacom-ceo-interview/>

A case study of the impact of mobile phone use in Morocco:

<http://ethnology.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/Ethnology/article/view/6055>

Wireless in Kenya

<http://archive.wired.com/gadgets/wireless/news/2003/01/57010>

Make sure that you include:

- Relevant concepts
- At least two sociological theoretical perspectives on the issues
- Images
- Facts and details
- A summary of the positive and negative effects
- A summary of how your example challenges the idea of a digital divide
- An evaluation/conclusion including ideas about the use of new digital communication in the future for non-western societies.



Student resource 7: Virtual communities

There are increasing numbers of anthropologists who are applying sociological research methods to virtual worlds. Denise Carter (2005) has conducted fieldwork in one particular virtual community known as Cybercity. Cybercity is a virtual community that had over 1,062,072 registered users when the study was conducted in June 2004. It has all the characteristics of a normal city. Carter spent three and a half years in her fieldwork from September 1999.

Carter visited the community at least once every day, using participant observation as her main research method along with questionnaires, including open and closed questions and offline semi-structured interviews. Carter also met four informants face-to-face. Her objective was to understand Cybercity culture and to understand the nature and meaning of relationships that exist there. More specifically Carter wanted to know the answers to the following questions:

- What kinds of relationships are formed online?
- Do relationships formed online migrate to other social settings?
- How are real life and virtual life interwoven in terms of lived experiences?

Carter was also interested in exploring friendship and to what extent online social relationships result in trustworthiness and authenticity.

Carter concluded that, for many people, cyberspace is just another place to meet people. Interestingly, she suggests that people in Cybercity are investing as much effort in maintaining relationships in cyberspace as in other social spaces. She suggests that cyberspace results in the widening and strengthening of social networks and relationships, rather than weakening them. Denise found out that friendship is a complex interaction between trust, intimacy, disclosure and time as complex relationships develop. People do in fact move friendships offline; she found out that relationships that begin online rarely stay there. She argues that cyberspace is becoming increasingly embedded in people's everyday lives. As such, Carter concludes that distance no longer extinguishes friendships, since friends are now able to communicate in the virtual world.

This study highlights the increasingly important role that technology has in mediating relationships, and demonstrates how technology enables geographically remote individuals to transcend distance and establish or maintain relationships in ways never imagined before. As such, boundaries between different social ties are being broken down and reconstructed.



Student resource 7: Virtual communities continued

Tom Boellstorff (2008) - Coming of Age in Second Life

Millions of people around the world today spend large portions of their lives in online virtual worlds. Second Life is one of the largest of these virtual worlds. The residents of Second Life create communities, buy property and build homes, go to concerts, meet in bars, attend weddings and religious services, buy and sell virtual goods and services, find friendship, fall in love and all of this is experienced through a computer screen. Second life acts as an extension of relationships carried out in people's offline lives.

Tom Boellstorff, conducted more than two years of fieldwork (from June 2004 to January 2007) in Second Life, living among and observing its residents in exactly the same way sociologists and anthropologists have traditionally done to learn about cultures and social groups in the so-called real world. His home and office in Second Life was called Ethnographia. He conducted his research as the avatar Tom Bukowski. He used participant observation and interviews all inside the virtual world. He explored a range of issues including gender, ethnicity, sex, money, conflict and antisocial behavior, the construction of place and time, and identity. Boellstorff shows how virtual worlds can change ideas about people's identity and society. However there were some concerns about this virtual world. Belgian police have "patrolled" the virtual world of Second Life since 2007, after a user reported being raped in the game.

Questions:

1. What were the research methods used by Carter and Boelstorff?
2. How are relationships online similar to relationships offline?
3. What are the advantages of establishing relationships and communicating in a virtual world?
4. What are some of the potential disadvantages of establishing and communicating in a virtual world?
5. What challenges do sociologists face in understanding virtual reality? (Think about the practical, ethical and theoretical issues.)



Student resource 8: Are social networks the new 'opium of the people'?

This activity considers the positive and negative impacts of digital forms of communication of peoples' identity, social inequalities and relationships.

In a recent interview, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman was asked this question:

You are skeptical of the way people protest through social media, of so-called "armchair activism," and say that the Internet is dumbing us down with cheap entertainment. So would you say that the social networks are the new opium of the people?

Bauman begins his answer saying 'The question of identity has changed from being something you are born with to a task: you have to create your own community. But communities aren't created, and you either have one or you don't. What the social networks can create is a substitute.'

Read the rest of his response to the question then answer the questions that follow: http://elpais.com/elpais/2016/01/19/inenglish/1453208692_424660.html

Questions for class discussion:

1. According to Bauman, what is the difference between a community and a network?
2. What are Bauman's concerns about social media networks?
3. Why do you think Bauman describes social media networks as "a trap"?



Suggested answers

Student resource 1: Defining globalisation

Definitions of globalisation might include reference to:

- interconnection/connection of different parts of the world
- greater geographical mobility
- movement of people, ideas, goods, services
- multiculturalism
- spread of different values, ideas and lifestyles
- greater awareness of global issues (e.g. deforestation)
- increasing role of technology in our lives
- internet and mobiles providing greater communication
- links to postmodernism
- transnational corporations and international trade
- McDonaldization.



Suggested answers

Student resource 2: New forms of digital communication

Read the information above. In small groups discuss each 'fact'.

What is your response to it?

How valid (truthful) is each point likely to be and why?

Each point may be based on different samples, sample sizes, geographical location, differing levels of research rigour. Also data such as this goes out of date very quickly so to what extent is this valid in the current context? Bias may occur in collecting data for example, exaggeration to promote certain goods or services.

Does each point reflect your own perceptions? Why?

How can sociologists understand the ways that new digital communication affects people's lives?

It is a challenge – adapting research methods, much more up to date research needed, different measures needed as well as recognising that individuals may well use a range of platforms in different ways. Also, how can we know about who isn't using new digital forms of communication and why this is the case? Crosscultural comparisons are difficult to manage.



Suggested answers

Student resource 2: New forms of digital communication

Using the table below suggest ways that existing sociological perspectives might interpret new forms of digital communication.

Theoretical perspective	Views on the role of new forms of social media/ relevant concepts	Evaluation (strengths and weaknesses)
Functionalism	Part of the wider process of structural differentiation, the specialising of functions carried out by institutions. Likely to see greater communication as evidence of an improvement in the quality of relationships.	How applicable are functionalist theories to today's society? May ignore the problems created/dysfunction by new forms of digital communication.
New Right	Coalition government concern with children's access to adult content online eg pornography	Unlikely to recognize the support mechanisms accessed by people through the internet
Marxism	See new digital forms of communication as a way of the ruling class controlling/exploiting the working class, through advertising etc	Anti capitalist social protests rely heavily on new forms of digital communication. How relevant is social class to people's identity today?
Feminism	Argue that those who control new forms of digital communication are men, although liberal feminists may acknowledge the ways in which it creates support mechanisms for women and acts as a vehicle for social protest for women	Ignore positive effects of new forms of digital communication eg the ability to transcend gender eg through cyborgs (where you do not have to necessarily identify as male or female)
Interactionism	It is the meanings given to interactions within new forms of digital communication that are significant and reflect broader meaning	A micro approach may be very appropriate for exploring how individuals choose and interact with new forms of digital communication
Postmodernism	New forms of digital communication reflect postmodern society – choice, globalisation, change, plurality of identities, fragmentation	Useful for describing contemporary society but does not offer explanation or recognize the inequalities perpetuated through for example the digital divide



Suggested answers

Student resource 4: Important concepts that relate to new forms of digital communication

Positive effect	Sociological interpretation	Negative effect	Sociological interpretation
<i>New forms of digital communication provide muted groups voice.</i>	<i>Eg women (feminists) the disabled, the politically or economically oppressed.</i>	<i>Some groups are unable to access new forms of digital communication.</i>	<i>The digital divide Economic and social capital advantages some.</i>
<i>New forms of digital communication enable individuals greater agency and free will in selecting parts of their identity.</i>	<i>Through the development of alternative identity eg second life (Boellstorff) people can choose their identity.</i>	<i>Certain powerful groups control digital communication.</i>	<i>This may reflect cultural bias eg the hegemony of the ruling class.</i>
<i>New forms of digital communication increase the quality and quantity of relationships.</i>	<i>Miller (2012) argues that new social media are simply an extension of already exiting weaker social relationships into more meaningful/developed relationships.</i>	<i>New forms of digital communication are difficult to police/authorities.</i>	<i>The current legal system isn't adapting as quickly as cybercrimes, making it difficult to police. Current punishments may not be appropriate for some of the offenses, suggesting there may need to be changes in the way that people think about crime and punishment.</i>
<i>Individuals can get support through new forms of digital communication, and find other like minded people regardless of their geographical location.</i>	<i>Eg tribal groups/minority groups or muted groups who may not have had access to support before.</i>	<i>New forms of digital communication lead to problems such as cyber bullying.</i>	<i>Difficult to police/'know' about this but recent cases in the media suggest that cyber bullying can be a real issue. Hard to investigate and police.</i>
<i>New forms of digital communication allows people to transcend parts of their identity.</i>	<i>Haraven (1978) a feminist points out how women can transcend gender in order to focus on other aspects of their identity, thus avoiding sexual politics.</i>	<i>Problems with access to new forms of digital communication results in even greater inequalities between different social groups.</i>	<i>The digital divide is a real issue, with some estimates suggesting only 15% of the world's population have access to the new forms of digital communication, and that these are concentrated in the worlds richest countries.</i>



Suggested answers

Student resource 4: Important concepts that relate to new forms of digital communication

Positive effect	Sociological interpretation	Negative effect	Sociological interpretation
<i>New forms of digital communication mean that people can choose different work practices, working from home, for example may benefit family life.</i>	<i>Positive and negative impact on home life – in France there is a law being proposed which seeks to limit work related e-mails after working hours. Positives too.</i>	<i>New forms of digital communication perpetuate patriarchal ideology as those in control are mainly men.</i>	<i>Feminists are highly critical of the ways in which the control of media/business is male dominated. Only 1.5% of people involved with developing free software for sharing were women.</i>
		<i>New forms of digital communication lead to greater opportunity for different types of crime eg identity theft.</i>	<i>Interesting challenge for sociologists and others to 'know' what kinds of crimes are being committed.</i>
		<i>Building relationships through digital communication means that peoples other social relationships are affected negatively.</i>	<i>Concerns in the media - mixed evidence sociologically inconclusive as to the validity of this statement. Ideas about digital addicts.</i>
		<i>New forms of digital communication result in greater exposure to the mass media.</i>	<i>Cultural homogenization as a result.</i>



Suggested answers

Student resource 5: Impact of digital forms of communication

Activity 5:

This activity requires students to consider the impact that digital forms of communication have had on people's identity, social inequalities and also peoples' relationships.

There is often an overlap with the same positive and negative impacts being relevant to identity, social inequality and relationships. The table below includes some example answers.

	Positive impacts	Negative impacts
People's identity	People can adopt/choose an identity as they are free from their physical bodies. In particular this can advantage those who may feel constrained by discrimination due to age, gender, disability etc. Instead digital communications can enable people to feel liberated and free. (Locke and Pascoe: 2000) (Bowker and Tuffin: 2002)	Once we post online, we have little control over the post. This means it may be shared with others who could misrepresent or take the post out of context.
	Postmodernists argue that our identities used to be firmly fixed around social class, gender, age etc. whereas society now, with digital communications, offers freedom and choice.	When we speak face to face, people can hear intonation in our voices, see our facial expressions. On the internet, as there is no physical body you know less about the identity of the person which can make online communications more risky (Locke and Pascoe: 2000) .
	Feminists such as Haraway (1991) believe online users can present themselves as whoever they want to be. This can free women (and men) from gender expectations as it allows them to represent themselves free from gender, for example using usernames which are not gender specific.	Jenkins (2007) - even within virtual worlds we are all social actors who struggle to create identities within social relationships. Some people assert more power than others. Identity is never just a matter of choice, but a position negotiated through complex interactions, with winners and losers – those who become powerful and can take the identity they wish, and those who cannot.
	Reinforcement of people's identity. The UCL Why we post research project carried out research in Trinidad and found an increase in local slang and local symbols being used by Trinidadian's online.	Unlike the real world, when online you can control the communities and networks you belong to, this can lead to us having narrow views and make us become entrenched in our pre-existing beliefs. Bauman (2016)
	Holmes found that most of the people who people communicate with online are people they already know from face-to-face contacts and are not strangers.	Social trust will gradually be eroded, not only online but spreading to wider society too. Indirect, online communication is isolating, substituting superficial online contacts for authentic and long lasting friendship (Turkle: 2012) .
		Our identities are shaped by capitalist products. Katz and Sugiyama (2005) write that phones have become a status symbol and fashion accessory and therefore allow us to shape our identity. This is particularly the case for young people.



Suggested answers

Student resource 5: Impact of digital forms of communication

	Positive impacts	Negative impacts
Social inequalities	Greater access to information and the opportunity to engage with political and social issues more easily. (Castells: 2013; Hinton and Hjorth: 2013)	Whilst is often an intrinsic to the lives of younger people, there is evidence that older people use digital communications less, which can exclude them from routine activities such as shopping, banking and access to information. It can increase feelings of loneliness (Damant: 2015)
	Children have greater access to ideas, information and learning reducing educational inequalities.	Some people are unable to afford the cost of buying the devices needed to access digital communications (smart phone, tablet, computer etc). 'Digital underclass'.
	You can make new connections with people you previously would not have been able to come into contact with increasing social capital.	Increasingly to get the best value utility prices (for example heating) you need to have an online plan, or many jobs require applicants to submit their CV online which can disadvantage those who would benefit most from these savings but who are disadvantaged by having less access to digital communications.
	Feminists such as Haraway (1995) believe online users can present themselves as whoever they want to be. This can free women (and men) from gender expectations as it allows them to represent themselves free from gender, for example using usernames which are not gender specific.	There is disparity in internet access/fast broadband speeds with differences both within the UK, and also between more developed and less developed countries. Globalisation is not an even process (Curran, Fenton and Freedman: 2016) .
	Postmodernists argue that our identities used to be firmly fixed around social class, gender, age etc. whereas society now, with digital communications, offers freedom and choice.	It can increase inequalities within education as many children are expected to use digital communications as part of their homework or learning. Some children will have access at home whereas some may have limited access of public devices (Paus-Hasebrink, Sinner and Prochanzka: 2014) .
	People can adopt/choose an identity as they are free from their physical bodies. In particular this can advantage those who may feel constrained by discrimination due to age, gender, disability etc. Instead digital communications can enable people to feel liberated and free. (Dodge M and Kitchin: 2001; Locke and Pascoe: 2000)	Lower social classes are more likely to use the internet for entertainment rather than educational purposes (Mertens and D'Haenens: 2010) .
	There are increases in the number of older people using the internet and digital forms of communication.	Middle and higher social classes are able to further their existing advantages as they can increase their social and economic capital through online networks.
	Enables an increase in home-working (World Development Report: 2016)	Marxists would argue that digital communications are still controlled by the ruling class.



Suggested answers

Student resource 5: Impact of digital forms of communication

	Positive impacts	Negative impacts
Relationships	Can form connections across the globe and keep in contact with family and friends (Hinton and Hjorth: 2013)	It can be difficult to know how to feel and respond to online relationships – how close should you get to people? Holmes (2011) considers Facebook etiquette.
	Opportunity to connect with a wider group of people who you would otherwise not have been able to meet, for example removal of barriers such as social class.	Occurrence – and increase - of cyber bullying (Livingstone, Haddon, Vincent, Mascheroni and Olafsson: 2014).
	Specific websites (e.g. dating websites) enable people to form new relationships that they might not otherwise have time to do.	More people engaging in work outside of working hours can reduce the time we spend with family and friends (The Digital Brain Switch: 2015).
	There are websites designed to reconnect local communities for example through specific projects (Dodge and Kitchin: 2001).	Less time for offline. For example Putman: 2000 suggests that since the rise in digital media, the number of community groups and associations has fallen dramatically in the USA.



Suggested answers

Student resource 7: Virtual communities

Answers to the questions on page 23

1. What were the research methods used by Carter and Boelstorff?
Cyber ethnography, questionnaires, interviews, participant observation
2. How are relationships online similar to relationships offline?
Essentially, similar. Carter suggests that people's peripheral relationships may be strengthened as a result of using new forms of digital communication.
3. What are the advantages of establishing relationships and communicating in a virtual world?
No geographical boundaries, quick and easy, people can create their own identities and so may feel more confident or less inhibited in establishing contact
4. What are some of the potential disadvantages of establishing and communicating in a virtual world?
Less time for off line relationships, potential problems with abuse, difficult to assess what is true and what is not
5. What challenges do sociologists face in understanding virtual reality? (think about the practical, ethical and theoretical issues)
Time consuming, may get over involved, deception, consent, difficulty to gain access to people in their off line lives to check how their on line life affects them



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